



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 13: 28-37

Mark

"Be on the Alert"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Howard, and good morning. Our passage is Mark chapter 13, and we will finish up our exposition of this Olivet Discourse and Mark 13 beginning with verse 28 and concluding with verse 37. So if you have your Bibles open, follow along with me as I read, beginning with verse 28.

"Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. Even so, you too, when you see these things happening," and he's referring to the signs that he has described through much of this discourse, "when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door. Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

"Take heed, keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time will come. It is like a man away on a journey, who upon leaving his house and putting his slaves in charge, assigning to each one his task, also commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert. Therefore, be on the alert – for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning – in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep. What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'"

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study in it together. Shall we pray?

[Prayer] Our gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for the privilege we have to come together and to study the Scriptures, to study them as Your people, a people whom You have chosen for Yourself from the foundation of the world, a people whom You have redeemed for Yourself through the precious blood of Your Son. And as we consider that great thought, we marvel over it, that You would purchase a people out of sin, a rebellious people, a people who had no interest in You, that You would seek it, seek us when we were not seeking You, and not only that, but You would actually purchase our salvation at such a cost, the cost of Your own son. We thank You for that, Lord, and we recognize that we haven't enough thanksgiving within our hearts for that great act. And we confess that, and pray that You would change us and make us a more grateful people.

Lord, we are grateful not only for that, but that this is not the end, that Your Son is coming again, and that the kingdom is coming, and that we have that to look forward to. That because of what He has done for us on the cross, we not only have the forgiveness of sins, but we have all eternity. That You have purchased that for us. We pray that as we consider the text of Scripture before us this morning, that You would remind us of these great truths, that You would remind us of our hope, and that You would enable us to live in light of it. Don't let us, Father, devote our lives to things that pass away. To some extent, we have to do that, but we can do them with an attitude as serving unto You. We pray that You would instill that within our hearts and give us the anticipation, the expectation of the Lord's return.

Father, we pray also that You would bless those who are in need of Your assistance in this present time, because we are a people that live in the present with the needs of the present, and we thank You that in redeeming us to Yourself, You've also given us citizenship in heaven. You have given us membership in Your family, and You've given us access to Your throne of grace. And we remember those names that have been listed for us, the people who have requested our prayers. You know them, Father, and You know those who have not made such requests. You know our needs from the beginning to the end. You know them better than we do, and You know the best solution, and we pray that You would apply it.

Bless those in our congregation. Bless other Christians elsewhere, that we would look to You and that we would be good witnesses for You. Pray for our nation. We pray for our president, and the Congress, the leadership that You have

placed over us. We pray for those in high positions in courts. And in the local level, we pray for them as well, and pray that You give wisdom. And if it please You, Lord, that You would bring great revival upon this land, and bring many people to a saving knowledge of Your Son.

We are considering, Lord, the future events, the days that will come on this earth before Your Son's return, and they are terrible days. Days of great apostasy. And yet, we know also Lord that in those days will be great revival. An innumerable multitude will come out of the nations that You have purchased through the blood of Your Son, and a multitude will come out of the Jewish people.

And Lord, if You can do it in that time of apostasy, You can do it in this time as well. And we pray that You would do so, and use us in that great ministry. Make us bold in our professional faith. We're willing to take a stand and witness to the grace of God and the gospel. Pray for Your instruction now, Lord, and teach us, because You are the teacher. Bless these truths to our understanding. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.

[Message] We are and have been studying eschatology, the study or the doctrine of the last things, prophetic events. And the subject that addresses the question: how will it all end? A question I suspect has occupied the thoughts of men throughout history. And working with human reason alone, men have developed different answers to that question, from that of the ancient Greeks that there is no end to history. It's cyclical; nations would rise and nations would fall, and nations would rise and nations would fall. Time and history just go on in a circle like the seasons of the year.

And so, the Greeks had very little interest in the past and what had taken place, or in the future, what will take place. Because as far as I saw, they could see things, nothing really changed, and there was no goal to time, no goal to history. An equally discouraging view was that of the Nordic or the Germanic peoples who worshipped the gods Odin, and Thor, and Valhalla, and had their hope in that place. And yet, they were people without much hope at all, because ultimately, they believed that the gods would be overthrown, and evil would triumph over good, that the world would collapse and become a frozen waste.

"The gods are doomed, and the end is death," they said. Pretty bleak outlook. Which is interesting because modern science seems to have aligned up somewhat with that pagan view of things. Some scientists predict that the universe will eventually burn itself out and become a great dark cinder. They put it off a few billion years, so there's supposed to be, I guess, some hope in that, but ultimately all mankind is under the sentence of an inevitable doom.

Science seems very interested in the question of the nature of things, and of the end of things. They, many of them at least, don't stick to the observable facts, but tend to speculate on the meanings of things. And so, they enter into a little bit of the philosophy and even theology on their subject. And sometimes, they do so on things that they don't even observe. They can't even really apply the scientific method, too.

This last week, the Wall Street Journal ran an article entitled "The Cosmos Contemplated," which reviewed a book entitled "Through a Universe Darkly: A Cosmic Tale of Ethers, Dark Matter, and the Fate of the Universe." It's a very interesting article which focused on one aspect of the book in which scientists speculate that 99 percent of all matter in the universe is composed of dark matter. Which is very significant stuff, because its gravitational pull keeps the hundreds of billions of galaxies filled with their hundreds of billions of stars from spiraling out into chaos. It determines the ultimate shape of time and space.

So, our existence depends on dark matter. Problem is, it's invisible. No one's ever seen it. In fact, we don't even know that it exists. It's an hypothesis. But if it does exist, key ingredients of it may be either weakly interacting massive particles, known as WIMPs; or massive astrophysical compact halo objects, known as MACHOs. Kind of reminds you of high school. The wimps and the machos.

Well, it's kind of disturbing to think that your whole fate may depend upon a bunch of wimps. But what was particularly disturbing to one of the scientists, astrophysicists who is interviewed or contributes to the book is that she hopes that she lives to find out the answer to the question of dark matter and the nature and fate of the universe. But she said, "My greatest fear is that the solution will be boring."

Well, I don't know much about dark matter other than what I read in that article, but I do know that the solution won't be boring. The Bible is very clear about that. It's clear about how things are held together, and what the end will be. And if that sounds a bit unscientific, well, it's an answer that's been given to us by the one

who knows it all, who created everything, who knows every atom, holds all the galaxies and the stars in place. The only one, really, who was able to explain it all. And He has revealed both the origin and the destiny of all things. And for the Christian, it's not a gloomy or boring future. It's a glorious one. The Lord Jesus Christ will return with the clouds in power and in glory, defeat the forces of antichrist and Satan, and establish His kingdom on the earth. That's the goal of history.

That's our great hope, and it's one of the fundamentals of the faith. Christians may disagree about some of the particulars about eschatology, about prophetic events, but one fact that they all agree on, and one fact that they hold as very important is the hope of the second coming of Christ. It's a fundamental of the faith. Premillennialists, amillennialists, postmillennialists all agree on that point, and it is a major theme of the Bible.

James Montgomery Boice wrote a brief article on this that brings out the statistical features of this, and the prominence that's given to this doctrine of the second coming. And he writes that in the New Testament, 1 verse in 25 deals with the Lord's return. It's mentioned 318 times in the 260 chapters. It occupies a prominent place in the Old Testament in that most of the Old Testament prophecies concerning our Lord's return, or the coming of the Lord don't concern the Lord's first advent when He came as the sin bearer, but concern His second advent when He is to rule as king. It's mentioned in every New Testament book with the exception of the Books of Galatians, 2 and 3 John, and the Lord Himself spoke of it frequently to His disciples. So, you see the importance of it, and the attention that's given to this subject by the Lord Himself and by the apostles and by the prophets of the Old Testament. Or put in another way, you see the importance that the Holy Spirit placed upon it because as He began to reveal God's word to us from beginning to end, He emphasizes over and over again, that Jesus Christ is Lord of history and He will return, and He will bring His glorious kingdom.

All of which, as I say, shows us the importance of these things. It's not just a solution to a puzzle that we have about how it will all end. It's not just the solution to satisfy our curiosity. It is an answer that has great practical influence upon us. Or so it should, because it's the answer that gives hope. Man without hope is lost. All men need hope. And without it, there's nothing but despair, and that leads to suicide and other calamities.

And so, men manufacture hope. If they don't have it, they try to manufacture it. But what the Word of God gives us is real hope, genuine hope, and we need that hope. But it also gives to us the motivation to live a righteous life, and it places a constraint upon sin. We see that throughout the Scriptures.

I want to spend some time before we get into our text, as a matter of fact, looking at these things, that we would get our minds oriented to the fact that this is a very important subject. We don't have to go back very far in our study of Mark to see the importance that the Lord placed upon His return. Because in chapter 8, verse 38, He said, "Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation," of Him, "Will the Son of Man also be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels?"

Now, you can see there that the Lord is explaining His second coming in a way that is to influence our daily conduct now. He's coming again. And it's going to be a day of reckoning. The apostle Paul brings that out also in Romans chapter 14 and 2 Corinthians chapter 5. We are all going to stand before the judgment seat of our Lord, and we're going to give an account for our deeds, good and bad as well. So, the question that we should ask ourselves is: where are we going to stand in that day?

Peter does much the same in 2 Peter chapter 3 and verse 11 in view of the fact that everything in this world as we know it is coming to an end, that the temporal things will not last, and all that we build for time is not going to endure, because Christ is coming back and He's going to change everything. Peter says, "What sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?" Are you going to squander your testimony or compromise your character for a few years of ease and comfort? Or take a stand and take a difficult stand in the midst of a hostile world?

We have a good example of that in the Book of Hebrews in the life of Moses. Moses was a man who had great privilege, great opportunity to live life to the full in Egypt, because he was raised in the palace. And yet, he came to a point in his life when he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, "choosing," the author says, "rather to endure ill treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ, greater riches and the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward." There is a reward that comes, and the Lord is going to bring that.

Coming to the Lord has great influence upon our lives. Did upon the life of Moses and the other great saints. It's a sobering fact. We will give an account before the Lord. And yet, more than that, I think, the coming of the Lord is hopeful. It encourages hope. It encourages joy within the believer. And the joy is that we don't live under the sentence of doom. We have a glorious future ahead of us.

In John 14 verse 3, the Lord encouraged His disciples. You remember, He's told them that He's leaving. They're very discouraged over that. He says, "When I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself that where I am, you may be also." So there's going to be a great reunion. This is not the end of all things. All of God's people will be reunited with one another. And most importantly, we will be reunited with our Lord Himself.

Peter calls our Lord's return "our living hope." Titus chapter 2 and verse 13, Paul speaks of the appearing of the Lord in glory as our "blessed hope." He says that we're to be looking for it. And he develops that in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 16 and following, where he says, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus shall we always be with the Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these words."

Comfort one another with these words not only because it's a great reunion that we're going to have, that all those that have been lost in this life will be re-gathered in the future, but also because a great change is coming with that event. That's what the apostles develop as well. Paul, in Philippians chapter 3 verses 20 and 21 speaks of the Lord coming from heaven, and speaks of us eagerly waiting for that. And when He comes, He will transform the body of our humble estate into conformity with the body of His glory.

So, there's going to be a glorious change that will take place in these bodies. And John develops that as well in 1 John 3:2 where he says, "We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is." An amazing transformation is going to occur when He returns, literally, physically, and we see Him, we, who are on the earth when He comes, will be transformed into glorious people, glorious bodies.

Now, in principle, that happens now, as we read the Scriptures and see Him in the Scriptures. You can look over at 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and verse 18, and that's the point that Paul develops there. That as we see Christ in the Scriptures, as we study the Bible, there is an amazing change that takes place, a mysterious change. The Spirit of God takes that which we have learned, and with it, He applies it to us and changes our character. Changes the inner person, as He says, from glory to glory. But, the day is coming when we will behold Him, if we are alive and remain on the earth when He comes, and we will be changed into that glorious appearance.

Well, the Lord and the apostles develop that link throughout the Scriptures and make it very clear that this second coming of our Lord is an important doctrine, that it is a hope that is to occupy our thoughts. And if it does occupy our thoughts, then it will change us. Because as John says, every one who has this hope fixed on Him, purifies himself as He, as our Lord is pure. Lord Shaftesbury, a great English social reformer said near the end of his life, "I do not think that in the last 40 years, I have lived one conscious hour that was not influenced by the thought of our Lord's return." There's a man who's a living, was a living example of one whose life was literally changed and influenced by the hope of our Lord's return. It is life-changing. And so, Paul says that we are to be looking for the Lord's coming.

Our Lord says in our passage that we are to be on the alert. It's our great hope, it's the blessed hope, and a great motivation for righteous living. He is coming with His reward. He promises to give to every man according to what he has done.

And so naturally, with the glory that's to come, and all of the greatness that's to come, and the great joy and hope that that gives us, we want to know when He's coming. He has described His coming for us in verses 24 through 27, and He said that we should observe certain signs that portend His coming, foreshadow it. But on what date can we expect His arrival?

That's the question that was on the minds of His disciples, and it's the question that our Lord now takes up in the remainder of our chapter, which He does with a parable. It's a parable that not only addresses the time of His coming, but also the concerns that must have been felt very keenly by these disciples, because the Lord has described for them great tribulations and persecutions that will come upon the earth before He returns. And so, His parable gives them the assurance that He will come back, that He will deliver them, and that that is a certain hope.



Verse 28. "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near." Now, one of the questions that commentators raise is: what is the significance of the fig tree? And particularly, the question concerns: does the fig tree represent Israel? And there is some precedent for taking that interpretation, that it does represent Israel. Because if you'll remember earlier in chapter 11, the Lord cursed the fig tree, and it was a symbol, something of a parable in itself, of Israel. It had leaves, but it had no fruit. Israel is a nation that has religion but it has no reality to that religion, no real fruit. And so, He curses it, showing His rejection of empty religion, and showing the fate of Israel. Judgment that would come upon it. And so, as I say, there's some warrant for seeing it that way, but little warrant for the conclusions that some have drawn from that interpretation.

About 20 years ago, a very popular book came out in which the author identified the fig tree as Israel, and dated the putting forth of its leaves as 1948 when Israel became a modern state. And since the Lord says in verse 30, "This generation will not pass away," he concluded that we are that generation. Then, calculating a generation to be 40 years, he deduced that within 40 years or so of 1948, which is around 1988, the Lord might return.

Well, 1988's come and gone, so it doesn't look very hopeful for that interpretation, but it raised a lot of interest at the time. I can remember that. One problem with interpreting the fig tree as Israel is that in Luke's account of this, the Lord says, "Behold the fig tree and all the trees." In other words, he seems to be saying trees in general are the parable. Look at nature. It tells you something.

And the fig tree was particularly good for this because they're on the Mount of Olives, and the Mount of Olives was well-known for its fig trees. Many of them were very large fig trees. And so, that one may have been in front of them. And one thing that's characteristic of the fig tree is that it begins to leaf out in late winter, early spring. And so, this tree that has lost its leaves in the fall, is barren in the winter. When it begins to put forth those chutes, signifies that warm weather is coming, that summer is near, that there's a change of seasons.

And in the same way, the events of history indicate that. They don't indicate the precise moment and the point of the fig tree is not to emphasize immediacy of the end, of the coming of the Lord, and the coming kingdom, but it does show proximity.

And those signs that we see, that he has described here, do indicate that the Lord's return is near. It's coming. And so, He says in verse 29, "Even so, you too, when you see these things happening, recognize that He is near, right at the door."

In Luke's account, the Lord says, "Recognize that the kingdom of God is near." So we could put these two together very nicely in the fact that with the coming of the king, will come the kingdom. The king will bring His kingdom.

Well, that's something He says is near. And we're to be looking at the signs, and we're to be observing them. And it calls for careful study, and not predicting the time of the coming, but knowing that in these signs, we do see the reality, the indication that the Lord is going to come again. And they remind us of that. And we should give attention to it.

And in verse 30, the Lord stresses the certainty of His coming. "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Now, there's a certain solemnity about this statement, because the Lord begins it by saying, "Truly I say to you." So, we're to give special attention to these words, and a lot of attention has been given to them, primarily attention that centers on the meaning of the expression "this generation."

What does it mean? What generation? Our Lord's generation or some other generation? Or how do we understand that word? And many have understood the Lord to be referring to His own generation, and that He was expecting the end within His lifetime, or within the lifetime of His disciples, and that case was simply mistaken, because it didn't happen.

That's the view of Albert Schweitzer, for example, and he makes that description or that explanation plain in his monumental work, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus." And in his book, he makes the point that Jesus was looking for the coming of the kingdom of God on earth in his day. He had the Jewish expectation of a coming kingdom, and He tried to force the events of history by challenging the authorities, and in so doing, hoping to cause that kingdom to appear. And so, as Schweitzer puts it, He took hold of the wheel of history, but it wouldn't move. And so, He cast Himself upon the wheel of history, crushing Him. And as the wheel of history rolls on, the mangled body of Jesus hangs upon it. He describes Him as a courageous man, the most courageous man of history. But He was mistaken.

Now, of course, orthodox Christians could never accept such a conclusion, which is the common view in one form or another of liberal theologians. We could not accept that because, as the Son of God, Jesus is perfect and could not make an error in His divine or His human natures. And further, the idea that the Lord was giving a date, even a general date within a period of time of His generation, that is totally contrary to the context. because in verse 32, He states that He doesn't know the time of His return.

Well, others have interpreted the word "generation" to mean the Jewish race. So that the Lord is saying that the Jewish people would not pass away before the kingdom comes. And of course, that is a true idea. It's a true position. The Jewish people will not pass away from the earth. But that's a very questionable meaning for this word "generation."

There are examples that might fit that specific generation, that of His contemporaries. He was referring to His disciples, but understand Him to be speaking only of those signs that lead up to and include the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. So, the Lord was saying these events would begin to unfold before His contemporaries passed away. Not all of them would happen, but they would begin to unfold.

The weakness of that view is that it doesn't really do justice to this expression "all things" in verse 30. "This generation will not pass away until all these things take place." And that has to include the second coming that is described in the previous passage, verses 24 through 27.

So, that's a difficult position to hold. Now others have said, well, it does include those verses, but those verses aren't really describing the second coming. Marcellus Kik, who was a postmillennialist, has advocated that view in his book, "An Eschatology of Victory," in which he explains that the coming of the Lord on the clouds is merely a metaphorical description of judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70. The problem with that view is that if you look at Revelation, which was written after the destruction of Jerusalem, the Lord describes, rather, John describes our Lord's coming in the words that are similar to this, the same words that are used in Matthew's account, the parallel passage with this one in Mark, in which the Lord comes on the clouds, and the tribes of the earth mourn at His coming. And there, it's clearly a reference to the second coming.

And so, I'm inclined to the interpretation that this generation refers to the last generation, the generation that will be on the earth in the final days when these events unfold. In which case, the Lord is assuring them, assuring His people generally, that when the trials begin, when persecutions increase, that the end would come soon. It's very similar to what He said in verse 20. "For the sake of the elect, He would shorten those days."

So, they were not to despair. And that last generation is not to despair when trials begin and when the tribulation comes, because He will come again. And the emphasis here is on the certainty of His coming; not on the end or the time of His coming. That that generation would not pass away before the completion of the events with our Lord's return.

And in verse 31, He adds further confirmation to the certain of His coming, and the reliability of His words when He says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away." They are that certain. They are that firm. They are that fixed. The whole universe, all of creation is less reliable than His words. As great and as old and as enduring as the Himalayas are, or the Rocky Mountains are, they will all turn to dust before His words fail.

Now, they will come to an end. And the Scriptures make that very clear. Isaiah states that this world will wear out like an old garment. There will be a new heaven, and there will be a new earth, but that's part of our Lord's word. That's His promise. That's certain. God's word, as He says, never fails. The universe will come to an end, but God's word will never ever come to an end. And so, we're to trust in what He says.

And yet, that's difficult to do. At least the world finds that impossible to do. And evidently, some within the church have found it difficult as well. Peter, as you know, in 2 Peter chapter 3 records what some of the skeptics in his day were saying about the Lord's return. And in chapter 3 of 2 Peter in verse 4, he writes their words: "Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the Fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."

And that is something of a convincing argument. Because what they're saying is: look at history. Nothing's really changed. Things come and go. Wars happen. Peace breaks out. War occurs. On and on, repeating the same thing. It's like a wheel that keeps turning. We hear about the Lord's coming, but we don't see it. Thousands

of years have rolled by. The Lord hadn't come. But the Lord says, "Don't look at the world, and don't listen to what the skeptics say. You listen to what I say, and My word is a promise that is firm and true and certain. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away."

Those are amazing words for anyone to say. I wonder if any of us would dare to say something like that. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. Very similar to what is written in Isaiah 40 in verse 8. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of God stands forever.

The Lord is saying essentially the same thing. And in saying it, he's saying My word is divine. It's the Word of God. And what He's saying in that, or what is being clearly suggested by that is that He is divine. He is God's eternal Son. And that's why His words are reliable. They're not reliable and they're not something we should hang onto because they're a wonderful hope, and every man needs hope, and even if it's not true, we've got to have hope, and it sure sounds wonderful to say there's an end to history, and it's a glorious. That's not the reason we hold onto these words and this promise; it's because of the person who said them. He is the Son of God. He is the maker of heaven and earth. He is seated at the Father's right hand, and He is in control of all things. He is directing history.

As the author of Hebrews writes of our Lord in Hebrews 1 verse 2, He is the one who made the ages. That's literally how that expression is to be translated. He's the one who makes history. He makes the events. And not only that, he goes on to state that He upholds all things by the word of His power. So if there is some dark matter, He's the one that holds it together. He's the one that holds all things together.

And so, all of the promises that He makes to us are reliable. And we simply need to realize that and to live in light of them. Now, I think we can take that and, in principle, bring that into the present to a very applicable point. And that is, that if the Lord is the one in control of history, and He's bringing it to His determined end, and it's going to be a glorious end in which He will remove all of the armies of the world, He will bring peace upon the earth. He's going to bring it to a glorious conclusion, then can He not do the same in our lives personally in the present? If He's that great to orchestrate history to its glorious end, one that He's determined, can He not orchestrate the events in our life to a good end? Can we not trust Him for that?

I got a phone call just yesterday from a friend of mine who's a business man. He owns a company. And he faced what I guess he'd say was the greatest crisis in his career as a businessman just the other day. He needed financing for his company. They thought they had it all lined up, and then suddenly there were problems, an avalanche of problems. And they kept solving the problems as the day went on. But toward the end of the afternoon, he had two highly paid lawyers on one speakerphone, and his accountants on the other speakerphone, and all of them were saying to him: what do we do?

Now, he's paying them to tell him what to do, and they're saying, "We don't know what to do." And so, he said, "I don't know," and he went home, or he left the office, and he prayed. And he cast himself before the Lord, and he said, "I'm at the end of my rope. I have no one to turn to but You. I have sought to conduct my business affairs in a godly way and be a testimony to You, but if You don't intervene, then this is finished."

Got home, his wife said, "Oh, everybody's been calling. They've got great news." And with some trepidation, he went to the phone, he called his lawyers, and they'd found the solution. The Lord brought him to the point where he had to cast himself upon Him, and the Lord was faithful. He's always faithful to us, always. We can trust Him at every moment. His word is true now, and the promises that He gives for the future, they are certain, and we can rely upon them.

Well, the Lord now concludes with a call for vigilance. In light of these promises, in light of the certain hope that we have of His coming, He says, "Take heed, keep on the alert." He says that in verse 33. And the reason is because we don't know when the Lord is coming. Verse 32. "But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone."

Now, you might wonder how it can be that having just said that His words about the future are eternal, that they are divine, what He says is the Word of God, that how He can then confess His lack of knowledge concerning the future. How can He, as the Son of God, not know something. God is omniscient. If He is God's Son, He must be omniscient. He must be all-knowing. And yet, He says He doesn't know.

Well, of course that's true. He is God's son. God's Son is omniscient. Not only is He perfect, God, He is also perfect man. But, in His humanity, He was limited. Not defective. He was not in error. But, He experienced the limitations of a

finite human nature, and that's what Paul is describing for us in Philippians chapter 2 where he describes our Lord as humbling Himself when He became a man, as he describes it, becoming a bondservant. And He emptied Himself. He didn't empty Himself of His deity, but He did empty Himself of the prerogative of His deity, of the full use of His divine attributes. And in joining His divine nature to a human nature in one person as the Godman, He limited Himself as a man.

He had a genuine humanity. It wasn't a kind of divine humanity that was omniscient as a man. He was subject to the limitations of mankind because He limited it Himself in the incarnation. And in so doing, He placed Himself under the authority and the guidance of His father.

So in His humanity, we see Him experiencing fatigue, thirst, hunger, ignorance in matters which the Father withheld from His human knowledge. And the Father has withheld that from the understanding of mankind altogether. God has not told man the date of our Lord's return. He has kept that from us, and there's wisdom in that. I think it's apparent from the exhortations that follow to be on the alert.

And so, by not revealing the date of our Lord's return, believers are kept with that attitude, kept in that attitude of constant expectation. And while it's tempting to conclude from the signs of the times that the end is close at hand, and it may very well be, we should realize that it's always seemed that way to men. Every generation has felt that they're in the last time. I say every generation. That may not be true across the board, but frequently you see that. 1,000 years ago when the Vikings were raiding the English coast, sermons were preached to the English people that the world was near its end.

I have a friend who translated a sermon for me by the Archbishop of York in which that's the point he makes. The end is near, he says. In the early years of the Reformation, Martin Luther was convinced that the papacy would crumble, that the Jews and Turks would be converted, and Christ would return. And down through the ages, people have felt that their generation must be the last generation. And some have even set dates for it, set dates for our Lord's return.

There's a famous example of that with the Baptist minister William Miller who predicted that Christ's return would be in 1843. And he even wrote a book about it. Can you imagine someone writing a book where they put the date of the Lord's return? You can, because you probably read a bunch of them yourself. They come

out quite frequently. And he did that and had a predictable result. Multitudes of people, thousands of people accepted the view, and some of them even prepared for His coming by putting on white robes and going to the top of the hill, and waiting for Him to come.

Well, you can see why some people mock at the idea of the Lord's return because of activity like that. No one knows the date. It's not for us to know the date. And were we to know the date, it would be a hindrance for many of us. I include myself in that. If I knew the Lord was coming in 100 years or 200 years or 50 years, it would affect the way I live. I'm sure it would. We're that sinful, and we're that prone to wander.

The Lord has kept us in the dark on that for very practical reason. He keeps us anticipating. He keeps us expecting it with a very real hope that is ours. We don't know the date, and so what we are to be doing is living each day busy with the work that God has given us.

One writer, CFD Moule, a British commentator likens our situation to athletes in a game. The clock is ticking down, but the athlete, the player is not to be worried about the clock. There's the coach, and there's the captain to worry about that. He is to worry about where he is supposed to be when the pass is thrown. He is to worry about his assignment. That's what we're to worry about. We're to be concerned about our responsibilities. That's what we're to focus on. Doing it in the light of His coming, knowing that He's coming, and that should give an urgency to what we do. But what we're to concentrate on is the responsibility that God has placed upon us, which is not only a responsibility but a great privilege. Not to be distracted by dates, but to concentrate on the work that we have been given, and doing so with the expectation of the blessed hope. Because it may come soon. We may be that generation that sees the Lord face to face.

Well, He illustrates the importance of living expectantly with another parable in verses 34 through 36. This is of a man who goes on a journey and leaves his house. And leaving the house, he leaves it to his servants. And they have certain responsibilities that they are to be engaged in while he's gone. Then, as he leaves, he says to the doorkeeper, "Stay on the alert." Then the Lord turns to the disciples and says in verse 35 and 36: "Therefore, be on the alert – for you do not know when the master of the house is coming, whether in the evening, at midnight, or when the



rooster crows, or in the morning – in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep."

We're like those servants in the house. We have our duties to perform, and we are to be engaged in them. We're to be like that doorkeep. We're to be on the alert. We're to be looking for our Lord's return. There are a number of ways in which we do that. We're to be on the alert, keep awake regarding our spiritual condition. It's very easy to become lethargic about spiritual things, to become dull, to begin to drift. And when we do that, we're to challenge one another, to provoke one another to righteousness, provoke ourselves to righteousness. We do that by reading the word. We do that through prayer. That's another way in which we keep on the alert. We keep in communion with our Lord in prayer, and seek His face, and seek His guidance. And then thirdly, we do that by carrying out the duties, as we have already stressed. We can all serve the Lord. In fact, we all have the responsibility to serve the Lord, whether we're businessmen, or housewives, or secretaries, or businesswomen, or whatever our position is. It may be that of a student. We are to be serving the Lord in every capacity, and seeking to be a witness for Him in every place that He's given to us. We're not to be idle. We're not to be asleep. And knowing that He's coming, being alert to that fact and to the signs that point to His return is a motivation to be diligent in our labors.

John Calvin was a man who was very diligent, very diligent in the labors that he had been given all of his life. In fact, his health suffered as a result of it. And toward the end of his life, when friends wanted him to slow down and do less work, he would say to them, "Would you have my master find me idle?" Would any of us have our master find us idle? The return of the Lord is a strong incentive to godly living and disciple.

The Lord concludes with verse 37 by again underscoring the point. "What I say to you I say to all, 'Be on the alert!'" The Lord's discourse in chapter 13 began by Him saying, "See to it that no one misleads you," which is just another way of saying, "Be on the alert." Don't be deceived. Be alert. Don't be deceived by false signs that come, and false interpretations of the signs that we see around us. Don't be deceived by the length of time that has passed between our Lord's first and second coming.

Be on the alert. That's the keynote of this whole address. Be watchful. Be alert. These days in which we live are evil, and these days are short. They're going to

come to an end one way or another. And the Lord is coming again. So, we're to be alert to that and live in light of it.

Francis Schaeffer wrote a well-known book, a book that I'm sure many of you have in your homes, entitled "How Should We Then Live?" That word "then" is really very important to the title; the whole title pivots on that word "then." It makes the point of the question. It's not just, "How should we live?" But, "How should we then live?" That is, how should we live in light of all that we have as Christians? How should we live in light of the work that the Lord has done in His first advent, obtaining salvation for us? The forgiveness of sins, the possession of the Holy Spirit. All that we have now, how should we live in light of that? How should we live in light of this great truth that He has set forth here, of His coming again, of our blessed hope, of the truth, the reality that He is coming again to judge the living and the dead?

Well, the Lord has told us how we are to live. We are to live in light of these truths. We are, as He says, to be on the alert. And the importance of that is seen again in the way it is described throughout the Bible, all the way to the end. Revelation chapter 22 concludes on that great note of hope where the Lord says, "Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with Me to render to every man according to what he has done."

When He comes, how will He find you? Spiritually alive and at work, spiritually alive but asleep, or spiritually dead? If you're here this morning and you don't know Christ as your Savior and as your Lord, then you're a man or a woman who has not believed in Him, who have not trusted in Him, and you are spiritually dead; and being spiritually dead, you're under God's judgment. And the day of judgment is quickly approaching. We don't know when it is, but it's coming. He's promised us that it is. Whether you've thought much about history and the goal of history, and whether there is a goal of history, the Scriptures are very clear: there is a goal to history; there is an end to things. They will all come to a great conclusion with our Lord's return. And then, the judgment seat.

Are you ready to meet Him? There's only one way to be ready to meet our Lord, and that is to believe in Him, to recognize that you are a sinner, that you are, as a sinner, deserving of judgment, and to look to Jesus as the solution, as the Savior, as the one who became a man in order to represent men in judgment, to stand in their place, to bear the wrath of God in their place, to bear it for everyone who believes in

Him. And the promise is that all who come to Him, everyone who believes in Him will be saved.

Have you believed in Him? May God give you the grace to turn to Christ and look to Him, and may God give grace to all of us. Help us be on the alert and live lives in light of His coming. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Gracious heavenly Father, we do thank You for the great promise that we have before us, the blessed hope as we look to our Lord's return someday, and pray that You would help us to live in light of it. Live lives that take into account that things of this age in which we live are going to come to an end. One way or another, they're going to end. Either the age will come to the end, or we will leave it ourselves in death, but we will not be here forever. Help us to live for what is to come, for what is eternal. We pray that You would enable us to do that by Your grace. And we pray that if there be any in attendance who do not know Christ as Savior, that You would so move upon their heart to give them the realization of their lost condition and their need of a Savior, that they might turn to Him, whom to know is life eternal. We pray these things in our Savior's name. Amen.