

WATCH!

Mark 13:32-37 | First Sunday of Advent | Nov 30/Dec 3, 2017

**Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. Amen.**

“What I say to you, I say to everyone: Watch!”

Jesus

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Mr. and Mrs. Jones decided to go on a week’s vacation. In their absence, they put their eighteen-year-old son Justin in charge of the household. They gave him a number of chores to do while they were gone: “Bring in the mail. Take out the garbage. Mow the lawn. Clean up after yourself. And absolutely no parties!”

After a restful time away they decided to return a day early. When they pulled up to the house they were very disturbed by what they saw. They couldn’t get into the driveway because of all the cars. The lawn looked like a hayfield. The mailbox was jammed with catalogs and credit card offers. And they could hear the booming bass of the stereo before they even got out of their car.

What they saw inside disturbed them even more. The garbage can had overflowed on the floor and looked as if it was a living, breathing organism. The pile of dishes in the sink would have given a world-class mountain climber a good challenge. And—worst of all—about two dozen teenagers were engaged in a rowdy, drunken party. As Justin wheeled another keg in from the garage he said, “Hey, what

happened to the music?” Then he saw his parents and realized he was going to have to face the music. He didn’t expect his parents to return so soon. He was completely irresponsible. And now he was in big trouble. The biggest of his life.

Jesus is not on vacation. As our ascended King he continues to sit at his Father’s right hand ruling all things for our eternal good. But, like the Joneses, Jesus is going to come back one day. When he does we definitely don’t want to be—spiritually speaking—throwing a kegger. That’s why Jesus tells us and all people to “WATCH!” We need to be ready, spiritually prepared for his return. We need to watch responsibly. We need watch expectantly.

I. Watch Responsibly

It was Tuesday of Holy Week. In a few days Roman nails would pin Jesus to a cross. In a few days Jesus would be dead. Before Jesus went to the cross he taught his disciples about the last days before his return, the days in which we are living right now. Jesus says this about the day of his return: **“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not**

know when that time will come.”

I wonder how many thousands of hours people have wasted trying to figure out when Jesus will come again. Scripture tells us again and again that we cannot know that day. For a time, even Jesus didn't know the day. While he walked this earth as our Substitute he didn't make full use of his divine knowledge. Of course, our glorified Lord knows now. But we still don't. In fact, we won't know until the notes from that last trumpet reach our ears.

In order to impress on us the need to be watchful and ready for that day, Jesus made a comparison: **“It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.”** It's not hard to understand what Jesus is saying. He is the master of the house. He “left his house” at his ascension. The servants are Jesus' followers—you, me and every believer. Jesus has given us a long checklist of tasks to carry out until he returns.

There's a bumper sticker that reads: JESUS IS COMING. LOOK BUSY. Jesus doesn't want us to just look busy. He wants us to be busy—busy carrying out the work of his kingdom, busy living Christian lives. He wants us to make regular use of the Means of Grace. He wants us to wear out our Bibles. He wants us to bring our children to the font, and ourselves to his Supper. He wants us to be faithful stewards of all he has entrusted to us—time, abilities, money. He wants us to call

on him regularly in that heart-to-heart talk called prayer. He wants us to teach our children to love the him and to seize every opportunity to tell others about the hope that we have in him. He wants us to serve faithfully in our vocations. He wants us to be busy living for him.

That's a long list. And we can put a checkmark next to every item, right? Wrong. Far too often we fail to carry out the tasks our Lord has assigned to us. Like Justin Jones we are often too busy having a good time to worry about being responsible. At times we're more interested in seeing the latest episode of our favorite show than seeing the pastor make the sign of the cross as he forgives our sins in the name of Christ. We give more attention to the latest headlines than we do to God's saving truth. We're more interested in burgers and beers than we are in our Lord's true body and blood. We have lots of excuses. Partying is more fun than praying. I'm too busy to serve. I'm too broke to give. I'm too scared to tell others about Jesus. But when our Lord returns he's not going to have any time for excuses. My friends, we sinners are in trouble. Big trouble. The biggest trouble of all. Because of our sins our very souls are in jeopardy. We deserve to spend eternity in hell.

But, of course, we're not going to hell because God is such a nice guy right? He'd never send anyone to hell. Wrong again. God means what he says. **“The wages of sin is death”** (Romans 6:23). But we don't need to worry about getting what we've earned. Someone has already collected

the terrible wages earned by our sins. The One coming in glory to judge the living and the dead is the same One who came in humility to rescue us from our sin, our death and our hell. **He humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!** (Philippians 2:8) Jesus completed that long list of tasks in our place. He lived a responsible life of sinless obedience. Jesus suffered hell for us on the cross. He bore the punishment God promises for sin in his body. God made him responsible for our irresponsibility. He paid for it all with his life. And when he took that life back on the third day the message to us couldn't have been clearer: Every sin is forgiven! Death itself is dead! The gates of heaven are open, ready to receive us and all who trust in Christ alone for salvation.

My friends, that's what moves us to gladly carry out the tasks our Jesus has given us. That's what moves us to joyfully prepare for his return. Not the threat that he's going to get us, but the promise of his love and forgiveness. With the eyes of faith we watch for his return. In fact, we can't wait for our Savior to come again.

II. Watch Expectantly

Why doesn't Jesus just tell us when that will happen? Well, why does the drill sergeant have surprise inspections? Because he wants his platoon to be prepared at all times. Why does the science teacher give pop quizzes? Because she wants her students to really know their stuff, not just cram for a test. Jesus

knows human nature. He knows that we human beings will definitely put off until tomorrow what we should be doing today. And so he wisely withholds from us the day, date and time of his certain return. He has our best, eternal interests in mind.

Giving us a date to mark on our calendars – either the date of our death or of his return – would be like singing us a lullaby. Jesus wants us to stay awake. **“If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: Watch!”** Have you ever driven alone, late at night? The low hum of the tires and the twinkling taillights ahead of you can almost lull you into a trance. Your eyelids start to get heavy. Suddenly you realize that you nodded off. With eyes wide open and heart pounding out of your chest, you get a white-knuckled grip on the steering wheel. You crank the radio and roll down the window to fight off the drowsiness. Similarly, Jesus tells us to chase away our spiritual sleepiness. He says, **“Be on guard! Be alert!”** In essence he says, **“Expect me to come TODAY!”**

What a beautiful thought! What a wonderful way to begin each day! Jesus could come today! When stress and depression are hounding you, remember: Jesus could come today to give you perfect peace and happiness! When conflict and broken relationships are around every corner, be comforted: Jesus could come today to take you to live with him and all the saints in perfect, eternal harmony. When old age, failing health or chronic pain are getting to be more than you can bear, take heart: Jesus could

come again today to relieve your pain forever and ever. When the weight of guilt is all but crushing your heart, be at peace: Jesus could come again today! He already came once and won your forgiveness. He could come again today to take you a place where sin and guilt just aren't part of the equation. And if, at the end of the day Jesus hasn't come again, we still have his promises. **"Surely, I am with you always"** and, **"Behold, I am coming soon!"** Expect Jesus to keep those promises!

Justin Jones wasn't expecting his parents to return so soon. He wasn't prepared. And he paid the price. He's probably still grounded. My friends, when it comes to Jesus' return something much greater than a grounding is at stake. Our very souls hang in the balance. But don't be afraid. Jesus washed us in his blood. He made us his own in Baptism. We are holy in God's sight. And now, with every sin forgiven, we can get down to the business he has given us. With willing responsibility and joyous anticipation we can watch for his return, praying in our hearts all the while: **"Come, Lord Jesus!"** (Revelation 22:20). Amen.

S.D.G.