

Written Copy Mark 13:32-33 Be on Guard, Keep Awake, Be Ready
Last Sunday of the Church Year
November 24th, 2018

Text: Mark 13:32-33

³² "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.

³² Indeed, concerning that day or the hour no one has known or knows today, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son, if not (except for) the Father. ³³ You must continue to be observant, you must continue to be awake. For you have not and still do not know when the occasion/fitting season is now.

Exegetical Statement

Jesus is finishing His discourse on what must happen between the time He ascends and the time He returns. After having dealt with general observations of what will happen during this period, He now deals with the time just prior to His return and the return itself. There will be cataclysmic events involving the sun, moon, and even the constellations and stars throughout the whole universe. They will no longer be fixed in place but will fall from the sky as the sun's light is obscured and the moon stops shedding light. Then as the earth and heavens disappear Christ will appear in the clouds in all His glory and power uncloaked. He will send His angels out to gather up all the elect from one end of the earth to the other. He tells them a parable about how a farmer can tell when summer is on its way as the fig tree sprouts and blossoms. He is excited to know that harvest time is soon. In the same way we should watch for these signs excited about what they point to: Christ's return and our entrance into eternal life. While heaven and earth will pass away all the promises of Christ will remain forever. But no one will know the season, the day, or the hour when this will happen. Jesus doesn't even know so we should not believe anyone else's prediction. But like the door-keeper watching for the return of a sojourning master we need to keep watch and remain awake in faith for His return when we least expect it.

Focus Statement:

You were chosen before the world began to be a special child of God. Christ came to earth and became one of us and shed His blood so that you would have a place next to Him on the Last Day. He now rules and governs over all that will happen until He returns. He rules over your life working to keep you awake and ready by faith so that you won't miss out. He continues to draw you back and closer to Him through the means of grace. On the Last Day He will dispatch an angel to gather you to His side and give to you the new body and new soul as promised so that you can live with Him forever in eternal life.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

In the rush and busyness of our daily lives, especially with Christmas on the horizon, and all the preparation that entails our time devoted to our relationship with Jesus can suffer. We can choose holiday preparations over personal and corporate time with Him. How do we find balance this time of year? How are we to remain on our guard, awake, and ready?

What the hearer should do as a result:

In the midst of our holiday preparations make time for Jesus. Make your personal and corporate worship time a priority. Give the Holy Spirit opportunity to keep you close, protected, guarded in faith, watching and hoping for His return any day.

Subject Sentence: Let The Spirit Keep You ready For Christ's coming

Part of my weekly prayer ritual has been to pray for my classmates who are still at the Seminary. And in doing so this week I was remembering what it was like for me a year ago. Coming back from Thanksgiving Break the push was on toward the end of 2nd half of the Semester and papers and assignments were beginning to come due and final exams loomed on the horizon. Along with that the pastor of my Field Work congregation where I assisted as part of the Seminary training was looking at the extra services he had on his plate for Thanksgiving and Advent and was looking for some help. And there were things that needed to be done to prepare for Christmas, shopping, and planning for a trip up to Michigan, which by God's grace we were able to do together as my nephew was letting us stay with him and bring both dogs. And the pastors at several churches up here upon hearing I was coming were asking if I'd like to come and preach. Suffice it to say I had a lot on my plate. Something had to give. And that something ended up being my personal and devotional time with the Lord. I normally set aside an hour or so each morning to read some Scripture, meditate on it, and pray. But when I was already behind and things needed to be done the temptation to make use of that hour was overwhelming. Now you might think that attending Seminary is like one big unending worship service where you live and breath Jesus 24-7. We are busy studying about Jesus and learning about Him, but that's all in the 3rd person. What is lacking is time with Him in the first person. There is a world of difference learning about Him as everyone's Savior and worshiping Him as my Savior. So this time of year I found my relationship with Him stretched.

Perhaps you do as well. Right after Thanksgiving starts the Season of Christmas shopping. There is baking of cookies to be done. The setting up and decorating of Christmas trees to be done. There are parties and get togethers with friends to attend. There are those special Christmas movies that you can only see this time of year. And there are those extra worship services for Advent along with the regular Sunday service. And often something has to give. And what is it that goes by the wayside? It's often what is not of number one importance in our lives. For you is it ever your personal devotional prayer time with Jesus? Is it your time to gather in small groups and study His Word? Is it ever your time spent in gathering with your fellow brothers and sisters in Worship? And it is any of these things does it matter?

In light of this let's look at our Gospel Lesson and the theme we have before us as we celebrate the Last Sunday of the Church Year. The readings focus on the end times just before and at the return of Christ on the Last Day. In our Gospel Lesson from last Sunday Jesus described what must happen between His ascension and His return on the Last Day. There will be natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods and other things such as the Forest Fires that have been destroying portions of California. Disasters that have affected portions of the United States this year. And yet Christ has still not returned. There are places across the globe such as North Korea, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Syria where Christians are suffering persecution. In our own country there are groups accusing us of being unloving, judgmental, and intolerant because we oppose abortion, stand by the Biblical definition of marriage, God's design that He created us male and female instead of allowing us to make lifestyle choices on gender. And yet as these go on Christ has not yet returned. Through print and electronic media the Gospel has been spread across the globe, and yet Christ has not yet returned. It's been over 2000 years, perhaps it will be another 2000 before he actually returns. Is His return any day important enough for us to worry about right now; with all we've got going on?

Look at how many in the Church have predicted Christ's imminent return only to be proven wrong. Among them are the early church fathers Hippolytus of Rome and Irenaeus who thought Christ would return by AD 500. Pope Sylvester II said He would return in AD1000 because he believed that marked the 1000-year anniversary of Christ's birth. When it didn't occur he put forth AD 1033 as he believed it marked a 1000 year period from Christ's death. John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church predicted 1836. Charles Taze Russel founder of the Jehovah Witness' Watchtower society predicted 1914. Herbert W. Armstrong founder of the Worldwide Church of God predicted 1935, then 1943, then 1972, and finally 1975. Too many names to mention thought it would happen when the ball dropped on the year 2000. Televangelist Jack Van Impe predicted 2012. And there are still those predictions awaiting us in the near future: Ronald Weinland who heads what remains of the Worldwide Church of God predicts it will happen in 2019. And self-proclaimed psychic and astrologer Jean Dixon predicted the world would end in the year 2020. But the One who will actually usher in the end of the world by His return in the flesh states (**Mark**

13:32) ³² **"But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."** If not even Jesus in His humanity knows the date, then it's guaranteed no other human being knows it.

But do all these things serve to color our sense of urgency when we read today's Gospel Lesson on what will happen directly preceding Christ's second coming? Think about what Jesus predictions of what must happen directly before His return: **(Mark 13:24b-25)** ^{24b} **"the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, ²⁵ and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken"**. What will it be like to experience this first hand if we are still alive? What will happen when the sun and moon suddenly go dark? What kind of panic might that cause? How about when the universe itself begins to fall apart? When stars and planets and solar systems no longer remain in their fixed courses because the forces that bind all reality together are removed? **Isaiah 51:6** describes the end in this way: **"the heavens vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and they who dwell in it will die in like manner"**. How much presence of mind will anyone have to remember "Yeah, this is what Jesus said would happen. He must be on His way. I'd better turn back to Him now." Not to mention that no one can or will turn back to Him in faith unless the Holy Spirit first calls Him. But will there be time? For Jesus says **(Mark 13:26-27)** ²⁶ **And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven."** Jesus will appear in all His glory. The brightness of His appearance as the uncloaked Holy Son of God overwhelming all those unprepared for His return. For them it will be a very scary time. It will be the beginning of an eternity of suffering and pain in hell. And there will be no time to repent, to change one's heart and believe. The time of the Holy Spirit to work such a miracle will be over. What will that time be like for you?

Jesus desire for you is not that you be among those who are fearful. Not that you be one of those who are headed to an eternity of torment. He came down from heaven to earth to take on human flesh so that this would never have to be your future. In all that you say and do you could never do enough to be right with God and deserving of His gift of eternal life.

So Christ came to do it for you. He came to be your sacrifice, to shed His blood which covers over all your sins of past, present, and future. He came because He desires and faith relationship with you now; one that stretches from your baptism throughout your life and into the eternity to come. The new heaven and the new earth that He, by His mighty power, that same power that created all things very good at the beginning, will restore all things to perfection in the new heaven and the new earth. Including us. He has called you by faith to receive this wonderful gift that comes by faith now but will be your reality on the Last Day. When He returns, because of all He has done for you, you will be gathered by the angels to Him, along with me, and everyone else who believes, to live with Him forever.

But the devil is hard at work in your life. Hard at work to turn your attention from this glorious future to make your now more important. All the other things that vie for 1st place in your schedule and in your heart. Is this a problem? Jesus seems to think it is. That's why He warns us in verses 32-33 **(Mark 13:32-33)** ³² **"But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come."** Be on your guard. Remain connected to Him in a faith relationship. He goes on to say in verses 34-37 **(Mark 13:34-37)** ³⁴ **It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. ³⁵ Therefore stay awake---for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning---³⁶ lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. ³⁷ And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake"** Jesus is the One who has gone on a journey back to the Father and has left us His servants to do the work of the Church. But we should never become so busy with that work or with our own personal lives that we neglect to remain awake and on guard. We should never take a chance that we neglect our faith relationship with Him to the point that spiritually we have fallen asleep. That we have forgotten His promise that one day we shall live with Him in paradise in our focus on our lives and plans for today.

He calls you here today to draw you back to Him through the means of grace. Through Word and Sacrament. His Spirit desires to continue this work in you throughout the week

through personal meditative and prayerful study of His Word, and through the gathering together of likeminded Christians for Bible Study and prayer. He is willing to take the time to draw you closer in a personal relationship with Him. Are you willing to make time for Him? It's one thing to have a cross hanging on your wall and a Bible on your coffee table. It's another thing to crack that Bible open and hear what He has to say to you. To fall down on your knees before that cross and with a broken and repentant heart hear His healing words of forgiveness and salvation that come from the One who hung on that cross for you.

He is always calling out to you, making time for you. Let Him have a place in your schedule to ensure that whatever day and whatever time Christ may come, even if you're physically asleep, you will be spiritually ready. Because Christ has secured your heart and your mind in faith toward Him, now and forever. Amen.