

26th Sunday after Pentecost
November 25th, 2018
Pastor Matthew Ude

We Watch for Him Who Comes With Grace

We watch because His kingdom alone will endure forever. We watch not knowing when He will come but hoping it will be any minute. While we wait we work doing those things He has given to us to do. When He comes we receive the kingdom because He forgives our sins.

Mark 13:31-37 ³¹ "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. 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!"

We come to the final Sunday of the church year. Next Sunday of course we will begin again at the beginning. We will once again be looking forward to the coming of birth of Christ. We will see Him born. We will follow his years of teaching and miracles. We will witness his death and resurrection. But this Sunday before we start over the Lord has one final word to say to us "Watch, be ready."

And the Lord makes it clear that this is not for the apostles, or for the pastors, or even just for the believers, "What I say to you, I say to all, WATCH." Indeed this is an urgent plea for all people to be prepared for what is coming.

Why should we watch? When should we watch? How should we watch?

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

The story is told that during WWII the city of Warsaw was leveled. There was nothing left of the city except the outline of one badly damaged building. It was the headquarters of the British and Foreign Bible Society. There was one wall remaining intact and the words written on that wall, clearly visible from the street, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words will by no means pass away."

I myself can not testify to the validity of this story, having never been to Warsaw and certainly not having been alive at the end of the WWII. However, even if the story is untrue the image is very much true.

This is very much the situation that Jesus has just described to his disciples. The temple would be destroyed. The Nation of Israel will be destroyed. The believers, the apostles themselves would be scattered throughout the world and martyred.

The one and only thing that would remain was the Word of the Lord. The one and only thing that could give them a solid foundation in all the death and destruction of this world will be the Word of the Lord.

Jesus talks about the stars and sun and the moon falling from the sky. But His word remains solid and true through it all.

We all know one of "those people." Those people who can't let go of anything. They have to save every empty can, every newspaper, every old piece of clothing because you never know when it will be useful. Well most of those things will never actually get used and if you throw them away you probably won't ever notice they are gone. But here is the one thing that you do not ever want to let go, forget about, or throw away.

You do not want to get to the last day of your life and realize somewhere along the way you left the word of the Lord behind. For this reason WATCH because you do not know when that day will come, and you do not want to be found without it.

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.**

When should we watch? No one knows that day and hour! No one! Not the angels in heaven, not the demons, not even Christ himself. That is in His humiliation, while he was on this earth He does not know.

Almost immediately after Christ's ascension people started making predictions about when Christ would come. The Epistle of Barnabas was written sometime between 70 and 132 AD. The apostle John wasn't even dead yet. And yet here comes a man saying, well creation was 6 days, and "a day is like a thousand years." Therefore clearly the earth is going to last 6,000 years and then Christ will come again.

Yet Jesus says very clearly, nobody knows. Not even the angels, not even Christ himself. If not the angels and not Christ how utterly foolish for any man to say on this day or in this year. If the Bible indicated when Christ was coming again, Christ himself even in his humiliation would have known it. No one knows.

Now Barnabas may have said well we don't know exactly but we know generally. But again Jesus says it might be the evening, midnight, morning, or after dawn. The night here is a picture of the entirety of time. At what point? Any point.

If anyone comes to you and says, this year, or this day, or even this century, leave and do not listen to that preacher. He is not preaching the word of God. For Christ makes it absolutely clear NO ONE KNOWS.

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.***

How are we to watch? Any parent can tell you that a child sitting around waiting with nothing to do is going to get in trouble.

This was a problem even in the early church. There were those who thought, well Christ is coming we might as well sell all that we have, quit work and just sit and wait. Paul spoke to them pretty harshly. Get off your lazy butts and get to work.

Notice that Christ left each of us with authority and with work to do. In one sense ultimately the work we do will come to nothing. Whether we build bridges or paint art or farm the land, ultimately the bridges, the art, the land will be destroyed. Nevertheless God has given us each work to do. And even if it will come to nothing in the long term these are useful things now. In our work we serve our family and our neighbor. We provide food or roads or beauty and when we do these things in faith we glorify the Lord. No work that is done in faith and love is pointless.

Ultimately of course the work the Lord has left for us is to warn others of the coming day of the Lord. Here we have the example of Noah. 120 years he was given till the coming of the flood, but he was not to be idle. The Lord gave him work to do. He built the ark. And as he built the ark he warned his neighbors of the coming judgment. The Bible says he was a preacher of righteousness.

All of us work, but there is difference between one who works so that he can make money and have the riches of this world, and one who works out of faith and love for the good of his neighbor. This latter person waits and watches for the Lord through his work. His work is an extension of his waiting. The former works for himself forgetting the Lord and acting as though he is not returning. This one the Lord will find sleeping even though he is working.

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

And we respond with joyful hearts and prayer, “even so come Lord Jesus.” What Jesus says here is a dire warning. The saints echo in great joy at the end of Revelation, “even so come Lord Jesus.”

We wait and watch not in fear but in excitement. As we wait and watch for Christmas not as an arduous task but because we love it. As a child waits and watches for his birthday.

We wait and watch for the Lord. Because his coming means the end of pain and sadness. Because his coming means the end of night and death. Because when He comes He brings salvation.

When He comes he comes to reward not those who have done great works, but those who have been washed in baptism and made his children.

We are children whose father is gone to a far and distant land, and we wait in eager expectation, knowing that when he comes, he will bring wondrous gifts. He will take us to the zoo and to the park. He will live with us forever.

We wait for Him who comes in grace.

AMEN