

Stay Awake

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[0 : 0 0] welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community, and as we follow Jesus together, we've become convinced there's no one so good they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word. We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark. You'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and his life and his death and his resurrection, and we are in what I said last week was the most difficult chapter in the Gospel of Mark, at least the most difficult to understand. That's Mark 13, which talks about both the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, and also the end of the world, and it was those two things that we discussed last week. Remember, we discussed the destruction of the temple. We saw God's faithfulness to his people in the first century, which reminds and reassures us of God's faithfulness to his people in the 21st century. We also saw the end of the world, which reminds us that Jesus is coming back. He is separated from us, but he has not abandoned us. So that's what we looked at in the middle of the chapter, of chapter 13 last week, and you'll remember I told you that it's easy to get lost in a passage like this. We need to have a due north clear in our minds, and for that, the heart of the passage is this. How do we make it between Jesus' first coming and his second coming? That's what the entire chapter of Mark 13 is attempting to answer. Now, in the past few weeks, we have had encouragement and comfort, God's provision towards us as we make that journey. This week, we turn towards challenge and action, because Jesus is going to remind his disciples of the importance of doing what he calls staying awake. It's with that that I invite you to turn with me to God's word. We're in

Mark chapter 13, starting at verse 32. You can turn with me in your worship guide. You can turn in your Bible. You can turn on your phone. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word, and God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold, and it's sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb. And so, that's why we read now Mark chapter 13, starting at verse 32. But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven nor the sun, but only the father. Be on guard, keep awake, for you do not know when the time will come.

It is like a man going on a journey when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you, I say to all, stay awake. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you once again that you have not left us without instruction, but instead you come to us and you speak to us clearly in your word. We ask that you would do that again this morning, that we'd understand the hope of Jesus' return. We'd also know the challenge and the preparation that you've given us, that we would be encouraged and empowered by your grace and challenged by your commands. We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen. If you are a homeowner and you're anything like me, you know that there is sort of an endless list of things that need to get done. Let's see if I can stop that. Endless list of things that need to get done. And so you sort of have to prioritize what is the most important or the most urgent thing, because it's impossible to do everything at once. So one of the things that's been on my list for a while is I really wanted to get my fence gate replaced because the gate just drives me nuts.

[4 : 31] It does not close really all the way, swirling apart, not really. And it's just a thorn in my side. So at the end of last year, I decided this is the time I'm going to get the gate replaced.

Here's the thing though. The gate didn't have to be replaced. It didn't need to be replaced. It just annoyed me. And I wanted to know that in my life, whenever I dealt with the gate, it would just work exactly the way I wanted it to work. And the reason I did that is because I expect to be in my house for a long time. And so it's worth it to me to make that investment for my own enjoyment. If I were planning to put my house on the market in six months or 12 months, the gate would be a complete waste of money because no one cares when they're trying to buy my house, whether the gate is perfect or not, right?

They're not going to add several thousand dollars to have the house with the new gate. No, it'd just be complete throwing it away. Which I bring up to remind you all of just a simple principle, which is that what we believe about the future, what we think the future holds for us determines how we live and operate in the present. Because I believe, because I hope that I'm going to enjoy this gate for many years, it's worth it to me to replace it. If I were shopping around for a new house, there would be other things that would be more important to fix, other things that might help it actually gain value on the market.

There's been talk recently about how my generation is supposedly going to live longer than other generations. And so we should think more seriously about saving for retirement because our age is just going to go on and on and on. Now, whether that's true is a different discussion, but it again highlights this fact, what we believe the future holds determines how we live now. This passage asks us, do you really believe that Jesus is coming back? Do you really believe that Jesus is coming back?

Will you live as if that's true? When I bought a new gate to my fence, I was living out my belief that I'm going to be in my house for a while. Do we live out the belief that Jesus is actually coming back?

[6 : 53] Now, remember I told you in chapter 13 of Mark, we're talking about two things. We're talking about the destruction of the temple in 70 AD, and we're talking about Jesus' return. In this section, we are turning back. Remember, last week we were talking primarily about the destruction of the temple, at least at the end, first. And so now the question is, why do we know that in this talk that Jesus is giving, we're talking about his return, not the destruction of the temple? Because we're talking about both, right?

So why do we know that this parable of the man who's returning to his servants, how do we know this is about Jesus coming back, not about Jerusalem? Well, there's a few things. First of all, verses 34 and 35 give us an example of an individual who leaves and then returns. The destruction of the temple, the fall of Jerusalem, is not about one person leaving and coming back, right? That doesn't make sense.

So Jesus' illustration here makes most sense in talking about his return. Second, it stands in sharp contrast to verses 28 through 31, which we just looked at. Those verses are about watching the signs, knowing when the fall of Jerusalem is going to come. Here, there are no signs to know, verse 32, but concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. And so the uncertainty of the return also points to the fact that we're talking about Jesus coming back. There's many reasons. I'm just going to point you to two more. In verse 32, we're told, but concerning that day or that hour. If Jesus was continuing his discussion of the fall of Jerusalem, he would not say, but concerning that day or that hour. He would say, and concerning that day or that hour. So, but there tells us we're changing topics. And finally, that day or that hour in verse 32 is a technical term that appears throughout the New Testament to refer to the day when Jesus is coming back. With all of that being said, this passage is not complicated. In fact, it's incredibly simple. It is set up to be idiot proof.

And the main point is clear. The main point is this, stay awake. We know that's the main point because it's repeated not once, not twice, not thrice. It's repeated four times in verses 33 through 36.

And even before the passage is finished, we're given the summary, the whole point, right in verse 33. Be on guard, keep awake, for you do not know when the time will come.

[9 : 37] And so the point of this passage is very, very simple. Live your life in light of the fact that Jesus is coming back.

Live your life in light of the fact that Jesus is coming back. Verse 34, We have this man going on a journey. What does he do?

He gives each of his servants their work. He leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with their work. So there's something these servants are supposed to be doing. And he commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.

What does it mean then to live in light of the fact that Jesus is coming back? It means we're doing the work that the master has given us, and we don't want to be found asleep. We don't want to be found distracted, doing something else, going off on side quests, being found lulled into a false sense of security or complacency.

Now I could leave it there. We could pray, and we could sing our final hymn. Live your life as if Jesus is coming back. But I want to call your attention to two different ways in which we live our lives in light of Christ's return.

[10 : 55] First, the priority of Christ's return. And second, the urgency of Christ's return. First, the priority of Christ's return. And second, the urgency of Christ's return.

And so first, we'll talk about the priority of his return. There's a man named Richard Sibbes, who is a Puritan, and he lived during the 1500s and the 1600s.

And he provides this example of the Christian life where he talks about it as if it's a stream. And he says, imagine you have this stream, and this stream is split into all these smaller, tinier streams.

What's going to happen to the power and the force of that stream if you split it in a bunch of different directions? It's not going to have any power. It's not going to have any force. It's just going to be diluted.

And so it's not going to be able to accomplish anything. On the other hand, imagine that the reverse is true. You have all these small, little streams, and they flow into this one large, great stream.

[11 : 56] Well, what's that stream going to be able to do? It's going to be able to bear in on something with all the force and power of that water. You're going to be able to focus everything in one direction.

Now, coincidentally, it turns out that you have this illustration on the back of your worship guide from Richard Sivs. And he tells us what the main direction is that our stream is supposed to be headed.

This is the last sentence. The main desire must be to be saved and by grace to have communion and fellowship with God in Christ Jesus. Unless this be the main care, the soul can produce nothing good.

To stay awake, to live in light of Jesus' return, is to say all of our streams, every piece and point of our life, converges in this one direction.

It goes back to the first catechism question. What is man's purpose? To glorify God and enjoy him forever. Whatever you do, it's meant to be driven in that direction.

[13 : 05] And so that's the priority of Christ's return. Whatever we do, we want the first question to be, how does this contribute to being prepared for Jesus to return?

And so it means that as we are raising our children, we are keeping first things first. We are more concerned about preparing them for Jesus coming back than we're concerned about preparing them for college admissions.

Because the kingdom of God, heaven, is more important than Harvard or USAPHA or UCCS.

It means that as we are training our bodies and staying strong as fitness is important for us, we are not doing it for vanity. We are not doing it out of anxiety or fear, but so that we can do productive work for the Lord.

That Ephesians 5, 16 would be true of us, that we would be making the best use of the time because the days are evil. It means that when the church gathers to worship, you are here.

[14 : 24] Because this is part of how you stay awake. This is how you're reminded of what is most important in life. This is how your stream is constantly redirected in the right direction.

Being in worship pushes out other things in your life not the other way around. If Jesus is coming back and he is, this is how we stay awake together.

It means as we arrange and think about our lives, success is not as important as character and godliness and holiness.

Better to love God and no one to know our name than to be famous and be separated from him.

For what does it profit a man to gain the world and lose his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul? It's Mark 8, 36 and 37.

[15 : 40] Every yes is a no. Everything that you say yes to, you are saying no to something else because you have seven days and 24 hours in each of those days.

Your resources are limited. Staying awake means when you make difficult decisions in your life, you always say yes to the kingdom of God and no to other things.

Stay awake. And so I'm pleading with you all this morning on behalf of Jesus Christ.

If you are not awake, wake up. Make first things first. Every yes is a no.

If you are awake, keep awake. Stay awake. Now, I do want to say in relation to that, there are some who take teachings like this and they make the Christian life as a result of it a life of unusual and constant sort of austerity and intensity.

[17 : 08] You know, I preach this passage and suddenly it's mandatory for everyone to be in church six times a week. There's a famous preacher who at one point told people they were, they were, had their priorities off if they were collecting seashells.

Somehow that was a sin. Okay. That's more a reflection of someone's personality and their anxiety than it is a biblical teaching. And so I want to just say on the one hand, it's good to enjoy all sorts of things in the right perspective.

God created this world. He's glorified when we enjoy it, right? On the other hand, pleasure here and now is not our ultimate goal.

Okay. So we do all sorts of things to the glory of God. There's all sorts of things we can point into that stream. Do them to the glory of God.

Do them in light of eternity, whether it's your work or your play. It doesn't mean we don't enjoy this world. There is a way to ski in light of Jesus' return, but do it in light of Jesus' return.

[18 : 17] Keep it in the right place and perspective in the right season. We take all things, everything in our lives and we assess them. We direct them towards the fact that Jesus is coming back.

We want all our small streams to be part of one large stream. And so I'm saying two things. On the one hand, it doesn't mean we stop enjoying any of God's gifts and we live sort of this monk lifestyle.

On the other hand, it doesn't mean there aren't real sacrifices and trade-offs. We do say no to good things sometimes so we can say yes to God and his kingdom.

We've talked about the urgency that we are putting first things, excuse me, the priority that we're putting first things first.

There is also an urgency. We're not just doing first things first, we are doing first things now. There are some things that are simply daily actions, right?

[19 : 19] They're just, you're just being faithful day after day as you live life in light of Jesus' return. There are some things that you're just going to do every morning because Jesus is coming back.

There are other things that are tasks that we are tempted to put off and so that takes us to the urgency of Christ's return. Imagine for a second that you're a student, maybe you're in college, and you show up to class and the professor announces there's a major research paper that's going to be a large portion of your grade for this class.

And at the beginning he says, you'll notice on your syllabus there's no deadline for this paper. And the reason is I'm just going to roll into class one day and ask for you to hand it in.

But you don't know which class that's going to be. What are you going to do? Well, hopefully when that class is over you're headed to the library, right?

You are going to get to work. That's the only chance to hand it in. There's no late assignments. You can't run back to your dorm and get the paper. No, you need to be ready. If you come to that class you want to know that if he asks for the paper you have it to hand in.

[20 : 31] You're going to get to work. You're going to write. Procrastination is deadly if the deadline is unknown.

Procrastination is deadly if the deadline is unknown. We're told here remember verse 32 concerning that day or that hour no one knows not even the angels in heaven nor the son but only the father.

Live life in light of Jesus' return and you don't know when he's coming back so there's an urgency. There are things that need to be taken care of now. There are certain things that are on a limited time offer.

here's a few of them. Addressing broken and strained relationships. Living in light of Jesus' return means that we are tenderhearted and quick to reconcile.

We do not want Jesus to return and to find us nurturing and coddling bitterness and grudges and lists of complaints.

[21 : 46] Reconcile now before it is too late. Do you want Jesus to come back and find that you're in the middle of an intense conflict with someone else in the church?

No. Can you imagine what that would be like? Jesus is coming back in his glory and what are you doing? You're like spitting it out with someone. No. Stay awake.

Live in light of Jesus' returns. Be quick to forgive and repent. Don't delay in healing your marriage because Jesus is coming back.

Stay awake. Do you want Jesus to return in this picture that he's given for us on earth of what his relationship with the church is going to be like?

You're in the midst of destroying that picture. No. Jesus is coming back. Stay awake. Don't delay.

[22 : 57] Your money here on earth will be worth nothing when Jesus returns. do you want Jesus to return and find that you have stored up no treasure in heaven?

Stay awake. We don't want Jesus to return and find that all of our treasure is here on earth. There is an urgency.

There is a limited time offer. the story is told of a man who had millions and millions of dollars and at one point he had to declare bankruptcy and someone asked him in light of the fact that you ended up having no money, do you regret any of the money that you gave away?

Because you could have that money that could have helped you in this bankruptcy suit. and he said, the only money I kept was the money I gave away. Brothers and sisters, when Jesus returns, the only money you will have kept is the money you gave away.

Stay awake. Live in light of Jesus' return. Don't miss the chance to give, not just financially, but in other ways.

[24 : 22] Don't miss the chance to do good. You may not have it tomorrow. People who are experts in leadership talk about the fact that good leaders have a bias towards action. They get things done.

I'm going to suggest to you this morning Christians have a bias towards doing good. Do as much good as you can in light of and because of Jesus' return.

Making the best use of the time because the days are evil. Finally, there is an urgency to repenting of our sins and following Jesus.

No one knows the day or the hour. Do not be like Herod in Mark 6. Do you remember what Herod loved to do?

Herod loved to listen to listen. But he would not act. He loved other things more.

[25 : 31] I say this with love for you. Some of you are nibbling around the edges of our church and nibbling around the edges of Christianity. Jesus is coming back and no one knows the day or the hour.

The time to repent is not tomorrow, it is now. Procrastination is deadly if the deadline is unknown. Stay awake.

Now, I gave you an illustration a little bit ago. That was a terrible illustration.

I told you about a college professor who was going to come in and just announce a deadline. And I compared that to this passage to highlight the urgency. And there is a point, except excuse me, did not announce a deadline, announce an assignment.

You didn't know when it was due. There's a point in which that's true, and the point is the point of comparison that's true is that we don't know the day or the hour. Here, though, is why that illustration was terrible. Jesus is not an absent college professor.

[26 : 41] And your work for him, your staying awake, is not a stressful deadline. Remember what we've looked at in this passage. Jesus is the one who loves us and cares for us.

He is returning to us, not having abandoned us, but returning to us after a separation. He's made promises to us. Remember, he's faithful to the church in the first century.

He'll be faithful to you in the 21st century. He made a promise in verse 11 that if you're in persecution, he's even going to give you words to speak. And then he gave us this promise two sermons ago in verse 13, but the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Jesus is not some absent and irrational college professor. No, he is the one who is coming back for his people, has made promises to his people.

And so staying awake, being prepared for his return, is not us trembling in fear at an administrator who's coming to evaluate our lives. No, we are making things ready for our heavenly father to come back and he will stay awake.

[28 : 08] The story is told of an air force pilot who returned from the first war in Iraq. He had finished his 300th mission and so he was immediately sit home without any notice.

He and his team were put on a plane. They flew in that plane to Massachusetts and then they immediately got in a car and drove to their home places in western Pennsylvania. So they drove all the way through the night to get home.

His family had no idea that he was returning. He gets dropped off in the driveway of his home just as the sun is rising and as he arrived he was surprised to find a banner across the garage door that said, welcome home dad.

And he was surprised because he told no one that he was returning. He says this, when I walked into the house the kids about half dressed for school screamed daddy. His daughter Susan came running down the hall.

She looked terrific, hair fixed, makeup on, and a crisp yellow dress. How did you know? He asked. I didn't, she answered through tears of joy. Once we knew the war was over, we knew you'd be home one of these days.

[29 : 18] we knew you'd try to surprise us, so we were ready every day. Stay awake for no one knows when the time will come.

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you that you are not a cold and calculating administrator coming to see if we've dotted our I's and crossed our T's.

you're not an absent and arbitrary college professor, but you're the one who loves us and cares for us. You've made promises that you'll protect us and you'll provide for us, and most of all, that you will come back to be with us.

We ask that you would drive that reality home to our hearts, that we would live more and more in light of your return. We ask all of these things in Jesus' name. Amen.