

Living In Expectation: Watch!

Mark 13: 24-37

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Begin with video - "*Jesus is coming, Ready Or Not.*"

Are you ready?

Are you watching?

Are you awake for the coming of Jesus?

It is the season of Advent - which is the *getting ready* season in the life of a follower of Jesus.

The season of Advent not only helps us prepare for the celebration of Jesus' **first** coming. It also asks if the activity of my life helps shape my heart and mind to be ready for that inevitable day when Jesus returns;

Am I awake and ready, watchful in anticipation of his **second** coming?

Jesus speaks as Prophet in Mark 13. Reminding us that the end is coming.

Status quo is not forever.

Time, as we know it, is not infinite.

The end is coming. So, live **today** with that in mind.

That is deeply true on two levels, actually.

The first is personal.

Over this past year we've traveled to the cemetery eight times.

For each of those beloved people time stopped.

And they met the Master of the household face to face.

If that call comes in your life, would you be ready?

One brother here shared with me on Thursday, "If Jesus calls me home tomorrow, that's OK. I'm not worried. I'm happy and ready to meet him. But I love life. And if he allows me to remain for a time yet, I'm grateful and ready for that, too."

Could you say that?

That's the personal level.

There is also the corporate level - where time as we know it will come to a stop for all of humanity.

It will stop with the coming of the One who is both the Son of God and, as Jesus calls himself in v.26, the "*Son of Man.*" That's an ancient poetic title referring to him as the "proto-human," the great representative of humanity.

Which is the essence of Jesus, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas.

Fully human AND fully divine.

The Holy Mediator who brings heaven and earth together in himself.

He is coming with great power and glory.

He is coming with his angels.

He is coming as the Master of all Creation and will demand an accounting.

Are you ready to meet him face to face?

Could you account for the way your life is managed?

For the way you relate to those immediately around you and those farther away?

For your participation in the care of our planet, and the management of its resources?

For the state of your day to day relationship with Jesus?

The signs are there, all around us, reminding us that

life and time are not rock solid, and are not forever.

Are we ready for the end?

A few years ago my family traveled to the west coast. We passed a memorial to the Alberta town of Frank. It was located at the base of Turtle Mountain, which contains rich reserves of coal. Problem was that the mountain experienced regular tremors. In fact, miners used those tremors to their advantage, knocking loose large chunks of coal. Which it did - a lot.

Local natives didn't go near the mountain, referring to it as "*the mountain that walks.*"

Townfolk ignored the warning, and while they slept, early in the morning of April 29, 1903 a 1000x200 meter, 100 million ton section of the mountain broke off and buried the town. The exact number of dead will never be known. Only 12 bodies were recovered. The rest remain entombed there.

Time stopped for the town of Frank on that day.

One day time, as we know it, will stop for all of us.

Are we you ready?

Jesus is coming again.... whether we're ready, or not.

Keep awake!

Keep alert!

Watch!

Watch the fig tree, says Jesus.

In Palestine most trees, I'm told, are evergreen. The fig tree is an exception. Like deciduous trees here in Ontario it loses leaves in the Fall. And then, in spring, the sap begins to run and the tree begins to leaf out.

It's an unmistakable sign that summer is coming.

Jesus tells his hearers that in the midst of what may some incredibly challenging, even frightening times, to be aware, to be awake, to be ready.

They are not signs that everything is out of control.

Rather, they are icons along the way pointing to the return of Jesus.

Each time you see them, remember - he's coming back.

When you see the vignettes which Jesus described lived out around you,

about struggles within families,

about suffering and warfare,

about false messiahs,

about chaos in the cosmos

let those stand as signposts to us all that Jesus' return is at hand.

Just -

- don't get too worked up about trying to predict **when** that will be.

No one knows, says Jesus.

God doesn't want us spending energy figuring out the **WHEN**.

Instead, He wants us to spend our energy on the **NOW**.

Not gazing and speculating about the distant **FUTURE**.

But living, awake and energized in **TODAY**.

He has assigned a task to us.

We're to be at that task at all times.

Beginning - ***right now.***

Therefore, says v.35, 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.

Those were the four times used in ancient Palestine to measure the passing of the night.
The night hours are the ones that pass most of us unaware, while we sleep.

What happens at night is often not very pretty.

Much evil happens in the night. Under the cover of darkness.

That's the time when people bent on doing wrong are convinced that nobody will see them in their activity.

Be aware, be awake, watch!

All the time.

There isn't a time in your life that God doesn't see.

There isn't a season where we can retire spiritually,
living without responsibility for our attitudes and actions.

There isn't a chapter of our lives for which we will not be held responsible.

When the times get dark around us, and evil seems so acute
- pay special then.

When everyone else is looking after their own interest in dark economic times, it is easy to go along with the crowd and not pay attention to the ongoing, even heightened needs of the poor, and instead focus on keeping whatever we've got for ourselves.

It would be easy to demand that our government spend less on foreign aid and development so that there's more for ourselves.

Or cheat on taxes.

In dark times these activities are easy.

But how would we answer for them when the Master returns?

At nighttime many of us tend to go home and lock the doors.

Nobody comes in to our homes at night.

It's easy to make that a pattern.

To lock the doors of my life and not open it up, making space for others.

No strangers in my home.

No struggle in my soul on behalf of the less fortunate in our world.

Just leave them "out there."

But how would I answer to the Master when he returns?

It's easy when times are dark to pay attention to entertainment that is morally marginal, and perhaps downright degrading of the innate dignity of humanity and corrupt.

Because nobody, we think, is monitoring the channel we're watching or the night club we're at, or the web site we've clicked on.

But if Jesus was right beside you, would you still be doing it?

It's easy to toss garbage alongside the road, to tip out the dregs from that old gas can, or purge your trailer's black water tank under the cover of darkness.

Nobody sees you pollute and poison creation in the dark.

Except the Master who created it.

Keep awake! says Jesus.

Live as though every moment of your life was a moment lived in LIGHT.

Live with the awareness that the Master in Heaven **does** watch every moment.

No matter what everyone else does.

No matter how hopeless things seem to get.

No matter how dark it gets around you, says Jesus,

or how long that darkness seems to last

KEEP AWAKE!

Keep watch!

Keep awake.

One of the other things about darkness is that it is an easy time to lose your bearings. It's easy to get lost in the dark. Ask anyone who lost their flashlight while walking in the night through the woods. Ask anyone who has had to try and navigate their way through strange city streets in the dark.

It's easy to lose your way and wander in the wrong direction.

When Jesus personally asks you about your life, will you be able to answer that it was on target?

That you kept awake, kept alert, and watched.... the right way?

Consider the unfortunate story of Matt Emmons.

Matt had the gold medal in sight. He was one shot away from claiming victory in the 2004 Olympic 50-meter three-position rifle event. He didn't even need a bull's-eye to win. His final shot merely needed to be somewhere on the target.

Normally, the shot he made would have received a score of 8.1, more than enough for a gold medal. But in what was described as "an extremely rare mistake in elite competition," Emmons fired **at the wrong target**.

Standing in lane two, he fired at the target in lane three.

His score for a good shot at the wrong target? 0.

Instead of a gold medal, Emmons ended up in eighth place.

It doesn't matter how accurate you are if you are aiming at the wrong goal.

David Mordkoff, "American Emmons Misses Out on Gold by Firing at Wrong Target,"

www.Sports.Yahoo.com (8-22-04)

Is your life on target?

Where are you aiming it to go in 2009?

What would it take for you to say,

"Yes, my life is a success"

or

"No, it was a let-down"

How do you measure that?

Do you?

Pause, that is, and take time to measure your life?

I hope you do take time for that once in a while.

And may I encourage conversation together about how we measure success?

What does it take for us to say, "*Yes, my life in on target.*"

Talk about that together.

One last thing about darkness - we can easily feel alone.

When I speak with widowed people they often tell how the most lonely time is night time.

Friends, remember that for God there is no difference between day and night. For him all is as the light of day.

He always sees us.

Always knows us.

Always watches us.

We are ALWAYS in his strong, caring hands.

The promise of scripture, pictured in Luke's baptism this morning,

the promise that

38 ...neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Romans 8)

that promise remains for us.....

...day and night.

Believer - the Master is **NOT** that far away.

His words are right here with us in Scripture.

And His Holy Spirit has taken up residence right inside us.

In bright times and dark times.

Remember that.

Remind each other of that.

Keep awake to his

constant, holy, gracious, loving presence within and around us.

And in the encouragement of that promise remember to respond to that.

When I am asleep in the dark, I can't respond to anyone.

My wife may be laying beside me and whisper "I love you" but if I've fallen asleep, those words fall on ears as good as deaf.

All she would back is a snore.

God has come into our dark world with the amazing gift of His Only Son.

He grants the gift of full forgiveness for all the night-time blunders of our lives.

He surrounds us with His strong, never-failing love.

And He, who forgives us all, and gives us the treasured opportunity of a new day, whispers, "I love you."

Dear friends, let's help each other be spiritually awake so that we can hear those treasured words and respond,

"Yes, Lord. And we love you, too!"

Yes - stay awake.

Awake to the security of His love that holds you.

And in that wakefulness,

no matter how dark our world may seem around us

choose to live with alert boldness in the NOW

in whatever minutes and hours and days and weeks

that the Master gives us.

Until that final day

when the trumpet sounds

and the angel comes

and time for us
will be no more.