

Mark 13:28-37 “What to Do ‘til Jesus Comes”

Intro. As you look into the future of our world, are you optimistic that things are going to get better? Or are you pessimistic? I believe for the first time, polls are indicating that most Americans are beginning to feel that conditions will be worse for their children and grandchildren, than they have been for themselves. But I have good news! The great hope of every Christian is the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In fact, Titus 2:13 says that we are “looking for the blessed hope even¹ glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” The Bible says that a reward awaits believers who love His appearing (2 Timothy 4:8). There are a number of reasons why we should love His appearing. Sin and Death will be defeated forever (I Cor. 15:54). The Bible says that when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is (I John 3:2). So we will have a glorified body like Jesus has! Furthermore, Satan will be defeated and the curse will be lifted. Christ will be worshiped throughout the world, and creation will be liberated. The earth will once again be like a Garden of Eden. The Lord’s Second Coming is as real of an event as His first coming.

Up to this point in Mark 13 Jesus has been giving a series of predictions concerning the future. Many of these predictions have already been fulfilled. Some have yet to be fulfilled. But in the present section admonition replaces prediction. Christ admonishes us to do certain things while we wait for His return. And these admonitions were not just for the apostles. Notice what Jesus said in v.37, “And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!” So that includes us!

In this text we see 3 main things we should do while we wait and look for His return. First of all, we are to:

I. WAIT PATIENTLY

This exhortation is based on the parable about a landowner and master of the house, who represents Christ. He says in v.34, “It is like a man going to a far country²...” There are a couple other times when Jesus likens His departure to a man going into a far country (12:1; Lk. 19:12). It that day, travel was pretty slow, so a journey to a far country would mean that he would be gone a long time, especially if he stayed to conduct business.

Even so, Jesus indicated that when He ascended back to heaven, He would be gone a long time. Indeed, by the time the Gospel of Mark was written, He had been gone at least 30 years. That must have seemed like a long time to those Christians. In fact, just a few years later in 2 Peter 3:4 Peter quoted some who asked, “Where is the promise of His

¹ I have substituted the word “even” based on a Greek Grandville/Sharp rule of grammar.

² Translated from *apodemos*, literally, “away from one’s people,” to travel abroad. The verb form is used in Luke 20:9, “A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far country for a long time.”

coming?” Because of the long delay they questioned His promise to return. Today, He has been gone almost 2,000 years! He has certainly been away a long time by now, and His return could be delayed even longer.

How does this apply to us? Jesus implied that His people would have to patiently wait for His return. In fact, James 5:7 says, “be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord....” So don’t give up on Jesus! Though most of us would like for Jesus to come today, we may have to keep waiting patiently, perhaps for many more years.

Imagine a guy who has a girlfriend in High School. They date a year or so, break up, and then get back together just a few months before he goes off to College a long way off. For the first few months they write and call each other. Will she wait patiently for his return? He was about to find out when she wrote one of those “Dear John” letters. Then he started singing that old Hew Haw song, “She met another and ... she was gone.” We are not to be like that in our relationship with Jesus. We are to wait patiently for his return.

The point is that we have been betrothed to Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 11:2). Some day He is coming for His bride, and we need to wait patiently for His return, and be faithful to Him while we wait.

By the way, does the long wait mean that Christ is not coming at all? Certainly not! There are two main reasons why Christ is waiting so long before He returns. 1) He is still adding to His church. Jesus said in v.10, “And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.” He is not coming back until the mission is completed, and that takes time. Likewise, Paul wrote in Romans 11:25, blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in.” Furthermore, 2 Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, ... but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.” 2) He is not bound by time. 2 Peter 3:8 says, “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” 2,000 years may seem like a long delay to *us*, but it is like a couple of days to God, who is called “the Ancient of Days” (Daniel 7:9, 13, 22).³ The older you are, the faster time seems to pass. Amen?

So let us wait patiently for His return. Don’t give up. Don’t lose hope. Next, we see from our text that we should:

II. WORK FAITHFULLY WHILE WE WAIT

Jesus did not want His disciples to get so involved in the prophecies of the future that they would neglect the responsibilities of the present (cf. Acts 1:6-8). He left us with work to do while we wait for His return. So notice with me:

A. The Mandate of Faithful Service – Jesus said in v.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....”

³ A third reason is that He is permitting evil to run its course. The cup of God’s wrath is evidently not yet full (cf. Rev. 16:19). In Genesis 15:16 we see that God delayed sending the Israelites to judge and dispossess the inhabitants of the land, “for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

Like the landowner in the story, before our Lord went back to heaven, He gave each of us work to do.⁴ So instead of being idle, what work should we be doing until Jesus comes?

1. Proclaim the Gospel to All Nations – Jesus says in v.10, “And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.” Likewise, after the disciples asked if it was time for Jesus to establish His kingdom, Jesus said to His disciples in Acts 1:7-8, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” While it is important to learn prophecy, our *primary job* is to share the Gospel and make disciples.

2. Pray – Jesus said in v.33, “Take heed, watch and pray....” One of the most important ministries we can engage in is to pray. Prayer should be a priority.

What are we to pray for? We should pray for the lost. We should pray for our missionaries. We should pray for the spiritual well-being of fellow believers. Pray for spiritual alertness, that we not succumb to temptation or deceptive false teachers (vv.21-22). We should pray for our ministries, including our upcoming Vacation Bible School. We should pray that we will obey the next exhortation:

3. Persevere – The Lord expects us to be faithful to Him and our work while He is gone. We are not to quit or let up. Yet in this context Jesus warns of several forces at work in the last days that could turn believers away from the Lord. For example, He warned of persecution in vv.9-13. That same week He said in John 16:33, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”⁵ This will require inner strength to persevere for the Lord.

Are you still serving the Lord while you wait on His return? Some of our Senior Adults may feel you can’t do much, but you certainly can pray! You can give to help spread the Gospel. Jesus has gone to heaven, but while we wait, let us persevere and be faithful to do the work He has assigned to us.

Why should you work and serve Jesus while you wait? Well, we not only see the mandate of faithful service, but let’s consider next:

B. The Motives for Faithful Service – Christ wants to motivate you to be faithful in His service while you wait for His return. Notice from our text how He does so. First:

1. He Motivates Us by the Hope of His Return – Believers in the last days will face great difficulty. Yet if they see evidence that Jesus is returning very soon, it will motivate them to persevere. So Jesus said in vv.28-29, “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. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!” What an encouragement to remain faithful during those difficult days of stress and persecution. When you see these signs of the times, you know you do not have to wait and persevere much longer.

⁴ In Luke 19:13 Jesus gave another parable and said, “Do business till I come.”

⁵ Likewise, in Acts 14:22 the apostles warned new believers that “we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.”

Back when our children were young, we would travel over 500 miles to Georgia. After an hour or so down the road, what do you think we would hear from them? “Are we there yet?” We just had to tell them to be patient. But as we got closer to Rome, Georgia, we would see the signs indicating that we were almost home. One sign in particular let us know that we were *very* near our destination, “Welcome to Floyd County.” At that point we knew the wait was almost over, and that we had just about arrived home. How encouraging it is to know that the end of the journey is so near! Even so, as we see significant prophecies fulfilled, we know that the return of Christ is near. That knowledge makes it easier to persevere.

Then in v.30 He promises that at least some will survive those difficult days to see the Second Coming of Christ. There He says, “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.” What “generation” was Jesus referring to? He is clearly not referring to the disciple’s generation, though it is true that destruction of the temple took place before that generation passed away. But “all these things,” includes His return.⁶ So I believe the “one generation” timeframe of fulfillment will be a dual fulfillment of prophecy. Once the signs described in vv.11-22 take place, Christ will return within one generation.

There is additional evidence that once these signs take place, the coming of Christ will be soon. He says in v.29, “So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near — at the doors!” Then recall in v.20 that Jesus says that God has determined to shorten those days to prevent total loss of life. In fact, we know from other Scriptures that the Tribulation will last only seven years (Dan. 9:27),⁷ and the worst part of it will last only three-and-a-half years (Rev. 12:14).⁸ Christ will certainly intervene by the end of the tribulation to bring salvation to believers, and judgment upon their persecutors.⁹

Now if the rapture of believers takes place before the Tribulation, then this particular motivation only applies to a limited degree. However, for the saints of God in the Tribulation, those Tribulation signs would offer great motivation. If they will just persevere a little longer, no more than a few years, they could live to see Jesus coming again to accomplish their final and complete deliverance!

2. He Motivates Us by the Certainty of His Return - He says in v.31, “Heaven and earth will pass away,¹⁰ but My words will by no means pass away.” It has almost been 2000 years since Jesus promised to return. Therefore, you may doubt His promise or even scoff that His promise is true. But Jesus says here that His Word is more sure and reliable

⁶ Many believe Jesus was referring to the Jewish race. The Greek word translated “generation” (*genea*) can be used to speak of a kind of people or a race (cf. Mt. 23:36). The Jewish people were referred to by the term “generation” in the Old Testament (Dt. 32:5; Psa. 78:8). Also, Jesus used it to refer to the Jewish nation of His day on several occasions (Mark 8:12, 38; 9:19). Furthermore, the fig tree on several occasions speaks of the nation Israel. Therefore, Jesus would then be teaching the indestructibility of the Jewish people, even during the Great Tribulation. Haman was not able to destroy them, neither was Pharaoh, nor did Hitler succeed in his attempts. Also, a number of Bible teachers have linked this verse with the rebirth of the nation of Israel in 1948. The generation of Jews that re-established the nation of Israel have begun to die off, and will be gone within then next 10 years or so. Could this point to the soon coming of Christ?

⁷ Each “week” in Daniel’s seventy-week prophecy is seven years long.

⁸ Thus He assures believers that the antichrist will not succeed in his attempt to destroy their witness from the earth.

⁹ This probably explains the statement of Jesus that He repeated in Revelation, “I am coming quickly!”

¹⁰ The passing away of heaven and earth, to which Jesus refers, does not mean total annihilation but glorious renewal.

than the physical universe, which is going to pass away in its present form. Clearly, Jesus is making a bold claim that none other than the Son of God could make, for only the Word of God endures forever because God endures forever! 1 Peter 1:25 says, "The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever" (cf. Isaiah 40:8).

Another motive for faithful service until the Lord returns is this:

3. He Motivates Us by Holding Us Accountable - This is implied in the parable of the owner returning to his household and servants, to hold them accountable for their work (vv.34-36). You and I ought to live our lives in the light of the fact that we are to stand in the presence of Christ when He returns, and He is going to hold us accountable for how we have lived and served. 2 Cor. 5:10 says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

By April 15 of every year, I file and pay my income taxes. I do so out of obedience to the Lord (Mark 12:17; Rom. 13:7). But I am also motivated by the fact that an I.R.S. agent could contact me at any moment and require me to undergo an audit. By the way, that's never happened to me. But in the back of my mind, I know that it could happen.

Even so, we should always keep in mind that Jesus could come again, and will hold us accountable for how we have been living and serving. 1 John 2:28 says, "And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." If Jesus were to come today, would you be ashamed of how you have been living? Would you be ashamed of how little you have served Him? If He were to come again on a Sunday morning, would He find you in church? If not, would you be ashamed? Always remember that one purpose for the return of Christ is to examine our lives and determine if we will receive a reward. Jesus said in Matthew 16:27, "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works."

Are you ready to face Jesus when He returns?

Finally, while we wait for Jesus to return, we should not only wait patiently and work faithfully, but also:

III. WATCH EXPECTANTLY

When I was a child, my friends and I played hide and seek. Someone was chosen to close his eyes and count for a while until everyone else had a chance to hide. When the person was finished counting, he would open his eyes and say, "Ready or not, here I come!" Well, the day is coming when Christ will return whether you are ready or not! So we are to watch expectantly for the Lord's return, and always be ready.

So notice how Jesus commands us to watch in this text of Scripture. He says in v.33, "Take heed, watch and pray...." Then He says in v.37, "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!" In every case (also v.35) the command to watch is in the present tense: "Keep on watching." The apostles also exhorted us to watch for the return of Christ. The apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 4:7, "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful"

The primary reason Jesus gives for us to be constantly watching for His return is this: We do not know *in advance* when He will return. He says in v.32, “But of that day¹¹ and hour no one knows, not even the angels¹² in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” How could Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, not know something? That’s easily explained if we understand some facts about the incarnation. When He became a man, He voluntarily restricted the use of His divine attributes (Phil. 2:6-8), including His omniscience, unless granted otherwise by His heavenly Father. The main point of this verse is that it proves the futility and sinfulness of every attempt on man’s part to predict the date when Jesus will return.¹³

There is additional evidence in our text that we cannot know in advance when Jesus will come. In the last of v.33 He says, “for you do not know when the time is.” The word for “time” used here (*kairos*) does not refer to time as in a clock, but to a decisive time period in the plan of God.¹⁴ God knows the timetable of prophetic events, but we do not. Furthermore, He says in v.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,¹⁵ or in the morning.”¹⁶ In each case it is said this his return would take place during one of the night watches, probably because nighttime is the least expected time for someone’s arrival, especially in that day. In fact, Jesus said in Luke 12:40, “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” That’s why we have to keep watching.

However, the general time frame of the Second Coming will become obvious *once* God’s people see all the signs in Mark 13 and other prophecies fulfilled. Again, v.29 says, “So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near — at the doors!” (cf. 1 Thess. 5:4). But even those people won’t know the exact moment of Christ’s return. That is a secret.

Why did the Lord make this a secret? God doesn’t want mankind to know when the Second Coming will be because He wants every generation to live in expectation of it. Why is that? It is because watching has a purifying effect, knowing that you could stand before the Lord in judgment almost any moment. 1 John 3:3 says, “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” On the other hand, if someone knew that Christ’s return was a long way off, they are more likely to think that they can live in sin until much closer to His return. So the Lord, in all His wisdom, has kept secret the time of Christ’s return.

¹¹ The expression "that day" recalls the Old Testament concept of the Day of the Lord (e.g., Amos 5:18-20; Zeph 1:7,14-16), the day of judgment of both Israel and the nations that marks the end of the present evil age and the beginning of the coming age of righteousness [Brooks].

¹² The angels, though standing in a very close relationship to God and though they will participate in the Second Coming (Matt. 13:41; 24:31; Rev. 14:19), do not know the day nor the hour.

¹³ There have been dozens of failed predictions giving the date of the return of Christ, including more recently by Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, Herbert W. Armstrong and Harold Camping.

¹⁴ *The Message* translates it "the timetable."

¹⁵ The rooster begins to grow about two hours before daybreak.

¹⁶ As in 6:48, Mark again used the Roman way of reckoning four watches rather than the Jewish way of three watches (cf. Luke 12:38) – Brooks.

So if the Lord calls upon us to watch for His return, how do we do that? Are we to go outside and constantly look to the sky? Not at all. So how do we watch for the return of Christ? Well, first of all:

A. We Are to Watch for Signs of His Return - Notice what Jesus says in vv.28-29, “Now learn¹⁷ this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves,¹⁸ you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!” In the springtime the sap in the tree begins to flow through the branches, causing them to become tender and swollen. Leaves begin to sprout. That’s a clear sign that summer is just around the corner. Even so, when the signs spoken of in this text take place, we can know that the return of Christ is near.

So we should do two things: first, study and learn prophecy and the signs of the times. He says in v.29, “when you see these things happening....” He is talking about the signs mentioned, especially in vv.14-25. You have to be familiar with the signs that you are to be looking for. Then, watch for the events that are taking place, so that you will be able to discern the fulfillment of Christ’s predictions and be strengthened in your faith. In fact, the sign given in v.14 could mean the return of Christ is *very* near. That refers to the time when the final Antichrist carries out his work of sacrilege in a holy place, even claiming to be God or a god. We are already witnessing an increase in the desecration of churches.

Then Christ gives another exhortation so that we keep watching expectantly for His return:

B. We Should *Not* Fall Asleep! – Jesus says in v.36 that we are to watch for His return “lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.” In fact, in v.33, the word translated “watch” (*agrupneo*) is a different word that literally means “do not sleep,” that is, stay awake and alert! We must look to the previous parable for the meaning. Notice in the last of v.34 that the master “commanded the doorkeeper to watch” for his return.¹⁹ He was not to sleep on the job but keep watching. Now the parable has a spiritual meaning. In v.36, “sleeping” indicates moral and spiritual laxity. It is when we forget about the Lord and focus on worldly things. Luke’s account of the Olivet Discourse says something similar in 21:34, “But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly.”²⁰

In Matthew’s account of this section of our Lord’s teaching, he adds the following, “But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matt. 24:37;

¹⁷ He wanted the disciples to get the point of His analogy. The Greek word translated “learn” (*manthano*) speaks of learning something thoroughly. Jesus wanted the disciples to fully grasp the lesson He was teaching in the parable of the fig tree.

¹⁸ The fig tree is one of the few deciduous trees in Palestine (Garland, p.502), i.e. one that loses its leaves and re-grows them each spring. Olive trees are evergreen.

¹⁹ The doorkeeper could refer to pastors and other spiritual leaders that are especially responsible for watching and warning God’s people regarding the signs of the times.

²⁰ Likewise, Luke 12:45 says, “But if that servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and be drunk.” Some people drink so much they pass out, which is the opposite of staying awake.

cf. Luke 17:26-27). In the days of Noah, more and more people turned from God to sin. Immorality and violence were pervasive. Does that sound like today? Well, when Noah told the people that God's judgment was near, they didn't believe and didn't care. The people lived as if nothing would happen to them. They did not believe that God would judge them and scorned the warning that a flood was imminent. They were so busy with present, earthly affairs that they did not seek deliverance from the impending danger.

That's exactly what will happen during the Tribulation. People during the end times will see the fulfillment of these prophetic signs, but many won't recognize their significance. Men will be no different at the Lord's Second Coming than they were at His first coming. Many people saw Jesus, heard Him, and watched Him work wondrous signs, including raising the dead! Yet they still didn't believe and receive Him as Lord. Things won't be any different when people see the signs preceding Christ's coming again. But many people will not believe until it's too late.

Paul wrote, "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us, therefore, cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:11-12). Each day, we move closer and closer to the Second Coming of Christ. Cast off the works of darkness. Put on the armor of light and be a witness of Christ in these dark days.

So stay spiritually alert. Keep reading your Bible. Go to a Bible teaching church. Learn the prophecies that give signs of His return and keep an eye on the news. If you go to a church where the pastor hardly ever addresses the subject of Bible prophecy, you are probably in the wrong church!

Conclusion: Are you ready for the return of Christ? If you aren't a believer, you aren't ready for Christ's return. Don't put off getting saved another day. Repent of your sins and trust in Christ as your Savior. He died on the cross for you. When Christ comes again, it will be too late to get saved.

Sources: James A. Brooks, *New American Commentary: Mark* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2024; David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); H.A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Gospel of Mark* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1948); John MacArthur, Jr., *Signs of Christ's Return: Matthew 24-25* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1987); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4, Matthew & Mark (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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