

Watch and Be Ready for the Lord's Return

Mark 13:32-37

Mark 13:32-37 - *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is. 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, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. 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, or in the morning— ³⁶ lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. ³⁷ And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"*

Background Notes

The Olivet Discourse was given during the last week of our Lord's earthly ministry. In the Olivet discourse the Lord spoke about the future. He not only predicted the demise of the Jewish nation and the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, but He also gave signs for the "End Times" and His return to earth. The events of 70 AD are covered in Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse (Luke 21). Luke 21:24: *"And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."* The Gentiles mentioned in this Scripture were the Roman armies that overran Jerusalem in 70 AD, and also the Gentile powers that, down through the years, have dominated Jerusalem. Luke 21:24 says that this will go on *"until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled."* The times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled when the Lord returns.

Mark's account of the Olivet Discourse doesn't concentrate on the events of 70 AD, but rather on End Time events. In verses 5-13 of this chapter, the Lord gave a description of conditions that would characterize history from His time right up to and into the End Times. There would be false christs and deceivers, wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and famines in various places around the world, persecution and betrayal of believers. These conditions, Jesus said, were not specific signs of the End Times, but would characterize **all** times from the 1st century right up until the End Times. And certainly these predictions have come true.

Beginning at verse 14, the Lord gave some specific signs for the End Times. There will be a future Temple where the *abomination of desolation* would be set up. There will be a future Tribulation period unlike anything this world has ever seen. There will be cosmic disturbances preceding the Lord's return. All these would be specific signs of the Lord's Second Coming.

In verse 28 the Lord began to speak about another sure sign or indication that the End Times were just ahead, and that was the sign of the return of the nation Israel. Israel is the "fig tree" of the parable. Since Israel has already returned as

a nation, we would conclude that we are right on the threshold of the End Times, and the Lord's return to this earth is near. And if that's true, the Rapture of the Church should be that much closer.

Well then, you might say, let's try to figure out the exact date. There ought to be enough biblical data that we can figure out exactly when the Lord is going to return. No! We should *not* try to figure out the exact date when the Lord will return. That's the point of Mark 13:32-37. Watch and be ready - but don't try to figure out the exact date!

Doctrinal Points

1. "Watch" is more important than "when."

The *when* of the Lord's return is important - in fact the Lord gave us signs that indicate when (in general) He would return. He told us to keep an eye on Israel. When you see evidence of new life in the nation of Israel, you will know you're on the threshold of the End Times and the Lord's Second Coming. And In 1948 Israel was reborn as a nation.

But in verses 35-37 the Lord told us to watch for His coming - but don't try to figure out the day or the hour, because no one knows. By the way, the Lord wasn't indicating that we should try to figure out the *year*, just because He said no one knows the *day* or the *hour*! No, that's not the Lord's point at all. His point was that we're **not** to try to figure out a specific date. Our responsibility is to *watch*.

It's like a man, the Lord said, who leaves his home and goes on an international business trip. He tells his servants to watch for his return, and to stay busy while he's away. He gives them a general idea of when he will be back - but no specific date or time. He tells them that his return may even be in the middle of the night. (By the way, the "times" that are mentioned here in verse 35 were the four watches of the night according to the Roman culture at that time: in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning.) The master of the house could come back at **any** time, so stay busy! Watch and be ready.

So it is with our Lord's return. And what is true of His return to this earth to set up His kingdom is certainly true of the Rapture, when He catches up believers from earth to Heaven: **watch** is more important than **when**. Verse 37 once again: "*And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!*" **Watch** is more important than **when**!

2. There is a difference between having omniscience and exercising omniscience.

Verse 32 has caused problems for a lot of Christians. How are we to explain this verse? "*But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*" How is it that the Lord Jesus, who is God, said that there is something He doesn't know? It's true that Jesus is God, and God is omniscient – He knows everything!

However, there is a difference between **having** omniscience and **exercising** that omniscience, and I think that's the answer to this (apparent) problem. There is a difference between having omniscience and exercising omniscience. When the eternal Son of God became Man, He did **not** give up any of His attributes of deity. If He had, He would have been less than God. No, the incarnation was not a subtraction in any way; it was an addition. He took on humanity. He gave up no aspect of His deity, but He took on humanity. However (and this is the important point!), the Son of God **voluntarily gave up the unlimited use or exercise of certain divine attributes - temporarily** - when He took on humanity. There is a difference between having omniscience and exercising omniscience.

Luke 2:52 says that as a boy, the Lord Jesus increased in wisdom. Now God does not grow in wisdom; He's omniscient. But the Lord Jesus is not only 100% God, He's 100% Man, as well. As a true human being He grew in wisdom as a boy. So the way you put these two truths together, that our Lord is 100% God and 100% man, is that in the eternal councils of God it was predetermined that the eternal Son would not exercise the **full** use of His omniscience – temporarily, during His earthly ministry. We see glimpses of the Lord's omniscience throughout His life. Back in Mark 8 & 9 the Lord Jesus told His disciples *exactly* what would take place when they went up to Jerusalem—that He would be rejected by the leaders and be killed, and after three days rise again. He told them specifically, more than once. So certainly we see that the Lord did not give up His omniscience. But regarding the date of His Second Coming, the Lord said that no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

In Acts 1:6-7 it's significant to note our Lord's response to the disciples' question about the future. Remember, Acts 1 was after the Lord's resurrection. *"Therefore when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.'"* Notice what the Lord did **not say** here. He didn't say, "the Son does not know, and only the Father knows." No. He only said "you" - it is not for **you** to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. I believe the use of the word "you" is significant. After the resurrection, the Lord Jesus resumed **full use and exercise of all His divine attributes**, as He does today. But during His earthly ministry, although He definitely retained 100% of His divine attributes, He **voluntarily** and **temporarily** gave up the **full use or unlimited exercise of some** of those attributes. I believe that's the answer to this apparent problem. There is a difference between having omniscience and exercising omniscience.

Practical Application

Let's spend more time in preparation, rather than in calculation.

As we near the year 2000 there's a great temptation to try to calculate the date of the Lord's return. After all, 2000 years of Church history fits into a nice concise scheme of history, right? 4000 years from Adam to Christ, 2000 years between the two comings of Christ and then 1000 years for the Kingdom of Christ—7000 years total. A nice biblical number! So there's a great temptation to try to calculate the date of the Lord's return. But clearly we see in this passage that we

should spend more time in preparation, and not in calculation. We should be preparing by watching and praying. We should not be found “sleeping”!

As you live each day, are you thinking that *maybe today is the day* that the Lord will return? That would be a good thing to say every morning when you get up, right? *Maybe today is the day that the Lord will return!* That would keep us **watching**, wouldn't it?

Do we spend time in preparation by **praying**? Verse 33: *“Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is.”* We should be preparing by praying. If we knew the Lord was coming back tomorrow, how much time do you think we'd spend in prayer between now and tomorrow? We'd spend quite a bit - right?

And furthermore we should be preparing by **working** for the Master. Verse 34: [He] *“gave authority to his servants, and to each his work.”* So we should be preparing for His coming by working for the Master. Do your weekends or evenings include work for the Lord?

Let's spend more time in preparation, rather than in calculation!