

DO YOU KNOW THE TIME?

Mark 13:24-37 Text vs. 33 *“Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.”*

In last Sunday’s sermon I asked if you knew where you were going at the end of time. I ended by saying you shouldn’t go the way that leads to eternal Hell. You should go the way that leads to eternal life through Jesus Christ! Jesus didn’t say when the end of time was going to happen. But an American Baptist minister named William Miller began a religious movement known as *Millerism* and was convinced it would happen April 3, 1843, in Philadelphia, PA. Some of his disciples, called *Millerites*, set off to the Allegheny mountaintops hoping to get a head start to heaven. Others went to cemeteries to be reunited with their deceased loved ones so that when they were resurrected, they could go up to heaven with them. Society ladies gathered outside Philadelphia not wanting to enter God’s kingdom with all the *“common folk.”* Well, April 4th came and went. It didn’t happen! Those Millerites were disappointed. But they took heart. Their leader had given them a series of dates for Christ’s return. They still had another year. They got ready for March 21, 1844. But again, nothing happened! A third date was set. October 22, 1844. It passed. So, William Miller wasn’t alone in attempting this. Others have tried to predict when Jesus will return. Many more will continue trying. But they’re missing the point! Jesus said *be ready*, no matter what!

And our lesson this morning is from Jesus’ sermon in the Gospel of Mark about the end of time. It’s the longest sermon ever given by Jesus and He describes the end of the world and what will happen in His Second Coming. He will come in clouds with great power and glory. He will send His angels to gather His elect from the four winds. And from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. He made the point that it’s like a fig tree blossoming. When you see that happening, you know that fruit time is coming and it won’t be long! Jesus said no one knows the day, or hour of His return. Not even the angels in heaven. Not the Son. Only God the Father knows. So, He urged all His followers to be on guard. Be alert. Keep watch. Be ready. Because you don’t know the time. That’s why this passage of Scripture is used as a call to be prepared for the end of the world. It’s a warning to live a life of faithfulness and righteousness. It’s a reminder that if you are in God’s care, you will be together with Him in the end. His warning was it’s important for you to be prepared for what’s coming your way. His words are to remind you to always be prepared for the future. And preparation is key when it comes to facing the challenges of life. Jesus said without faith and trust, you cannot be saved. He taught His disciples it was important to have meditation and devotion in their lives. If they wanted to understand His teachings, they needed to reflect on them. And pray.

It’s the same for you! If you want to have a meaningful relationship with God, have faith and trust Him. And the importance of being watchful can’t be overstated. Earlier in this chapter of Mark, Jesus was warning about the dangers of being *unaware*. The disciples were scared about His leaving them. They didn’t know what they were going to do. Jesus calmed them down and told them He was coming back, soon. He told them to stay alert. And not to be fooled by the Devil. So, what are some of the signs He gave of *the end*? The sun will be darkened. The moon will not give its light. Stars will fall from heaven. The heavens will be shaken. The people of Earth will mourn. There will be an increase in wars and violent behavior. Earthquakes, food shortages, epidemics will increase. He was, also, warning about the importance of being prepared for the coming of the Antichrist. Be prepared to resist Satan. And be prepared for what may come. So, you can live in peace and safety. But what *is* coming? The Doomsday Clock has never been closer to “midnight.” Climate-change may cause devastation. Modern technologies will move forward. A global financial collapse is possible. The development of machine intelligence will change lives. The end of humanity is as old as humanity itself. Astrologists and religious orders have predicted the end of the world for centuries. But the risks today are distinctive to our own time. And irreversible. The risks have worldwide outreach.

Philosopher Nick Bostrom, a Swedish philosopher at the University of Oxford, and founding director of the Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford University has written about how intelligent life on earth can drastically and forever destroy any possibility for the future. Which brings us to the phenomenon of *“prepping”* which is a plan for storing food, water, and weapons. It’s developing skills on how to survive disasters. Books, podcasts, movies and TV shows are about it. Along with markets for camping equipment and bushcraft.

So, is there still hope in the world? Yes, there still is hope in the world. Despite the challenges we face. There are many reasons to be optimistic about the future. Extreme poverty is decreasing. The number of people that are living on *less* than \$1.90 a day are living in extreme poverty. That’s *\$57 a month!* That’s now dropped by more than one billion people. In the last 20 years the number of children around the world dying from things they shouldn’t, such as hunger, poverty, and disease, has dropped by half - from 30,000 *a day* to less than 15,000 *a day*. Between 2000 and 2017, the rate of women dying in childbirth, or birth complications, dropped by 38%. Better nutrition and access to quality healthcare are letting babies have a healthier start in life. Improved water and sanitation systems are preventing many diseases and are strengthening children’s immune systems. Vaccination prevents two to three million deaths each year. And more than twenty-five dangerous and devastating diseases, such as diarrhea, tetanus, measles, pneumonia, tuberculosis, and polio, are being stopped in their tracks by vaccinations. Immunization for children is now in every corner of the world and is saving more lives than any other health initiative of the past 50 years. Artificial Intelligence. Research is advancing rapidly. *Sports*

Illustrated is under fire for allegedly publishing articles that were written by artificial intelligence and not telling their readers. Computer generated articles by A. I. have the potential to revolutionize countless parts of our lives, from healthcare to transportation to entertainment. Even fewer hours worked. Some are talking about a three-day workweek with artificial intelligence!

Despite all of this, faith and trust in God are still necessary for any meaningful relationship with God. And our lesson today concludes that Jesus is coming back, soon. That should make you think about how you are living your life. Stay alert. Don't be fooled by the Devil. Stop being a prisoner of your past. You can't change it! Don't worry about the future. What's meant to be will be. Live your life in the present appreciating each moment as a gift by being aware of your thoughts and feelings and not being distracted by other things. And as you enter this Advent Season, look forward to the birth of Jesus which brings hope, no matter what you are facing. God is with you. He has made a way for your forgiveness. So, when the supernatural coming of Jesus does happen, you should have nothing to fear. It's all been predicted. It's all been planned. It's expected.

So, take comfort in the signs. They're the promises of God coming to fulfillment. We're not told to get ready for a particular date. But on December 25th we're going to celebrate His *First* Coming. The Birth of Jesus described in Scripture doesn't tell us how we are to do it *now*. We know it's coming. It's all about being ready for Christmas. And for this first Sunday of Advent, we've decorated the tree and the church. We've hung ornaments and wreaths. We're ready for Christmas. And that's what's taught in our lesson today. Always be ready. Because no one knows the exact time when Jesus will return for the second time. It could be before Christmas. Which means you had better be prepared. That's the choice every Christian should make. It's a powerful way to keep focused on your faith. Living a life of purpose and meaning. Reading the Bible every day. Praying. Attending church regularly. All help you stay connected to your faith and help you feel more prepared for Jesus' return. As we learned last Sunday, live a life of service. Help others in need. Volunteer. Be kind to those around you. That will help you live a life of purpose and meaning. And you will be making a positive impact on the world. You don't know *when* Jesus will return. But you know He *will*.

Living your life expecting Jesus' return at any moment should be your choice. The Bible teaches, always be ready for Jesus' return, because you don't know when it will happen. And since you don't know the time, being ready is certainly the best thing for you to do. But, if you're not ready for Jesus' return, you are going to be judged by God according to your deeds. The Bible says those who have not accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior will be separated from Him for eternity. And so, it's important to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior. And to live a life that's pleasing to Him. If you have not accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, do it today. The Bible says if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. Let us pray: Heavenly Father, we thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. Help us be ready for His return, and to live a life that is pleasing to Him as we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior and share His love and truth with others. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN