

Mark 13:32-37

³²“No 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!”

Be Prepared

I.

Have you begun your preparations yet? Probably so. Most Christians—even many non-Christians—have begun putting up decorations and getting ready for Christmas.

It’s the season of family get-togethers, and the season for having a gathering of friends over for a party. The house has to be spruced up in preparation for your guests. Your tree is probably already up and lit. Perhaps you have lights and other decorations outside. Those who ordered Christmas wreaths from the Ladies’ Guild will find that they have been made—they are ready for you to pick up.

Those who are *really* ahead have started—and maybe even *finished* their Christmas shopping. Even if you are one of those who is super-excited about the Christmas season and hyper-prepared, you have plenty of things that still need to be done for your Christmas season. There are cookies to be baked, special gatherings to attend with work parties or others, meals to plan and prepare, relatives and family to be enjoyed.

Though the world sometimes thinks that the most important things about the Christmas season are love and family, Christians realize there is something much more important. The new Church Year begins with the season of Advent as of this morning.

Here at Holy Trinity *our* decorating has also been done. The tree is up, and other decorations have been put out. The decorations on our tree include Chrismons—decorations that specifically point to Christ, such as the Chi-Rho symbol, which are the first two letters of the word “Christ” in Greek. We do this because we want to focus our attention in this Advent season on the coming of Christ. The point of our preparation, of course, is to be ready to welcome the baby Jesus at Christmas—to celebrate his birth. As we watch for his first coming, Jesus also urges us to be prepared for his second coming. Soon he will be coming back for us. Be prepared.

“Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come” (Mark 13:33, EHV). Don’t put off your preparations for Christ’s return. Jesus knows human nature very well. Certain people are labeled as having a disorder if they are easily distracted. Jesus knows that’s called being a human. Paul says: “Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge them into complete destruction and utter ruin” (1 Timothy 6:9, EHV). You and I live a better life than kings and queens of only 100 years ago. They didn’t have television or the internet. They

didn't have central heat and air conditioning in their homes. They didn't have refrigeration to preserve their food. They didn't have the opportunity to get fresh fruits and vegetables from around the world throughout the year. We live in the lap of luxury, yet we still find the things of this world distracting. We want more and more of these things. Distracted by wealth and the things it can buy, our attention is easily pulled away from watching for Jesus' return.

Proper preparation for the return of Jesus even takes on a warlike mentality. Paul says to the Ephesians: "Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil" (Ephesians 6:11-12, EHV). Satan is waging spiritual warfare against us. *He* treats this battle seriously, even if *we* don't.

Jesus says: "Therefore 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. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!" (Mark 13:35-37, EHV). With your busy Christmas schedule you might be tempted to procrastinate. "Maybe tomorrow I'll have more time to think about my Christian faith." "Next year I'll make a resolution to spend more time thinking about spiritual things." That's *not* the attitude Jesus urges as you wait for him to come back. Despite the fact that it has been 2,000 years since his first coming, complacency is inadvisable.

II.

Even for the most committed Christian, the danger is always lurking. Paul said: "Indeed, I know that good does not live in me, that is, in my sinful flesh. The desire to do good is present with me, but I am not able to carry it out. ¹⁹ So I fail to do the good I want to do. Instead, the evil I do not want to do, that is what I keep doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who am doing it, but it is sin living in me" (Romans 7:18-23, EHV). Take a look at the Ten Commandments. You know what God says is good and right. What he wants *from* you and *for* you in life is clearly delineated there. They have served as a mirror to you; you have seen how impossible it is to keep those Commandments. In spite of your desire to keep them, you have cheated. You have lied. You have disobeyed those in authority. Lately sexual misconduct has been much in the news. You know that you, too, have urges and feelings that are not in line with what God tells us are proper, even if you have never done anything for which social media would explode in outrage against you. It is as Isaiah says in our Old Testament Lesson today: "All of us have become like something unclean, and all our righteous acts are like a filthy cloth" (Isaiah 64:6, EHV). The very *best* we have to offer looks like the rag you used to wipe up the oil spill in the garage.

The reason to watch and be prepared is respect for your Savior, Jesus Christ. He kept the Ten Commandments perfectly. Every aspect of the Moral Law he fulfilled to a T in your place. This is the real reason you want to be prepared.

"³³ Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come" (Mark 13:33, EHV). As a Child of God you have an unique opportunity: you remain prepared for Christ's return by following your vocation—by doing the things warranted by your station in life in loving response to what Christ has done for you. If you are a father or a mother—you try to be the best Christian father or mother you can be. If you work in a factory or an office—you strive to be the best Christian employee you can be. If you are the boss or the owner of a business—you strive to be the best Christian boss you can be.

Jesus said about the Last Days: “False Christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great signs and wonders so as to deceive even the elect, if it were possible” (Matthew 24:24, EHV). Christian watching is extra-important because Satan is out there trying to deceive you if at all possible. Unfortunately, it works. “The Spirit clearly says that, in later times, some will fall away from the faith, because they devote themselves to deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons,² in connection with the hypocrisy of liars” (1 Timothy 4:1-2, EHV).

III.

Be aware. Watch. Be prepared. Satan is out to deceive you and lead you away from Christ. He tries to distract you with all kinds of baubles and shiny objects that take your focus away from the Savior.

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father...³⁵Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house is coming” (Mark 13:33, 35, EHV). There *is* a day and an hour. You and I don’t know when it will be, but God does. Jesus assures us that the day *is* coming. He *will* return. Of that you can be sure. After they had seen Jesus ascend into heaven, the disciples just stood there staring at the clouds behind which Jesus had disappeared. Two angels spoke to them reassuringly: “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here looking up into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11, EHV).

IV.

That is exciting news! The fact that he is coming back means that he is coming for you! Are you prepared? In today’s Second Lesson Paul says: “You were enriched in him in every way, in all your speaking and all your knowledge,⁶ because the testimony about Christ was established in you.⁷As a result you do not lack any gift as you eagerly wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:5-7, EHV). You have all the tools. You have the Word of God to teach you. You have faith established—planted inside you by the work of the Holy Spirit. You are able to use the faith God has given you to live as a Christian and share what you have learned about God’s love for the world. Paul continued: “He will also keep you strong until the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 1:8, EHV).

While we do not know the time, we know that we *are* prepared. God has given us every tool we need, and has even given us the faith we need to live as watchful Children of God.

“What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!” (Mark 13:37, EHV). And we do. With great excitement. Jesus’ return will be better than Christmas morning with all the anticipation of the presents under the tree. After all, those presents are mere tokens to remind us of the greatest gift of all—the gift of our Savior. We are prepared. We watch and wait with eager expectation and anticipation. Amen.