

Mark 13:32-37

“No one knows about that 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!’ ”

I’ve heard people say, “Winners write the history books.” Now I’m definitely not learned or smart enough to comment comprehensively on the topic. My gears did, however, start to turn on that topic last week. Here’s what I’m wondering: Instead of saying, “Winners write the history books,” couldn’t we just say, “survivors write the history books”? It just seems easier and simpler to think of it like that. You don’t have to be a cynic or a person trying to sniff out some monstrous historical cover up in order to say, “Survivors write the history books.” You just have to know that you can’t write history if you’re dead.

Sometimes I wish it weren’t true that the survivors write the history books. Take this week for example. I think it would be very instructive for people watching for worldwide destruction to hear the voices of the people who experienced the world’s first destruction. I’d love to hear from the people who saw the water heaping up and hear their reflections upon what Noah had told them. I’d love to hear a report like this: “Yeah, we all thought Noah was a pretty bizarre guy for building that massive ark. After work, we’d go watch him build, drink beer, and make jokes at his expense. Most of the time, Noah was pretty patient with us. He told us how God said, ‘I’m going to destroy the earth.’ He said to us, ‘If I was you, I’d get serious. I know you all think I’m nuts, but I’m telling you God is going to destroy this place.’ We rolled our eyes and snickered at him when he said stuff like that. After a while we got tired of making fun of Noah and we just lived our lives. We ate and drank. We married and were given in marriage. We thought that dumb ark would just sit there forever. You want to know what my last thought was as the water rushed at me? I thought, ‘I wish I had listened to Noah.’” It’d be great to read a story like that, but we can’t because the survivors write the history books.

Maybe, when you think about it though, their silence speaks the loudest. Maybe the fact that they can say nothing about their failure to listen Noah’s warning is the most powerful message of all. God isn’t going to put up with this world forever. Its destruction is imminent. What are you going to do about it? Let the collective silence of those pre-flood people clue you in to God’s seriousness. Tune in - not to Noah’s preaching - but this time to Jesus’ preaching. He’s saying the same thing Noah did, **“Watch!”**

Jesus is coming. Watch. Seriously, do that. Don’t let the nonsense of a guy like Harold Camping wreck for you the credibility of Jesus. Jesus never time stamped his return. Harold Camping did. That was his mistake. Do you remember that last May? Harold Camping and his followers put up signs along highway 41 in Appleton. They ran radio ads and wrote articles that all said, “Judgment Day is coming May 21st.” Then it didn’t. After an embarrassed silence we heard this from the Harold Camping people, “Our calculations were off. We now think that it’s October 21st, 2011.” October 21st came and went too. Oops. Wrong again. Harold Camping was dead wrong. And that shouldn’t surprise us. Jesus told us point blank, **“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but**

only the Father.” (v. 32)

No one knows that day or hour. Nobody. There isn't anybody in the father's inner circle who knows - not the angel Michael, not even the Son according to his humanity. No mole or undercover agent is going to pry the information from the Father. Nobody knows except the Father and that's the end of the matter. God, of course, does that on purpose. It's best that we don't know because our lack of knowledge actually increases our watchfulness.

Imagine a nice set of parents. Their oldest is babysitting the rest of the kids while they go out with friends. They give their last minute instructions before they leave. They say, "Get your homework done and everybody in bed by 9pm. We'll be home at 11pm." So at 10:59pm - and not a minute sooner mind you - the kids rush to bed. Then they all pretend like they're already asleep when Mom and Dad get home. As the years go on Mom and Dad get smart. They don't tell the kids when they'll be getting back. And guess what? Those same kids actually go to bed when they're supposed to. You noticed what happened, didn't you? The lack of knowledge actually had the kids well prepared for their parents' coming. There's a similar effect here. Our lack of knowledge of Jesus' coming actually increases our watchfulness.

That's what Jesus is driving at. Watchfulness. It's very important to Jesus because it's important to us. How important is this watching to Jesus and to us? Short answer? It's all Jesus talks about here. Long answer? By my count, Jesus either by implication or by direct statement encourages watchfulness nine times in six verses. Look at all the different ways he says it. Keep watch! Don't let him find you sleeping! Be on guard! Be alert! Then, to put the cherry on top, he goes out with a one word bang, "Watch!" And all of this is jam packed into just six verses. I honestly don't think Jesus could have made his point with more clarity or forcefulness.

Watch. That's Jesus' message. So what does it mean to keep watch and how do we do it?

First, let's talk about what keeping watch doesn't mean. Over the years, people have had some serious misunderstandings about what it means. So here's what keeping watch doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that you stop your life and stare into the sky. Do you remember what the disciples did when Jesus ascended into heaven? They stared into the sky. It's like they were so eager for Jesus to come back again that they couldn't rip their eyes from the skies. It wasn't until some angels came and jolted them out of the trance with this question (notice how incredulous the angels sound over the disciples' behavior), "Why are you standing here looking into the sky?" Keeping watch obviously doesn't mean that we should get into sky gawking, or into any modern equivalent of that either. We're not supposed to be hitting refresh on Google Chrome every 10 minutes to see if MSN is reporting Jesus' second coming yet, nor should we feel compelled to have our TV's tuned to CNN 24/7. Jesus' doesn't want us spending our lives staring at the sky waiting for him to come back.

So if watching doesn't look like that, then what does it look like? Jesus tells a parable where watchfulness looks like this: **"He (Jesus is talking about himself here) 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) So there is one guy who stays at the door and has the special function of keeping his eye to the sky. He makes sure the household is always on high alert and is all prepped for the master to come back. That's the first part of Christian watchfulness. We want our hearts to be ready and we want our minds primed for Christ. That's the inner part of watchfulness. We do, however, still have assigned tasks that God wants us doing while we're waiting. That's the outer component to watchfulness. Each person has their

assigned tasks. Don't think too hard about what that means. Be who God has made you to be. Be the mom God wants you to be. That's your task. Be the husband God wants you to be. Be the employee God wants you to be. Be the Trinity member God wants you to be. Fulfill the obligations God has given you in your life. That's the outer component to watchfulness.

So let's do a dry run. Let's say Jesus came back yesterday. How did he find you? Did he find your inner you ready for him? Did he find your heart just as he should? Did he find your mind prepped and ready for him? How did he find the outer component to your watchfulness? Did he find you yelling at your kids? Did he find you annoyed at your wife? Did he find you wasting time on the internet at your employer's expense? Did he find you drunk? Did he find you trying to mend bridges with the people in your life to whom you have obligations? How did he find you?

It's a little scary – to say the least – to think about how Jesus will find you. And I'll tell you why: we all know ourselves well enough by now. It's always something. It's always someone. I had a catechism student ask me once, "What if Jesus comes back and I'm sinning? What will happen?" We had to change the question. It's not that he will come back and *might* find us being sinners. He will come back and he *will* find us in some kind of spiritually compromised position - even when we're doing our best works we fall short of the standard. The question is not whether Jesus will find us thinking or doing something questionable. The question is who takes the heat for our sin when he does come back.

Actually that's not the question either. The question is who *did* take the heat for our sin when Christ comes back. And, of course, Christ did. That's what the cross is all about. Now think this through with me. The same guy who died for our sins is the same guy who is coming back to judge. Tell me that's not comforting to you! God's justice system is completely rigged in your favor. The God who loved you enough to die for you is the God who judges you. Tell me that doesn't comfort you. I know that comforts me! It'd be one thing if there were two different people. God could have set it up where there is one guy who pays for sin and another guy entirely who judges. In that case, the guy who judges could figure that the guy who died and rose didn't make a payment that extended far enough. That's not how it works. The God who died is the same God who judges. He knows how much sin he paid for. He knows exactly how deep his mercy runs. That's a justice system perfectly rigged in your favor. So, ask the question all over again. This time in light of Christ, his sacrifice, and his mercy. How will he find you? He'll find you holy. He'll find you perfect. He'll find you blameless. No matter what you're doing or how you're doing it. Why? Because his payment went, yes, even as far as you. And Jesus is uniquely qualified – like nobody else could ever be – to know that truth because he died to make it true.

And that brings us full circle on our discussion of Christian watchfulness because this is the most important aspect of all. That's the truth to set your heart on. That's the truth that primes your mind for Christ to show up. And that's, of course, the truth that drives us to more perfectly and more selflessly carry out our Christian obligations to spouse, to employer, to teacher, to church, and so on as we wait. That's Jesus' message today and it's all contained in the one word with which Jesus left us in these verses and with which I'm going to leave you today. Watch! Amen.