

Wake Up Call

Mark 13.32-37

There is an advertising campaign currently going on radio that is about heart attacks. It is not pleasant listening. The advert features a man narrating the story about his wife showing some signs of having a heart attack – heaviness in the chest, tingling in the fingers, a cold sweat . . . but they weren't sure, so they waited. They thought perhaps it would just pass on its own. They made a fatal mistake.

The point of the ad is don't ignore the signs. Be alert and take action.

Lately we have been talking about the signs for the end times. Like the signs for a heart attack, it is perilous to ignore them. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that it is even more perilous to ignore these end-times signs than the signs for a heart attack – eternally more perilous.

As we come to the end of Mark 13, and its teaching on the second coming of Christ, we hear Jesus giving us a wakeup call. This is not pleasant listening, but it is necessary. Now is the time to be awake. Now is the time to be alert. Now is the time to take action. Don't ignore the signs.

Sermon in a Sentence: **Live for God today as if there is no tomorrow.**

Mark 13:32-37 (NKJV)

³² “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!”

Four times in this passage, we encounter the word ‘watch’ – there is no mistaking the point Jesus is making, is there? Good Christians watch for the coming of the Lord.

If we were to go back to the Greek manuscript from which this was translated, we would see that two different Greek words are used. The first ‘watch’ in verse 33, is the Greek word for ‘sleepless’. It is from roots meaning ‘to chase’ and ‘sleep’ – to chase sleep away. The idea is that our awareness of the coming of Christ should put us on high alert, so much so that we wouldn't think of dozing off (spiritually speaking). Incidentally, this same word is used in Hebrews 13.17 to describe how a good pastor feels about his church – many sleepless nights keeping watch over their souls!

Notice in verse 33 that Jesus joins prayer to this sleepless-type of watch. We find this same combination in Ephesians – watch and pray.

Ephesians 6:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸ **praying always** with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, **being watchful** to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints—

This is a reminder that no-one can truly be ready for the coming of the Lord without the Lord making him or her ready. We cannot achieve sleepless watchfulness on our own. We must depend on God daily in expectant prayer.

The second Greek word – found in verses 34, 35, and 37 – is an imperative: Stay awake! This is the word you would use of a sentry intently gazing into the distance for any sign of movement.

Staying awake takes gut-tough effort. We must be determined and disciplined. Christ is coming and we dare not be caught unprepared.

In actual fact, this has been Jesus' theme throughout the Olivet Discourse. His motive for preaching this sermon was not merely to stir the imaginations of the disciples about end times phenomena. It was chiefly to motivate them to be faithful and true today and every day. The expression, 'take heed', in verse 33, is merely an echo of what Jesus says repeatedly in this chapter.

Mark 13:5 (NKJV)

⁵ And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "**Take heed** that no one deceives you.

Mark 13:9 (NKJV)

⁹ "But **watch out** for yourselves, for they will deliver you up to councils, and you will be beaten in the synagogues. You will be brought before rulers and kings for My sake, for a testimony to them.

Mark 13:23 (NKJV)

²³ But **take heed**; see, I have told you all things beforehand.

This warning is directed at those closest to Jesus. Falling asleep is so easy to do. Becoming complacent is so easy to do. Starting to compromise is so easy to do. 'Wake up!' Jesus says, 'I'm coming quickly.'

Are you ready today?

Live for God today as if there is no tomorrow.

Jesus gives three reasons in this text for why we must be awake, be alert and take action. The three reasons are these: imminency (any time), accountability, and universality.

1. Because of imminency (vv 32-33)

The disciples asked Jesus when His kingdom would come. They hoped the answer would be a definite day and time so they could put it in their diary. But they didn't comprehend what violence would have to come first. There could be no crown without a cross. Jesus would die before He would triumph – in fact in less than 48 hours from the time He gave this sermon, He would be on the cross!

The answer to the disciples' question, then, is not as specific as they wished. Jesus essentially tells them it can happen at any time.

Mark 13:33 (NKJV)

³³ Take heed, watch and pray; for **you do not know** when the time is.

To emphasise imminence – that is the any-time-ness – of His coming, Jesus runs down a quick list of who doesn't know the exact day or time. It turns out that no-one, other than God the Father, knows. Therefore, all must be perpetually prepared.

a. No human

Mark 13:32 (NKJV)

³² "But of that day and hour **no one knows**,

Now that is an easy verse to interpret. Nevertheless, since the ascension of Jesus, there have been more than 200 specific dates infamously announced to the world by Christian preachers, Islamic clerics, and even psychics for the return of Christ. All have proved to be wrong. The next predicted date is coming later this year – in December. Don't pay attention to it – Jesus might come sooner!

All of these would-be prophets ignored Mark 13.32. No-one knows – so date setting is a foolish endeavour. Next we see that not even angels know.

b. No angel

Mark 13:32 (NKJV)

. . . not even the angels in heaven,

Angels are about as close to God as a being can get, yet they do not know the day or the hour of Christ's coming. Remarkably, Jesus says He doesn't know either.

c. Not even Jesus

Mark 13:32 (NKJV)

. . . nor the Son, but only the Father.

Now critics of Christianity have taken this verse and said, 'Here's a contradiction. If Jesus were truly God, He would know.' These critics ignore the wonder of the incarnation. When God the Son became human, He voluntarily submitted His supernatural attributes to the will of the Father. As God, of course, Christ knew the day and time. But as man, He does not determine when that time is. It is the Father's prerogative.

And so the imminence of Jesus' coming means not only that it could be at any time, but also that it cannot be manipulated into happening sooner or later than God the Father has planned. It is . . .

- i. Not determined by conditions – as if the world must reach a certain level of badness first.
- ii. Not determined by desire – as if Christ will come when a certain quota of Christians pray for His coming.
- iii. Not determined by non-specific signs – as if a severe earthquake or a devastating cyclone is proof that Jesus is on the way.

The sobering reality is that nothing prevents Jesus from returning now – except the will of the Father. Once God the Father says ‘go’, the end will come.

It is imminent. It could happen any time – even today. Are you ready? Are you awake?

Live for God today as if there is no tomorrow. The first reason to stay awake, alert and active is imminence. The second reason is . . .

2. Because of accountability (vv 34-36)

Many people who claim to be Christians have the wrong idea about the future. They think it is all about them – an eternal holiday in heavenly luxury. These people show by their self-centred expectations that they may not actually be Christians after all.

A true Christian is mindful of accountability. We must give an answer to God.

Jesus tells a short parable to illustrate our high accountability.

Mark 13:34-36 (NKJV)

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**.

Jesus cannot over-emphasise what a serious matter this is – that is why He counts down each watch of the night in verse 35. ‘Wake up!’ Jesus warns. Lest He come and you be left behind!

At this point, we need to know what exactly we are accountable for. Some points can be discerned from this text, others from related texts. There are at least four – we’ll cover only one today.

Firstly, we are accountable to . . .

a. Desire God

Notice what the doorkeeper is commanded to do in verse 34: Watch. Remember, this is the kind of watching that intently scans the horizon for any sign of movement – it is, in relation to Christ, intense desire that His appearing will be today. It is the earnest prayer, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. In short, it is to love God supremely with all that you are and have.

Is that how you love God?

I remember when I first fell in love with Sue. The thought of her consumed my every waking moment. When we had to be apart, I longed for the next time I would talk to her; see her.

Early in our relationship, we had to be parted whilst I went with my family to my grandparents for Christmas. On the return trip, we passed within 50 kilometres of Sue's house. Seeing me pine away, my parents surprised me by detouring the 50 kms so I could see her. I remember saying, 'Praise God! I'm going to heaven!' It sounded silly – my sisters rolled their eyes in disgust – but I didn't care. I desired Sue.

How much do we desire God? Enough to make a detour? Enough to sound silly?

2 Timothy 4:8 (NKJV)

⁸ Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also **to all who have loved His appearing**.

That is to say, 'to all who have longed for His appearing'.

I don't see many people desiring God today. There are some who give God token bits of attention – an appearance at church, an occasional read of the Bible, a quick prayer, but that doesn't truly qualify as desiring Him. How healthy would a marriage be if the level of desire went no further than an hour here or a half-interested five minutes there?

Yet some people classify themselves as good Christians for less than that!

Just as good marriages need special times away – second, third and fourth honeymoons – so our relationship with God needs some special times. That is why I am going to the Bible conference this week every night that it is on – to desire God. That is why last week I took Monday off to fast and pray. That is why every morning I set time aside to pray and read God's Word. That is why I am here today and every Sunday. I need ample time with God. I want to be with Him.

The Scripture uses some very specific words to define desire. These words are used in conjunction with values that those who desire God always hold dear.

i. Hunger and thirst

Matthew 5:6 (NKJV)

⁶ Blessed *are* those who **hunger and thirst** for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

Is there any food for you that once you start eating it, you can't stop? Maybe you have a sweet tooth. Or maybe you are like me and potato chips are your weakness – I can eat a whole bag.

What I've just described is a weakness. But when we have that kind of insatiable taste for righteousness, it is a strength. Do you hunger and thirst for righteousness?

ii. Crave like newborn babes

1 Peter 2:2 (NKJV)

²as newborn babes, **crave** the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby,

I've learned from my grandson that Grandpa is no fun to be around when it is feeding time. I'm useless. When he has a craving for milk, he'll cry as if the world were coming to an end. He is satisfied with no-one but mum – or Grandma, because she's pretty handy with a bottle, too.

Do we crave God's Word in that way? Or does it sit on the shelf while we satisfy our hunger with lesser things – newspapers, magazines, or '50 Shades' of novels? Or maybe we're not into reading at all. Maybe pictures are our thing. Maybe YouTube, TV or movies are our distraction. Maybe it is pornography.

What do you crave?

I'm not saying that books or YouTube are inherently evil, but even the best are cheap substitutes for the Word of God.

A litmus test for our desire for God is our desire for His Word. What does your Bible reading or Bible listening habits indicate about the quality of your desire for God?

We are accountable for our desire for God. We are also accountable to – and here I'll just list the other three and we'll pick it up next week – denounce sin, be disciplined in stewardship, and fulfil our duty in community.

These are lofty ideals – yet God is fair to enforce them because He has given us all the enablement we need through the Holy Spirit. The question is, are we awake, aware and active.

You'll never be ready for the coming of the Lord if you are lazing around spiritually with your eyes half shut and your desire for God going cold.

It is time to wake up . . . before it is too late.

Live for God today as if there is no tomorrow.

Three reasons to wake up and be serious about this: imminence, accountability, and, lastly, universality.

3. Because of universality (v 37)

Look at verse 37.

Mark 13:37 (NKJV)

³⁷ And what I say to you, **I say to all**: Watch!"

Have you had the experience of having a teacher at school say, "I'm going to call on some of you to answer some questions from your reading" – and you haven't done the reading? I've been there. What strategy did you use in that circumstance? I would avoid eye contact with the teacher and try to be inconspicuous. Most times, I got away with it.

But there will be no escaping the coming of the Lord. Each and every one of us will be personally held to account. It is universal. Not just Israel – Australia, too. Not just random: this one, and that one, but maybe He won't call on me – everyone.

Are you ready for the coming of the Lord?

Jesus says to all, 'Watch'. Literally, He says, 'Wake up!'

Several years ago, the President of ABWE, Dr Wendell Kempton, was coming to Sydney. As the field leader for ABWE, it was my privilege and responsibility to greet him at the airport.

I set my alarm for 5am and went to bed. The next thing I knew, I felt sunshine on my face – I awoke with a start – looked at the clock and was horrified to see I had overslept! I want you to know I prayed hard for the traffic to part that morning! I couldn't be late for the coming of the president.

What about the coming of the Lord?

Have I set my alarm to be ready to meet Him? Am I living today as if it is my last day – the Day Jesus returns? Am I living today with vigilance – being careful to desire God more than anything or anyone else because this might be my day of accountability?

Live for God today as if there is no tomorrow. This is our wake up call. Let's not ignore the signs.