

## Mark 13:24-37 The Return of Jesus

May 20, 2017 Sat Eve service

**Hook:** [video: text & walk] Attention v distraction. What **distracts your attention?**

For most of us, our phones do the job well: we receive a gazillion messages and sounds at all times of the day and night.

For me: the TV. Have to turn it off / pause it when Michele and I want to talk. Really hard to concentrate when there's a TV on behind you.

When is it hard for you to **stay awake?** For some, right here! For me, a quiet place after lots of activity.

Tonight we'll look at Jesus teaching about when He will return a second time, and how He means that fact to affect the way we live right now.

This passage completes the teaching of Jesus while He and the disciples sat on the Mt of Olives, just 3 days before His crucifixion. Jesus is answering their question, **"Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things will be fulfilled?"** (13:4)

Matthew puts their question this way, **"Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"** (Mt 24:3) They, like us, want to know when Jesus will return, and what will happen to the world leading up to His second coming. This is His answer, along with the book of Revelation, given to the Apostle John in 90 AD.

**READ MARK 13:24-37**      **PRAY**

**:24-27 Jesus Returns**

**:24** **"In those days"** the Great Tribulation, when the coming world ruler called the antichrist / the beast (Rev) declares that he is god, and all must worship him or be killed. God reveals Himself in so many ways during that time: one of which is judgment on a scale never before seen on earth.

Revelation describes 3 sets of 7 worldwide judgments on the earth: **seals, trumpets, and bowls** of wrath. As the plagues of Egypt in Moses' time, each was meant to dethrone someone/something worshiped as god, judge sin, and call people to repent.

**"After that tribulation"** After the greatest time of trouble the earth has ever seen, for 7 years, but especially for those final 3 ½ years!

**:24b-25**      the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, **"the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.**

These cosmic disturbances are prophesied in OT numerous times as part of **"the day of the LORD"**: a day of judgment on the earth and restoration for Israel. God will save Israel through the devastation of these times.

Isa 13:9-11 **Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger, to make the land a desolation and to destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of the heavens and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be dark at its rising, and the moon will not shed its light. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will put an end to the pomp of the arrogant, and lay low the pompous pride of the ruthless.**

Joel 2:1-2, 10-11 **Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming; it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.**

Many of the judgments recorded by apostle John in Revelation will result in the sun being obscured and the moon's light not even making it to earth. When our valleys fill w/ smoke from a forest fire, we get an inkling of what this will be like.

Judgments like burning of 1/3 of all trees; worldwide earthquakes will throw clouds of dust and smoke into the atmosphere. Judgments of supernatural darkness as well. [List on *handout*]

Amazing how dependent we are on sunlight. Separation from light a small indication what separation from God would be like... forever! All these judgments designed to lead people to repent!

**:26** “Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.” When Jesus returns, there will be no doubt! He will return “in the clouds”.

Many passages in OT and NT indicate when Jesus returns, He will be accompanied by armies of angels... and us! This throng of redeemed, resurrected people and angels so numerous that they/we appear to be “clouds”.

“With great power and glory” Jesus will be seen when He returns as King of Kings and Lord of lords. We have seen Him the first time as the humble Servant of the Lord, the lamb of God. That is who He really is. But Jesus is also the ruling, reigning Lion of Judah! He will intervene and defeat armies of the earth who were fighting each other, but turn to fight HIM at His return!

His **power**: the power of almighty God, victorious over sin, death, and evil. His **glory**: the visible shining out of God’s character. When Jesus returns, all eyes will see Him as apostle John did on Patmos: “One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.” -Rev. 1:13-17

**:27** “And then He will send His angels, and gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.

And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Mt. 24:31)

Those who are alive on the earth and who have believed in Him will be gathered into His presence by angels! Remember, these are meant by Jesus as encouraging words. He is speaking them to His disciples then, many of whom would live through the destruction of Jerusalem; He is speaking them to us; several of you face suffering or trouble on a scale the rest of us cannot appreciate. And He is speaking most of all to those who believe in Him during the great Tribulation. Picture the earth in utter ruin: all mountains and cities leveled; the ocean poisoned; scores of people killed. Yet in that time not one person who trusts in Jesus will be forgotten. When He returns, He will send His angels to escort each believer into His presence.

That strong encouragement is meant for us, too. We are never forgotten or ignored by our Lord, even if we feel forgotten, abandoned, or useless. “You [God] hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel and afterward receive me to glory.” -Psalm 73:23-24 Jesus is with us every step of the way and will usher each of us into His presence when our bodies wear out, and no matter what we go through.

### **:28-31** The Parable of the Fig Tree

**:28** Very simple parable: when fig tree sends forth its leaves, summer is not far away. In Israel, this occurs in April, as days get warmer and longer. Like fruit trees doing right now in our area.

**:29-30** “So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors! “Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

In the same way, when you see “these things happening”: all the events Jesus has just described associated with the Great Tribulation. The abomination of desolation; the signs in the heavens (later, all the events described in Rev. 6-19) will precede Jesus’ return. This generation, the one alive when these final events occur, will witness His second coming. What a comfort to them, especially given what they will go through!

This simple parable also provides a cautionary tale for us of how easy it can be to misread Scripture. A famous commentator in the 70s (Hal Lindsey) took the fig tree to represent Israel (which is not what it says). Since Israel re-established as a nation in 1947, and since a generation is roughly 40 years, he reasoned that Jesus would return in the 1980s. Oops!

Misinterpretations like that can call the accuracy of God’s word into question. But if / when we don’t quite understand God’s word, His word is not the problem.

**:31** “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

Everything in creation can (and will) pass away--it continues now for a time but will one day be gone-- but God’s word will never pass away.

These words are meant to bring comfort to us when we face uncertain, troubling times in our lives. They will comfort those who will live during the worst moment in human history. Evil will NOT triumph! We can trust God and His word, even and especially when we suffer or experience evil firsthand.

### **:32-37** No One Knows the Day or Hour

If you’ve been a Christian for very long, you have heard someone make a pronouncement about **exactly** when Jesus will return... like that commentator I spoke about. Others exist today, and there will be many more in the future.

It’s hard to see what’s difficult to understand about v. 32, “**But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.**”

Taking Jesus at His word on this one will save us a lot of wasted time and disappointment: Jesus is coming back, but **NO ONE** knows the exact moment except the Father. Jesus, while on earth, had emptied Himself of His glory of God so completely that the Father knew things He didn’t, like the date of His return. Therefore, people who assert *they* know when Jesus is coming back are claiming to know more than Jesus Himself!

If you want to guarantee a disagreement among Christians, just get a discussion going about when Jesus will return. All believers know Jesus is coming back! However, there’s a spectrum of beliefs about when in history He will do so. Here’s a summary of the three main views:

-All the events concerning the Tribulation have **already occurred** (either in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 or within the first 3 centuries after Christ): Jesus will return when the work of spreading the gospel has been completed. His kingdom is now being brought to earth through the work of the church.

-The Tribulation is a future event. Jesus will return once, at **the close of the Great Tribulation**. Dead will be raised and those alive will be caught up at the same time Jesus intervenes in history at the battle of Armageddon.

-The Tribulation is still future. Jesus’ return spans this time period called the Tribulation and involves **two distinct events**: His return for the church and His return to end the Tribulation and usher in His kingdom on earth.

The first event fits the description of His return as being “a thief in the night”. Matthew describes Jesus’ return like the days of Noah, “**For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.**” (Mt. 24:38-41)

The comparison goes like this: believers will be like Noah and his family, spared from the harrowing experience of the Tribulation. One is taken and the other left... Those alive when He returns will be “caught up” to be with the Lord as described by the apostle Paul in **1 Thess. 4:13-18**. Those “left” will experience the Tribulation, but many will come to saving faith in Jesus through it. Jesus’ return at the end of the Tribulation is **visible to all**.

When I was younger, used to be much more dogmatic about this. I have my considered opinion, what I feel Scripture teaches about His second coming, but I now realize there are family in Christ who disagree with me, and we’re still family. Jesus is still going to return, and He won’t consult with any of us before He does it! Regardless of when or how Jesus returns, the fact of His coming is meant to shape our life now. It’s much more important to love one another and work together as His people for the sake of the gospel than to part company over when we think Jesus will return... but that’s my opinion.

**:33** Three commands that tell us how we’re to live as we wait for Jesus to return: **take heed, watch, and pray**. EXAMPLES

**Take heed:** keep an eye out. Be alert. You’re watching for a fly by or a meteor shower or for a parade to begin. Pay attention to what is going on.

**Watch:** also idea of being attentive, but over a long time. Stay awake & alert; be ready. Like firemen at their station. Don’t fall asleep, spiritually speaking.

**Pray:** talk to God about what is going on in our lives, our church, our world. **What are we to be alert for, attentive to? What God is doing.** What He’s doing in the lives of family members; in our neighborhood & community (JVES, nursing home, video); in our world. So thankful for Dan alerting us to what God is doing around the world, along with Ray, Bob, and Edwin. Let’s all be praying as to what our response will be to what we now know!

Look for ways to serve? See what God is doing, and then follow Him. -Andrew Murray

**How can we fall asleep, spiritually?** Simply put, by being distracted and by being unaware of what God is doing.

Most of our lives are really, really busy. Small things can grab our attention and draw us away from paying attention to what God is doing in our lives, our world. We recently got a letter from the IRS: that got our attention! We needed to attend to the questions they asked, but that’s not what we live for! We can get sidetracked even by good things from what is most important: our walk with God; our families; our service to Him (our relationship meant to be dynamic, growing, active).

**:34** Jesus tells us another parable to explain the need to be alert. **“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.”**

This man, the owner of the estate, leaves on a long journey and gives his servants assignments. Each has his/her work to do. The doorkeeper, along with everyone else, has the task of watching.

The idea is this: each of the master’s servants were to be working as if he were standing right there. Since they were discharging their duties for him, they eagerly awaited his return. (Like kids who wants to show you what they accomplished in school. Show you something they’ve made, a new skill they’ve mastered: great eagerness and anticipation for your return.)

**:35-36** If you think about it, there will be people all over the world for whom He will return at one of these times!

The opposite of being alert: asleep on the job. If the master showed up and the servants had been slacking off, it would be an occasion of dread.

**:37** Every believer is a servant of Christ’s. While He is physically gone, we are at this time entrusted by Jesus with our life, our talent, our money. We’re to be investing, living, serving in His strength, fully expecting to account to Him one day.

**WRAPUP:** Each of us has been given spiritual gifts and talents. God has placed us here, together, in HCC and our community in 2017, for a reason. In His amazing wisdom and

creativity, He allows us to choose whether and how we'll serve Him. He provides everything we need: like one of those **chef shows**. Everything is there, we just need to get cooking! We need to serve Him together, and every person is important. Apostle Paul reminds us that the people we might look at as least important are the most necessary.

Each of us need to see ourselves as God does: gifted by Him and meant to be actively involved. Those of us in leadership are really here to serve you, to help ensure that happens.

It's possible for even a believer to live as if Christ is never coming back. In that case, Jesus' return will be like a thief: sudden and unexpected. Suddenly we'll be called into account, rather than planning for that moment. Want to invest the time, money, and spiritual gifts He has given to us wisely, keeping in mind the day when we will stand and account for how we've spent our lives. We want to be like your kids/ grandkids, eager to see you!

### **APPLYING GOD'S WORD TO MY LIFE:**

Jesus means for His return to encourage us to live spiritually alert, active lives in His strength.

-How has God gifted you to serve others? If you have questions about identifying your spiritual gifts, PLEASE seek out a pastor, elder, or home group leader. We can help you!

-What is your passion to serve others? What has God placed on your heart? What training or experience have you had that can be used to serve others in Jesus' name? If so, [community contact info, if available now].

-How can we as the leadership team at Hilltop help you to grow in Christ and serve others? Please let us know!