

Mark 13:26-37 “Then you will see the Son of Man coming on clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷At that time he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of the sky. ²⁸Learn from this illustration of the fig tree: Whenever its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near. ²⁹So also when you see these things happening, you will know that he is near—at the doors! ³⁰Amen I tell you: This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things happen. ³¹Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. ³²No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It 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. He also commanded the doorkeeper to keep watch. ³⁵Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house is coming: whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or early in the morning. ³⁶If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷What I say to you, I say to everyone: **Keep watch!**”

Time is relative. No, I’m not going to talk about Albert Einstein’s theory of general relativity because a) I don’t understand it well enough and b) I don’t want all of you to get dents on your foreheads from falling asleep and hitting your head on the pew in front of you. What I mean is that time seems to go by at different speeds depending on how old you are.

When I was in grade school I remember time passing so slowly. The clock on the wall barely seemed to move. As I’ve gotten older, it seems to go by far more quickly. It’s hard to believe that in about a month and a half, I will have lived in Vassar for four years already. I suppose it’s because when I was 10 one day was a far greater percentage of my life than it is now.

The difference is even greater from God’s perspective because to him, time is irrelevant. He is completely outside of time. The Apostle Peter said, “**For the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.**” So when Jesus says at the end of the Bible, “**Yes, I am coming soon,**” those words are true, even though 2,000 years have passed. Jesus Is Coming Soon. It is a sure thing so keep watch.

Jesus spoke the words of this chapter on Tuesday of Holy Week, the last time he did any teaching in public. In verses 6-13 of this chapter Jesus gives us signs to look for that the end of the world is coming. In verses 14-23 he talks about one particular thing that is coming up—the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. At the beginning of this chapter the disciples are marveling at the impressive buildings in the city, but Jesus said they would all be destroyed. In verses 24-37, he talks about his return on the Last Day.

No one is going to have to question if it is Judgment Day or not. Here Jesus says, “**Then you will see the Son of Man coming on clouds with great power and glory.**” In Matthew’s account of this same event Jesus says, “**Just as the lightning flashes from the east and shines as far as the west, so it will be when the Son of Man comes.**” How everyone on a round planet will see Jesus at once is something I can’t figure out, but it will be actually the least amazing thing he does on that day.

Jesus says, “²⁷**At that time he will send out his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of the sky.**” The elect are believers, those whom God has chosen from eternity to be his own. Whenever the Bible uses that term, it is always intending to give us confidence. If God has been thinking about me before day one of creation, he won’t forget about me now.

That verse certainly gives believers confidence as we face living in the Last Days. Jesus talks about wars, famine, and hostility. How can we hope to live through days like that and come out the other side unscathed? If we were on our own, we wouldn’t be able to. But God will remain with us. He sends his holy angels to guard and protect us. He will keep us as his own until the end. He will see to it personally.

Jesus gives an example of a fig tree. Fig trees don’t grow around here, but you could think of any fruit tree. “**Whenever its branch becomes tender and sprouts leaves, you know that summer is near.** ²⁹**So also when you see these things happening, you will know that he is near—at the doors!**” If a tree starts growing leaves back you know it won’t be too long before we will be enjoying the warm summer months.

Jesus told us different things to look for. I already mentioned some of them. He also talks about people pretending to be him. That’s something I thought about—we haven’t had anyone claim to be him in a long time. I think we’re about due for another cult to spring up like that. People will teach things that completely contradict God’s Word yet still claim to be Christian. People will only be concerned about themselves.

We see these things happening all around us. When we do we tend to become afraid or ask, “What’s happening?” What we should do instead is nod our heads and say, “This is exactly the way that Jesus said

everything was going to be.” We want to keep watch. We’ll talk more about that in the next part of the sermon. We want to redouble our efforts to bring the good news about Jesus while there still is time.

Jesus said some words that have thrown people for a loop, “³⁰**Amen I tell you: This generation will certainly not pass away until all these things happen.**” They point to that and say, “See, Jesus didn’t know what he is talking about. That generation died thousands of years ago and the world still goes on.” If Jesus was talking mainly about the destruction of Jerusalem, that would occur while that generation was still alive.

But it seems clear that Jesus is talking about the Last Day too here. The thing is that the word “generation” in Greek isn’t the exact same thing as the English word. It can mean the same thing as in I’m this generation, my parents are the previous generation, and my children are the next generation. But in Greek it can also mean this particular group or type of people.

In that case, what Jesus would be saying is that we are never going to be free from people who will want to persecute his church. We are never going to be free from people who will want to live in anyway that defies God’s will for their lives. There’s no law that could be passed that would improve the basic human condition. There is only one thing that can truly change hearts and that is the good news about Jesus.

Jesus continues, “³¹**Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.**” The Apostle Peter talked about that too, “**That day will cause the heavens to be set on fire and destroyed, and the elements to melt as they burn with great heat.**” His point is that the world as it now exists is temporary. On the Last Day it will all be gone. So why should we waste our lives trying to get more stuff when it will be gone in a flash?

There is only one thing that will last and that is God’s Word. No matter how many people reject it, it won’t go away. Jesus will always be the one and only way to heaven. All of the promises that God makes in his Word will come true. The Word brought us to faith and it will keep us in the faith. The Word will change people’s hearts and lead them to trust in Jesus too. So everything that our Savior says in this text we can take to the bank.

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So we know what is going to happen. Now what? What do we do from this moment in history until Jesus returns in glory? Jesus starts out by telling us what not to do, “³²**No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**” His words could not be more clear, but people love trying to pick a date anyway. I’ve even seen people guess a date and time and act as if they are really listening to Jesus’ words here.

There was a person I took through instructions in Wisconsin. She’s maybe 10 years older than I am. When we were going through classes there was a big billboard on the way to Green Bay saying that the world was going to end on a certain day. She was kind of shaken up by that. I told her not to worry because that person doesn’t know what they’re talking about. The Sunday after that day came and went she said to me, “You’re right!” I replied, “I know! Because Jesus said so.”

This is also a passage that some like the Mormons or Jehovah’s Witnesses will point to to say that Jesus is not God like God the Father is. Paul answers that objection clearly, “**Though he [that is, Jesus] was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, ⁷but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant.**” In his state of humiliation Jesus did not make the full use of his power and glory as God. Now in his state of exaltation, Jesus knows that date full well.

So instead of guess dates and times, what should we do? Jesus tells us, “³³**Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come.**” The issue we face is that it has been 2,000 years since Jesus ascended. Mathematically, what is the chance that of all the days today will be the day? So we let ourselves get caught up in day to day living. Before long, we don’t even give Jesus’ return a second thought.

This is what Jesus is warning about when he says in his little parable that we’ll cover in a second, “³⁶**If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.**” Not even the cruelest master would demand that his servants never sleep. Jesus is talking about spiritual sleep here. When someone is asleep they are oblivious to the world around them. If someone is spiritually asleep, they are oblivious to anything spiritual. They might still call themselves believers, but they don’t have time for their Savior anymore.

So Jesus tells us to “³³**Watch! Be alert and pray.**” To be alert is to live every day knowing our purpose in life. We aren’t here to displace air or to see how much money we can make, we are here to show love for our God and love for the people around us. We don’t want anyone to be caught by surprise by the Last Day. We want them to have them some firm confidence that we have.

Keep going to your Lord in prayer. Pray for opportunities to talk to a friend, relative, or neighbor about their Savior. Pray that God would give you the right words to say. Pray that God would keep you spiritually awake and aware. These are prayers that ones that God cannot possibly answer with a “no” because these things are exactly what God wants us to be doing.

Now let’s get to that little parable, “³⁴**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. He also commanded the doorkeeper to keep watch.**” It’s sort of like if your boss at work would go on vacation. He doesn’t want his business to crash and burn while he is gone, so he will put people he trusts in charge so that things keep running smoothly. If those people just goof around, they will be looking for new employment.

In this case, the man is Jesus. His journey is describing the time from when he ascended into heaven until the day that he returns. The servants are all believers. There are many parts to the work that he has given to us—which is the best work ever. Part of it is to remain in the Word. That Word proclaims that Jesus is our Savior. It is the good food our souls crave. Like plugging in a phone recharges it, digging into God’s Word recharges us for a lifetime of service to God.

Then he wants us to take that Word to the world. It can be something as simple as a small child talking about the birth of the Savior in our Christmas service. It can be comforting a family in the loss of a loved one with the good news of the resurrection when Jesus returns. It can be giving offerings to support the Gospel ministry here and to bring that message to people we will never meet personally. The options are almost limitless.

Right now all across our country kids are getting fired up for Christmas. They can’t wait for that day to come. Lions fans are looking forward to the playoffs hoping that maybe, just maybe, this will be the year that a Lombardi trophy comes home to Michigan. You don’t have to tell people to get excited for days like that. The excitement comes naturally. You can almost feel it in the air.

If we get that excited for gifts that eventually will get broken, worn out, or just ignored; if we get fired up for a championship that may or may not occur, then why shouldn’t we be even more excited for Jesus’ return on the Last Day. When that day comes, everything we’ve been living for, everything that God has done for us, will be complete. God’s final promise will be kept. Sin will be gone. Eternal joy will be ours. I can’t wait.

Jesus Is Coming Soon. It is a sure thing so keep watch. Jesus might return today. It might be tomorrow. It might be many years in the future. The exact time is irrelevant. As we bring this old church year to a close, we do so with a message of confidence for the future. Our Savior God will be with us every day that remains until he takes us to his side forever. There’s nothing to fear.