

**Mark 13:32-37:** <sup>32</sup> "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> "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. <sup>36</sup> If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup> What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'"

"Children, I have some good news! Grandma and grandpa will be coming!"

"Oh, Mother, that's great! We love grandma and grandpa, and they love us. Everyone is happy when grandma and grandpa are here. They always bring us nice gifts and presents. Mother, should we stand at the window and watch?"

"Yes, children. That would be a great idea." So the children stand at the window and watch.

But time goes on. Grandma and grandpa do not arrive. Finally, the children say, "Mother, I was in 1<sup>st</sup> grade when you told us that grandma and grandpa are coming. Now I am ready to graduate from high school. Are you sure they are coming? I want to do more in my life than stand at the window. I want to go on to college and get a job. I want to get married some day and have my own children. Maybe grandma and grandpa changed their mind. Maybe something bad happened to them."

That conversation is similar to the words in our sermon text. Except that here Jesus Himself is speaking to us. Jesus tells us that He is coming! And Jesus says to us,

**WATCH!**

As you watch, Jesus says, remember two things:

1. Remember that God has set the date.
2. Remember that God has given us work to do.

**I. God has set the date**

**A. Announcement and question**

**1. Destruction!**

It was Tuesday of Holy Week, just a few days before Good Friday. Jesus had spent the whole day teaching the people at the temple.

Now Jesus led His disciples out of Jerusalem and up the hill called the Mount of Olives. When they turned around and looked back on the city, they saw the temple and the other buildings glistening in the sunshine. And they remarked, "Lord, just look at those beautiful buildings!" (13:1) Jesus replied, "I tell you the day is coming when these buildings will be torn down - completely destroyed. Not one stone will be left on another." (13:2)

The disciples couldn't believe it. They asked, "Lord, when will this happen?" Jesus did not answer their question. Instead He replied, "I need to tell you something else, something much more important. The day is coming when this entire world will be destroyed. On that day, 'the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky.' (13:24,25) 'At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory.'" (13:26) It will be Judgment Day, the day when all of us stand before the throne of God.

**2. Our question; Jesus' answers**

If we had been there with Jesus, we would surely have asked, "Lord, when is *this* going to come?" Jesus answers, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, not even the Son of God; but only the Father." God's angels stand in His presence, day and night. They know a lot of things; but they do not know the date God has set. Jesus is the Son of God. But even He does not know the date. How can that be? While Jesus lived here on earth, He ordinarily did not use His divine powers or show His divine glory. He looked like and acted like any other human being. In that humble estate Jesus Himself could honestly say, "Only God the Father knows the exact date."

**3. Watch!**

When mother announced that grandma and grandpa are coming, the children knew exactly what to do. They wanted to be ready when grandma and grandpa arrive. So they began to watch.

Jesus tells us to do the same thing. He says to us, "Be alert!" "Be on guard!" "Watch!" (vv.33,37) Literally, "Be watching – continuously; all the time, 24/7." Why? Because "you do not know the day or the hour." (v.35,32) Jesus could come in the evening, or at midnight; He could come in the morning – at dawn, or even before dawn, when the rooster crows. (v.34)

**B. The meaning for our life**

Most of us have a calendar. We list all the important dates - doctor appointments, birthdays, perhaps even a wedding in our family. We check that calendar at least every day. We do not want to miss even one of those dates. But the most important date is not on our calendar. It is the day and the hour of our court appearance, the day when we stand face-to-face with Jesus. It is the day when He returns in glory; or the day of our death.

On that date Jesus will divide all of us into two groups. Those who believed in Him will stand at His right hand; those who chose to reject Him and His word will stand at His left. That date will be a horrible experience for all who chose to reject Jesus as their Savior. But for us, for all who trust in Jesus, it will be the greatest day of our lives. It's the day when Jesus will welcome us into the joy of eternal life.

Therefore Jesus says, "Watch!" Be ready. Because God has set the date.

**II. Remember that God has given us work to do.**

Waiting for grandma and grandpa does not mean staring out the window for the next 50 years. Waiting for the coming of Jesus does not mean that we do nothing except look into the sky. When Jesus says, "Watch," He wants us to remember the work that God has given to us.

## **A. Jesus' parable**

### **1. A man goes on a journey**

Jesus concludes this section with a short parable. He says, "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." (v.34) In the parable a man is going away on a journey. That man, obviously, is Jesus. In just a few days He will die on the cross, rise from the dead; and then 40 days later He will ascend into heaven and sit at God's right hand. Yes, Jesus will always be with us; but it will be different. We will not see Jesus, or touch Him, or speak with Him face-to-face.

### **2. He gives His servants "the authority"**

Therefore, when that man left his house, he "put his servants in charge." Literally, Jesus says, the man "gave *the authority*" to his servants. We are Jesus' servants. That means Jesus has given us *the authority*. Our question is, "Jesus, exactly what authority have you given to us? Authority to do what?" In one sentence the answer is this: Jesus here gives His servants *the authority* to do what He was doing on earth.

- He gives His servants *the authority* to speak God's word, just as He did.
- He gives us *the authority* to call people to repentance, just as He did.
- He gives us *the authority* to forgive the sins of all who repent, just as He did.

In addition the man on the journey gave to each of his servants his own particular work, his own particular job.

## **B. The meaning for our life**

In the previous verses Jesus pointed to several situations in which we will use our authority and do our work. Each situation is an opportunity for us to remind others that Jesus will return and to encourage them to be ready for that unknown hour.

For example:

### **1. Dealing with the troubles of COVID**

Jesus told us that while He is gone, we can expect all kinds of trouble in our world. COVID is an example. Obviously none of us wants to get sick from COVID and then die from it. But if that does happen, we know for sure where we will be. Unbelievers do not have that same knowledge and confidence. Many unbelievers are scared stiff at the thought of standing before the throne of God. (And well they should be!) Here Jesus says to us, "While I am gone, I am giving you the authority to continue my work, the authority to speak my words. Say to those who are terrified, 'Do not be afraid. God loves you. Your sins are forgiven.'"

Many Christians also are struggling. Some are struggling because of the problems that COVID has brought into their family. Other Christians are struggling because of (what Jesus called) the "great tribulation," that is, the opposition Christians will face from unbelieving family members and from anti-Christian governments during these last days. Here Jesus says us, "While I am gone, I am giving you the authority to continue my work, the authority to speak my words. Encourage those who are struggling. Remind them that 'God is our refuge and strength' (Psalm 46:1); and that, 'he who stands firm to the end will be saved.'" (13:13)

### **2. Dealing with sinners**

Each of us knows people who, by their own sins, have made a mess of their lives. They are like the Samaritan woman at the well. This woman had been married 5 times and was now living with a man out of wedlock. Jesus says to us, "While I am gone, I am giving you the authority to speak my words. I want you to speak the truth in love. I want you to call sin by its proper name, and then direct the hearts of penitent individuals to Jesus, our Savior."

Jesus says, "While I am gone, I will not be standing in your pulpit to announce that your sins are forgiven. While I am gone, I am giving you the authority to do that work. I want you to call qualified men to serve to serve as your pastors. When these men stand before the altar and say to you, 'I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,' they are using the authority I have given to you and are doing the job I have given to them."

### **3. During Advent**

Today is the first Sunday of Advent. The word "advent" means "coming." By custom we use the 4 weeks before Christmas to prepare for the coming of Jesus – His coming as a baby in Bethlehem, and His coming as the Judge at the end of time. Advent, therefore, is a special time of repentance – a time to think about the judgment we deserve and to rejoice in God's forgiveness.

Thousands of others do not see it that way. Thousands spend the Advent season preparing only to welcome the big man in the red suit. They say to us, "Don't worry about Jesus return in glory. It's not going to happen. The sun has come up every morning for thousands of years; and it will come up again tomorrow." Jesus replies, "Don't count on it."

Jesus says to us, "While I am gone, I will no longer be speaking directly to the thousands who are unprepared. I will no longer be walking from village to village, and will no longer be preaching, 'Repent! The Kingdom of heaven is at hand.' That is your job. I want you to warn others, tell them that the great day is coming. I want them also to be ready for my return."

Here in Wisconsin most Christian churches have a cross at the top of their steeple. In Latvia the custom is different. In Latvia many steeples are topped with a rooster. That rooster is more than a weathervane. Its main purpose is to remind people of Jesus' words here in Mark 13. Jesus' return could be during the day or during the night. It could be just before the sun comes up, when the rooster crows.

Jesus' final word is this: "What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!' Remember that God has set the date. Remember that God has given us work to do." May God bless us. Amen.