

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

Jesus Teaches About the Future
Mark 13:1-37

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the "Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study". That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

A white board or newsprint with suitable markers should be available.

Bible Study Leader:

Children's leaders may want to plan a study for children apart from adults this week. The nature of today's discussion may cause children to ask questions that are very difficult for adults to answer.

A white board or newsprint with suitable markers should be ready to use.

Worship Time Leader:

Music Sources:

“Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory”. *Baptist Hymnal*, (1991) #633

“When the Morning Comes”. *Baptist Hymnal*, (1991) #522

“The King is Coming”, *Heritage Hymnal*, #91

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Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

Jesus Teaches About the Future

Focal Text

Mark 13:1-37

Background Text

Mark 13:1-37

Main Idea

Jesus told his disciples to be alert and faithful to him in the way they lived and to be aware of being led astray by people who claimed to know the future.

Question to Explore

How should we live in relation to the uncertainties of the future?

Teaching Aim

To lead the class to summarize Jesus' teachings in Mark 13 and determine appropriate ways to be ready for Jesus' second coming.

Gathering together:

On a large poster board have participants write names of books, movies or people who use the "end of the world" theme to popularize their work.

Allow a brief time for sharing how one of these mediums impacted the thinking of the one who wrote about it.

Ask, "How do we understand today's world events in the light of Jesus' teachings about his return?"

First thoughts:

The Return of the King

Many people have enjoyed the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien and the subsequent trilogy of movies created from his beloved story, "The Lord of the Rings". The last of the three movies is titled, *The Return of the King* in which the joy of the people over King Aragorn's ascendancy to rule over Middle Earth is unmistakable. While Tolkien's writings are heavily influenced by the Bible, his vivid scenes of struggle, temptation, loyalty, weariness, sacrifice, and majesty can't compare to the sight that believers will one day experience when King Jesus returns.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Have someone pray for the Bible study and the one who will lead it.

Say: Today we will be looking at a passage from Mark's gospel that has proven to be very controversial in terms of interpretation. We may have come with strong opinions about the events Jesus described as he taught his disciples about the future. However he was primarily speaking to them. We are "eavesdroppers" regarding that conversation and do not have all the facts nor do we have a great deal of clarification elsewhere in scripture that would give us additional information. As we participate in today's discussion it is important to allow the Holy Spirit to instruct us.

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

Jesus Teaches About the Future

Focal Text

Mark 13:1-37

Background Text

Mark 13:1-37

Main Idea

Jesus told his disciples to be alert and faithful to him in the way they lived and to be aware of being led astray by people who claimed to know the future.

Question to Explore

How should we live in relation to the uncertainties of the future?

Teaching Aim

To lead the class to summarize Jesus' teachings in Mark 13 and determine appropriate ways to be ready for Jesus' second coming.

Introduction to your personal study:

I doubt if anyone on his or her deathbed ever said, "I wish I had spent more time at the office." Usually the regrets people have are about important things that they neglected (e.g. spiritual matters, family, character issues, etc.) while they spent their life and energy concentrating on things quite trivial by comparison. It is far better to have less money but have a strong family life. Or as Jesus said, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36).

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the “**Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study**”, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you as well.

Today's passage has spurred endless discussions and speculation about "signs of the end times." Many books have been written, many sermons have been preached, and many Christians have spent countless years trying to figure out when the end will be. Jesus taught in the passage that such speculation is misguided. He refused to give definite teaching about signs of the end. Rather, he gave very clear teaching about how we should live and what we should be doing until he returns. Let's not lose the big picture.

Focusing on the Meaning:

Mark, for the most part, focused upon the actions of Jesus rather than on his teachings. At this point in Jesus' ministry, however, some extended teaching was vitally important for his disciples. His death was quickly approaching, and Jesus wanted his disciples to focus upon his glorious return. He would suffer and die, but after that he would be vindicated and glorified. Jesus' disciples would face suffering and hardship in the future, but they could endure suffering with hope of their wonderful reunion with Jesus upon his return. History cannot thwart God's purposes, and those who belong to him will ultimately triumph over evil.

Several points of interpretation are important for this chapter. Jesus taught his disciples about the future, specifically about the destruction of Jerusalem (v. 2) and the end of the age, marked by his return (v. 26). In doing so, he jumped between the two events freely, and many times it is difficult to determine which event he was referring to. Although interpreting the details of the passage may be difficult, the main teachings of the passage are easy to determine. What is significant here is the amount of exhortation, or preaching and teaching that Jesus gave on how to live. Jesus gave nineteen commands for his disciples in verses 5-37. So Jesus did not try to satisfy the disciples' curiosity about the future. Instead, he gave them practical teaching on how to conduct themselves in light of what would happen in the future. He prepared his disciples, and all Christians, on how to live and how to witness in a world that is hostile to Jesus.

Mark 13:1-4 – The Destruction of the Temple

The disciples were impressed at the size and beauty of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple in Jerusalem of Jesus' day was a huge complex, covering some 35 acres of land and took decades to build. It was about one-sixth of the area of the entire city, and the outer courtyard itself measured some 400 by 500 yards. Some of the stones used in the walls measured twenty to forty feet long and weighed over 100 tons. The temple itself, made of white marble with entire walls covered with gold plates, was an architectural wonder to behold and the pride of most every Jewish heart.

Jesus quickly responded that in the future the temple would be completely demolished (v. 2). This prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70 when the Romans utterly destroyed the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Today temple buildings are no more and only a few pieces of the retaining wall exist. A Muslim mosque stands today on the original temple site as a visual reminder of God's judgment.

The disciples then asked Jesus two questions: **"Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?"** It seems that these are two different ways to ask the same question, but Matthew's gospel (and Mark's discussion) makes it clear that the questions referred to two different events: the destruction of the temple and the end of the age. "Tell us when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3). The disciples thought that if God's temple were destroyed, such a cataclysmic event would certainly usher in the end of time. Jesus refused to give his disciples any "signs" to look for; instead, he was more concerned to prepare them for the trials that lay ahead of them. Dates and signs were not important, but their readiness was.

Mark 13:5-23 – "The End is still to come"

In this section Jesus specifically dealt with the destruction of Jerusalem and the false signs of the end of the age. This section is bracketed by two statements of the same warning, **"Watch out that no one deceives you"** (v. 5) and **"Be on your guard; I have told you everything ahead of time"** (v. 23). Each statement is attached to a warning about false messiahs (or "christs") who will deceive people (cf. v. 6 and vv. 21-22). Much false information would be passed around about the end of time. People will point to certain "signs" or events with the message, "The end is near!" But in this passage Jesus gave a list of "signs," with the warning, **"The end is still to come"** (v. 7). These are not signs of the end. When the end is near, everyone will know for certain (vv. 24-27).

Vv. 5-8 – "Watch out that no one deceives you" (v. 5). Jesus used this same warning several times in this passage (vv. 9, 23, cf. v. 33), because his followers were in danger of being deceived concerning end times. Many believers today are deceived by focusing their attention on the skies and on times and dates rather than on being busy doing his work (cf. Acts 1:6-11). Jesus mentioned several false claims that people would make as signs of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world: false messiahs (vv. 6, 21-22), wars and rumours of wars (vv. 7-8a), natural disasters (v. 8b), persecution of God's people (vv. 9, 11-13), "the abomination that causes desolation" (v. 14), and the destruction of Jerusalem (vv. 14b-20). These events are not signs of the end, because **"the end is still to come"** (v. 7).

Wars and natural disasters are merely **"the beginning of birth pains"** (v. 8), that is, they are necessary suffering before the Messiah returns (cf. Isaiah 13:8; Jeremiah 4:31; Hosea 13:13; Micah 4:9-10). The word "beginning" suggests that there will be many more to come, so this is not a "sign" of the end. Pain and conflict are unavoidable

in this age. They are merely a part of the fallen world we live in and not a sign of the end of time.

Vv. 9-13 – Persecution for God's people is inevitable also. Christians would be persecuted by the Jews ("**local councils**," "**synagogues**") and by pagans ("**governors and kings**"). But the true sign before the end is that "**The gospel must first be preached to all nations**" (v. 10). Matthew included the phrase, "and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). Jesus seemed to be saying, "Instead of looking for signs for the end of time, get busy and preach the good news! All nations must hear the gospel before the end will come." God has decreed that all nations must hear his good news of salvation.

Persecution of Christians is not a sign of the end, for it happens in every generation. But all Christians need to know how to conduct themselves in the midst of their persecution. Jesus taught that his followers should continue to give testimony through their trials (v. 9), depend on the Holy Spirit to tell them what to say (v. 11), and stand firm to the end (v. 13). Throughout the ages Christians have suffered greatly for their faith, and Jesus expects all of us to remain faithful to him to the very end. Our reward will come from the victor himself (cf. 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 2:10).

Vv. 14-23 – Jesus also referred to "**the abomination that causes desolation**," a term first used in Daniel's prophecy (cf. Daniel 9:27; 11:31; 12:11). This refers to an "abomination" so horrible that the temple is left deserted or "desolate." Daniel's prophecy came true in 167 B.C., when the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes put a statue of the pagan god Zeus Olympus and a pagan altar in the temple. This kind of sacrilege was done to God's temple many times throughout Israel's history. Jesus stated that such an abomination and horrible persecution would take place when the Jerusalem temple would be destroyed. The people would have little or no time to escape the city (Mark 13:14-18). Jesus' prophecies were fulfilled exactly in A.D. 70 when the Roman general Titus destroyed Jerusalem. The Christians in the city fled to the mountains.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the abomination that causes desolation, however, seemed to be a pattern of one or more happenings further in the future. The severity of the distress (vv. 19-20) and the shortening of the time of tribulation (v. 20) seem to point beyond even the events of A.D. 70. At some time in the future God's people would undergo tremendous persecution, and an awful sacrilege would take place (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12). Sometimes the same prophecy may have both an immediate fulfillment and a far-reaching one. Because Jesus' prophecy may not be totally fulfilled at present, God's people ("**the elect**") must always be alert and prepared. That means that even the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 is not a sign of the end (v. 23). "The end is still to come."

Mark 13:24-37 – "The Son of Man Coming in Clouds"

Vv. 24-27 – When the time of the end comes, everyone will know it. Using the word **"But,"** Jesus shifted from the previous discussion to something far more definite, his second coming. The coming of the true Christ will be far different from the "false Christs" who would appear (cf. v. 22). The phrase **"in those days"** is a common Old Testament expression for a future time when God would intervene and act in a special way. God's people will undergo **"distress"** (v. 24) until the time of the end, when Jesus would return. Certain cosmic phenomena would accompany his return (vv. 24-25). Jesus, **"the Son of Man"** (cf. Daniel 7:13), will come **"in clouds with great power and glory,"** and he will gather his chosen people from the ends of the earth (vv. 26-27). The disciples saw this "Son of Man" ministering as a humble servant on earth (Mark 10:45), they would soon see him suffer and die (Mark 8:31), but one day he will return "with great power and glory." People will see Jesus as he truly is, victorious and triumphant. This must have been a great encouragement to the disciples. Jesus prepared them for his upcoming death by teaching them of his ultimate triumph!

Vv. 28-31 – When a fig tree in Palestine shows its leaves, summer is near. When the conditions are right, the event will happen. **"This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened"** (v. 30). The difficulty in interpreting this passage centers on what "this generation" means. Mark usually used the term to mean the people living when Jesus was alive (cf. 8:12, 38; 9:19). If this is the meaning here, then Jesus would be saying that "all these things" would take place before the present generation of those living would pass away. "All these things" would then refer to the events found in verses 5-23, specifically the suffering and fall of Jerusalem.

Another possible meaning for "this generation" is "the last generation," or those in the Christian age. This "last generation" lives in "the last days," the period of time from Jesus' first coming and his second coming (cf. 1 John 2:18). When Jesus first came, the "last days" began; when Jesus returns, the "last days" will end (cf. Acts 2:17). This "generation" is not limited to a small period of time (e.g. first century A.D.), but it refers to a certain kind of people (cf. Luke 17:25), the generation of people living in the last days. If this is the meaning here, then "all these things" that will happen (v. 30) refers to all of the events Jesus mentioned in verses 5-27, including the coming of the Son of Man (vv. 26-27).

The most natural meaning of "this generation," however, is the first one. It refers to the people alive when Jesus spoke. Jerusalem would fall and the temple would be destroyed within that generation. Forty years after Jesus' prophecy Jerusalem was destroyed. Many who heard his prophecy saw it come true.

"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (v. 31). Jesus' prophecy about the temple's destruction was fulfilled, and we can be just as certain of his prophecy of his second coming. The event is decided by the Lord himself and will come true. We can trust every word that he has said.

Vv. 32-37 – Several times Jesus urged his disciples to be alert and ready (vv. 33, 34, 35, 37) because they did not know the exact time when the second coming would take

place. No one knows exactly when Jesus will return, not even **“the Son,”** for **“only the Father”** knows (v. 32). In his humanity, Jesus assumed certain limitations, and some things the Father had not yet revealed to him (cf. John 8:26, 28; Acts 1:7). But not knowing the exact time should not hinder God's people from being ready, whenever it happens, **“Be on guard! Be alert!”** (v. 33). A true disciple should always be prepared for his coming. Jesus did not know the exact day, but he was still obedient to the Father's will. That Jesus will come (v. 26) and that the gospel must be preached to all nations (v. 10) should keep us ready and busy doing his will. When the master finally comes in his power and glory, **“Do not let him find you sleeping”** (v. 36). Jesus commanded everyone, **“Watch!”** (v. 37). This is an active term. It does not mean standing and cloud-gazing (cf. Acts 1:6-11) but to be busy with the task he has given us. We should leave the future in God's hands and do his work in the present.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

This is one of the most difficult passages in the New Testament to interpret. The details may be confusing, but the overall message of Jesus is perfectly clear. Jesus warned his disciples that people would try to lead them astray from their true focus into an unhealthy preoccupation with "signs" of the end times. Jesus assured us that times will be tough until he comes back, but we should wait in hope, remain faithful, rely on his Holy Spirit, and continue witnessing until the end. When he returns, he must find us faithful doing his work. Even though we do not know when that will be, we have plenty to keep us busy.

For Personal Reflection:

1. **What have I learned from this study?**
2. **What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**
3. **What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

Jesus Teaches About the Future

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc. Children who stay with their parents in the Youth/Adult study should have the material on worship as suggested in **The Children's Corner** at the beginning of this **Unit** of studies. (Ask your leader who downloads the studies for those suggestions).

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

Mark 13:1-37

Background Text

Mark 13:1-37

Main Idea

Jesus told his disciples to be alert and faithful to him in the way they lived and to be aware of being led astray by people who claimed to know the future.

Questions to Explore

How should we live in relation to the uncertainties of the future?

Teaching Aim

To lead the class to summarize Jesus' teachings in Mark 13 and determine appropriate ways to be ready for Jesus' second coming.

Connect with Life:

As the group gathers, ask them: Have any of you lost something that was truly important because you were concentrating on something that was actually quite trivial? (e.g. relationships, business deals, spiritual matters, etc.)

State that today's lesson has spurred much discussion on controversial issues about events of the end times. Assure them that while many of the details of Jesus' teaching here may be difficult to understand, his overall message is very clear.

State that this passage causes us to ask the question, How should we live in relation to the uncertainties of the future?

Guide the Study:

Give a brief mini-lecture from the "Background" section of the Teacher Preparation section. Highlight that the disciples were to understand Jesus' crucifixion in light of his glorious and triumphant return.

Point out: Jesus was teaching about two subjects at the same time, the destruction of Jerusalem and his second coming. Make sure that they understand that the main points of the passage are how his people are to live and what we should be doing until he returns.

Have someone read Mark 13:1-4.

Point out that Jesus was actually answering two questions at the same time, about the destruction of the temple (a more specific thing than the destruction of Jerusalem) and the end of the age. Read Matt 24:3 to the group if this needs to be clarified.

Have someone read Mark 13:5-6 and 13:21-23.

Point out that these passages act like parentheses, showing that everything in between deals with the same topic.

Point out that verse 7 is key, ***"but the end is still to come."***

Explain also the meaning of the statement, ***"These are the beginnings of birth pains"*** (v. 8).

Have the group glance through verses 5-23 and list the ***"false signs"*** of the end that Jesus listed here. (false messiahs, wars and rumours of wars, natural disasters, persecution of God's people, the abomination that causes desolation, the destruction of Jerusalem). Remind them that none of these are signs of the end, for ***"the end is still to come."***

Ask the group: What do you think Jesus meant by the statement, ***'The gospel must first be preached to all nations'*** (v. 10)? (the end will not come before the gospel is spread throughout the world)

Then ask: What does that mean for Jesus' followers to be doing until then? (Instead of looking for signs of the end, get busy and preach the good news of Jesus).

Have someone read Mark 13:24-27.

Ask the group: How important would it have been for Jesus' disciples to hear of his glorious return before they saw him suffer and die?

Point out that verses 28-31 probably refer to the events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem.

Show the group from verses 32-37 how even Jesus did not know when the second coming would be.

Have the group count the number of times in verses 32-37 that Jesus commanded his followers to be alert. [5 times].

Point out that the command **"keep watch"** or **"be on guard!"** are active terms, to be busy doing our assigned task.

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Remind the group that it would be very easy with a passage such as this to become enamoured with interesting bits of information about the future.

State, It is far more important for us to understand how Jesus wants us to live in light of this passage.

Have the group glance through verses 5-37 once more and list the commands he gave his followers to follow.

("Watch out that no one deceives you" [v. 5],

"Do not be alarmed" [v. 7],

"You must be on your guard" [v. 9],

"Do not worry beforehand about what you will say" [v. 11],

"Just say whatever is given to you at the time" [v. 11], etc.).

Ask the group: What is Jesus trying to say to us today? (times will be tough until he comes back, we should wait in hope, we should remain faithful, we should rely on his Holy Spirit, we should continue witnessing until the end).

Then ask: What does Jesus want me to do personally?

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

Jesus Teaches About the Future

Mark 13:1-37

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Scary Thoughts and Calming Instructions

Ask: How many times have you been asked “What do you want to be when you grow up?”

Ask: What were some of the things you answered over the years?

Say: King Solomon said God has set eternity in the hearts of men. (Eccles 3:11). We are created with a longing for the future – for eternity. Just like Jesus’ disciples, we want to know what’s going to become of us.

Jesus wanted us to be aware that our eternal destiny is to meet him when he returns to this earth and join him for eternity. But meantime we have more important concerns.

Have someone read Mark 13: 5-11

Ask: What are some of the instructions he gave his followers? (Be on your guard against deceivers (v. 5); Don’t be alarmed about war (v. 7); be warned of personal attacks (v. 9); don’t worry about how to answer for yourself (v. 11).

Ask: What about the instruction in verse 10?

Ask: Which of these instructions are meaningful for us in today’s world? How?

Pray for courage and wisdom to face the future.

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Jesus Teaches About the Future*****Mark 13:1-37****Beginning the Service:**

Sing several of the suggested songs or others of your choice that speak of the future.

Offering:**Praying for the World:**

Have people identify areas of the world where people are experiencing war, earthquakes, and famine. When each is mentioned, take a moment to pray for those who are affected by these catastrophes.

Finally discuss areas where Christians are being persecuted for their faith. Lead in a prayer for these fellow-believers.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

With the Future in Mind

Many Christian leaders have stated that they feel current events and world disasters indicate that the time for Christ's return is imminent. Church people often eagerly listen to these "wise" men and women; read their books and follow their ideas.

Christians who live in poverty or whose countries are torn by war may have an emphasis on Jesus' coming return that is not present in those countries where life is easier and most Christians are not longing for this life to be ended.

Finding a balance in anticipating Christ's return and living each day with integrity as if Christ were to return this very day and becoming overly obsessed with the "signs" of the times challenges us.

This writer was born in 1941. The world was involved in World War II that would not end until 1945 after the death of millions of soldiers. In 1966, when we anticipated the birth of our first child, I said to my mother, "The world is such a scary place; there is so much conflict; it's really not a very good place to bring a baby into." My mother replied, "It wasn't a very safe place when you were born either, but I think you are glad you are here." I have remembered those words when each of our grandchildren has been born. No, the world isn't a safe place. Yes, there are wars and rumours of wars. There are earthquakes in which thousands of people have died. The AIDS epidemic has decimated many countries; there is fear of other horrific infectious diseases. Justice is often withheld from some even in the most just of societies.

We may read Mark 13 and anxiously search for a definitive word about the end of the world and the return of Christ. What can Jesus teach us in this passage?

1. "Watch that no one deceives you." (13:5). One characteristic that seems true of today's Christians is our passion for "big name" Christians. We eagerly attend conferences, buy books by the thousands and watch radio and TV programs of our favourites. We just want somebody who can authoritatively tell us what is going to happen. Yet this obsession may keep us from our own Bible study; our own faithful church service; our own witness to neighbours and friends.

2. "You must be on your guard" (13:9). North American Christians seem to have a low-level anger simmering much of the time because governmental sanctions for those beliefs we hold become increasingly scarce. Perhaps North American Christians must learn that the living out of faith in a world unfriendly to the Christian value system is possible and may ultimately be more satisfying than the cultural Christianity of the past. Parents will become more responsible for teaching their children the truths of faith and/or living those truths before and with their children. ***"You must be on your guard"***. You have an enormous responsibility for sharing Christian values with those around you in meaningful ways. This will involve a deep sensitivity to the values and beliefs that others hold.

3. "The gospel must first be preached to all the nations" (13:10). Even with today's sophisticated communication systems; even with missionary enterprises faithfully sharing the gospel; even with people traveling from country to country so that almost everyone knows someone who has never heard the gospel, we have not yet preached the gospel to all nations. Mission strategists have identified people groups who have no

Christians within the group and little or no access to the gospel message. Our task of sharing the gospel continues.

Call to Commitment:

We cannot know the future. What we can know is that God is in control. We hold fast to those promises found in the Word.

1 John 4:4. ***“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.”***

James 5:7, 8, 10, 11. ***“Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You, too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord’s coming is near. Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”***

Romans 8: 35-39. ***“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered’. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”***

Concluding the Service:

Leader, Say, *In the book of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon attempts to analyze the purpose of life through observation and experience. He was unaware that a far greater King than he, one of his descendants, would be born, die, and be raised to live again to fulfill God’s eternal purpose. As this passage (Ecclesiastes 3:1-11) is read aloud, pay particular attention to the concluding verse.*

Read aloud Ecclesiastes 3:1-11.

A Time for Everything

¹ There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under heaven:

² a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,

³ a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,

⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,

⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,
a time to embrace and a time to refrain,

⁶ a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,

⁷ a time to tear and a time to mend,
a time to be silent and a time to speak,

⁸ a time to love and a time to hate,
a time for war and a time for peace.

⁹ What does the worker gain from his toil? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden God has laid on men. ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.