

**The End of the World as We Know It**

November 29, 2020

**Mark 13: 24-37**

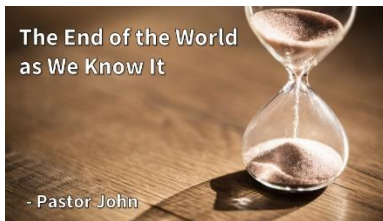
*<sup>24</sup> "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, <sup>25</sup> and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. <sup>26</sup> Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. <sup>27</sup> Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.*

*<sup>28</sup> "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. <sup>29</sup> So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. <sup>30</sup> Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. <sup>31</sup> Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*

*<sup>32</sup> "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>33</sup> Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. <sup>34</sup> It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. <sup>35</sup> Therefore, keep awake — for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, <sup>36</sup> or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. <sup>37</sup> And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."*

## 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1: 3-9

*<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, <sup>5</sup> for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind — <sup>6</sup> just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you — <sup>7</sup> so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup> He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup> God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*



Welcome to Advent! In the season of Advent, we see that God's beginnings and endings are different than our ending and beginnings. Today's message wrestles with

this idea as we read about the day of Christ's return – the end of the world as we know it. In general, Advent, more than any time of the year, is about being home. It is about finding that place where you feel like you belong. During this season we remember that God came and found a home among us just over 2,000 years ago. We know that one day God will again be at home with us. In between these moments, we sense a longing to be at home with God.

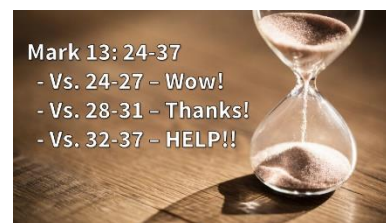
Sometimes that is how we feel when we gather for worship. Sometimes that is how we feel as we walk in the quiet woods or as we take in an amazing sunset. And sometimes God takes us by surprise, making us feel right at home in the place we least expect it. Let us pray...

Much of Advent is about anticipation and expectation and waiting. The focus of Advent tends to be on Christmas Eve, as I believe it should be. But the birth of Christ is but part of the story. It is the beginning. As our devotional for this week states, *"The season offers the opportunity to share in the ancient longing for the coming Messiah, and also wait in expectation for his second coming in glory"*. The events that would occur roughly thirty years later, those events that we remember during Holy Week and on Easter Sunday, are the climax of Christ's ministry and life on earth. Today, in Mark 13, we hear about the end of the story. There is much anticipation, expectation, and uncertainty about the day of Jesus' return. And it is a day that we wait for to varying degrees. It is also a day that the world very much needs – a day of restoration, of making all things new.



As we look at the world today, it is a place with too much death, too much violence, too much hatred and prejudice, too much division – just plain too much ungodly behavior. Like many generations before ours, we look at the world and think that it has never been this bad. As we think about the second coming of Jesus this morning, perhaps a few of us are thinking that now would be a pretty good time. That is what the first Christians were beginning to think about the time Mark began to write his gospel. It has been about seventy years since Jesus died and no Jesus, no second coming, no restoration of Jerusalem, no justice. In the section of Mark that we read today, Mark assures the early church that God's promise to return is based on God's sense of timing, not their sense of timing.

As we begin, please turn with me to Mark 13. As we work our way through the passage this morning, here is a helpful framework to consider and keep in mind. Verses 24-27 are like the “Wow!” section. Verses 28-31 are the “Thanks!” section. And verses 32-37 are the “HELP!” section.



Verses 24 through 27 tell of the events that will accompany the second coming of Jesus. The sun and the moon will go dark, the stars will fall from the skies, and the powers in heaven itself will be shaken. Then the clouds will roll away and the Son of Man will come in great power and glory. The angels will be sent out and will gather up the believers from the ends of the earth and heaven. Picture all of that happening in your mind – that’s the “wow” moment. It is the moment that every knee will bow and acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah.

Verses 28 through 31 remind us to watch the signs. Using the fig tree as his illustration, Jesus calls us to be alert, to be ready. Just as the branches become tender and put forth the first growth just before summer arrives, so too will there be signs that the coming of Jesus is drawing near. Although Jesus does not declare the date, he does offer this clarification: *"this generation will not pass away until all these things happen"*. Scholars have identified the generation as the humanity of the world. In this sense, the people from Adam to the time of Noah and the flood would be the first generation. We are part of the second or current generation. This section closes with this promise: *"Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away"*. One day this will be no more.

A new heaven and earth will follow the second coming of Jesus. But his words – the words that he speaks – will be true and will remain forever. Thanks. Thank you, Jesus, for your eternal presence with us.

Verses 32 through 37 comprise the “Help!” section. This section begins with the reminder that we do not know the day or hour of Jesus’ return. This is followed by the admonition to *“keep alert”* and prepared for that unknown day. Jesus compares this to a man who goes on a journey, leaving his slaves in charge, *“each with his work”*. Jesus advises the slaves to *“be on the watch”* and to *“keep awake”*, a command that he reiterates to us all in verse 37. I call this the help section because this is where I most need help – in remaining alert, in staying awake, in always being prepared for day when I meet Jesus.

Thinking in terms of wow, thanks, help - I wondered how often do we pray these types of prayers? Every once in a while, I see God move in an amazing way, in a way that takes my breath away or brings tears to my eyes. In those moments, I pray “wow” prayers afterwards. I am better with the “thanks” prayers. Each morning I take a few minutes to note five to seven things from the day before that I am thankful for. Then I spend a few minutes praying through my little list. I’ve found that this daily habit makes me more aware of the small ways that God impacts my day to day life. I wish I could say I was as good with the “help” prayers. Probably like you, I am good at praying the “HELP!” prayers when things are really bad. But in the smaller things, I’m not so good. I tend to think I can figure it out or I can do what needs done on my own. I need to be better at taking all things to God. God can help with any situation – big or small.



A large focus of this passage must fall on the end times – on the end of the world as we know it. To begin wrestling with his part, I ask: What does the day mean to us? For some, this day means the end to suffering and pain, the end to the hurts of this life. For some, this day means a new being – one without any of the trappings of this earth. For some, thoughts of this day bring fear and worry and anxiety. Whatever the day means to us, we are assured that the day will come. So, how does knowing it will come impact the life we live in the here and now? If we are serious about the "*keep awake*" words that we hear from Jesus, knowing that he is coming back should really shape and form how we live out each of our days. The old adage, "live each day like it is your last" comes to mind for me when I ponder this reality.

Fresh off Thanksgiving, many of us may already be looking forward to some time off. Christmas usually brings a respite from the daily grind and allows us some time to catch our breaths, to rest our weary bodies, to refresh our souls. But another reality of this time of year is that we are now in full of end times – the end of the financial year, the end of the calendar year, the end of the semester. By now we are often tired, burnt out, exhausted. Add in what is now being termed "COVID fatigue" and many people are being pushed to their limits.

All of these end times thoughts run smack into the church calendar. Advent signals the beginning of a new church year. The season of Advent calls us to newness, to being alert, to journeying to the manger to meet the Christ child.

Against these calls are the reality that we are people of time. We carefully track the seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades, centuries. We all have watches, cell phones, wall clocks. For the human race, time is so comfortable, predictable, patterned, orderly. We like the routine and definition that time provides our lives. But what is time to God? And, how do we understand God's time or God's sense of time?



Well, my friends, not very well. God's timing does not match our ordered, planned, structured sense of time. But our way is not God's way. Earlier I mentioned that sometimes God surprises us, making us feel right at home in a time or place where we do not expect it. But the reverse also happens – God can break into our lives at unexpected and inconvenient moments. These moments always disorient us, at least for a time.

And sometimes God's time collides with our time. That is the heart of the Mark passage for today. We have no idea how God's time works, but we know it does. We have no idea when the time of Jesus' return will be here, but it will be here



anyway. Jesus himself does not even know when the time will be here for his second coming. For that moment that marks the end of the world as we know it, we must simply wait, trusting in God's plan and in God's

timing. In our Mark passage Jesus tells us how God will one day answer our pleas for help. We hear how Jesus will return in power to gather and to redeem and to restore.

So, some of you may be wondering, how do we even know that God's time works? Well, in the scope of the scriptures, we can see that God's plan has been unfolding and continues to unfold exactly as God planned it. Prophecies in the Old Testament predicted Jesus' birth and the return of Jesus as well. About 2,000 years ago, when the time was just right, a baby boy was born in Bethlehem. It was time for God in the flesh to unexpectedly break into our world and into our lives. At that hour, God came not in power and might, but in humility and helplessness. God came as a baby. We will celebrate this in 25 days. That date and time we know. But the return date? We are unsure.

So, we ask how long? It is an unknown for us all. We are called to wait and to be alert, to stay awake, to pay attention to God's presence and movements in the world. We are called to look for God all around us and to live into God's presence that comes in the unexpected, along the margins, a presence that seeks to change hearts, to redeem brokenness, to and save lives. This is how Jesus is being revealed in our lives and in our world.

Turning to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1, Paul brings us some encouragement as we wait. Paul reminds us that *"in every way you have been enriched in him... so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ"*. We are reminded that as we wait, as we desire the second coming, that the body is well-equipped with all that we need to sustain ourselves as we work to offer ministry to the world. You and I are equipped for this journey of faith. These are the gifts of the Holy Spirit – given to support and grow the church and our faith.



Paul closes with these words in verses eight and nine: *"He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord"*. If we strive to walk with and grow in the Lord, Christ will strengthen us and guide us so that we will be found blameless on the day, whenever it comes. One of the great truths that Paul also reminds us of is that God is faithful. As followers of Jesus Christ we were called into fellowship with him. On the day that we accepted and claimed Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we entered into a fellowship, into a saving relationship, one that is not bound by time. Once we enter into a personal saving relationship with Jesus Christ, we are assured that when the day comes, when the end of the world as we know it begins to unfold, that our place by his side is secure. For this we say thanks be to God. Amen and amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. How well does your life reflect Mark 13: 35-36? What will you do this week to become better at being awake and ready?
- 2) *Pray*. Where are you struggling with God's sense of timing right now in your life? Pray for understanding, discernment, patience...
- 3) *Study*. Read Luke 21: 25-36. How is this passage like Mark 13: 24-37? How is it different? What do verses 34-36 speak of that are relevant today in your life or in the lives of those you love?