

# Mark 13.1-13

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## *Jesus is... the prophet*

Amington Church

Sunday 3 March 2019 (Café Church)

Mark: Seeing Jesus [40]

### **(1) There *will* be trouble ahead**

Benjamin Franklin said, 'In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except...' except what? Death, and taxes.

I think Jesus would have added a third: trouble. Have you ever been on a motorway, and you can see heavy storm-clouds building up and gathering ahead of you? There's absolutely nothing you can do about it, except drive through the storm.

On our recent trip Jess and I were driving along a mountain road, called Arthur's Pass – there's no way round, you simply have to drive through the pass. On the way there is a rather spectacular viaduct, which is rather worryingly called ¶ 'Death's Corner'...! ¶ Here's a picture of the viaduct – and although it's hard to take a video of wind and rain, you get a little idea of how bad the storm was from this little video ¶.

The theme of our service today is: ‘There *will* be trouble ahead’ – and with that, it’s time to introduce the band... (!)

Please stand, and let’s pray.

## (2) Warning signs

The triangle warning sign in the UK is a warning – most of the time a helpful one, sometimes less so! They help us to be ready for something we wouldn’t otherwise expect, to be prepared – though with some of these, I think I’d rather stay ignorant... ]

Jesus gave his disciples a similar warning, which Mark recorded for us – we’re going to hear the first part of that warning now – and Mark is going to read it for us... (!)

## (3) Life *through* difficulty

The Bible often compares this life to childbirth (8):

‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines. **These are the beginning of birth-pains.**’

*Mark 13.8 (NIV)*

Life is life giving birth: it is long and painful, and doesn't always end well. We all hope and pray that labour ends in joy, with a new-born baby – but tragically we know that is not always the case, as some of you have experienced.

The thing is, God never promises to take all our troubles away, to give us a life free from pain and hardship. Like Jess and I found driving through those mountains: there is no diversion, there is no shortcut, there is no other road.

But what God *does* promise, is to be with us *despite* and *through* the troubles. Did you spot in our reading, Jesus *didn't* tell his disciples, 'It's fine, God will keep you from being arrested'?

Instead, he told them they *would* be **arrested and brought to trial**, but that God would still be with them, even in prison, even in court, giving them the words to say (11).

The other thing God promises is that *he* is the light at the end of the trouble **∫**. Jesus warns things are going to get really bad – but the situation is not hopeless, because ultimately he is stronger:

‘Everyone will hate you because of me, but **the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.**’

*Mark 13.13 (NIV)*

That is the true hope of the Christian faith: *not* that we will be saved *from* suffering and death, but that we will be saved *through* it. Jesus says: **stand firm to the end**, and you **will be saved**.

## (4) Perseverance

Jesus says in these few verses, **‘watch out’, ‘do not be deceived’, ‘be on your guard’, ‘do not be alarmed’, ‘do not worry’**.

He *knows* it’s going to be difficult. He *knows* it’s going to get worse before the end comes.

I’m sure you’ve all seen films or TV shows where the characters have to keep guard all through the night – what do they do? They take it in turns. They help one another, because it’s not possible for one person to keep watch all the time – you fall asleep!

In many ways it’s easier to give up, it can be ever so tempting to give in to the way the world thinks, to have an easy life. **‘Everyone will hate you because of me,’** Jesus says (13). Even in this country, where religious freedom to worship is protected by law, it is still hard to stand up for the truth, because people don’t want to hear it. It’s tempting to compromise for an easy life.

But Jesus says no: **be on your guard, and stand firm to the end**.

# Prayer

When we planned this service we thought it would be good to pray for our Christian brothers and sisters around the world, living in countries where being a Christian is actually dangerous. For them, standing firm in the faith has serious consequences.

The charity Open Doors, which supports persecuted Christians around the world, keeps a list of the most dangerous places to be a Christian – we have put together some prayer cards for the nine most dangerous countries. In your tables, please read through the background information, and then pray together.

There is a prayer at the bottom of the card, split into different lines – it would be great if you could take it in turns to read one of those prayer lines out loud.

Please also feel free to use your own words to pray, based on the background information to your country, or for the more general information on the back of the prayer cards.

## (5) Sharing the good news

Now, we all know people – maybe ourselves, our family and friends – who are having a tough time right now. What is the good news for them from this passage?

‘It’s going to be alright’ isn’t much comfort – things are as likely to get worse as they are to get better!

But there is a 100% chance that God will be with us, no matter what happens, if we open our hearts to him, and choose to trust and follow him. After all, Jesus was named ‘Emmanuel’ which means ‘God with us’, and before he left his disciples he promised **J** to be **‘with’** them **‘always, to the very end’** (Matthew 28.20).

So I wonder if, this week, there is one person you know who is having a tough time right now. I wonder if you might get in touch with them, and offer to pray with them, to pray that God would bring his peace into their life.

And I wonder if you might be able to share this good news with them, that if they choose Jesus they will be choosing life and hope – life that is stronger even than death, hope that is stronger even than the worst the world can throw at us.