

December 3, 2017

Text: [Mark 13:24-37](#)**Title:** “Beware, Stay Alert!”

It was coming up to Christmas and the judge was in a jolly frame of mind as he asked the man, “Now then, please tell me: what is the charge against you?” “Yes, your honor, I was caught doing my Christmas shopping very early,” replied the defendant. “That doesn’t seem like an offense to me,” said the judge. “By the way, how early were you doing this shopping?” “Well, your honor,” said the defendant, “it was before the shop was open.”

Maybe some of you too are thinking about all the preparation and tasks to be completed before Christmas. But, please don’t go too early before the shop is open. These weeks are for many of us the busiest days of the year. There are parties to attend, cookies to bake, decorations to put up, gifts to buy, cards and notes to send and on and on it goes. By Christmas Day, I’m sure, we will be exhausted.

In the midst of all this endless hoopla we enter the somber season of Advent. On the first Sunday in Advent, the church casts its gaze toward the end of time. Christmas is but a few weeks away, yet today we do not focus upon that well-known night in Bethlehem when our Savior first came but upon that future day “nobody knows . . . not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father” (Mark 13:32), when Christ will come again “with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26).

Theologians call this day the *parousia*, and ordinary Christians call it the “Second Coming,” but regardless of how we speak of that time, it embodies the Christian hope and conviction that God will not leave the world to its own devices. When people watching the nine or ten o’clock news, viewing the reports of yet another day of cruelty and violence and terrors, shake their heads sadly and mutter, “What’s wrong with this world?” “What’s this world coming to?” The church dares to affirm that, in ways we do not understand and can hardly imagine, this world is coming to Christ because Christ came to us and is coming again to the world.

In today’s text from Mark, friends, Jesus speaks to His disciples about this day, promising them that history does not finally belong to the power-brokers and the war-makers or terrorists who grab the daily headlines but only to Christ. Friends, the curtains of time would one day be drawn back, He is telling us, and all humanity would see the glory of God face-to-face. Watch out! Beware and stay alert, He warned them and is warning us, because no one knows when that time will come.

17-1203-2

That is why the Advent season is a time of patient waiting and preparation for the coming of our Lord. It is the same year after year. It is the time to look both to the future and back to the past. We look forward to Christ's coming again as we remember and celebrate His first coming long ago.

Before Jesus ascended into heaven He promised the disciples that one day He would return. The apostles asked the question which is the same question that has been asked in every generation since, "When will these things be?" Friends, if only we knew exactly when Christ will return we could pencil Him into our busy schedules. Right? The problem is that we do not know. While we can count the number of days until Christmas we cannot count the number of days until Christ will return. In fact, Jesus warns us about people who try.

So, my friends, the word from Jesus our Lord is to keep alert. We are to be awake, because we do not know when He will establish His Kingdom in this world. No one does. "Nobody knows," said Jesus, "when that day or hour will come, not the angels in heaven and not the Son. Only the Father knows." Please notice that even Jesus Himself did not know the day or time but only God the Father. Jesus did not want His followers to waste time speculating, for they had work to do.

To reinforce His point, Jesus told a story about a man who was about to leave for an extended trip. Since he was traveling a good distance he was unsure when he would return. It could be in ten days or ten months, or even ten years. He was unsure. Whenever he returned, though, he expected to find his house in order.

One of the servants was given the job of doorkeeper. It was his responsibility to keep watch. Since the doorkeeper did not know when his master would return he had to stay awake. He had to keep watch. He is to stay alert! He could not allow himself to become engrossed with other activities. And we get the impression that if the master returned and found the doorkeeper asleep, he would be in serious trouble. So, my friends, it is with those who serve Christ. It is with those who are called as His disciples. It is with those who believe in the Bible, because we do not know the day and hour!

There was once an absent-minded professor who became so absorbed in his work that he forgot the simplest details. One morning his wife said, "Now Henry, remember, we're moving today. Here, I'm putting this note in your pocket. Don't forget."

17-1203-3

The day passed by and the man came home to his house. He entered the front door, and found the place empty. Distraught, he walked out to the curb and sat down. A young boy walked up to him, and he asked him, “Little boy, do you know the people who used to live here?” The boy replied, “Sure, Dad, mother told me you’d forget!”

Friends, how often do we become so absorbed in “the little things of this world” that we forget who we are and whose we are and where we are going? How many times the Lord has told us not to be forgetful and be prepared for His coming? I wonder how many times the Lord has been close at hand, seeing the chaos of our world and longing to come, but waiting and waiting, sparing us judgment a little longer. Perhaps we are given more time to get our lives in order.

My friend, let us remember that this Advent season is once again our chance to be reminded that the Lord is coming, and we are to be alert! He is again speaking to us, “What I say to you, I say to all: Stay alert!”