

The Unknown Time

Mark 13:24-37

Our passage of scripture was always a source of fear and anxiety when I heard sermons based on it in my childhood. However it was in response to the disciples admiring the temple of Jerusalem and Jesus saying the temple would be destroyed. So when the Jesus and the disciples were sitting on the Mount of Olives they asked him when was this going to take place. Jesus told of a time of suffering or the Tribulation. As in the Book of Revelation, Jesus tells of the last half of the Tribulation which is called “the wrath of God” (Rev. 14:10, 19; 15:1, 7; 16:1, 19; 19:15). During this time, God will judge the world and prepare Israel for the coming of her Messiah. It will be a time of intensive judgment as the world has never seen or will ever see again. In it, God will be working out His purposes and setting the stage for the coming of the Conqueror (Rev. 19:11ff).

Even in the midst of His wrath, God remembers mercy (Hab. 3:2); and for the sake of His elect, He will limit the days of the Tribulation to the three and a half years already determined and stops on time.

Satanic deception will continue to the very end, and false Christs and false prophets will lead people astray. In fact, they will even do miracles (Matt. 7:21–23; 2 Thes. 2:9–12; Rev. 13:13–14). So deceptive will be these miracles that even the elect will be tempted to believe their lies. So miracles are not a proof of divine calling and approval (Deut. 13:1–5). No, the final test is the Word of God.

The Tribulation period will climax with the appearing of terrifying signs in the heavens and worldwide chaos on the earth (Luke 21:25–26). These signs, which have been predicted by the prophets Isaiah and Joel (Isa. 13:10; 34:4; Joel 2:10; 3:15), will prepare the way for the coming of Jesus Christ to the earth. It will be a

revelation of His great glory (see Dan. 7:13–14; Mark 8:38) as He comes to establish His rule on the earth (Acts 1:11; Rev. 1:7).

Mark 13:27 describes the regathering of Israel from the nations to which they have been scattered throughout the world (Deut. 30:3–6; Isa. 11:12; Jer. 31:7–9). They will see their Messiah and trust Him, and the nation will be created in holiness and glory (Zech. 12:9–13:1; 14:4–11).

Jesus did not want His disciples or us to get so involved in the prophecies of the future that they or we would neglect the responsibilities of the present; so He closed the Olivet Discourse with two parables. The first parable (Mark 13:28–31) emphasizes knowing that His coming is near, while the second parable emphasizes *not knowing* the time of His return. This is not a contradiction because the parables were addressed to two different groups of people—the first, to the Tribulation saints, and the second, to all believers of every age.

Most of the trees in Palestine are evergreens and do not change dramatically with the seasons. But the fig tree's leaves come out in spring, so its shoots are an indication that summer is indeed near.

As Christian believers today, we are not looking for “signs” of His coming; we are looking for Him and during Advent we remind each other to watch! But people living during the Tribulation will be able to watch these things occur and will know that His coming is near. This assurance will help them to endure (Mark 13:13) and to be good witnesses.

Jesus' statement of the Tribulation and the generation that will not pass away until all these things have taken place, has caused a great deal of speculation about whether he was mistaken or when Jesus will return. In truth, that generation did see many of the things that Jesus said would happen...they saw the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and God protected them through the times of persecution. And there are countless books about when Jesus will return. As I mentioned last

Sunday there are camps of people who call themselves Pre-Tribulation and Post-Tribulation scholars. Some believe the church will be Raptured before the Great Suffering, others believe that Jesus will take the church away to be with him before the Rapture. The Parable of the Fig Tree cautions Tribulation saints to watch and to know the “signs of the times.”

The Parable of the Householder warns *all of us today* (Mark 13:37) to be alert, because we do not know when He will return to take us to heaven (1 Cor. 15:51–52). Like the householder in the story, before our Lord went from us back to heaven, He gave each of us work to do. He expects us to be faithful while He is gone and to be working when He returns. “Take heed, watch and pray” is His admonition.

To be alert means to stay at one’s best, to stay awake. We must we stay alert because nobody knows when Jesus Christ will return. When He was on earth in His humiliation, Jesus did not know the day or hour of His coming again. Even the angels do not know. The world scoffs at us because we continue to cling to this “blessed hope,” but He will return as He promised (2 Peter 3). Our task is to be faithful and to be busy, not to speculate or debate about the hidden details of prophecy.

Our watchfulness is a matter of pleasing God hearing His loving commendation, and receiving His reward (Matt. 25:14–30). His family is one, and He is now preparing a home for all of us, even the least worthy (John 14:1–6). We will live with him because of His grace, not because of our faithfulness or good works (Eph. 2:8–10).

The Christians who read Mark’s Gospel eventually had to face intense persecution from Rome (1 Peter 4:12ff), and this particular message must have brought comfort and strength to them. After all, if God is able to help His people

witness during the Great Tribulation, the worst persecution of all, then surely He could strengthen the saints in the Roman Empire as they faced their fiery trial.

While Christians today will not experience the terrible sufferings described in this chapter, we will have our share of persecution and tribulation in this world before the Lord returns (John 16:33; Acts 14:22). But the warnings of this message in Mark 13 may be applied to our own lives: “Take heed that you are not deceived” (Mark 13:5, 23); “Take heed that you do not become discouraged and quit” (Mark 13:9); “Take heed, watch and pray” (Mark 13:33).

“And what I say unto you, I say unto all, ‘Watch’ ” (Mark 13:37).^{1 2}

We live in the shadow of eternity. That is no reason for fearful and hysterical expectation. But it means that day by day our work must be completed. It means that we must live so that it does not matter when he comes. It gives us the great task of making every day fit for him to see and being at any moment ready to meet him face to face. All life becomes a preparation to meet the King. The wise person is the one who never forgets that they must be ready when the summons comes. If one lives in that memory the end will not be terror, but eternal joy.³

¹Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Mk 13:19

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:170

³Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Gospel of Mark*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 309