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[0 : 00] Okay, now, it's true, isn't it, that there are areas of the Christian faith, there are elements of the Christian religion that we do not consider as we should in the 21st century church.

So there are areas of the Christian faith, elements of the Christian religion that we do not focus on perhaps as we should. Areas that we don't get due consideration and time.

For example, if we focused on the predicament of the lost perhaps as we should, that would maybe tell in the way that we witnessed and our evangelistic zeal, wouldn't it?

Or if we focused on the holiness of God as we should, I think that would tell maybe in increase of more fervent repentance from sin.

So there are areas that we don't focus on as we should. But perhaps chief amongst these overlooked essentials is the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 03] Do you not agree? I think it was said of the early church that they thought more about the Lord's return than they did about their own lives and their own death.

I wonder if that could be said for us in here. Isn't it true perhaps that Christ's return has maybe been pushed onto the back burner of the modern church, of the contemporary church?

Well in our short time this afternoon, what I hope we can do is just consider one or two elements about the return, the perusia, the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Before we do that, before we get to the text, I think maybe we've got to say one or two things just about the different interpretations that people might have of Mark chapter 13.

Because it's certainly the case that some people, some scholars, they see that what Jesus is doing in Mark 13, is he is actually thinking only about the fall of Jerusalem in AD 17.

Now do you see where they're getting? Do you see their point? They're saying that when Jesus in this chapter, when he talks about increased persecution in the church, when he talks about apostasy and things like that, that really all he's got in mind is the time leading up to the fall of the temple in the first century.

[2 : 23] So you've got that quite significant understanding of Mark 13. So you've got that. You've also got something else. Because quite a few people think Mark 13 is just really, what we say, higgledy, piggledy.

That's what my mum would say anyway, higgledy, piggledy. A bit over, all over the place. A bit disjointed. So they will see that what Jesus is doing. Yes, in some places he's talking about the fall of the temple.

Maybe something. In other parts he is talking about his return. And their interpretation is he's just jumping from one thing to the other. He's just all over the place. There's no sort of coherent kind of thinking or coherent thought going on.

So that's another interpretation. Now, to be honest with you, I don't think either of those interpretations does justice to Mark 13. What I think is happening here is that really our Lord has both of those things.

Few. Do you see what I'm saying? That yes, at this moment he is preparing his disciples for the coming fall of Jerusalem. Do you know what else he's doing?

[3 : 30] He's using that event, the fall of the temple, really as a symbol or a kind of paradigm of the end of the age. And when we've been looking at this in our congregation in the centre of London, I think I've said the same thing at every single service, in every single sermon.

But really here in front of you what Jesus is doing is he's looking through that fall of the temple, fall of Jerusalem, and he's looking through it to the time where he will return. Return on the clouds.

And as we look at this very short section from verse 28 onwards just now, I think what we'll see from our Lord, what we'll learn from our Lord, are two important lessons about the second coming.

So it's not, I remember going to a meeting like this once in Edinburgh, and the guy stood up and he said, well, I'm going to be short, but I do want to cover 11 points. So basically, it won't be like that, I promise you, I promise you.

Two important lessons we learn from the Lord. But each of those points has a necessary required response from you and from me.

[4 : 37] So what do we have? What's the first lesson we've got here? Well, first of all, I think we learn from verse 28 onwards that the return of Christ is imminent.

Okay, you got it? The return of Christ, the return of our Lord is imminent. Now we know, don't we as Christians, that in Scripture, our God loves to teach us using nature.

Isn't that the case throughout the Bible? He uses, very often our Lord uses natural, nature metaphors, metaphors taken from nature. I'm sure you could cite some examples of that, couldn't you? Let's go for the salt of the earth, or maybe of when Israel is spoken of as a vineyard.

You see the idea, nature being prominent. Now you'll see that that is how Jesus begins. If you look at your Bible in verse 28, he tells you and I to learn from, do you see what it is?

It's a fig tree. I don't know how familiar you are friends with fig trees. My wife and I, we've got a fig tree just a couple of doors down.

[5 : 44] One of our neighbours has one, so it kind of makes a little bit of sense to me. But even if you have never even in your entire life seen a fig tree, the message here is not difficult. So you understand this, that in the Middle East, the fig tree was very, very unusual in how it bore fruit and bore leaves.

A lot of the trees in the Middle East, they begin to bud in early spring. Others in the Middle East, of course, were evergreen trees. There's the fig trees, they're thin.

You see, it's different entirely because the fig tree, they begin to bud just before the summer arrived. Just as the summer was on the horizon.

Now you see, do you, that's what Jesus sent us here. He's saying just as people can look at a fig tree, they look at it and they say, yes, we can know for sure that summer is at hand.

Jesus, he is saying, if you look at the world, and if you see the signs that he's mentioned in this portion of scripture, if you see in the world, increased persecution, apostasy, what do we know?

[6 : 48] What do we know? We know that the summer, we know that one great event is on the horizon, it is at hand. Now, what is the obvious question we've got to answer then?

If Jesus is saying, if you see this in the world, there's one great event. What's the obvious question we've got to answer? What is this great event he's talking about here? Well, I think, to be honest with you, primarily Jesus is talking about the fall of Jerusalem.

If you've got your Bible, if you look at verse 30, see what he says. He says, he looks at the disciples, they're sitting in the night of all this, and he says to them, this generation.

Do you see that? This generation will not pass away until all of these things have happened. So I think primarily, he is talking about the fall of the temple. But hang on a second.

What did we just say? We said that in this chapter, Jesus very often is looking beyond the immediate. So I think this is also what Jesus is saying. He's speaking to us. He's saying, this generation, the one in which we inhabit, this present age, these last days, they will not pass away until we see some of these things happen.

[8 : 01] All of these things happen. And when we understand that, I wonder if we all in here just now hear the message from God. I think it's just four words.

I think he's saying to us, the end is nigh. Simply, I think that is it. But let's be frank about things. That since you and I live in the last days, do you know what's true for us?

The end, the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, it's always nigh. Do you understand? The return for us in the last days, the return of Christ is always nigh, always imminent.

Now, let me pose to you a question. How else, as Christians, do we know that Christ's return is at hand? Isn't it true that we know that that is the case because Christ's return is just one part of a greater redemptive event?

Isn't that the case? I mean, how much do you think about Christ's return? Do you think of it as a sort of separate entity? Do you think about it as a separate event? It's not like that.

[9 : 15] Do you see that it is one part of a greater redemptive act of God that includes Jesus' life and his death and his resurrection? It's a sin.

It is one part of a whole. In fact, let me try and explain it like this. For years in this country, if you were in school and in a science class, invariably you would be given the same scientific experiment to do.

So perhaps if you were educated in the United Kingdom, perhaps it is the case that you've done this very science experiment. And if you're a scientist, you will have to excuse if the details are a little bit rough.

But what happens is that you would take hydrogen peroxide like it is. Do you remember this? And you would add it to a black solution and the solution was iodine and starch.

Now if you do that, hydrogen peroxide to iodine and starch, what happens? What happens? Not very much happens. There's this strange kind of delay.

[10:22] You add it to the solution and you have to wait a while to look at the beaker and wait before eventually, immediately, because of the chemicals involved, that black solution all of a sudden turns bright blue.

And you see, that's what we are dealing with here. Do you understand? That because Christ's resurrection and ascension has been added to his perfect life, his righteousness, and his death, what's happening today?

Like, spiritually speaking, what are we doing as Christians? Do you see what we're doing? We're staring at the beaker. Do you see, we're waiting. There's this delay. We're waiting before the inevitable happens that Christ Jesus returns to this earth.

Do you see? Christ Jesus, his return is always imminent. It's always imminent for you and for me. So, tell you what, let me bring this to your door just now.

Let me ask you what sounds like a really wishy, washy question, but it's not. But I say to you that Christ's return is near.

[11:31] And I say to you that the Lord Jesus Christ could return this year. As a Christian, how do you feel about that?

That Christ could return this year. Is there a sense, perhaps, of anxiety a little bit with that? Do you wonder about your service, your work, in the church?

Is there, perhaps, even a sense of fear, maybe, that builds up? So, if you're a Christian, you need not fear because did you notice what Jesus says here to calm your nerves and calm your heart?

Have a look at his verse 31. What he says, he says, the end is coming. It's for sure. He says, the heavens and the earth are going to pass away. But what does he say to you? He says that his word is not going to pass away.

You see what that is? That there, that's your security. The fig tree might begin to bud. Summer might be at hand.

[12:32] What do you know? What do I know? We know that the gospel, we know that the word of God, we know that the incarnate word of God will endure. We know that Christ, our friends, all who are in him, we are going to outlive this present age.

Isn't that, isn't that encouragement? Isn't that a beautiful thing that there might well be a nearness to the Prusia? There is. But on that final day if you're in Christ Jesus, there's going to find, you're going to find refuge under the protective wings of your God.

So you see here that the return of Jesus is at hand and is imminent. Now the second thing, he said two things, and the second thing we also see here is that the timing of the return of Christ, the timing of it is unknown.

I don't know where you are with scripture, I don't know where you sit theologically, you know, if there was, if there is, or was with you any doubt that Christ in Mark 13 is thinking of his return, I think that doubt has to evaporate, it has to be eradicated by what Jesus goes on to say in that kind of new section.

You see what he says in verse 32, he speaks of that day. It might seem like an ordinary phrase to us, but actually it's a technical phrase that the prophets would use in Old Testament scripture, that day was a technical phrase to speak of the day of the Lord, the coming of the Lord.

[14:16] So what do we know? We know for sure Christ is thinking of the end of the age. I wonder when Paul read this out earlier on, did you notice the main theme of this second section here?

let me spell it out and underline it. It is, friends, the hiddenness of the timing of Christ's return. Or maybe you would allow this.

The main theme here is the unknowability of exactly when it is that our Lord and Saviour is going to return. Because we get verse 32, what does he say?

He says it simply as it is possible. He says, no one knows. And that's something he repeats. No one knows. No one knows. It's something that he extends out because he says, no one knows.

Look what he says. He says, no one knows. The disciples don't know. And he says, the angels don't know. Now, I've come along as Paul kindly invited me to come along here.

[15:19] I wasn't sure really what was going to happen. But I'm delighted to be here. And I can say you look like a well-read and alert and attentive group of people.

So I'm sure of this. As Paul read it out, I'm sure that you saw that in front of us just now we have one of the most arresting, startling truths in all of the Bible.

Did you see it? Look, verse 32. Who does Jesus add to the mix? He says, no one knows when he sets a return. He says, the disciples don't know.

He says, the angels don't know. Look who does that? He sits in the mouth of all of the disciples and he says, and I, I don't know. Isn't that a nice thing?

Isn't it quite a startling thing? You know, this is the Lord Jesus we're dealing with and he's saying, I don't know the age of the age, I don't know the time scale or the timing of it all. I do think that could be confusing for us.

[16:24] So let's deal with just a couple of things here. First of all, let's ask him, if Jesus Christ doesn't know the time of the end of the earth, can we truly regard him as God?

Can we? Like, you see the question in fact, you know, is it not the same question that the church was embroiled in and the Aryan controversy in the fourth century? You know, people were saying, they were pointing to this verse, they were saying, Jesus says, I don't know when I'm set to return, I don't know the end of the age.

So people were saying, can he be defined? I mean, does this here not suggest that he is beneath God? Does this not suggest that he is subordinate to God? How would you answer that?

I'll tell you this, I love the way that we can answer that. Oh, do all we need to do? All we need to do is point back to the very last thing he said. What did he say? Heaven and earth are going to pass away.

My words are not going to pass away. Now what would every single Jew have known? They would have known that that was an implied claim of divinity. They would have known that phrase. Heaven and earth can pass away my words and not pass away.

[17:34] They would have known that was Jesus claiming it to be God. Because what did every Jew know? What did they know? They knew that only God's word endured. Friends, you know Isaiah 40 verse 8, don't you?

The grass withers and the flowers fall. But how do you go on? But the word of our God stands for everything. Do you see it? And whatever this lack of knowledge about the end tells us, it does not tell us that Jesus was worse than God, does it?

He has just claimed full, perfect divinity in the previous phase. But that then leads on to the second issue.

Friends, aren't you asking why is it that Jesus doesn't know? Aren't you asking that when you read this? Why is the timing, the knowledge of the timing of the end of the earth, why is it the preserve of the Father?

Why does the Son not know? And I think, honestly friends, the answer to that, I should send you and me just now to our knees wonderment, maybe, certainly worship because I think in that lack of knowledge, see the extent of what Jesus Christ has done for you.

[18:54] How do you think about your salvation? What do you think about the atonement? Do you think God has just done a little thing, there's nothing to God, this great redemptive work.

Do you think Christ has done just a small thing for you? See there, come on. See there, the extent of the incarnation, the magnitude of the self-entering, consider this, that to win your soul, Christ has dressed himself in ignorance.

Isn't that what you've got here? That in order to become a sufficient sacrifice for human sin, what has Jesus done? Do you see what he's done?

He has added to his divine knowledge, what? human unenlightenment. Isn't that a stunning thing? The son knew not the time of his own return and why? It was all for you. It was all to win your soul from hell.

[20 : 01] Now, what did I say? At the start, I said that there would be two points and two required responses. We've seen the first required response.

We are surely to rejoice. Christ. What's the second required response? We don't know when Christ is returning. We know it's near. We don't know what's the required response. Thankfully, praise God, Jesus makes it so clear.

In fact, I think I can say this to you. I honestly think in his word, God is shouting the required response at you. He is screaming it at you today.

Look at verse 33 to see it. What does Jesus say? He says, you don't know when I'm coming back, so be on your guard. And friend, do you understand what I mean by God shouting it at you?

Understand that five times in that little section, Jesus repeats the same thing. Five times. He says, be on your guard, stay awake, be alert.

[20 : 59] Then right at the end, do you notice? He extends out. He says, everyone stay alert, stay awake. Then he even gives us a parable. He compares you to a doorkeeper who has to watch out for his master's return.

I'm asking you, do you hear the message that God is screaming at us this afternoon? Do you hear what it is? We don't know when Christ is set to return.

We know he's at home, so what do we do? We've got to be ready. That's it. We've got to be waiting. We've got to be prepared for this. So, I'll end with two questions and we're done.

first of all, if you're a Christian here, are you asleep? Is that an adequate description of your spiritual life just now?

Like, if you are true to yourself, is it the case that you are unenthused about Jesus? Unenthused about the gospel? Are you uninvolved in the service of Christ's church?

[22 : 07] Are you spiritually asleep? You surely see what God is saying. He's saying, this is an urgent matter here. Friends, I call you, I do not know you, but surely you see here the message, we've got to rise up out of our slumber.

And we rise up to prayer, we rise up to service, we rise up to actually telling these few people on the street this wonderful message of what Christ has done for us. Because I have to warn you, you and I, we don't want to be asleep when our Lord returns.

And then we close with the second of those questions, and that's maybe for you, if you have yet to bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ. Friends, if you are yet to submit to him, here's the question for you.

Are you ready for this event? You know, I think, as well as I do, that time, life, opportunity is short, and Christ Jesus is coming back.

So I am asking, are you ready to meet God? Friends, if not, surely maybe today even is the time where you waking up, and you waking up to eternal life, you maybe see in scripture something of what Christ has done for you, something of his glory, and even today, you turn from your sin, you repent, and you believe in the Lord of glory.

[23 : 43] Friends, when we read Mark chapter 13, surely it's the case that actually for all of us, we all have the same fervent prayer, don't we? What would that be? It would be, Maranatha, come, come, Lord Jesus, and come quickly.

Let's pray.