

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 reveals what is coming (24-27).
 - A. Tribulation is coming (24a).
 - B. Catastrophic events are coming (24b-25).
 - C. The Son is coming (26).
 - 1. He will come in clouds.
 - 2. He will come with power and glory.
 - D. 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 reveals what we should do about it now (28-37).
 - A. We should 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. We should 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)

A Personal Question: Am I ready to see Jesus?

He is coming again! He, of course, is Jesus. And “coming again” is something God’s people have been waiting for since Jesus left after His first visit to earth. There are many passages that predict His second coming, and this morning we’re privileged to behold one of the most significant as we continue our journey through Mark’s Gospel.

Scripture Reading: Mark 13:24-37

In 1942, during the second world war, General Douglas MacArthur was forced to leave the Philippine Islands. Japanese forces were about to conquer the Philippines, and President Franklin Roosevelt transferred MacArthur to another location in the Pacific. It was then that General MacArthur made a simple statement to reporters, shortly after his harrowing escape from Corregidor and arrival in Australia.

He said, “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 1940s. Circumstances were bad and about to get worse, but those 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 consider carefully the promise Jesus gave His followers in Mark 13, the promise of His return. Thirty-three years earlier He had entered this 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).

Now 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, Jesus delivered a message of instruction and hope for His followers, and said in essence, “I will return.”

There are two points in today’s message. They come right out of this text. In Mark 13:24-37, point one, Jesus reveals what is coming (24-27). And point two, Jesus reveals what we should do about it now (28-37).

I. Jesus reveals 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 in verse 1 about the size and beauty of the Jewish temple. This was followed by Jesus’ revelation in verse 2 that the temple was going to be destroyed. At which point, four of the disciples (Peter, James, John, and Andrew) approached the Master 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.

That was last week’s message. This is what Jesus said was coming for His followers. And it did. The *danger* came, and the world did oppose them, and arrest them, and throw them in prisons, and kill them.

And the *desolation* came too. In AD 70 the Romans attacked Israel, suffocated Jerusalem, killed over a million Jews according to Josephus, and demolished their sacred temple.

Then came the deception, and it continues to this day. The false Christs have come and continue to come, claiming to speak for God and offer a way to God.

But it’s not just past tense. What happened in AD 70, as horrible as it was, is a foreshadowing of the ultimate “abomination of desolation” who will “stand where he ought not to stand.” Paul calls him “the man of lawlessness” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. He’s called “the antichrist” in 1 John and in the book of the Revelation, and he will do his deadly deeds in the period of time known as the great tribulation, predicted in the final book of the Bible.

So the danger, desolation, and deception that has come, will continue right up until the end.

Then in verse 24 a shift occurs. Whereas Jesus’ predictions in verses 5-23 point to both the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 *and* to end time destruction in Jerusalem, verses 24-27 speak *only* of the end time.¹ In the text before us today, Jesus is offering four prophecies pertaining to the end of the age.

This is what is coming. Four events.

A. Tribulation is coming (24a). Note the beginning of verse 24 (ESV & KJV), “But in those days, after that tribulation.” In the NIV, “But in those days, following that distress.” What’s coming? Tribulation is coming. This isn’t referring to the horrible things that occurred in AD 70 when the Romans slaughtered Jews and destroyed their beloved Jerusalem. Jesus is talking about something even worse, *the* Tribulation period

¹ As Wessel observes, p. 750.

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's what is coming. And that tribulation has not yet occurred. It is still future, but it's coming. So too is this.

B. Catastrophic events are coming (24b-25). "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken."

Please note the time indicators mentioned by Jesus. He says that these catastrophic events will take place *following* the days of tribulation. Apparently, the transition between the coming seven-year tribulation period and the kingdom age will involve a magnificent display of heavenly phenomena.

Jesus uses imagery from Isaiah 13:10. He says the sun will turn dark. The moon will follow suit. Stars will crash from the sky. The heavens will rumble.

Nearly sixty years after Jesus spoke these words, He gave the apostle John a vision of what's coming, and John wrote it down in the book of Revelation. Listen to his description of these coming cosmic occurrences.

We read in Revelation 8:12, "The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of their light might be darkened, and a third of the day might be kept from shining, and likewise a third of the night."

Then in Revelation 9:1-3, "And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. ² He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. ³ Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth."

This is what's coming, dear friends. Jesus says tribulation is coming, described by John as a seven year period of time filled with spectacular judgments, which will climax and conclude with the catastrophic events mentioned by Jesus.

Then what? Then the hope of the ages will occur, the event the cosmos has been waiting for as a woman in labor since Adam brought sin's curse upon it.

C. The Son is coming (26). "And then they 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 BC.

Listen to Daniel 7:13 (NIV), "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."

The son of man is a messianic title, according to Daniel. In Daniel's prophecy, there are a series of powerful kingdoms coming, all rivals to God. And God allows them to reign. But the day is coming, and Daniel sees it, when One like *a son of man* will come (see His humanity) *with the clouds of heaven* (see His deity). And He, the King of kings, will approach the Ancient of Days (God Himself) in heaven and take the throne over heaven and earth.

That's Daniel's prophecy. Now notice what Jesus says about that coming day. He gives a couple of important 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..."

What's this imagery all about? Is this about transportation? Does Jesus need the clouds to move Him from heaven to earth? No, this is not about transportation.

Men often talk about buying a car to make a statement. My first car was a rusty ten-year-old Chevy Impala. It didn't make much of a statement. If I had picked up Sherry in a new corvette, that would have made a statement, that I had money (or at least a good credit line), which I didn't. The point is, the mode of transportation often makes a statement about the clout of the person driving it.

I found an interesting article, "*10 Most Interesting Cars World Leaders Ride In.*"² The Pope rides in a Mercedes-Benz M-Class. John F. Kennedy had a Ford Thunderbird Convertible. Ronald Reagan had his Jeep CJ-8 Scrambler. Present Biden has a Corvette Stingray C2. President Lyndon B. Johnson had his Amphicar, one of the most extravagant cars ever built which could go both on land and in the water.

Pretty impressive, right? Not really. When King Jesus returns, his chariot will be the clouds. Let that sink in. What kind of authority does He possess? He's in a league all by Himself. And if we need anything else to convince us, consider this.

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, to give His life for them, to redeem a people that would no longer live for themselves but for God who is worthy. And so, He came quietly, humbly, and died. Three days later He conquered death, and a few weeks later returned to heaven, again quietly, unseen by the world.

Think about this. 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 of God came to earth, but very few on planet earth even saw Him, for it was not His agenda to be seen, but to *save*.

Yet know this. When He comes *the second time*, He will be seen! 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. Revelation 1:7 puts it this way, "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 when it happens, 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 comes, then what? A fourth event.

² <https://www.hotcars.com/most-interesting-cars-driven-by-world-leaders>

D. The Son will gather His elect (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.”

The Bible uses the term “elect” (*eklektos*, from the verb “to choose”) in several ways. 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. Here Jesus is referring to those who believe in Him, God’s chosen people (which He mentioned twice already, in verse 20 and verse 22). The world hates His people, and seeks to eliminate them. But God has chosen them, and given them to Christ, and He will gather them when He returns, no matter where they may be on this hostile planet.

You say, “Is this what Paul is talking about in 1 Thessalonians 4?”

Good question. It’s there we read this prediction, in 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*.

J. Vernon McGee said this gathering of the elect in Mark 13 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).”³

What I am describing is what our church has believed for many years. We realize, however, that 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 in eternity past. He has set His affection on them, died for them, and 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, beloved, our Savior is coming! Wesley reflected on that great day and penned these words (which we’ll sing together later to close this service).

*Lo, He comes with clouds descending
Once for favored sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending*

³ J. Vernon McGee, p. 160.

*Swell the triumph of His train:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
God appears on earth to reign.*

So there's point one. Jesus reveals what is coming (24-27). 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.

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

Look at the commands. In verse 28 Jesus says, "Learn." In verse 33 He says, "Keep awake," and repeats that three more times (in verse 34 "stay awake", in verse 35 "stay awake", in verse 37 "stay awake"). There's what we're supposed to do with this teaching. Jesus identified two responsibilities. Learn, and live.

A. Learn from the fig tree (28-32). Notice verse 28, "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near."

Jesus is the Master illustrator. Even as He gave this teaching, the twigs on the fig trees on the Mount of Olives were tender, the leaves 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. A clear reality. Then, after giving the fig tree illustration, Jesus delivers four guarantees.

1. *When you see these things happening, the time is near (29).* Listen to His words in verse 29, "So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates."

Jesus uses the same pattern He offered 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*. The NIV says "it." The ESV says, "*He* is near," as does the NASB and ESV. It's interesting that in Luke's account, instead of having "it" or "he" Luke says "*the kingdom of God* is near" (Luke 21:31).

So which is it? 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.

Jesus gives a second guarantee. In verse 30, "Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."⁴ In other words...

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

What does Jesus mean by "this generation"? Bible scholars offer several interpretations. 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 AD 70.⁵ 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."⁶ Others take an

⁴NIV "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."

⁵ Wessel agrees, p. 751.

⁶ J. Vernon McGee, p. 161.

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”? It doesn’t seem to me that He’s referring to the generation of His first century audience. It does seem rather that He’s looking ahead to that final generation in God’s redemptive plan.

But questions aside, of this we can be sure. Jesus here is making it clear that His prediction will happen right on schedule, even if we don’t understand the schedule! It’s enough for us to know that He does!

3. *Heaven and earth will pass away (31)*. “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”

This is a sobering reality. This place we call “home” is going to perish. Your house. My house. This community. Appalachia. Our country. This entire planet. Even the universe itself. At some time in the future, heaven and earth *will* pass away.

Listen to Isaiah 34:4 (NIV), “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.”

Friends, we must not let the so called “experts” of this age misguide us, who say that life will go on and on. Peter warned about such skeptics in 2 Peter 3:3-9, saying, “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.”

Look carefully again at Peter’s question in 2 Peter 3:11. It’s a significant one, especially in a day in which we’re being bombarded by a society that seeks 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?*”

And the answer? We ought to *live holy and godly lives* as we look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

Jesus gives one more guarantee in verse 32. “But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

4. *Only the Father can answer the question when (32).* No one knows, says Jesus in Mark 13, 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.

This 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 and temporarily laid aside 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, He laid 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.

I believe 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.

So yes, He knows now. But He did not know *when* while He was on earth.

You say, “That just raises more questions for me. I’d like to talk more about this.”

Great! That’s why we have community groups, so we can go deeper and discuss together the questions and implications of our Sunday morning sermons.

For now, back to the *when* question. Friends, it’s so easy for us to get hung up on the *when* question. The disciples did. They asked Jesus the *when* question just before He returned to heaven. And He answered them 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. And if He knows, that’s all we need to know, says Jesus.

Wessel is right when he says, “A map of the future would be a hindrance, not a help, to faith.”⁷ 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.”⁸

Are you a person who frets? Choose to trust your captain today! Learn from the fig tree. But don’t just learn. Live. That’s the final responsibility from our 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.

⁷ Wessel, p. 753.

⁸ C.F. D. Moule, in Wessel, p. 753.

1. *Be alert (33).* “Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.” Such a vital piece of instruction. Be on guard! Why? Because we’re under attack.

Even now, many of our brothers are facing persecution. We are facing a different foe, one that is just as dangerous as persecution, perhaps more so. 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 grandchildren and on and on and on. We’re thinking about lots of stuff, but what we may *not* be thinking about as much as we ought 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. For some of us, the OSU-Michigan game is a *big day*, which is why some of us are already counting the days. A wedding is a big day, which is 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. When I was fifteen, I was consumed by the thought of my sixteenth birthday and 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 we living like we believe that big day is coming?

“Be alert!” He said. Be on guard. 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 we sell our home and move to a mountain top? No. Here’s how. Jesus says in verse 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.” In other words...

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

We too, beloved, have a “work” to do, given to us by Jesus. 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) the assignment. Jesus isn’t talking about working for our salvation. That’s a gift. He’s talking to His followers about how to be ready for His return.

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.”⁹

If we 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 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.”

⁹ J. D. Jones, p. 497.

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 we have things in our lives that are keeping us from church on the Lord's Day, we probably need to make some changes, some *hard* changes. We may need to make a job change. We may need to say no to some family invitations. We may need to change our shopping habits.

"Why?" you say. "What does missing church have to do with being ready for the return of Jesus?" According to Hebrews 10:25, a lot! "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)* Jesus concludes His teaching on future events with this charge in verse 37, "And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake." The verb means, "Watch!" as the NIV puts it. Be alert. Be fully awake. And Jesus makes it clear this challenge wasn't just for the four disciples in front of Him. This is for *everyone*, including us today.

Until He returns, we are to watch!

A Personal Question: Am I ready to see Jesus?

My friend, are you ready for Jesus to return? Are you ready to see Him?

Closing Song: #241 "*Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending*" (all four verses)

Benediction of the month: Nahum 1:7

Community Group Discussion:

1. In today's text, Jesus makes it clear that He is coming again. Read today's passage again, Mark 13:24-37, and then discuss the effect Jesus' words have on you.

2. In verse 26 Jesus refers to Himself as "the Son of Man". Why does He choose to refer to Himself by this particular title? He also says He will return "in clouds with great power and glory". What's significant about this description?

3. In verse 27 Jesus says His angels will "gather His elect from the four winds". Why does He refer to His people as "His elect" in this particular passage (He also does so in verses 20 & 23)? What's the significance of this description?

4. What's the point of Jesus' parable about the fig tree in verse 28? What does Jesus mean in verse 30 when He says, "This generation will not pass away until all these things take place"? What things? And what generation?

5. In verse 32 Jesus says that no one (including the Son) knows "that day or that hour". What does this important statement indicate about the Incarnate Son? How would you explain to a child how the all-knowing Son could "not know" something?

6. In verse 37 Jesus gives the command, "Stay awake." What does He mean by this, and how can we put it into practice this week?