



Sermon – Mark 13.1-8  
November 15<sup>th</sup> 2009

Intro

Start at middle of passage – v8 – Jesus, speaking to his four closest disciples, has predicted all sorts of terrifying events which will take place soon; then he says:-

*These are the beginning of birth pains.*

I haven't experienced birth pains but I know a lot of people who have! The special thing about birth pain is that it is not pointless and not usually disastrous but the prelude to great joy and new life... (agreed?)

Mk 13 is not about the 'end of the world' (*see also v14, 19, 30*), it is about the birth pain, the struggle of labour which happens as God's kingdom breaks into history, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, bringing great joy and new life.

Context

Growing conflict between Jesus and Temple authorities (11.27 to 12.44).

Disciple:- The Temple is magnificent!

Jesus:- The Temple (and all it represents) is going to fall! *Note: if someone said the White House, Houses of Parliament or Congreso de los Diputados was going to be destroyed, they'd be talking about more than just a building!*

A walk in stunned silence to the Mount of Olives follows, then the 4 closest disciples ask J to explain, as they sit facing the Temple.

The wrong question – 'When?'

As on other occasions in Mark, the disciples get the wrong end of the stick and ask the wrong question (v4). Jesus does not answer in the way they expect.

Looking beyond his own death (*like Jacob in Gen 48-49, Joseph in Gen 50, Moses in Deut 33, David in 2 Sam 23*), he talks instead about...

WHAT will happen and HOW his disciples should respond

Deceivers will come, pretending to represent Jesus. The disciples must not allow themselves to be deceived (v5-6)

They will hear of wars and rumours of wars. They are not to be alarmed. These events are inevitable but are not the end (v7)



There will be struggles and wars between nations and kingdoms. There will also be earthquakes and famines. The disciples are to remain calm and patient – these events are not death pains but birth pains (v8)!

They will be persecuted by religious leaders and governments and kings – and when this happens, they must witness about Jesus (v9).

They are to preach the gospel to all nations, because this good news is not the possession of a single tribal or religious group – it is for everyone (v10).

When put on trial they are not to worry about how to defend themselves because at the time of trial the Holy Spirit will speak through them (v11).

They will be hated and betrayed by many, including relatives, because of their allegiance to Jesus. They must stand firm to the end, confident that they will be saved, that their life with God will be completely secure, even after death (v12-13).

### The Big Picture

What Jesus is doing in all of this is putting the disciples' struggles in the context of a much bigger struggle – between good and evil.

The good news proclaimed by Jesus in *Mark 1.15*...

*The time has come... the kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!*

...is not about God's desire to rescue a few individuals who are exceptionally pure or who hold the right religious beliefs, out of the world – it is about God's breaking into history to rescue all humanity and all creation from the powers of sin and death.

In his first sermon (Luke 4.18-19), Jesus makes this clear by quoting Isaiah 61 and announcing "*Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.*"

See also *John 3.17*, *Philippians 2.6-11*, *Colossians 1.18-20*.

The followers of Jesus are warned that they will face all kinds of trouble and stress and persecution – but none of this will be futile because it is part of a bigger struggle in which evil is being defeated by God through the power of the cross. They are to live in the light of this victory day by day, knowing that their pains are BIRTH PAINS – leading to new life, transformation and eternal joy. *Acts of the Apostles* shows how Jesus's predictions came true and how the apostles lived as he'd urged them to live. (*We'll be working our way through Acts at the new evening services starting 29<sup>th</sup> November*).

### Application

How does this apply to us? Well, like the disciples, our individual and communal lives are often in crisis and we may be driven to despair by the apparent meaninglessness of it all. It is very tempting to see only our own problems, especially if we are suffering unjustly or being persecuted for our faith.



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And if we lift our heads up and look around the world this sense of despair can become overwhelming (*refer to photography exhibition currently on at Caixa Forum*).

The things we BELIEVE direct the things we DO – *think of some examples...*

So what happens if we believe our lives and the lives of everyone else are also PART OF A BIGGER STORY? And what if our story is the same story that Jesus and his first disciples were part of – the story of God's kingdom breaking into the world to set humanity and all creation free from the grip of sin and evil?

What if our pain and the pain of our fellow man is not futile but is BIRTH PAIN, a pain which may intensify but will inevitably lead to joy and transformation and new life? Because God is transforming everything, including us.

If we can see things this way might that not free us to be people of peace, joy, love and hope - whatever is happening in our home or workplace, our city or country or on the TV news? Perhaps we might start to share the pain of our fellow human beings around the world instead of blaming or scapegoating others, or just changing channels – maybe we would express ourselves by offering prayers and practical relief. Perhaps we could even learn to really love our enemies and to pray for those who persecute us – as Jesus did, even from the cross...

*We'll be exploring these issues in our Routes2 course in the new year and also on our Weekend Away in May, when we will be led by Ann Morisy, author of 'Bothered and Bewildered – enacting hope in troubled times.' More details next week.*