

## **A Storytelling Commentary on Mark 13:24-37**

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This speech of Jesus is the last part of what is called the little apocalypse. It is Jesus' last extensive discourse to his disciples in the gospel of Mark, and is one of two major speeches in the gospel of Mark. In this speech the storyteller as Jesus addresses the audience as his disciples. So when you are telling this be aware that you are Jesus speaking to your audience as the disciples. The imagined setting is that you are all sitting on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the temple. (If you have a projector and screen, you might even find a picture of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives and put it on the screen). It was one of the most spectacular views in the ancient world. The temple was covered in gold and radiated golden light. The temple enclosure was one of the largest architectural creations in the ancient world, and at the time of Jesus there was constant activity going on. It was the center of the nation. This speech is then given in the context of a spectacular perspective from which to see what has gone before and what is coming in the future.

Another dimension of the setting of this speech is that Mark is telling this speech of Jesus in the context of the Jewish war (66-70 CE). We don't know the exact date of Mark. It's possible that the Gospel was written and first performed in its present form as early as 69 CE. In my opinion, it is more probable that it was written and told first in the immediate aftermath of the end of the war. The war ended in August of 70 CE. The temple was destroyed and the armies of the zealot revolt were slaughtered. Most of the men, women and children of Jerusalem were killed. It was a time of enormous tragedy. There are a number of allusions earlier in Jesus' speech to that experience: wars and rumors of wars, not one stone left upon another in the Temple, tribulation in those days as has never been before nor ever will be again. These were literal descriptions of the end of the war.

If this is the case, as is clearly implied by these allusions, Mark was written as a response to the end of the war, as a story of hope and of good news in the midst of that immense tragedy. The spirituality of this address is then the spirituality of waiting expectantly, of hoping for the establishment of the kingdom of God. The proclamation of the gospel is that Jesus is establishing

that new kingdom, and that the responsibility of the listeners is to watch for the signs of its coming. Therefore, the spirit of this speech by Jesus sitting on the Mount of Olives with the four disciples is an intimate conversation, the last extended conversation between Jesus and his disciples prior to his own suffering and death. The setting is intimate and relatively quiet. It is not a rhetorical setting of a speech to a large group like the parable of the sower. Jesus is talking to them about what is going to happen. The tone is more like advice or preparation for a great crisis that is coming. For Mark's listeners, they are hearing these words of Jesus spoken nearly forty years earlier about this enormous tragedy they have experienced. He speaks about these calamitous events calmly, quietly, and with full faith and confidence in the coming of the kingdom of God.

The structure of the speech moves from the prophecies of the great tribulation and the trials they will experience (which also have been fulfilled in, for example, the persecutions of Christians by Nero at the time of the great fire in Rome in 64 CE) to the prophecies of the coming of the son of man and his sending out his angels to gather his elect. The climax of the speech is his injunction to watch in light of the fact that no one knows when this deliverance will happen. The overall impact of this speech is to establish Jesus as one who knows the future and is now the ruler of the world. It is not Vespasian, the current emperor of Rome who led the initial conquest of Palestine, nor is it his son, Titus, who destroyed Jerusalem. Rather the one who is in charge and who will finally be both vindicated and established as the ruler of the world by God is the Son of Man, Jesus. The Romans may have won the war, but Jesus will win the conflict between the powers of good and evil.

The hope implicit in Jesus' speech is of a different character than anything that we are used to. This speech is not about the possibility of a new party being in power or even a new governmental system. It is about the establishment of the government of God over the whole of the world in which the actions of Jesus of healing, teaching, caring for the poor and non-violence will be the policies of the government. Its primary impact is then to set all of the tragedies of life, warfare, destruction and persecution in the context of the establishment of God's government. Jesus invites his listeners to look for the signs of this new government that God will establish.

Presenting Jesus' speech is an opportunity to learn Jesus' spirit of peace and calm in the midst of turmoil and stress.