

³² “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴ 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. ³⁵ “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. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ ”

Are you ready for Christmas? Why do I hear all those groans? There are only 27 shopping days left until Christmas! People were busy over the weekend getting their lights out to decorate their homes. Some of you snuck in that work before it got cold and beat the rest of us to the punch. If you fell asleep in the middle of June and just woke up this morning, you would look around and say, “We must be getting close to Christmas – not real close, but close! I see lights on trees and decorations and shopping ads all over the place!”

This season of Advent the church is getting ready for Jesus’ coming. We prepare our hearts to celebrate again the wonderful, saving message of Christmas. We also prepare our hearts so that we are ready for the next time that Jesus comes to earth on Judgment Day. How close is that day? Jesus gave us three kinds of signs – the stay alert signs, the getting close signs, and the here I am signs. He talks about wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and natural disasters. Those are the stay alert signs which have been flashing throughout the time since Jesus ascended into heaven. Then there are the getting close signs. He tells us that there will be lots of false teachers, even people who pretend to be Jesus. People’s love for each other will grow cold. And my favorite, the gospel will be preached in all the world. With modern communication, we have to be getting close. Then there are the “here I am” signs. When the sun is darkened and the stars fall from the sky, then we will see Jesus coming in the clouds with all his angels to gather believers into heaven. As I look at the world around us, I see a lot of getting close signs. I think that we are getting close to that last day.

Why does Jesus give us these warning signs? He gives them to us because he loves us and wants us to be ready when he comes again. He tells us to **KEEP WATCH!**

I. **Watch and wait patiently**

Jesus says something surprising in our text. **“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”** Doesn’t Jesus know everything? Yes, he does. And today he is sitting at God’s right hand and he knows when Judgment Day is coming. But when he came to earth, he chose not to make use of all of his divine powers. For example, as a child he would have had to learn how to read and write. He chose to limit himself in this way. In the same way, Jesus chose to limit himself in this knowledge of when the last day would be.

Once in a while there are Christian groups who have tried to predict the exact day when Jesus would come again. The Jehovah’s Witnesses, for example, have set a number of days which have come

and gone. Any group that says they know exactly when Jesus is going to come again should read this passage. So no one knows the exact day when Jesus is going to come. We can see the signs and know it has to be soon, but we can't say when.

Jesus then applies this truth to our life. He says, ³³**Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.** Think of what a blessing it is to not know the exact hour, or day, or even year of Jesus' return. That means we have the privilege of waking up every morning and wondering to ourselves if this is the day. This wondering leads us to be more faithful in prayer, more faithful in reading our Bibles, and filled with a desire to live our lives for Jesus and for his glory.

Not knowing when is also a wonderful curb for our sinful nature. Our sinful nature is a terrible procrastinator and it would like to procrastinate us right into hell! A number of years ago I paid a visit on a young couple that were not coming to church and showed no evidence in their lives that they were connected to Jesus. I talked to them about how important it was to stay connected to Jesus and to feed their faith with God's Word. The young lady said something that sent a chill up my spine. She said, "Pastor, I am a non-practicing Christian right now." I was so dumb-struck by that statement that I really didn't know what to say!

I think Jesus would have had something to say. In fact, he did in John 15: **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."** Either we are connected to Jesus by faith or God will throw us away like a dead branch on judgment day. Either he remains in you and his words remain in you, or you are not going to make the grade on judgment day.

Ask yourselves this question. If Judgment Day is scheduled for ten o'clock AM tomorrow morning, what would you do differently today? I am going to let you think about that for a moment because you may want to think about that question carefully – if not now, then later. I am guessing where most of you went with that question. Your conscience just screamed at you as you thought about the most prevalent sin in your life, the sin you have been battling for years and maybe most of your life. What's your chance on the last day if you have not FULLY REPENTED of your sins?

I don't believe that we can say we have ever fully repented of any sin which we like to commit. Pick a sin, any sin. Let's pick one which we are probably all committing at this time of the year – greed, covetousness. We want that new Playstation, or that new computer, or that new television. You might convince yourself that you haven't given in to your desires, because you didn't rush out to buy it. You've controlled yourself again – to a point. You might even get through Christmas without giving in to your greed. But how many times have you checked the Black Friday ads to see if that item was on sale? And when Christmas is over and you controlled your desires, will you have this big letdown because you didn't get what you really wanted? Can you say you have *fully repented* of any sin in your life, that you have no residual wants or desires?

I don't believe you can be fully repented of any sin, but you can be full repenting of all of your sins when the Holy Spirit is working in you. When Jesus tells us in our text to watch and be on our guard, he is using the present tense of the verb. Literally it could be translated, "Keep on watching and keep on being on your guard." Don't let any sin grab your heart and own it and turn you into an unbeliever. Do you struggle with greed and covetousness or some other sin? It's going to be that way until the day you

die. Repentance is something you never finish. And even if you could fully repent of the sin of covetousness, what about all the others? There will always be sins that you are struggling with in your life.

And if Jesus comes when you are struggling in this fight of faith against the sins in your life, rest assured that you will be taken with him into heaven. You may not have fully repented of all your sins, but Jesus has fully forgiven you for all of your sins. Jesus often compares you to his bride in the Bible. You feel so dirty because of your sins, but in reality Jesus has washed away every stain. Jesus has taken you and me when we were unfaithful to him because of sin. He found us when we wanted nothing to do with him. He brought us to himself, then washed us clean, and made us his beautiful bride. He has not told us when the big wedding celebration is coming, but he has already dressed us in the beautiful wedding clothes of his righteousness.

Could it be tomorrow? If we think of our sins, it makes us afraid. If we think of Jesus, it only makes us anxious to be with him. Watch and wait for that day to come. And at the same time, work diligently!

II. Watch and work diligently

Listen to what Jesus 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.”** ³⁵ **“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.”** ³⁶ **If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping.”** I want you to picture the disciples on the mountain before Jesus ascended into heaven. Before he went away, he gave them something to do until he returns. He told them to make disciples of all nations. He told them to preach the gospel to the whole world. That was their mission in life, and every one of them took up that task as if they were running out of time.

Notice that Jesus says that each one has a task. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus makes that clear to every one of his believers. **“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function,** ⁵ **so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.** ⁶ **We have different gifts, according to the grace given us”** (Romans 12). Paul then goes on to list that includes prophesying (or preaching), serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, and leading, and showing mercy. You could match those gifts to almost everything that happens in a Christian congregation. Serving on the council is using your leadership gifts. Visiting prospect members is using the encouraging gift. Cleaning the church or making a meal is a serving gift. Helping out someone who is sick in their home, which may be your mother or father, is a showing mercy gift.

And to what end? Jesus wants us to use our gifts and our time to make disciples – to win those who are lost so they can share a place in heaven with you. You don’t have to be a pastor to do that work! One of the best little evangelists we had in our congregation was an elderly lady named Pauline, who was Martha Heier’s mother. She called me up and asked me to come and visit her and meet someone. She had asked the single mom from the apartment upstairs to have coffee with her and meet her pastor. When she was in assisted living, she made a friend with a member of our church who wasn’t very active at the time. Every month when we came to visit, she would have us come to her friend’s room so we could visit both of them. Is there someone you know that you want to introduce to Jesus?

Another way for you to do this wonderful work Jesus has given us to do is to teach your children about Jesus. Parents, I cannot stress this enough! You have your children with you for about 18 years, and after that they are on their own. You have 18 years to prepare them for a lifetime of temptation. You have 18 years to get them ready for the day when Jesus comes again. Use that time wisely! Have a Bible story with your children every night before you go to bed. Teach them well. You can go to the church's Facebook page and find a devotion that I write every day on the Sunday school story for that week. Review that lesson with them and help them understand what that story teaches them about Jesus.

There was once an article written about the Christian church with the title, "How Do You Wake Up a Sleeping Giant?" At first you might say, "Very carefully!" The author of the article pointed out that there are hundreds of millions of believers in the Christian church today. The Christian church is like a giant. It is huge. But all too often it is sleeping. One study shows that only 85% of the church's work is carried out by only 15% of the people. How do you wake up a sleeping giant? Jesus has the answer for us this morning. He calls us to watch for his return, by patiently waiting, living each day and each hour as if he were coming immediately.

So let me ask you that question again. If you knew that Jesus was going to come back in judgment tomorrow morning at 10:00 AM, is there somebody you would talk to about Jesus to rescue them from Satan's grasp? Maybe you've always thought there would be a better time to talk to your friend, a magical, opportune moment. Somehow Satan loves to interfere so that such a moment never comes. How long can you afford to wait?

Do you remember playing hide and seek? If you were the first one caught you closed your eyes, and counted to 50 or some other number as everyone found a place to hide. When you were done counting you shouted out, "Ready or not here I come." Jesus is coming. He says, "Ready or not, here I come." I am ready for him to come and so are you. His precious blood washes us clean. We wear his robe of righteousness. Our hope of being accepted does not depend on how successful I am at living a new life for Jesus or whether my repentance is perfect. It depends on who he is and how he has lived his life for me. That makes us eager to work diligently not to earn his favor, but simply because of his unfailing love and mercy and kindness to us. Jesus is coming. He is coming soon. Amen.