

**“Watch!”**  
**December 3, 2023**  
**Pastor John Mars**

This is the day that the Lord hath made; let us rejoice and be glad in it! Good morning, Church. Thank God for rain; it is not snow! I want to read a passage of Scripture this morning taken from the book of Mark, chapter 13, verses 24 to 37, Jesus speaking. His disciples had asked Him, “When will the end come?” This is part of His answer.

“But in those days, following that distress,  
‘the sun will be darkened,  
and the moon will not give its light;  
and the stars will fall from the sky,  
and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’

“At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great glory and power. He will send his angels and gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happen, you will know that it is near, right at the door. I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Earth and heaven will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

“No one knows about the day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. 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.

“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. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’”

May God bless the reading of the Word.

I do not like “wait.” I am a very patient man...for a very short period of time. But the season of Advent is all about wait and watch and prepare. Traditionally, during Advent, the emphasis was only on the Second Coming of Christ, and we would not sing any Christmas songs until Christmas Day. Now, in modern times, we have begun to anticipate the First Coming of Christ in His birth. And as we get closer and closer to Christmas, we will sing more and more Christmas carols. This is not wrong. It's not right. It just is. That is the way it is in the modern church.

Now, in our passage, Jesus' disciples had asked Him, “When will the end come? When will the end come?” Now, to understand that question, you have to understand how the Jews thought about time. They divided time into two eras: this present era and the era to come, this present time and the time to come. And some of you are going, “Duh!” But wait. This present era they saw as altogether evil and the era to come as being altogether good. Those two are separated by something they call the Day of the Lord. That is not a literal day but a time period, and God would accomplish bringing about all good through Messiah. When they asked Jesus this question, He gave them two answers. They didn't understand and they didn't know, but their world, as they knew it, was about to end. The nation of Israel was about to be destroyed. And Jesus said, “This generation will not pass away until this happens.” A generation is forty years. And in 69

A.D. the nation of Israel rebelled against the Romans, and the Romans came down on them like the wrath of God. They sacked Jerusalem and they utterly destroyed the temple. And Israel would be no more until after World War Two.

The second answer: Jesus talks about when God is going to make all things right. And that is when He would return. And He uses popular, prophetic language. The sun will be darkened; the moon will not give its light; the earth will be shaken; the stars will fall; there will be earthquakes and famines and all these different things. This is popular rhetoric of that day. You can find it in the Old Testament, but mostly you can find it in books of the Apocrypha. The Apocrypha is not a part of our Scriptures, but it is a part of the Catholic Bible. It was used extensively during the time of Christ, and it was filled with this type of imagery. When Jesus used this imagery, He used it to get their attention, to let them know what He was talking about. He was preaching. This is not a map of the future. It is not a timetable of future events. Let me say that again. This is not a map of the future, and it is not a timetable of future events. Every single generation, from the time of Christ until today, has seen these same things and said, "It's the last day." Eventually somebody's going to be right. This is imagery. Right after the destruction of Jerusalem, there were wars on virtually every front of the Roman Empire. Right after the destruction of Jerusalem, there were earthquakes in several parts of the Roman Empire. Right after the destruction of Jerusalem, not many years after that, a volcano erupted, buried Pompeii, and caused so much atmospheric disturbance there was a volcanic winter for two years. It disturbed agriculture, and there was a famine all over the Roman Empire for two years. And the early Christians said, "This has got to be it!" And that was 2000 years ago.

Bottom line: Don't get hung up on the imagery and rhetoric. There have been segments of the Christian faith, in every single generation, who said, "We have got to be living in the last days." What Jesus says very clearly is: "I don't know. I don't know. The angels in heaven don't know." So, here's what I've been pondering, what I'm wondering: Is it blasphemous for us to wonder about the "when," when Jesus didn't know? I'm wondering: Is it blasphemous for us to wonder about the "when," when Jesus didn't know and seemed not to care to know? Now, do not leave here saying, "Pastor John said..." I said, "I'm wondering if it's blasphemous." There have probably been more books and more articles written about the Second Coming than any other topic in the Christian faith. And I know that I know that I know, that for me personally to wonder about the Second Coming is useless, fruitless, and pointless, because I'm not going to put that much energy into it.

I always think about this gentleman who was 70-something years old and had been studying the Second Coming all of his life. And when he was 70-something years old, he said, "You know what? I know the Bible says that Jesus doesn't know when it's going to be and doesn't know the day or the hour, but I have narrowed it down to one of three days." And he was dead serious. He had studied this all of his life. He believed it so much. He was so sincere he wrote a book. And then he raised the money to have it published and have it sent to every pastor in the United States. Do you know how many of us there are? And he sent it to every single one of us. He was that sincere. Problem: That was in September of '86.

The apostle Paul believed that he would see the imminent return of Christ. He believed that he would see the return of Christ with his own eyes. And when he got toward the end of his life, he said, "Well, I may not see it, but you will see it." Paul was wrong.

Every generation has thought it lived in the last days. Trust me when I tell you, within 100 miles of where you are sitting right now, a pastor is telling their congregation, "We are living in the last days." Jesus will come back soon. I agree. Wait. I agree, but "soon" is a relative term, isn't it? Soon, as human beings count years, or soon in geological terms? Soon, in a couple of years, or soon in a couple hundred thousand years? Or soon as God counts time? The apostle Peter says, "To God a day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as a day." Jesus said, "The angels in heaven don't know. I don't know." Jesus didn't speculate about "when." He had trusted that information to God and God alone. Sounds like a pretty good idea to me.

Our task, our job, is to watch and prepare as we wait. What this passage does make clear is that it will come, that Jesus will return. And I say, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly." Sometimes I stand with Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise, and I say, "Scotty, beam me up. There's no intelligent life here." You all laugh, but you've said the same thing, right? I say, "Come, Lord Jesus, and make it quick." But we neglect this doctrine to our own detriment. The reason the Ancient Church emphasized it is they knew, as we know, that one day Jesus will come. He may come for us collectively. But if He doesn't come for us collectively, He will certainly come for us individually. And we need to be prepared. Our job is to watch and prepare, as we wait. Are you ready? The Scripture also teaches us that history is going somewhere. We're not in an endless repeat of history. History is going somewhere. It will indeed end, either for us collectively, or us individually. But for those who are prepared, that's nothing to be dreaded. That's nothing to worry about. That's nothing to fear. That is a great and glorious thing, that we will indeed meet Christ. And that's awesome! It's a glorious day! So, prepare so you won't be embarrassed.

So, I want to say to you: Enjoy Advent! Enjoy Advent! Don't allow the busyness and the hectic nature of the season to rob you of the joy of Advent, as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' First Coming at Christmas, but also as we look forward to Christ's Advent, His Second Coming. Let's pray together.

Hear our prayers, O Lord. Reluctantly, we pray for patience. We also pray for eyes to see and ears that hear, that we would know what time it is, that we would prepare to meet You whenever that time may come, and that we would be ready. And Lord, as we begin this precious season, may we not allow the world to rob us of its joy. May we anticipate, with great thanksgiving, the joy that is the birth of our Savior. And while we wait, may we anticipate that great and glorious day when You will come again. We pray these things in the name of Christ. Amen.