

Sermon outline and notes:

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Mark 13:28-37 “What to Do ‘til Jesus Comes”

Intro. As you look into the future of our world, are you optimistic that things are going to get better? Or are you pessimistic? I believe for the first time polls are indicating that most Americans are beginning to feel that conditions will be worse for their children & grandchildren, than they have been for themselves. But I have good news! The great hope of every Christian is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In fact, Titus 2:13 says that we are “looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” The Bible says that a reward awaits believers who love His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). There are a number of reasons why we should love His appearing. Sin & Death will be defeated forever (I Cor. 15:54). The Bible says that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is (I John 3:2). We will have a glorified body like Jesus had! Furthermore, when Christ returns, Satan will be defeated. The curse will be lifted. Christ will be worshiped throughout the world, and creation will be liberated. The earth will once again be like a Garden of Eden. The Lord’s Second Coming is a real event that will take place in history, just as His first coming did.

Up to this point in Mark 13 Jesus has been giving a series of predictions concerning the future. Many of these predictions have already been fulfilled. But in the present section admonition replaces prediction. Christ admonishes us to do certain things while we wait for His return. And these admonitions were not just for the apostles. Notice what Jesus said in v.37, “And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” These admonitions were for all believers. That includes us!

In this text we see 3 main things we should do while we look for His coming. First of all, we are to:

I. WAIT PATIENTLY

In this text our Lord gives 2 parables: one about the fig tree, and one about a landowner who goes on a far journey. Well, the master or owner of the house represents Christ. It says in v.34, “It is like a man going to a far country....” It that day, travel was pretty slow, so a journey to a far country would mean that he would be gone a long time.

Even so, Jesus indicated that when He ascended back to heaven, He would be gone a long time. Indeed, by the time the Gospel of Mark was written, He had been gone at least 30 years. That must have seemed like a long time. Today, He has been gone almost 2,000 years! He has certainly been away a long time by now.

How does this apply to us? Jesus implied that His people would have to patiently wait for His return. In fact, James 5:7 says, “be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord....” 1 Corinthians 1:7 says that we are to be, “waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Don’t give up on Jesus! Though most of us would like for Jesus to come today, we may have to keep waiting patiently, perhaps for many more years.

Before I met Cheryl I had a girlfriend in High School. We dated a year or so, broke up, and then got back together a few months before I went off to Bible College in Dallas, TX. That was over 700 miles away! For the first few months after I went off to school, we wrote & called each other. But was she willing to wait patiently for my return? No indeed! She started seeing someone

else, & then she wrote me one of those “Dear John” letters. Do you know what I was singing? “She met another and ... she was gone.” By the way, I learned something from that experience. When Cheryl & I started a relationship, it wasn’t long before I convinced her to transfer to a college in Dallas, so we could date on a regular basis. I wasn’t going to let *her* get away me!

The point is that we have been betrothed to Jesus Christ. Some day He is coming for His bride, and we need to wait patiently for His return, and be faithful to Him while we wait.

By the way, does the long wait mean that Christ is not coming at all? Certainly not! There are a number of reasons why Christ waiting so long before He returns. 1) He is permitting evil to run its course. The cup of God’s wrath is evidently not yet full. In Genesis 15:16 we see that God delayed sending the Israelites to judge & dispossess the inhabitants of the land, “for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.” 2) He is adding to His church. Jesus said in v.10, “And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.” Likewise, Paul writes in Romans 11:25, blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.” Furthermore, 2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” 3) He is not bound by time. 2 Peter 3:8 says, “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” 2,000 years may seem like a long delay to us, but it is almost as nothing to God, who is called “the Ancient of Days” (Daniel 7:9, 13, 22).

II. WORK FAITHFULLY WHILE WE WAIT

Jesus did not want His disciples to get so involved in the prophecies of the future that they would neglect the responsibilities of the present. He left us with work to do. So notice with me:

A. The Mandate of Faithful Service – Jesus said in v.34, “It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work....” Like the householder in the story, before our Lord went back to heaven, He gave each of us work to do. In Luke 19:13 Jesus gave another parable said, “Do business till I come.” So what work should we be doing until Jesus comes?

1. Proclaim the Gospel to All Nations – Jesus says in v.10, “And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.” Likewise, Jesus said to His disciples in Acts 1:7-8, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” While it is important to learn prophecy, our primary job is to share the Gospel & make disciples.

2. Pray – Jesus said in v.33, “Take heed, watch and pray....” One of the most important ministries we can engage in is to pray.

What are we to pray for? We should pray for the lost. We should pray for our missionaries. We should pray for the spiritual well-being of fellow believers. We should pray for our ministries, including this week’s Youth Camp, & our upcoming Vacation Bible School.

3. Persevere – The Lord expects us to be faithful while He is gone and to be working when He returns. We are not to quit, or let up. Yet in this context Jesus warns for several forces at work in the last days that could turn believers away from the Lord. He warned of persecution (vv.9-13). That same week He said in John 16:33, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Likewise, in Acts 14:22 the apostles warned new believers that “we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” This

will require inner strength to persevere for the Lord. He also warned of deception (vv.21-22). We must not allow anyone to deceive us in these last days, and draw us away from faithfully serving the Lord.

Are you still serving the Lord while you wait on His return? Some of our Senior Adults may feel you can't do much, but you can certainly pray! You can give to help spread the Gospel. Jesus has gone to heaven, but while we wait, let us be faithful to do the work He has assigned to us.

Why should you work & serve Jesus while you wait? Well we not only see the mandate of faithful service, but let's consider next of all:

B. The Motives for Faithful Service – Notice how Jesus motivates us to be faithful in our service while He's away. First of all:

1. He Motivates Us By the Hope of His Near Return – Believers in the last days will face great difficulty. Yet if they know that Jesus is returning very soon, it will motivate them to persevere. So Jesus said in vv.28-29, “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!” What an encouragement to remain faithful during those difficult days of stress & persecution.

Back when our children were young, we would travel the long road to Georgia. After an hour or so down the road, what do you think we would hear from them? “Are we there yet?” We just had to tell them to be patient. But as we got closer to Rome, Georgia, we would see the signs indicating that we were almost home. One sign in particular let us know that we were very near our destination, “Welcome to Floyd County.” At that point we knew the wait was almost over, and that we had just about arrived home. How encouraging it is to know that the end of the journey is so near!

Then in v.30 He promises that at least some will survive those difficult days to see the Second Coming of Christ. There He says, “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.” What “generation” was Jesus referring to? He is clearly not referring to the disciple's generation, though it is true that destruction of the temple took place before that generation passed away. But “all these things” were not fulfilled at that time.¹

But in the context, I believe “this generation” refers to the generation of believers that will be living in those final days of tribulation. As Jesus says in v.29, they will see the fulfillment of the signs Jesus said would come to pass. So v.30 is an assurance that once those signs unfold, that generation will not pass away before *all* will be fulfilled. As the Lord said in v.20, those tribulation days will not go on and on. They will be cut short. In fact, we know from other Scriptures that the Tribulation will last only seven years (Dan. 9:27),² and the worst part of it will last only three-and-a-half years (Rev. 12:14). He assures believers that the antichrist will not succeed in his attempt to

¹ Many believe Jesus was referring to the Jewish race. The Greek word translated “generation” (genea) can be used to speak of a kind of people or a race (cf. Mt. 23:36). The Jewish people were referred to by the term “generation” in the Old Testament (Dt. 32:5; Psa. 78:8). Also, Jesus used it to refer to the Jewish nation of His day on several occasions (Mark 8:12, 38; 9:19). Furthermore, the fig tree on several occasions speaks of the nation Israel. Therefore, Jesus would then be teaching the indestructibility of the Jewish people, even during the Great Tribulation. Haman was not able to destroy them, neither was Pharaoh, nor did Hitler succeed in his attempts. Also, a number of Bible teachers have linked this verse with the rebirth of the nation of Israel in 1948. The generation of Jews that re-established the nation of Israel have begun to die off, & will be gone within then next 20 years or so. Could this point to the soon coming of Christ?

² Each “week” in Daniel's seventy-week prophecy is seven years long.

destroy their witness from the earth. Christ will certainly intervene to bring salvation to believers, and judgment upon their persecutors.

Now if the rapture of believers takes place before the Tribulation, then this only applies to a limited degree. We already see signs of the times pointing to the near return of Christ. The nearness of Christ's return motivates us to remain faithful. However, for the saints of God in the Tribulation, those Tribulation signs would offer even greater motivation. If they will just persevere a little longer, they could live to see Jesus coming again to accomplish their final & complete deliverance!

2. He Motivates Us By the Certainty of His Return - He says in v.31, "Heaven and earth will pass away,³ but My words will by no means pass away." What Jesus here drives home is that the physical universe, as we now see it, no matter how firm and strong some of it may appear to be, is actually going to pass away in its present form. However, His own words will continue to prove their stability and worth forever and ever. Clearly, Jesus is making a bold claim to be none other than the Son of God, for only the Word of God endures forever. 1 Peter 1:24-25 says, "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever" (cf. Isaiah 40:8).

Another motive to be faithfully serving until the Lord returns is this:

3. He Motivates Us By Holding Us Accountable - This is implied in the parable of the owner returning to his household & servants, to hold them accountable for their work. You and I ought to live our lives in the light of the fact that we are to stand in the presence of Christ. 2 Cor. 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

By April 15 of every year, I file & pay my income taxes. I report all of my taxable income, & I honestly report my deductions. I do so out of obedience to the Lord (Mark 12:17). But I am also motivated by the fact that an I.R.S. agent could contact me at any moment, & require me to undergo an audit. By the way, that's never happened to me. But in the back of my mind, I know that it could happen.

Even so, we should always keep in mind that Jesus could come again, & hold us accountable for how we have been living & serving. 1 John 2:28 says, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." If Jesus were to come today, would you be ashamed of how you have been living? Would you be ashamed of how little you have served Him? If He were to come again on a Sunday morning, would He find you in church? If not, would you be ashamed? Always remember that one purpose for the return of Christ is to examine our lives, and determine if we will receive a reward. Jesus said in Matthew 16:27, "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works."

Finally, while we wait for Jesus to return, we should wait patiently, work faithfully, and:

III. WATCH EXPECTANTLY

When I was a child, my friends and I played hide and seek. Someone was chosen to close his eyes and count for a while until everyone else had a chance to hide. When the person was finished counting, he would open his eyes and say, "Ready or not, here I come!" That statement can be applied to the text of Mark 13, which deals with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We are to watch expectantly for the Lord's return, and always be ready.

³ The passing away of heaven and earth, to which Jesus refers, does not mean total annihilation but glorious renewal.

So notice how Jesus commands us to watch in this text of Scripture. He says in v.33, "Take heed, watch and pray...." Then he says in v.37, "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" In every case (also v.35) the command to watch is in the present tense: "Keep on watching." The apostles also exhorted us to watch for the return of Christ. Paul said in Philippians 3:20, "Our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." The apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 4:7, "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful"

The primary reason Jesus gives for us to be constantly watching for His return is this: We do not know in advance when He will return. He says in v.32, "But of that day⁴ and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." The angels, though standing in a very close relationship to God and though intimately associated with the events pertaining to the Second Coming (Matt. 13:41; 24:31; Rev. 14:19), do not know the day nor the hour. Nor, in fact, does the Son Himself. How could Jesus Christ, who is God, not know something? That's easily explained if we understand some facts about the incarnation. When He became a man, He voluntarily restricted the use of His divine attributes (Phil. 2:6-8). Christ restricted the use of His omniscience to those things that the Father wanted Him to know. The main point of this verse is that it proves the futility and sinfulness of every attempt on man's part to predict the date when Jesus will return. Likewise, in the last of v.33 He says, "for you do not know when the time is." The word for "time" used here (*kairos*) does not refer to time as in a clock, but to a decisive epoch in the plan of God. God knows the timing of prophetic events, but we do not. Furthermore, He says in v.35, "Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning."⁵ It should not be overlooked in v.35 that the coming is in each case said to take place during one of the night watches. One reason is that fact that when Jesus comes again, it will be night somewhere! But the main reason the night watches are mentioned is that nighttime is the least expected time for someone's arrival. In fact, Jesus said in Luke 12:40, "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

The general time frame of the Second Coming will become obvious once God's people see all the signs in Mark 13. But even those people won't know the exact moment of Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation. That is a secret.

Why did the Lord make this a secret? God doesn't want mankind to know when the Second Coming will be because He wants every generation to live in expectation of it. Why is that? It is because watching has a purifying effect, knowing that you could stand before the Lord in judgment almost any moment. Peter wrote, "Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness" (2 Peter 3:11). 1 John 3:3 says, "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." On the other hand, not watching has the opposite effect. You see, if men did know the exact moment of Christ's return, they would probably choose to live in sin until just before that moment. Life would change considerably if you knew exactly when the Lord was going to come. People wouldn't make plans for the future; long-term relationships would be affected. So the Lord, in all His wisdom, has kept secret the time of Christ's return.

⁴ The expression "that day" recalls the Old Testament concept of the Day of the Lord (e.g., Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:7,14-16), the day of judgment of both Israel and the nations that marks the end of the present evil age and the beginning of the coming age of righteousness [Brooks].

⁵ As in 6:48, Mark again used the Roman way of reckoning four watches rather than the Jewish way of three watches (cf. Luke 12:38) – Brooks.

So if the Lord calls upon us to watch for His return, how do we do that? Are we to go outside and constantly look to the sky? Not at all. So how do we watch for the return of Christ? Well, first of all,

A. We Are to Watch for Signs of His Return. Notice what Jesus says in vv.28-29, “Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!” Notice our Lord’s opening words of v.28, “Now learn a parable”. He wanted the disciples to get the point of His analogy. The Greek word translated “learn” (*manthano*) speaks of learning something thoroughly. Jesus wanted the disciples to fully grasp the lesson He was teaching in the parable of the fig tree.

So we should do two things: first, study and learn prophecy & the signs of the times. He says in v.29, “when you see these things happening...” He is talking about the signs mentioned, especially in vv.14-25. You have to be familiar with the signs that you are to be looking for. Then, watch for the events that are taking place, so that you will be able to discern the fulfillment of Christ’s predictions and be strengthened in your faith. After all, Christ said in v.23, “But take heed; see, I have told you all things beforehand.” This principle is brought out by the parable of the fig tree. “When its branch is yet tender” refers to when the sap in the tree begins to flow through the branches at springtime, causing them to become tender and swollen. Jesus was saying that when spring comes, that means summer is near, and summer is harvest time. Whenever Christ speaks about harvests in the New Testament, He refers to the time when He will return to separate the good from the bad. Just as summer is imminent when a fig tree shoots forth leaves, so is the Second Coming imminent when the Lord’s people “see all these things.”

The Lord has already given some of the key signs that future believers are to look for. For example, when at a much later time believers see the final Antichrist carrying on his work of sacrilege and desolation, they will know that the glorious day of Christ’s return is close at hand.

B. We Should Watch for Spiritual Dangers – Jesus says in v.33, “Take heed, watch and pray...” Especially in the end times, there will be great spiritual dangers, including deception. Do you remember what Jesus said in vv.21-22, “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, He is there!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.” That is why the command to watch is often accompanied with the command to pray, as we will see in the next chapter (14:38; cf. Matt. 26:41).

C. We Should *Not* Fall Asleep! – Jesus says in v.36 that we are to watch for His return “lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.” We must look to the previous parable for the meaning. Notice in the last of v.34 that the master “commanded the doorkeeper to watch” for his return. He was not to sleep on the job, but keep watching. Now the literal meaning in the parable has a spiritual meaning. In v.36, “sleeping” indicates moral and spiritual laxity. It is when we forget about the Lord, and focus on worldly things. Luke 12:45 pictures this condition vividly, “But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk.”

In Matthew’s account of this section of our Lord’s teaching, he adds the following, “But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matt. 24:37; cf. Luke 17:26-27). In the days of Noah, more & more people turned from God to sin. Immorality &

violence were pervasive. Does that sound like today? Well, when Noah told the people that God's judgment was near, they didn't believe, & didn't care. The people lived as if nothing would happen to them. They did not believe that He would judge them and scorned the warning that a flood was imminent. They were so busy with present, earthly affairs that they did not bother about impending dangers. Social, family, and business life went on as usual.

That's exactly what will happen during the Tribulation. People during the end times will notice all the signs and wonders going on around them, but many of them won't consider what's happening and why. Men will be no different at the Lord's Second Coming than they were at His first coming. Many people saw Jesus, heard Him, and watched Him work wondrous signs. They saw Him raise the dead. Yet they still didn't believe & receive Him as Lord. Things won't be any different when people see the signs preceding Christ's coming again. But many people will not believe what they hear until it's too late.

Paul wrote, "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:11-12). Each day, we move closer and closer to the Second Coming of Christ. Are you ready?

Conclusion: Are you ready for the events of the return of Christ? If you aren't a believer, you aren't ready for Christ's return. Commentator William Barclay relates this story illustrating the danger of procrastination: "There is a fable which tells of three apprentice devils who were coming to this earth to finish their apprenticeship. They were talking to Satan about their plans to tempt and ruin men. The first said, 'I will tell them there is no God.' Satan said, 'That will not delude many, for they know there is a God [or heaven]. The second said, 'I will tell men there is no hell.' Satan answered, 'You will deceive no one that way; men know even now that there is a hell for sin.' The third said, 'I will tell men there is no hurry.' 'Go,' said Satan, 'and you will ruin them by the thousands'"⁶

If you are not saved today, you are not ready for the return of Christ. Don't put off getting saved another day. Repent of your sins & trust in Christ as your Savior. He died on the cross for you. When Christ comes again, it will be too late to get saved.

Sources: James A. Brooks, *New American Commentary: Mark* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); John MacArthur, Jr., *Signs of Christ's Return: Matthew 24-25* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4, Matthew & Mark (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982). A.T. Robertson read, but nothing added.

⁶ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), p. 317.