

Mark 13:24-37 “Get Ready to See Him!”\*\*

Main Idea: In Mark 13:24-37 Jesus exhorted His followers to get ready for His second coming. He talked about that event with two perspectives in mind.

I. Jesus told us what is coming (24-27).

A. There will be tribulation (24a).

B. Then there will be catastrophic events (24b-25).

C. Then men will see the Son coming (26).

1. He will come in clouds.

2. He will come with power and glory.

D. Then the Son will gather His elect (27).

1. Tribulation is coming, but it's not the end.

2. The Son will lose none of His own.

II. Jesus told us what we should do about it now (28-37).

A. Learn from the fig tree (28-32).

1. When you see these things happening, the time is near (29).

2. What Jesus predicted will happen right on schedule (30).

3. Heaven and earth will pass away (31).

4. Only the Father can answer the question *when* (32).

B. Live like it could happen today (33-37).

1. Be alert (33).

2. Do the job your Master has given you to do (34).

3. Don't let anything lull you to sleep (35-36).

4. Watch! (37)

Make It Personal: Are you ready to see Jesus?

*“I shall return.”*

Those three words are among the more famous in American history. General Douglas MacArthur made that declaration in 1942 as he left the Philippine Islands during World War II. Japanese forces were about to conquer the Philippines, and President Franklin Roosevelt had transferred MacArthur to another location in the Pacific. His promise was the last part of a simple statement to reporters shortly after his harrowing escape from Corregidor and arrival in Australia :

“The President of the United States ordered me to break through the Japanese lines and proceed from Corregidor to Australia for the purpose, as I understand it, of organizing the American offensive against Japan , a primary objective of which is the relief of the Philippines . I came through and *I shall return.*”

And he did. In 1944 General MacArthur returned at the head of an American army and freed the Philippines from their oppressors. The following year the war ended.

*I shall return.* Those words gave hope to fearful hearers facing brutal hardships in the 1940’s. Circumstances were bad and about to get worse, but these words inspired them to look beyond the situation to a day of deliverance. *I shall return.*

Two thousand years ago a small band of men were heavy hearted as their leader prepared to leave them. The enemy was fierce. Wicked men would indeed kill their leader in another day or so. But not before He made this announcement, *I shall return.*

This morning, it’s our privilege to ponder the promise Jesus gave His followers in Mark 13, the promise of His return. Thirty-three years earlier He had entered the world as the God-man, not to be served but to serve by giving His life as a ransom payment for many (Mark 10:45). The time had come. The cross was in sight. But the cross would not be the end. On the third day He would rise from the dead and forty days later ascend to heaven. But even that would not be the end. There on the Mount of Olives He delivered a message of instruction and hope for His followers.

In Mark 13:24-37 Jesus exhorted the disciples to get ready for His second coming. He talked about that event with two perspectives in mind, and so shall we.

#### I. Jesus told us what is coming (24-27).

It’s important to keep the context in mind. What prompted this discourse on future events was a comment by the disciples about the size and beauty of the temple (1), followed by Jesus’ revelation that the temple was going to be destroyed (2). Four of the disciples (Peter, James, John, and Andrew) approached Him with two questions in verse 4, “Tell us, *when* will these things happen? And *what* will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?” Those questions led to a series of predictions and warnings from Jesus about future events. He told His followers to *get ready* for...

Get ready for *danger* (9-13), warning that the world would oppose them.

Get ready for *desolation* (14-20), namely the coming destruction of Jerusalem .

Get ready for *deception* (21-23), coming from false Christs.

In verse 24 a shift occurs. Whereas Jesus’ predictions in verses 5-23 point to both the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 *and* to end time destruction in Jerusalem, verses 24-27 speak *only* of the end time.[\[1\]](#)

In the text before us Jesus offered four prophecies pertaining to the end of the age.

**A. There will be tribulation (24a).** Note the beginning of verse 24, “But in those days, following that distress.” The KJV says, “But in those days, after that tribulation.” Tribulation is coming. This isn’t referring to the horrible things that occurred in A.D. 70 when the Romans killed over one million Jews and destroyed their beloved Jerusalem . Jesus is talking about something even worse, *the* Tribulation period spoken of later by the apostle John in the book of Revelation (7:14). During the Tribulation the Antichrist will deceive the Jews by entering a pact with them, then breaking the covenant and unleashing his venom against them (2 Thess. 2:3-10).

In my estimation (and there is certainly difference of opinion when it comes to the interpretation of this prophecy),

that's what Jesus has in mind here. He's looking at least nineteen plus centuries into the future from when He spoke these words. "In *those days*," He said, "Following *that tribulation*."

That Tribulation has not yet occurred. It is still future, but it's coming.

**B. Then there will be catastrophic events (24b-25).** "But in those days, following that distress, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken."

Note that the catastrophic events will take place *following* that distress, *following* that period of Tribulation. Apparently, the transition between the coming Tribulation period and the kingdom age will involve a magnificent display of heavenly phenomena. Jesus uses imagery from Isaiah 13:10. The sun will turn dark. The moon will follow suit. Stars will crash from the sky. The heavens will rumble.

If you want to see an even more vivid description of these coming cosmic occurrences, check out the book of Revelation (for instance, 8:12; 9:1ff.).

What's next? There will be the seven year period of Tribulation, a period filled with spectacular judgments which will climax and conclude with the catastrophic events mentioned by Jesus. Then what? Then the hope of the age will occur, the event the cosmos has been waiting for as a woman in labor since Adam brought sin's curse upon it.

**C. Then men will see the Son coming (26).** "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory."

Jesus uses one of His favorite titles to refer to Himself, *the Son of Man*. He's picking this up, apparently, from Daniel's prophecy penned over five hundred years B.C. Daniel 7:13 states, "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence."

Notice a couple of details regarding His coming.

1. *He will come in clouds.* Jesus didn't say *a* cloud, but *in clouds*. Psalm 104:3 says this about the Lord, "He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind." Isaiah 19:1 echoes the same thought, "See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud..."

2. *He will come with power and glory.* When Jesus came to earth the first time, there was a short outburst of glory when the angelic host shouted, "Glory to God in the highest!", but that was it. The Son's glory was hidden. *Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate Deity*, the carol declares.

That was when He came *the first time*. At His first coming, the Son of God entered the world He created as a *servant*. He came to fulfill His Father's plan, to rescue sinners by giving His life for them, to redeem a people that would no longer live for themselves but for God who is worthy. And so He died. Three days later He conquered death and eventually returned to heaven.

Did you realize there were Indians living in North America when the Son of God visited earth? But they didn't even know He came. Nor did hundreds, even thousands and millions of people living in places we now call China, South America, Europe, and more. The Son came, but very few on planet earth even saw Him. It was not His agenda to be seen. It was His agenda to *save*.

But know this. When He comes *the second time*, He will be seen! Yes, Jesus specifically says that not only will He come in clouds and with great power and glory, but that *men will see Him*. Every eye will see Him, according to Revelation 1:7, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen."

It's worth noting that He will return to the very place where He delivered this prediction, the Mount of Olives

(Zech. 14:4).

Then what? After the Tribulation, after the catastrophic events, after men see the Son coming, then what?

**D. Then the Son will gather His elect (27).** “And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.” In the Bible the term “elect” refers to several things. Some passages refer to the elect Messiah, others to the elect nation of Israel, others to elect angels, and still others to elect believers in Christ (the church). Here Jesus is referring simply to God’s chosen people (which He mentioned twice already, in verse 20 and verse 22).

J. Vernon McGee said this is not referring to the Rapture of the church, stating, “Christ will not send angels to gather His own, but they will be caught up to meet Him in the air (see 1 Thess. 4:13-18).”<sup>[2]</sup>

A key text is 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”

Paul says the church will be “caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” The word “rapture” comes from the Latin Vulgate rendering of this text. When will the church be “caught up”? Based on Revelation 3:10, it seems the church will not go through “the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world,” that is, the Tribulation period. By comparing Scripture with Scripture, many have concluded that Jesus will “rapture” His church prior to the Tribulation period. During those seven years, however, He will save many more people, including many Jews. When He comes to earth at the end of the Tribulation period, He will send His angels to rescue these believers, these “elect ones.” And at that time *every eye will see Him*.

What I have just described is the doctrinal position of our church. Please realize, however, we have God-fearing brothers and sisters who disagree with this interpretation. That’s fine. Doctrinal systems are not inspired and must always be held in submission to the Scriptures.

But of this we can be sure. Based on Jesus’ words in Mark 13...

1. *Tribulation is coming, but it’s not the end.* And...

2. *The Son will lose none of His own.* Jesus is very specific here. He will gather His elect “from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens,” in other words, *from everywhere*. Jesus knows the people the Father chose from eternity past. He has set His affection on them. He died for them. He will lose *not one* of them. His angels will search the universe, including heaven and earth, until all are safely in His eternal presence.

Oh, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, He is coming! Wesley reflected on that great day in song:

*Lo, He comes with clouds descending*

*Once for favored sinners slain;*

*Thousand thousand saints attending*

*Swell the triumph of His train:*

*Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*God appears on earth to reign.*

Jesus told us what is coming. But He didn’t end His teaching on that note. Eschatology isn’t supposed to be an ivory tower subject. What God is going to do in the future is intended to affect the way we live the present. So notice, after teaching about the end times...

## II. Jesus told us what we should do about it now (28-37).

He identified two responsibilities...

**A. Learn from the fig tree (28-32).** Verse 28—“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.”

Jesus is the Master Illustrator. At the moment He said this, the fig tree twigs on Olivet were tender. The leaves were preparing to come out. Summer was near. If you didn't have a calendar you could still know summer was near by just looking at the season indicators on the fig tree. When you see this... you know this...

After giving the fig tree illustration, Jesus offers four guarantees.

1. *When you see these things happening, the time is near (29).* Hear His words in verse 29, “Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door.” Jesus uses the same pattern He used in the fig tree illustration. When you see this... you know this... When you see *tender branches on a fig tree*, you know *summer is near*. Likewise, when you see *these things happening* (the things He just predicted in verses 9-23), you know that *it is near*.

To what is “it” referring? Actually, “It is near” can also be translated “He is near,” as in the NASB and ESV. In fact, in Luke's account, instead of having “it” or “he” Luke says “*the kingdom of God is near*” (Luke 21:31). Actually, “he” and “the kingdom of God” and “it” are all referring to the same thing, aren't they? When the King appears, He will establish His kingdom and all He has predicted (the “it”) will take place.

Here's a second guarantee...

2. *What Jesus predicted will happen right on schedule (30).* “I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.”

What does Jesus mean by “this generation”? Bible scholars offer several interpretative possibilities. For instance, R. Alan Cole asserts that “this generation” is the generation of Jesus' earthly ministry, some of whom would have seen the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.<sup>[3]</sup> John MacArthur suggests it's referring to the generation living in the end times that witnessed the signs leading up to Christ's return, the signs just given by Jesus in this text. Or to put it another way, “this generation” is referring to a generation of people. J. Vernon McGee suggests, “In that case it would mean that those who saw the beginning of these events would see the conclusion of them also.”<sup>[4]</sup> Others take an entirely different approach, pointing out the word translated “generation” can also refer to “race” (see NIV footnote). Consequently, some suggest it refers to the race of Israel, emphasizing the indestructibility of the Jewish people (“This *race*, the Jewish race, will not pass away until all these things have happened”).

I'm not sure which view is right, quite frankly. What did Jesus mean when He said, “This generation will not pass away until all these things have happened”? He doesn't seem to be referring to the generation of His first century audience. He does seem to be looking ahead to the final generation in God's redemptive historical plan. Questions aside, of this we can be sure. In verse 30 Jesus is making it clear that what He predicted will happen right on schedule, even if we don't understand the schedule! He does!

3. *Heaven and earth will pass away (31).* “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”

This is a sobering truth. This place we call “home” is going to perish. At some time in the future, heaven and earth *will* pass away.<sup>[5]</sup>

Don't let the deluded “experts” of this age misguide you, those who say that life will go on and on. They are

wrong. History is moving ahead, right on schedule.

Peter warned about such skeptics in 2 Peter 3:3-9:

“First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.’ But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

You say, “Well, what exactly is going to happen to the heavens and earth? Jesus said they will *pass away*, but what does that mean?” Peter gives us some specifics in 2 Peter 3:10-14:

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.”

Chew on Peter’s question in verse 11. It’s a significant one, especially in our day when we’re bombarded by commercials aimed to convince us that the stuff of this world is worthy of our affection. “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, *what kind of people ought you to be?* You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.”

Jesus delivered one more guarantee in verse 32, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Here’s the guarantee...

4. *Only the Father can answer the question when (32).* No one knows, Jesus said that day, not the angels, not even Him. The fact that Jesus said that even He did not know when should caution us from thinking we have to know when. Only the Father knows when!

That raises some questions. “Isn’t Jesus God?” Yes, He is. “Doesn’t God know everything?” Yes, He does. He is omniscient. “How then could Jesus say He didn’t know the answer to the question *when?*” It’s because He didn’t, not at that time.

When God the Son became a man, He truly became a man. He purposefully laid aside temporarily the independent use of at least some of His attributes. For example, He laid aside His omnipresence—as a man He was no longer *everywhere* as He was prior to His incarnation. And according to verse 32 we learn He lay aside, at least in some measure, His omniscience. He says even He did not know, not at this point in time, when He would return.

He knows now, however, as the glorified Christ in heaven. According to John 17:22 He is now one with the Father, and I would assume this means that what the Father knows He knows. According to John 17:24 He is now experiencing the glory He laid aside when He entered the world as a man. I take this to mean He is no longer laying aside the exercise of His divine attributes, including His omniscience. Yes, He knows now, but He did not know *when* while on earth.

It’s so easy for us to get hung up on the *when* question.

The disciples asked Jesus the *when* question just before the Lord returned to heaven. Specifically, they asked *when* He would establish His kingdom. Jesus answered this way in Acts 1:7—“It is not for you to know the times or dates

the *Father has set* by his own authority.” The Father knows. That should be good enough for you to know that He knows.

Wessel is right when he says, “A map of the future would be a hindrance, not a help, to faith.”<sup>[6]</sup> We are saved by faith, by placing our trust in God and His promise of eternal life in Christ His Son. We are to live the same way, by faith, by trusting in God’s promises.

Ponder this observation by C. F. D. Moule:

“New Testament thought on the Last Things, at its deepest and best, always concentrates on what God has already done for men in Christ. It does not say, How long will it be before the last whistle blows full-time? Rather it says, Where ought I to be to receive the next pass? What really matters is that the kick-off has already taken place, the game is on and we have a captain to lead us on to victory.”<sup>[7]</sup>

Are you a person who frets? Choose to trust your captain today! Learn from the fig tree. Then take to heed one final responsibility from the Savior...

**B. Live like it could happen today (33-37).** You say, “How do I do that?” Jesus is very specific. He lays before us four assignments.

1. *Be alert (33).* “Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.” Some of our brothers are facing the foe of persecution. We are facing a different foe, one that is in some ways even more deadly. It’s the foe of *distraction*.

Oh, we know Jesus is coming again. We just don’t think about it very much. We’re thinking about ball games and car payments and retirement and our next vacation (and how we’re going to pay for our last vacation!) and grandchildren and on and on and on. We’re thinking about lots of stuff, but what we’re NOT thinking about is the fact that He is coming again.

Do you believe that will be a big day? When we really believe a “big day” is coming, it shows up in tangible ways. The OSU-Michigan game in November is a *big day*—that’s why there’s a count down in our newspaper every week; 55 days to the big day! A wedding is a *big day*—that’s why you can ask just about any bride to be, “How many days to go?” and she’ll tell you. The big day is always on her mind. For a young person the sixteenth birthday is a *big day*. When I was fifteen, I was consumed by the thought of getting my wheels. I lived for that *big day*!

My friend, the biggest of all days is coming, the day when we see Jesus Christ, the Owner and King of the universe, the Judge to whom we shall give an account, the Savior who died to rescue us from hell. Are you living like you believe that big day is coming?

“Be alert!” He said. That very command implies we’ll have to fight for our lives to stay focused.

How specifically do we show we’re living like we believe He’s coming back? Do you sell your home and move to a mountain top? No. Here’s how...

2. *Do the job your Master has given you to do (34).* “It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.”

Jesus uses another common illustration to teach this truth. Think of an estate owner who took off on a trip. Before leaving he delegated some authority and responsibilities to his servants. “Take care of my property,” He said. “I’ll be back. Make sure you’re ready.”

The fact is, beloved, we too have an “assigned task,” to use Jesus’ words. He gave us these assignments. I have one. You have one. And when He comes He will hold each of us accountable for how well we fulfilled (or didn’t) our assignment. Jesus isn’t talking about working for our salvation. He’s talking to His followers about how to be ready.

J. D. Jones said it well, “The best way, then, of preparing for the Lord’s coming is to work day by day with two hands earnestly as unto the Lord and not unto men...Some people pore over the pages of the prophet Daniel and puzzle their brains about the number of beasts in Revelation—thinking that from these passages they may discover the date when the Lord will come back. It is a futile task. The day and the hour God has kept within His own authority.”<sup>[8]</sup>

If you really want to prepare for His coming, here is how. Listen to Jesus. Be alert! And live like a steward. Thirdly...

3. *Don’t let anything lull you to sleep (35-36).* “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.”

In other words, don’t get sidetracked! In Luke’s parallel account Jesus is even more specific: “Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap (Luke 21:34).” The word “clutter” comes to my mind. Is there *clutter* in your life that’s weighing you down and keeping you from thinking about Christ’s return?

Here’s a practical suggestion. If you have things in your life that are keeping you from church on the Lord’s Day, you probably need to make some changes, some *hard* changes. You may need to make a job change. You may need to say no to some family invitations. You may need to change your shopping habits.

“Why?” you say. “What’s wrong with missing church?” Listen to Hebrews 10:25, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Did you catch those final words? One of the main reasons we need church is because *the Day is approaching*. What day? THE DAY, the Big Day! And what are we supposed to be doing at church? Let us *encourage one another*. Left to ourselves, we lose sight of the Big Day! We get off target, distracted, and preoccupied. And Hebrews 10:25 says missing church is a *habit* some get into, a habit we must kick if we’re going to finish the race well. One final assignment by Jesus...

4. *Watch! (37)* “What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

Jesus makes it clear this challenge wasn’t just for the four disciples in front of Him, but for *everyone*, including us today. Watch!

*I shall return.*

That’s what the Leader said, not just Douglass MacArthur either. The question is this. Are you ready to see Him? Are you ready to see *Jesus*?

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>[1]</sup> As Wessel observes, p. 750.

<sup>[2]</sup> J. Vernon McGee, p. 160.

<sup>[3]</sup> Wessel agrees, p. 751.

<sup>[4]</sup> J. Vernon McGee, p. 161.

<sup>[5]</sup> Isaiah 34:4—“All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.”



[\[6\]](#) Wessel, p. 753.

[\[7\]](#) C.F. D. Moule, in Wessel, p. 753.

[\[8\]](#) J. D. Jones, p. 497.