

Mark 13:32-37

November 30, 2014 – 1st SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Christ Is Coming...We Don't Know When

☞ **We have work to do.** (vv.32-34)

☞ **We need to keep watch** (vv.34-37)

In the Name of Jesus our Advent Master on His way, dear watching Christians:

How many ways do people misjudge God? I'd say, "Let me count the ways," but I can't count that high. At least two misjudgments against God come up in this text. First, people think God is only a God of "second chances." Yet every day of our lives is another opportunity, another chance to respond to the God of grace who leaves nothing to chance. God promised Adam and Eve a Savior, kept reminding ancient people of that promise, then sent the Savior of all at the cost of His own shed blood. Today is another day of grace to hear His call and repent of your sins. Secondly, all these extra "chances" day-by-day don't seem like enough for those who misjudge God. They want a "second chance" after this life is done. So they make up stories about a 1000-year rule of Christ on earth, even though Jesus said, "**My kingdom is not of this world.**" (John 18:36) They invent books and movies like the *Left Behind* series that make it sound as if you can be "left behind" and have another chance to get right with God. Two problems with that: 1) God says, "**It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.**" (Hebrews 9:27 AV) 2) According to the way Jesus talks about being "left behind," the *Left Behind* authors have it backwards. Jesus says unbelievers were taken away in the Flood; Noah and family were left behind on the ark. Being "left behind" is good as long as you're right with God. On this first Sunday of a new Church Year we hear: **Christ Is Coming...We Don't Know When.** In the meantime...

☞ **We have work to do.** (vv.32-34)

So much of your success in life depends on who you listen to. For example, you may be convinced your doctor has the best advice in the world about weight loss. But if it's not working for you, maybe you need a second opinion or a nutritionist. Maybe not from a survivalist like I sat next to on the plane a few weeks ago. He described how it can take three hours to test food safety in the wild. But sometimes doctors contradict each other. So do lawyers. So do pastors. Who are you going to believe?

Personally, I only know one Person who loves me in perfect, self-sacrificing love. He says He's loved me by name from all eternity. Though He knows me better than I know myself, He still loves me. Imagine! Though I fail Him miserably hour-by-hour, He refuses to give up on me. His scarred hands and feet prove the depths of His love washing my sins away. When my Lord Jesus speaks, I want to listen.

Jesus says, "**No one knows about that day or that hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**" ³³**Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come.**" (W.P.) ¹ One problem with just about everybody – doctors, lawyers, pastors – they all want you to listen to them. Some pastors have convinced their listeners to sell everything and sit on a mountaintop until Jesus comes back. We can be certain **Christ Is Coming** – because He said so. But we can be equally certain **We Don't Know When** – because Jesus also said so. During His State of Humiliation on earth (Philippians 2:8f) Jesus emptied Himself of the full use of His divine power in order to suffer for our sins and die on the cross. He chose not to make full use of His abilities as God, like knowing all things (omniscience). In this mystery as the God-Man, Jesus could honestly say only the Father knows the exact date or time of Judgment Day. Any person who says he can predict it is a wolf in sheep's clothing. Run!

¹ W.P. ~ unless otherwise noted translation is the Wartburg Project popular review. [11/29/2014] (<http://wartburgproject.org>)

Here Jesus does tell us what we should be doing: **“Watch! Be alert and pray....”** As His Apostle Peter later wrote: **“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”** (1 Peter 5:8f NIV84)

Can you hear Jesus? **We have work to do.** This calls for good stewardship of all our resources of time, talent and treasure. Jesus gave His marching orders to His Church in the Great Commission. Literally, **“While going, disciple all the ethnic groups by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and by teaching them to guard and treasure all things as many as I have commanded you. And surely I am with you all the days to the gathered goal of the ages.”** (Matthew 28:19f TPA)² If we’re totally busy feeding the hungry but neglecting to tell them the message of Jesus – law and gospel, sin and grace – we are failing to do the work Jesus commanded. If we pick and choose which doctrines or teachings we prefer, we are lying and deceiving by God’s Name. Jesus says, **“It is like a man going away on a journey. When he left his home he put his servants in charge and assigned what each one was to do.”** Being a father, mother, child, student, worker, manager, Sunday School teacher or Bible Class attendee – all are part of the big picture to bring people to Christ before it’s too late.

🕊 **We need to keep watch (vv.34-37)**

One servant Jesus singles out: The Master **“also commanded the doorkeeper to keep watch.”** His special assigned task is to guard the household against attack from the outside and watch over those who might leave alone at night and endanger themselves in the dark. That’s what doorkeepers do. As the Psalmist said, **“Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.”** (Psalm 84:10 NIV84) Parents, pastors and congregational elders have the assigned task of watching over the souls entrusted to them.

Jesus finishes His thoughts in this text: **“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming: whether in the evening or at midnight or when the rooster crows or early in the morning. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!”** Mark gives more precise possibilities than Matthew (24:36-51) or Luke (12:35-40; 21:34-38). And yet the exact moment in time we just don’t know. There are no second chances like the movie *Left Behind* wants to give for the airline pilot whose wife is supposedly raptured along with all the other people disappearing from earth. Their fiction fully disagrees with God’s Word the Bible. God promises one Judgment Day is coming. That’s the end of the world as we know it. Every possibility of repentance will be gone that Day. Otherwise, why would Jesus keep saying, **“Watch!”**

Will God find you **“sleeping”**? Peter, James and John fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane. Remember why God wanted me to be a preacher? To stay awake during the sermon. How about you?

One of the techniques I use in China can illustrate how God helps us here. Teaching the Bible languages (Hebrew, Greek) to Chinese students through an interpreter is difficult for them. One popular young woman was getting bleary eyed. So I went over and asked her to stand up and help me. I described the scapegoat in Leviticus 16 and ceremonially put all the sins of the class on her head. Then I led her out onto the balcony as the priest led the scapegoat away into the desert with the sins of the Israelites on its head. Her classmates laughed until I explained how Jesus is our scapegoat, the **“Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”** (John 1:29) He gives us “remission,” sending away of sins.

God uses trials to wake us up and help us pay attention. Don’t be **“sleeping”**! **“Watch!”** Amen.

² TPA ~ *The Preacher’s Apprentice* – pen name of the undersigned for exegetical sermon studies.

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