

Charting the Future or a Perspective on the Present?

The Paraenetic Purpose of Mark 13

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Television evangelists and dispensationalists have so emphasized eschatology in the past few decades that they appear to have wrested this area of theology from all other traditions. The unbelievable success and financial profit of the *Left Behind* series gives the impression that this futuristic approach is the only option when it comes to reading biblical passages such as Mark 13 and the book of Revelation. Reformed thinkers in particular have shied away from preaching apocalyptic texts, probably continuing the tradition of John Calvin who neglected to write a commentary only on the book of Revelation. The question that I would like to raise is this: What emphasis should fill this vacuum in Reformed thought about the future? Instead of handing over eschatology to the literal futurists, how can Reformed thinkers recover the biblical emphasis?

American evangelicals and fundamentalists cannot seem to get their fill of prophecy conferences. Detailed charts of future events, dogmatic assertions about biblical prophecies fulfilled in the events of the Middle East, and decoded hidden messages from the Bible have become the symbols of vibrant Christianity in our time. Paul Boyer, in his 1992 book, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Beliefs in Modern American Culture* contends that “‘Obsession’ is the appropriate word to describe some eight million prophecy buffs today, who pore over the prophecies of the Apocalypse in Nostradamus style, anachronistically correlating current events with its ancient cryptic warnings.”¹ China is equated with the kings of the East (Rev. 16:12-16), the European Common Market becomes the ten horns of the beast (13:1-10), and the mark of the beast is identified with everything from credit cards to the Internet. Before the cold war thawed after 1989, Russia was Gog and Magog. With the Scofield Reference Bible in one hand and Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* in the other, this army of prophets marched out into society confident of knowing the future. Every societal peace march became a future prophecy of the book of Revelation. “The crescendo of peace rhetoric,” wrote Jack Van Impe, “is but

¹ Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Beliefs in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, of Harvard University, 1992), 2-3.

a . . . harbinger of history's bloodiest hour."² The organization of OPEC in the Middle East led to John Walvoord's book, *Armageddon, Oil, and the Middle East Crisis*, which sold seven hundred fifty thousand copies and twelve foreign language editions.³ In 1987, Logos bookstore by the UCLA campus stocked no fewer than eighty-one separate prophecy titles. Even secular magazines such as the *Atlantic Monthly* featured as its cover story in 1982 an overview of the prophecy phenomenon by a Rice University sociologist. The historian Leonard Sweet observed: "Watching, waiting, and working for the millennium . . . has become, even more than baseball, America's favorite pastime."⁴

However, the tide is turning. With a new emphasis upon the preterist position, the first-century context is coming to the fore. Opponents of a future emphasis are letting their voices be heard like never before. Richard Hays in his book, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, points out that "The book (i.e., Revelation) was not written to predict particular historical events two thousand years in the future of its original author and audience. To construe it in that way is to make a foolish category mistake and—most important—to misread its word to the church."⁵ Such an interpretation is a category mistake because the genre of apocalyptic was not geared to the distant future. Larry Hurtado adds,

Instead of offering an eschatological timetable or speculative calculation on the basis of a checklist of eschatological woes, Mark 13 focuses on the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel and the opposition that such proclamation receives (vv. 9-13). The worldwide progress of the gospel is the key eschatological necessity. It is the condition that "must" be fulfilled "first" for the eschaton to appear (v. 10).⁶

Here we begin to approach the point that I would like to underline. It is the exhortation to the present that is the emphasis, not the intricate scenario of future events. Hurtado calls attention to the worldwide preaching of the gospel. That is certainly one of the paraenetic emphases, but there are many more. It will be my contention that the present emphasis of Reformed theology over against left-behind theology should be the identical emphasis that scripture presents, i.e., the climax and emphasis of eschatological literature is the paraenetic stress on how to live the Christian life here and now.

² Ibid., 176.

³ Ibid., 164.

⁴ Leonard L. Sweet, "Millennialism in America: Recent Studies," *Theological Studies* 40 (1979): 531.

⁵ Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 171.

⁶ Larry Hurtado, "Following Jesus in the Gospel of Mark—and Beyond," *Patterns of Discipleship*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 16.

To demonstrate the present paraenetic emphasis (i.e., instruction for the now consisting mainly of imperatives on how to live) of apocalyptic literature, I will first of all survey various examples of such literature in the New Testament. Then, I will turn to Mark 13 as a case in point to demonstrate that an ethical exhortation is its primary stress through (1) an investigation of the structure of Mark 13 and its vocabulary, (2) a close look at its tie to the passion narrative, and (3) a study of the Markan frame around the thirteenth chapter of Mark.

First then, let us peruse a survey of New Testament eschatological passages in order to discern their primary stress. The first loci of theology that the church debated appears to be eschatology based upon Paul's emphasis on the Second Coming in his first letters of correspondence—1 and 2 Thessalonians. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul teaches about the relationship of the coming of the Lord to those who have died. Paul concludes with an exhortation of eschatological ethics, applying the teaching to his readers' lives: "therefore encourage each other with these words." In 1 Thessalonians 5, Paul teaches about the timing of the Lord's coming and again ends with moral exhortations about life here and now: "Be alert and self-controlled" (5:6); "Put on the armor of God" (5:8); "Encourage one another and build each other up" (5:11). When we turn to 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12 on the theme, Judgment and the Future, and to 2 Thessalonians 2:1-15 on, Signs of the End, we discover the identical pattern. The climax is always eschatological ethics. In 2 Thessalonians 1:11, Paul exhorts his readers to "pray to be counted worthy of your calling" (1:11) and in 2:15 to "stand firm" and to "hold to the teachings we passed on to you." This pattern is deeply embedded in all eschatological teaching within the New Testament. Paul spends almost the whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 on the future and climaxes his teaching again with a paraenetic exhortation (15:58), "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." 1 Peter succinctly summarizes the apostolic eschatological teaching: ("The end of all things is at hand," 4:7) but then belabors the eschatological ethics (4:8-11): "Be clear minded and self-controlled so you can pray" (4:8); "above all, love each other" (4:9); "offer hospitality" (4:10); and use your spiritual gifts (4:11). 2 Peter 3:3-10 offers a number of teachings about the last days but likewise climaxes with moral exhortations such as "live holy and godly lives" (3:11) and "make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace" (3:14). James 5:7-11 alters the order of this pattern and places the ethical statement first followed by an eschatological reference. "Be patient until the Lord's coming" (5:7); "Be patient and stand firm because the Lord's coming is near" (5:8); "Don't grumble . . . the Judge is standing at the door!" (5:9). However, because James is entirely composed of the genre of paraenesis, the imperative is certainly emphasized (James includes nearly 60 imperatives within 108 verses).

This pattern of eschatological teaching climaxing in eschatological ethics is central not only to the epistles but also the gospels. Matthew's fifth discourse on

eschatology climaxes with a series of seven parables (24:32-25:46) that exhort the readers to keep watch (24:42); be faithful and wise stewards (24:45); have plenty of oil, probably meaning good works for Matthew (25:1-13); use your talents (25:14-30); and practice acts of compassion unto the least of these my brethren (25:21-46). Likewise, the teaching of Q found in Luke's first of two eschatological discourses (Luke 17:20-37) concludes with this paraenetic application, "whoever tries to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it" (17:33). Therefore, we have example after example in the New Testament where the ethical exhortation to present behavioral modification becomes the emphasis of the eschatological teaching.

The only example of eschatological teaching that I found that does not climax in ethical exhortation is Didache 16. But does this mean that the paraenesis is not prominent here? No! Instead it is placed at the very beginning. "Watch over your life: do not let your lamps go out, and do not be unprepared, but be ready, for you do not know the hour when our Lord is coming. Gather together frequently, seeking the things that benefit your souls, for all the time you have believed will be of no use to you if you are not found perfect in the last time" (16:1-2).⁷ Then, follows the eschatological teaching. Because this is the end of the book, the author wants to end with a christological statement, "Then the world will see the Lord coming upon the clouds of heaven," so the author of the Didache transfers the normal eschatological ethic to the beginning so that it can still be considered prominent.

Therefore, the placing of the eschatological ethic at the end (or at the beginning as in Didache 16) points to its prominence. However, Mark 13 in several unique ways supplies additional evidence that the early church thought the paraenetic part of the eschatological teaching should be stressed. We will examine the structure of Mark 13, its unusual change of vocabulary with regard to the word *watch*; Mark's clever manner of tying the eschatological discourse to the passion narrative; and, finally, the frame of discipleship stories that Mark places around the eschatological discourse. All of these techniques will demonstrate that Mark wanted the ethical application to discipleship to be prominent, not the future eschatological teaching itself.

Mark 13 can be outlined as follows:

A. The Double Introduction

1. 13:1-2 Jesus' prediction of the destruction of the temple (observation and prediction).
2. 13:3-4 The disciples' question about when this will be fulfilled (two questions).

⁷ See Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 267, 269.

B. The Double Description of “Signs”⁸

1. 13:5-23 “Signs” upon the earth
 - a. 13:5-6 Beware of false messiahs (inclusio with 13:21-23 (βλέπετε))
 - b. 13:7-8 General “signs” (things you will hear): the beginning of birth pains
 - c. 13:9-13 Persecution (βλέπετε placed at beginning, middle, and end of 13:5-23)
 - b’. 13:14-20 Abomination of desolation (things you will see): tribulation (θλιψις)
 - a’. 13:21-23 Beware of false messiahs (inclusio with 13:5-6 βλέπετε)
2. 13:24-27 “Signs” in the heaven
 - a. 13:24-25 The physical heavens
 - b. 13:26-27 The coming of the Son of Man

C. The double paraenetic conclusion using parables

1. 13:28-31 Parable of the fig tree (the nearness of Jesus’ coming)
2. 13:32-37 Parable of the doorkeeper (the suddenness of Jesus’ coming)

Mark 13 begins with a double introduction (1-2, 3-4) and concludes with a double paraenetic exhortation employing parables (28-31, 32-37). In between, we encounter teaching about certain traumatic events upon earth followed by various catastrophic happenings in heaven. The sermon about the earthly turmoil is organized into a typical Markan five-part chiasm. The exhortation to watch out (βλέπετε) for false messiahs (5-6, 21-23) is placed on the outside of the chiasm (see above). In the second and fourth position is a list of the “signs” you will hear about (7-8) and the “sign” you will see (14-20), namely the abomination of desolation. The timing of the events is balanced with the second section describing the beginning of birth pains while the fourth section rehearses the climatic tribulation (θλιψις). Centrally located at the middle, Mark repeats the key term βλέπετε (watch) and elaborates his undergirding message, the persecution that the disciples must endure. The prominent teaching is not the calendar of future eschatological events, but the taking up of the cross by the disciples. They will be delivered over to local councils and flogged in the synagogues. They will stand before governors and kings as witnesses. The use of the term παραδίδομαι is especially important to Mark. John the Baptizer was delivered over to death, Jesus is delivered over to death, and the disciples will be delivered over to death. This is what scholars entitle Mark’s passion paradigm.⁹ Therefore, Mark’s purpose for including chapter 13 in his gospel is to teach

⁸ I place signs in quotation marks because Mark treats asking for signs negatively (8:12), although we commonly speak about the signs of the times (also Luke 21:11,25). See Timothy J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 30-39.

⁹ Geddert, *Watchwords*, 201, 189, 258.

“the disciples how the passion and resurrection of Jesus influence their own discipleship in the post-resurrection age.”¹⁰ This emphasis Mark strategically places at the middle of his chiasm.

This proposal that the center of a fivefold chiasm is Mark’s emphasis in chapter 13 is verified if we investigate some of the other fivefold chiasms at strategic places in Mark’s gospel. From 2:1-3:6, Mark incorporates five controversy dialogues back to back in perfect balance with the center being 2:20, “but when the bridegroom is taken away, on that day they will fast.”¹¹ Jesus’ passion and the corresponding discipleship of the follower is prominent. In 3:13-35, Mark structures a fivefold chiastic discourse about Jesus’ true family with the rejection by the Pharisees and his natural family at the center and the choosing (3:13-18) and affirmation of the disciples (3:31-34) as his true family on the outside of the chiasm. Just as in Mark 13 the emphasis is upon how brother will betray brother to death and children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death (13:12), so in Mark 3, the Jewish leaders’ rejection and Jesus’ own family’s opposition is prominent. Likewise, in the parable discourse of Mark 4:1-34, the reader encounters a fivefold chiastic structure¹² with the secret of the kingdom (4:11-12) resolved in the middle of the chiasm when Jesus explains that “whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open” (4:22). This epiphany occurs historically at Jesus’ death when the centurion states that the crucified Jesus is the Son of God so that the Messianic secret no longer needs to remain hidden. Likewise in the eschatological discourse, which we are presently examining, the central emphasis is on the appropriate response to Jesus’ passion as found in Mark. 13:9-13.

We have observed the important structural function of the word βλέπετε in Mark 13:5-23 in Jesus’ sermon about the signs upon the earth. Therefore, it is important to note a switch in vocabulary at the end of Mark 13 where βλέπετε gives way to γρηγορείτε (13:34, 35, 37). The term βλέπω does not appear after Mark 13, nor does γρηγορέω occur before it.¹³ This switch of vocabulary ties the eschatological discourse to the passion narrative. It appears that “Mark intended to use a good deal of material in the Passion account to portray what it really means to obey the command, γρηγορείτε (watch!) and to portray models of obedience and disobedience to the command.”¹⁴ Therefore the climax of Mark’s eschatological teaching is the ethical exhortation “to watch,” and the

¹⁰ Ibid., 256.

¹¹ See Joanna Dewey, *Markan Public Debate* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1980), 122, 128.

¹² Ibid., 149-50.

¹³ Geddert, *Watchwords*, 90.

¹⁴ Ibid., 92.

content of watching is explained in the passion narrative. Watching means for the disciples to “go through their passion as Jesus went through his.”¹⁵

One could even argue that the threefold repetition of this word *γρηγορέω* is important.¹⁶ Geddert points out that “the threefold failure in Gethsemane to watch (14:37, 40, 41) is a fitting counterpart to the threefold injunction to do so (13:34, 35, 37).” In fact, maybe all three occurrences of this verb in Mark 13 should be seen as imperatives with the *ἵνα* clause in 13:34 interpreted not as a purpose clause but as an imperatival *ἵνα*: “tell the one at the door, ‘keep watch.’” Whatever the case, Mark wants to parallel watching for the eschatological coming of the Messiah in glory with watching for Jesus in his passion. Mark carries out this plan by repeating the term *γρηγορεῖτε* three times in the Gethsemane narrative (14:34, 37, 38). On three occasions, the disciples are asked to watch during Jesus’ prayerful preparation for passion, but, instead, they fall fast asleep. The disciples might be able to stay awake and watch for Jesus’ coming in glory in chapter 13, but they fail to watch for his passion in chapter 14. This, too, becomes a call for the reader to learn to carry the cross. The emphasis upon the reader is illustrated by the ending of Mark 13, “What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Mark’s special doctrine of the Holy Spirit is also brought into play in both the center of the eschatological discourse and in the disciples’ failure to watch in Gethsemane. The Holy Spirit for Mark is never identified as the indwelling presence of God as with Paul or the empowering divine force as with Luke. Instead, the Holy Spirit is always connected in Mark with trials and the testing of persecution. After Jesus’ baptism, the Holy Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness to be tested (1:12). In the eschatological discourse, the Holy Spirit reappears as the one who will give the disciples words to say during times of persecution. Then, during Jesus’ struggle in Gethsemane, the disciples cannot watch for Jesus’ passion because their flesh is weak, although the Spirit is willing. William Lane correctly argues, “the ‘willing spirit’, which stands in opposition to the weak flesh, is not a better part of man but God’s Spirit who strives against human weakness. The expression is borrowed from Psalm 51:12, where it stands in parallel with God’s Holy Spirit.”¹⁷ The Holy Spirit drove Jesus into

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 195. Now it should be admitted that not every commentator (and especially not Bob Gundry) agrees with this analysis. Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 855-56 is confident that (1) “Watch” has no metaphorical significance; it is rather a command to warn Jesus about the arrival of Judas and his mob; and (2) the disciples’ sleeping and not watching is only the unfortunate effect of a hearty Passover meal and plenty of wine. There is no symbolism for the reader. In fact, Gundry refuses to accept any symbolism in Mark. Just read page 1 of his commentary where he does not mince words on this issue, but truthfully Gundry misses half of what Mark is saying.

¹⁶ For a discussion of this issue by several commentators see the masters’ dissertation from Calvin Theological Seminary of my student Zachary King, *The Ethical Admonition of Watchfulness and the Timing of the Parousia* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 2005), 136, n. 9.

¹⁷ William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 520.

the wilderness and likewise the Holy Spirit will lead the readers through the desert of their trials; thus, helping them bear the cross in contrast to Jesus' disciples in Gethsemane who follow the flesh rather than the Spirit.

The eschatological discourse is preparing for the passion narrative. The bare call to watch in chapter 13 is given content in Jesus' willingness to face suffering, whereas the disciples fail to comprehend the meaning of the cross. Not only is this made clear through vocabulary but also through how Mark 13:35 structures the passion narrative. Jesus calls his disciples to be vigilant through the four watches of the night: in the evening, at midnight, when the rooster crows, and at dawn. These four time delimiters become the four divisions of the passion narrative.¹⁸ Evening occurs in Mark 14:17-31 with the Last Supper; the Gethsemane prayer and the arrest happen at midnight (14:32-51); the Jewish interrogation and Peter's denial take place when the rooster crows (14:52-72), and the trial before Pilate occurs at dawn as evidenced by the time designation in Mark 15:1.¹⁹ The implied message is that the disciples are ready and actively waiting for an eschatological victorious Jesus, but they are totally unprepared for Jesus in his passion. They are sleeping in the garden of Gethsemane (14:37-42); they flee when Jesus is arrested (14:50); one young disciple would rather lose his clothes than lose his life (14:51); they deny Jesus in his suffering as Peter does (14:66-72); and they are absent when Jesus carries his cross and suffers forsakenness. The eschatological discourse therefore is employed by Mark as a paraenetic call to the readers to watch for Jesus' passion and follow him in his suffering.²⁰

This repetition of time delimiters is also reinforced through the repetition of common themes encountered in the eschatological discourse and the passion narrative.²¹

¹⁸ See R.H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), 52 was the first to recognize this fact. Although in 1935, he wrote that in Mark 13 "there is no reference to the impending passion" (*History and Interpretation in the Gospels* [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935], 94), in 1950 he changed his mind and became the first to suggest that the four watches of 13:35 parallel four time references in the passion narrative.

¹⁹ Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 347 says of 13:35 that "For Mark, it is the culmination of Jesus' sermon" and offers "proleptic echoes of the passion narrative."

²⁰ Geddert, *Watchwords*, 92-93 demonstrates how the irregularities in the doorkeeper parable in Mark 13:33-37 lead to Mark's passion narrative. See David Wenham, *The Rediscovery of Jesus' Eschatological Discourse*, Gospel Perspectives, vol. 4 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 18,45 for a different explanation of the irregularities.

²¹ For a helpful diagram of parallels between Mark 13 and Mark 14-15 see Paul Achtemeier, Joel Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 139.

The Common Themes

1. The Gospel Will Result in a World Mission.

13:10 “The gospel must first be preached to all nations.”

14:9 “Wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will be told.”
2. The Three Calls to Watch for the Second Coming (13:34, 35, 37) are paralleled with the three calls to watch for Jesus’ passion in the garden of Gethsemane (14:36-41) and the triple denial by Peter.
3. Jesus’ return to the disciples who are sleeping (14:37-38, 40-41) is exactly what he had warned in the parousia parable would happen (13:36): the master will come suddenly and find his disciples sleeping. The parable of the doorkeeper and Jesus’ preparation in Gethsemane are the only two pericopes in Mark where sleeping is a vice. William Lane contends these two events are further tied together by the phraseology describing Jesus’ coming and finding the disciples in 14:37 and 40 and the coming and finding in the parable of the doorkeeper in 13:34-36.²²
4. Jesus was betrayed by one of his own (14:45) and brother will betray brother to death in the future as prophesized in 13:12 (there is a threefold παραδίδωμι in 13:9, 11, and 12 and ten occurrences of this term in chapters 14-15).
5. The Trial of Jesus Will Usher into a Trial for the Disciples.

14:53-72 Peter denies the Lord in his suffering.

13:9-13 The disciples will be faced with suffering where they will be tempted to deny the Lord.
6. False Messiahs Will Appear.

13:21-23 False Christs are coming before the end.

14:61, 64 The Sanhedrin believe that Jesus is a false Christ.
7. The Coming of the Son of Man Will Be Seen.

13:26 “Men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.”

14:62 “You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Might One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”
8. The Temple Destruction Is Prominent.

13:2 “Not one stone here will be left on another; everyone will be thrown down.”

15:38 “The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.”
9. The Three-Hour Time Designations of the four watches in 13:35 are paralleled by the three-hour time designations in Jesus’ death (15:25, 33, 34).

²² Lane, *Mark*, 513 notes the following formal similarities: 14:37 ἔρχεται καὶ εὑρίσκει αὐτοὺς καθεύδοντας; 14:40 ἐλθὼν εἶπεν αὐτοὺς καθεύδοντας; and 13:36 μὴ ἐλθὼν ἑξαίφνης εὕρη ἡμᾶς καθεύδοντας.

Finally, Mark places a frame of discipleship around chapter 13 to show that he wants to apply its meaning to the way disciples live here and now. Framing is a common narrative technique of Mark. Two of the most pronounced Markan frames clarify the intent of the miracles in Mark 4:21-8:21 and the purpose of the discipleship catechism in 8:22 through the end of chapter 10. The first boat trip across the sea, which I entitle “the sea calming,” is primarily a miracle story, but the addition of 4:40 is intended to cause the reader to pause and reflect on the insufficiency of miracles, “Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’” The sea-conversation incident (8:14-21) ends the presentation of Jesus as a miracle worker with the disciples’ incomprehension and hard-heartedness repeated ten times through Jesus’ questions. The disciples cannot understand Jesus’ miracles until they view them through the lens of his passion. They will not be able to comprehend the true multiplication power of the gospel (8:19-20) until they see that the two multiplications of bread prepared for Jesus’ death and the breaking of bread he accomplished at the Last Supper (notice the Markan repetition in 6:41, 8:6-7, and 14:22-23).

Likewise, the two healings of the blind men (8:22-26; 10:46-52) frame the discipleship catechism of the following section (8:27-10:45) so that the first blind man needs a second touch before he can see clearly and totally. This mirrors Peter himself who in the next incident proclaims Jesus as the Davidic Messiah but is unable to recognize him as the suffering Son of Man. Like the blind man, Peter needs a second touch that is then provided by the discipleship catechism with its threefold passion prediction, misunderstanding by the disciples, and subsequent teaching on discipleship. As the climax of this section, Bartimaeus is healed from blindness and appropriately follows Jesus along the way that is the way to Jerusalem and the cross.

Finally, the stories of two women giving their all to Jesus frame the eschatological discourse. The way to be prepared for the parousia is to emulate the widow who “put in everything—all she had to live on” and to imitate the woman who poured out her rich perfume to contribute to Jesus’ death and burial. This frame placed around the eschatological discourse gives the content on how to watch for Jesus’ coming, namely by surrendering all of one’s life to Jesus. Recent scholars such as Myers and Evans²³ who have reputed this emulation and discovered in this pericope a condemnation of the Jewish system where demands of tithing placed upon the poor devour widows’ houses have missed this Markan frame. Let me enumerate the evidence for a well-conceived Markan framework narrative.

²³ Myers, *Binding*, 320-21; Craig A. Evans, *Word Biblical Commentary 34B: Mark 8:27-16:20*, 282-85. See A. Wright, “The Widow’s Mite: Praise or Lament? A Matter of Context,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 256-65.

1. Vocabulary and lexical connections
 - a. The use of the term ὄλος 12:44 the widow gives all
14:9 the whole world hears the message;
 - b. Both begin with ἀμὴν δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν (12:43; 14:9)
 - c. The stitch word *poor* is employed twice in each story (12:42,43; 14:5,7)
2. Markan frames are found throughout the gospel with the resulting theme being either a suffering Messiah or discipleship that emulates this type of Messiah:

a. Messianic secret frame	1:40-45; 3:7-12	Suffering Messiah
b. Insider / outsider frame	3:13-19, 33-34	Discipleship
c. Seed parables frame	4:1-2, 33-36	Discipleship
d. Sea trips frame	4:35-41; 8:13-21	Discipleship
e. Blind men healed frame	8:22-26; 10:46-52	Discipleship
f. Royal Psalms frame	11:9-11; 12:36, and 13:1	Suffering Messiah
g. Woman's sacrificial action frame	12:41-44; 14:3-9	Discipleship
h. Burial actions frame	14:3-9; 16:1-8	Suffering Messiah
3. In both, Jesus praises a woman who demonstrates the way of self-giving
4. The widow's mite is surprisingly better than the enormous offerings of the rich placed in the temple treasury, and the woman's offering is better than giving money to the poor
5. Both stories anticipate the events of 15:21-16:8 about the death of Jesus:
 - a. The widow gives her whole life (12:44)²⁴
 - b. The woman has anointed Jesus' body for burial (14:8)
 - c. There is a progression from the giving up of life to burial after death
 - d. "Jesus praises a woman who gives her all to the temple which is about to be destroyed" just as Jesus is about to be destroyed in death"²⁵
6. In both, there is a contrast with its immediate context:
 - a. The bad example of scribes with reference to widows (12:40 "you devour widows' houses") is contrasted with the good example of the widow.
 - b. The woman's generous act is contrasted with Judas' dastardly act of betrayal (14:10).

From the change in vocabulary in Mark 13, the proleptic reference to the passion narrative in 13:35, the common themes with the passion narrative, and the literary frame placed around chapter 13, we can visualize how Mark wants

²⁴ See Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 154.

²⁵ Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), 155.

his audience to reflect upon eschatology. Mark then is not primarily interested in composing an eschatological calendar of future events.²⁶ He is calling the readers to a discipleship of the cross, a following of the forsaken one. It is the paraenesis that is prominent. As Geddert explains, “It is by means of cross-referencing between Mark 13 and the passion narrative that we see most clearly how the passion of Jesus becomes a model for discipleship in the post-resurrection age.”²⁷ “If Mark is deliberately using the Passion narrative to help define what it means to watch (γρηγορέω) in the waiting period before the consummation, then ‘watching’ certainly has nothing to do with watching for portents. It has much more to do with faithful discipleship in a time of crisis.”²⁸

This emphasis is recognized by other current scholars through different techniques. In an internet article originally presented at the 2003 eschatology conference at Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary, Paul Gibbs employs discourse analysis to come to a similar conclusion.²⁹ The point of the Olivet discourse is the paraenetic conclusion. He suggests, “Jesus’ point is to push His followers from extraspection to introspection.” He concludes, “the *foretelling* was only there to support his *forthtelling*.”³⁰

Similarly, Ben Witherington argues that this discourse de-apocalypticizes the eschatological discussion.³¹ Mark wants to dampen down an over-enthusiastic expectation of the end by (1) indicating that this is only the beginning of birth pangs (13:8); (2) by stating that no one knows the day nor the hour, not even the angels nor the Son (13:32); and (3) by forecasting that there will be end-time fanatics who point to false messiahs (13:6,21-22). He concludes as we do that “the major function of the Olivet discourse, then, is not to encourage eschatological forecasting, but rather to encourage watchfulness and diligence in Christian life and witness.”³²

²⁶ Geddert, *Watchwords*, 106 explains that Mark 13 is “an eschatology highly infused with Mark’s passion theology . . . , not an eschatology on the lookout for signs and apocalyptic phenomena.”

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 189.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁹ I like Gibbs’ conclusion, but his arguments are filled with holes. He unsuccessfully attempts to show that the peak marker is highlighted through rhetorical underlining, through repetition, crowded stage (density of participants) and heightened vividness (increased number of verbs, change in verb tense and so forth), and change of pace (longer / shorter tagmemes; fewer or no conjunctions).

³⁰ Paul Gibbs, “What’s the Point of the Olivet Discourse? A Discourse Analysis of Mark 13,” 8, seminary.cbs.edu/content/events/nlc/nlc-notes.asp

³¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 2001), 337.

³² *Ibid.*, 340.

The implications of this study suggest that preaching apocalyptic texts should climax in the ethical difference that this future teaching makes in the present lives of church members. Apparently there should be a lot fewer prophecy conferences and a lot more cross-bearing action on the part of the Christian community. Jesus, the gospel writers, and therefore the Christian community today should lay the primary stress upon discipleship activities such as the preaching of the gospel, our readiness to suffer, and the sacrificial lifestyle of the believer. Instead of the Reformed community allowing future literalists to dominate the airwaves and bookshelves with their forecasts and warnings, we must return to the biblical pattern of emphasizing eschatological ethics and the daily call to a discipleship of the cross.