



# THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK

*Week 41: Be Vigilant!!!*

## **Text: Mark 13:1-37 (Repeat Passage)**

This week we are covering the same passage that we looked at last week, so that we may extract some further applications from the text. In order to draw attention to the heart of what Jesus was saying to his disciples, Mark (the author) made use of repetition, so that his readers would take notice of, and then zoom in on, Jesus' warnings. Jesus made the point again and again to be careful, to be on guard and to stay awake (five times to be precise - vs. 5, 9, 23, 33 & 37). Our job as readers is to take the warning on board and to BE VIGILANT!

### **1. Be Vigilant Against Deceivers**

- Read Mark 13:5-8

Jesus wanted his disciples to be wary of people who would try and deceive them, knowing that when the trouble erupted, they would be particularly susceptible to deception. He wanted them to be prepared for the coming disasters, so that when they occurred, they would not be overwhelmed by anxiety, but that rather, they would take courage from the fact that this was all part of God's plan, and that they need not fear nor be led astray in the moment. There is a warning in that for us too. When we are under immense stress, and the world around us seems to be crumbling, we need to remember not to be anxious about the situation because it is entirely in God's hands. He knows about it all already, and so when we are confronted by wars or natural disasters, we can think back to this text. It should also keep us vigilant about being led astray when we are most vulnerable, running after people who promise us a way out of our difficulties, but that will lead us away from trusting in Christ.

- ❖ Q: What did Jesus mean when he warned the disciples to be careful of being led astray?
- ❖ Q: Why would the disciples have been at risk of being led astray when things began to unravel in Jerusalem?
- ❖ Q: In what ways are we, as South Africans, vulnerable to being deceived and led astray in our current times, when it seems that things are unravelling before our eyes?

### **2. Be Vigilant in Your Close Relationships, Especially Family**

- Read Mark 13:9-13 & Matthew 10:34-36

Jesus then spoke to the disciples about the future, when their allegiances to him would be tested in very real ways. He wanted them to know that this kind of testing was coming, so that they be aware of the need to be vigilant. In Jewish culture, family life was of utmost importance, and it still is today. For the disciples to imagine that there would come a time when they would have to choose between their own families and Jesus, would have been utterly shocking. Up until the time Jesus arrived on the earth, all Jews had believed the same thing about the promised Messiah - but now things had changed, and many of them were divided as to who Jesus was. Some believed in the risen Christ, while others rejected the idea outright. Jesus painted a very real picture for them about how difficult the future was going to be for those who wanted to be his disciples, and we are seeing the same pattern today in modern-day persecution of Christians.

We need to ask ourselves where our allegiance lies, and if it truly lies with Christ. If we are honest, for many of us, our allegiance lies first with our families and not with Christ. The amount of time, energy and money we dedicate to our own/our family's education and success clearly reveals where our true allegiance lies. For some of us, the temptation is to put our culture and traditions above Christ, and it shows in the compromises we make in our faith. Jesus speaks into all of these situations, and into any others that would cause us to place our allegiance elsewhere.

- ❖ Q: Ask yourself honestly: is your allegiance to your family or to Christ?
- ❖ Q: How can you really know if your allegiance is to Christ and not first to your husband or children?
- ❖ Q: What can we do if we realise that our true allegiance is to someone or something other than Jesus?
- ❖ Q: In what ways, if any, has God tested your allegiance to him in recent years? What was your response?



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### 3. Be Vigilant Against False Christs (Messiahs) and Prophets

- Read Mark 13:18-27

False prophets and those claiming to be the promised Jewish Messiah had come before and would come again. But here, Jesus specifically warned the disciples against those that would come, performing real miracles that would appear, on the face of it, to come from God. This form of deception would be hard for them to detect, and would come at a time when their world was in turmoil - therefore, they would need to be especially on their guard.

We need to be just as careful and heed the warning for ourselves in these times. There are people today, even from within the church, who claim to have unique gifts of God's power, which they will display before our very own eyes. But they too are deceivers, false prophets and false-saviours. What makes it difficult for us, as believers, is that God *has* given gifts to some of his people over the ages, where miracles have been performed by his divine power. We see this clearly in the book of Acts, not only in the lives of the apostles, but also in the life of Stephen, who was not an apostle but a deacon. And it seems as though God still performs miracles today, when he chooses to. Therefore, being deceived is always a possibility, when we, as his people, are not discerning.

One way to be vigilant in these situations is to see what fruit accompanies the people who perform the miracles. We need to listen carefully to what they preach, and determine whether their preaching is actually the gospel of Jesus Christ, as found in the scriptures, or whether it is a false gospel, such as the very popular prosperity gospel, which is sweeping our nation, particularly the poor and uneducated areas. But the temptation is not limited to that group of people, though they may be particularly vulnerable. If we developed a terminal illness, or lost all of our finances or faced some other life-altering calamity, and a Christian promised us that they could reverse the situation with their powers from God, we could easily be led astray. Jesus knew that when life's circumstances become desperate enough, none of us would be beyond the temptation of being deceived, especially by those who claim to be his own followers.

Though Jesus gave his disciples stern warnings to be on guard, he also gave them encouragement so that they could navigate these temptations. The first was to pray. We can pray for God to bring us a change in circumstances. If that is not part of his plan, then we can pray for his presence to be felt, and for the ability to hold on and to trust him through it, allowing him to give us his supernatural peace within the crisis. And we can also pray that he will keep us from being led astray. The second encouragement was to remember that he would return, and that this would be a public and universal event, which meant there was no way that the early followers, or we ourselves, could miss it.

- ❖ Q: Have you ever been carried away with a pastor or person in ministry because of their apparent powers/anointing? What was it that drew you to them?
- ❖ Q: If you were ill and heard that a Christian 'healer' or 'prophet' was in town, would you jump at the opportunity to go? Why/why not?
- ❖ Q: Have you ever seen a miracle or signs and wonders performed in real life? What was the result on your faith over the long haul?
- ❖ Q: How can we as a community (or as individuals) discern a false prophet?
- ❖ Q: How do you think we should respond if we can see someone in our community being carried away (led astray) by these people that Jesus warned us about so clearly?
- ❖ Q: While going through this point, have any of you sat here thinking arrogantly, "I would never be led astray by a false teacher or prophet"? (Think this one through. Jesus was warning the disciples who would go on to be the launching pad for the church worldwide. They were the ones who performed miracles, who wrote the scriptures, and spoke before councils by the power of the Holy Spirit. They had been with Jesus in the flesh and would have seen his risen body, and yet Jesus warned them excessively to be on guard because they would need to be. What does that say to us, who think we are stronger and less open to deception than they were?)

### 4. Be Vigilant Against Apathy Regarding His Return

- Read Mark 13:32-37

It is interesting that Jesus warned them to be on guard and awake regarding his return, while verse 32 makes it clear that no one except God knew when that would take place. The call Jesus was making to his disciples, and to all who would come after them, was to live as though he could return at any moment. It was not a call to try and calculate when it might happen, and to live for certain dates, but to rather keep a vigilant watch on how we live, making the most of every moment. Many Christians have allowed their focus to be consumed with the time and hour that he will return, instead of on how they are living.

- ❖ Q: Why do you think Jesus told his disciples clearly that no one apart from God knew the time of his return?
- ❖ Q: Why do you think people spend so much time and energy trying to work out when Jesus will return?
- ❖ Q: Why should the reality of Christ's return cause us to live differently to the world?