

Mark 13:24-37

Grace to you from the God of peace who Himself will sanctify you completely; and preserve you blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. Amen.

Mark 13:24–37 (NKJV) — 24 “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; **25** the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. **26** Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. **27** And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven. **28** “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. **29** So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! **30** Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place. **31** Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. **32** “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **33** Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. **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, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. **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— **36** lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. **37** And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”

– THIS IS THE WORD OF GOD –

Not Knowing “WHEN” Keeps Us Alert

1. Knowing the time “after that tribulation”
2. Knowing “the sign of the fig tree”
3. Knowing your watch

In Jesus name, dear fellow redeemed,

“I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel.” This is the word of the Lord that came to the prophet Ezekiel some 600 years before Jesus’s words. Ezekiel was called to be a watchman, to warn Israel of the sword that would come upon them. As a watchman, Ezekiel was to see the sword coming, to blow the trumpet, to warn the people. Yet the watchman’s warning was not a call to sharpen swords and deepen defenses, rather it was a call to spiritual alertness. It was a call to become alert and aware of sin and the judgment that sin brings.

Israel was entrusted with the care of their Master’s house, to protect His treasures, and to be ready to welcome His coming. Jesus is the watchman who sounds the warning yet again within Israel. He tells His disciples exactly WHAT to expect as we await His return. Yet He doesn’t tell us WHEN this final return of the Master will be. He wants us alert always – servants and watchman who are awake and ready, looking and warning. He wants us to know **the time after**

that tribulation; to know **the sign of the fig tree**; to know **our watch**; but He does not tell us when His return will be.

NOT KNOWING THE “WHEN” KEEPS US ALERT

1. Knowing the time “after that tribulation”

The Lord prophecies through Ezekiel – *Ezekiel 33:5* — *[whoever] heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood shall be upon himself. But he who takes warning will save his life.*

In order to hear the trumpet call, we need to listen carefully – to drown out all other voices and let the words of the watchman reveal where the danger lies and what our defense should be. For as Jesus says to His disciples, a time of tribulation is coming. **KNOWING THE TIME “AFTER THAT TRIBULATION,” we keep alert.**

When interpreting Scripture, it is essentially important that we think first in terms of the original audience. That is – firstly the word of God came from Jesus to His disciples and then through Mark’s record to the 1st century Jews living in Palestine that he addresses. All this helps us understand the Holy Spirit’s intentions as we apply the word to us today. The disciples sit on the Mount of Olives. In the distance lies the great and mighty structure that had been completed under Herod the Great – the holy Temple, a source of Jewish heritage and pride. Jesus has sounded the warning. As Jesus begins this discourse, He says, *Mark 13:2* — *2 “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone shall be left upon another, that shall not be thrown down.”*

This “coming of the Son of Man” mentioned in v.26 is said to come in those days of tribulation, as Matthew records, immediately after. It is marked by the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 where the Roman armies left not one stone upon another. Just prior to our text, Mark inserts the warning – “let the reader understand.” These are words specifically addressed to the original readers, to take heed – *30 Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.*

This coming of the Son of Man and the dark events that will accompany Him are said to come upon Jesus’ own generation, the Jews of 1st century Palestine. They Notice how Jesus contrasts “these things” and “those days” with v.32 – “that day.” The events leading up to v.32 will take place in “this generation,” whereas, “of that final day and hour in which the Son of Man returns, no one knows.”

Such references to the sun and the moon being darkened are sometimes used by Scripture in a figurative sense. Isaiah uses the same terminology and applies it to the destruction the Lord brings upon the Babylonians and the darkness of God’s vengeance against those who oppose the cause of His kingdom and salvation.

Here Jesus picture the darkness of God’s judgment upon Israel and Jerusalem. As Daniel prophesied, the coming of the Son of Man is an exercise of His authority to judge. It is met with the darkness that is coming on all those who stand against His rule of salvation by grace. The

heavens are shaken as the Lord of the heavens fulfills these words in the destruction of Jerusalem. We'll have opportunity to study this further in Bible Class today to study further how in the destruction of Jerusalem, we see the Son of Man coming with power, fulfilling the words He has spoken.

Ultimately, this applies to every one of us too. We too live in a "time of tribulation." The attitude toward the gospel and the light of God's Word is growing darker. We too should be alert to the "coming of the Son of Man." We hear the warnings of God's judgment upon sin and unbelief. We see His great power and glory in the extension of His gospel kingdom among us. This is the time of angels being sent forth. After all, the word "angel" simply means "messenger." Beginning with Pentecost, God has been sending forth messengers to evangelize the world. To the four corners of the globe the elect, believers like you and I, are being gathered in for harvest. All these things have been fulfilled. **KNOWING THE TIME AFTER THE TRIBULATION keeps us alert.**

2. Knowing the "sign of the fig tree"

Ezekiel was a watchman who trumpeted the Word of God. His watchman's warning was to abandon our self-righteous defenses which will provide no defense in the day of God's wrath. ***Ezekiel 33:12 — 12 'The righteousness of the righteous man shall not deliver him in the day of his transgression'*** The true defense and deliverance is found only in Christ's righteousness and the forgiveness of He has brought to the wicked. Trust in our self-righteous defenses leaves us fruitless. It is trust in our Christ-righteous defense that bears the real fruit. The fig tree becoming tender tells us that summer is near, a sign that the next phase of the seasons is coming. Will Jesus find any fruit? **KNOWING THE SIGN OF THE FIG TREE keeps us alert.**

28 ... When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. 29 So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!

The seasons are changing. The branch is tender and has put forth its leaves. Summer is near.

It was just two chapters earlier where Mark records Jesus cursing a fig tree. He walks by and expects to see the early figs coming in. This lack of fruit was a symbol of Israel who failed to bear the fruit God had expected. The coming of the Messiah and the grace He offered was rejected. Lack of repentance led to lack of fruit. Israel was in a drought of self-nourishment through self-righteous works. Jesus curses the fig tree and declares that it will never bring forth fruit again.

The season of God's kingdom was reaching a turning point. The sign of the fig tree was the sign that God's Old Covenant relationship with Israel was ending. In Christ, the fruit of the New Covenant was coming forth. Time and time again the Old Testament prophets pointed to this time of fulfillment in Christ. They point to a time where the kingdom will no longer be contained within these boundaries of Palestine. The kingdom will be extended beyond the bounds of the Law of Moses to freely welcome Gentiles. The destruction of the Temple was a

mark of the end of God's kingdom among the nation of Israel. We see this "coming of the Son of Man" as Paul and Barnabus respond to the Jews who reject their preaching by saying, *Acts 13:46* — ***It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.***

And yet now, some 2000 years later, we face the same warning call. The final season of God's kingdom is at hand. As it says in v.29 — ***it is near — at the door.*** Summer is past and the harvest season is upon us. The messengers of God have gone forth to the four winds, gathering in the ones chosen by God's grace. The sign of the fig tree is that God has brought the message of salvation to you today. His kingdom is here, among us. In the preaching of the gospel He comes to make us citizens of His heavenly rule. The Spirit is at work among us to bring forth the fruits that Israel lacked. These are the fruits of a faith that relies on Jesus for His gift of righteousness. All things have been fulfilled. The coming of the Son of Man is at our door. **KNOWING THE SIGN OF THE FIG TREE keeps us alert.**

3. Knowing your watch

Recall Ezekiel's watch. It was not an alertness to ready yourself for battle. It was an alertness to sin and a watch for deliverance. *Ezekiel 33:10–11* — ***10 ... 'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'*** The call is to awake from spiritual slumber. — to take guard of the treasures with which we have been entrusted. *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— 36 lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. 37 And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"*

KNOWING YOUR WATCH keeps you alert.

32 of that day and hour no one knows ... take heed, watch and pray.

Left to our own efforts we would be in such a deep slumber that these words of warning would be meaningless. So many approach the final return of our Lord in such a slumber. Ezekiel's warning was "the righteousness of the righteous man shall not deliver him." Our mind is by nature a dream land of sinful thoughts and pursuits. To be consumed with what things are going right or going wrong in my life, makes us drowsy. ***31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.*** All things of this world will pass away. Our watch is to care for those things which endure and which do not pass away.

Toys will pass away. Even though I think being first or getting that thing that my brother or sister is playing with is so important right now, it won't last forever. Drugs, alcohol, sex, money, all temporal pleasure, will most certainly pass away. Even though I sometimes think life is all about those things which will make me happy or satisfy what I want, will soon be brought to nothing and exposed for its worthlessness.

What will last forever is God's true treasure — His Word. We are the servants of our Lord, entrusted with the care of those precious things which belong to Him, things which will not pass away, things for which He is returning. It is in this awareness of sin that we are really woken up.

This is our alertness to everything we've failed to do, and to everything the Son of Man has done in our place. Jesus has come in the flesh to keep a perfect watch, to fulfill that readiness requirement and bring you full salvation. ***Psalm 121:4-5,7-8 — 4 Behold, He who keeps Israel Shall neither slumber nor sleep. 5 The Lord is your keeper; The Lord is your shade at your right hand. ... 7 The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. 8 The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in From this time forth, and even forevermore.***

It is His watch that keeps us safe and preserves our soul. By faith we have been delivered. His Son who has done all things right has paid for things you've done wrong. God has forgiven you and set you free from any trembling at His return. Sin no longer dulls your alertness. All your sins have been buried in Christ's death and you rise anew, righteous servants of the Most High.

1 Thessalonians 5:8-11 — 8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. 11 Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

You have been woken up – not in shock and fear that this sudden return of the Master is near, but in the joy of being set right with Him and longing for His return. You are His beloved servant. He has appointed you to salvation. Faith and love are the ready guard you keep.

Through the hearing of God's word today, the kingdom has come to you – it is near, it is at the door. In God's heavenly kingdom the Spirit comes to you, declares this message that God has counted you righteous. This is your watch – an awareness of what truly matters in this passing life. He has entrusted us with the treasures of His kingdom.

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, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch.

God's household is daily under attack. We've been entrusted with great authority to care and defend the things He has left us on earth. As Jesus commissioned us in this authority ***Matthew 28:18-20 — 18 ... All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*** Amen.

This is why we have elected an Outreach Chairman. These are our efforts to care for the Masters house – to baptize and to teach His Word to all nations. The authority He has given us is to forgive and set free, to welcome more and more sinners in as the end draws near.

As Jesus said, "to each his work..." Each of you have been given your own gifts and responsibilities within God's kingdom. Maybe its to lead the spiritual work of our church. Maybe its to lead the spiritual needs of a spouse or a child. Maybe its to share the comfort of the good news with a friend. Maybe its to choose what is right in the midst of persecution when everyone else is doing what is wrong.

Mark 13:24-37

We are the watchmen, the Ezekiels who blow the trumpet and warn of the devastation that comes upon all that opposes the cause of Christ. Let us now blow those trumpets and keep a watchful care for God's things. We watch over and guard what is most precious to God – His Word and our faith in Christ, for this is His presence among us. Only in this gift of the Spirit are we kept ready – learning daily an awareness of our sins and spiritual slumbers ... being woken again and again to the attention of our new man who walks righteously and is ever ready for this glorious return of our Lord. **KNOWING YOUR WATCH keeps you alert.**

We may not know when, but thank God we know what. We know the WHAT that does not pass away – that when ever Jesus comes, He comes as your Savior. He comes with a judgment of righteousness. He comes to announce the decision that He has already declared on the cross – “Come you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world.” **NOT KNOWING WHEN KEEPS US ALERT.**

Let us watch and pray... Lord keep us steadfast in Your Word, ever alert, trusting in Your salvation, ready for Your return. Amen.