

## **Sermon: Our waiting for Jesus**

At first glance, the passage from Mark is full of doom and gloom. The disciples asked for signs of the end times, and Jesus told them that the end times would be full of danger. Is this really the way for us to start the season of Advent? Isn't Advent supposed to be a time of hope and preparation?

The answer to both questions is yes. Advent isn't about preparing for Christmas. It's about preparing for the coming of Christ. Advent always begins with preparing and waiting for Christ to come again. Just as the first coming was an event of cosmic proportion, so will the second coming be.

The passage from Mark is not meant to frighten us. It is meant to comfort us, especially as we face life's trials. When people are suffering, we must acknowledge their pain, grief and obstacles. When we see the problems that will accompany the end times, it isn't a sign that the Kingdom is late or has been derailed. We don't know when it will come, but nothing can stop it from coming.

Jesus said that only God knows when Christ will return. Although Jesus was fully God, when he became human he voluntarily restricted the use of certain divine attributes. He didn't use them unless God told him to. He showed his Godlike character on several occasions, but he restricted the use of His divine attributes to those things God wanted him to know during his time on earth.

Power and glory belong to God and to those who know him and share the fellowship of his sufferings. As proof, he will send his angels to gather those he chooses to elect from every corner of the earth.

Just as summer arrives in Israel soon after fig trees start to blossom, so Jesus will return at the very end of the Great Tribulation, (when the Lord will accomplish at least two aspects of his plan.

He will complete his discipline of the nation Israel, and he will judge the unbelieving, godless inhabitants of the earth in power and glory), to set up his reign on a restored earth. This should not be confused with the Rapture, the catching up of the saints that will occur before the Tribulation begins.

The Lord did not say the things in verses 32-37 to prompt speculation on when he might return. The Christian's responsibility is to remain watchful, pure and ready. Jesus assures the disciples and us that God is in control of the universe. He assures them and us that their faith (and ours) will be rewarded with salvation.

We are noted at times to be impatient people. That's one reason why it's so hard for us to obey Jesus when he tells us to watch for his return. It's not part of our nature. We want what we want, and we want it now. If we can't have it right now, we're going to do something else. Yes, it's hard for us to wait for Jesus, but we ought to do it. Why?

1. Because Jesus asked us to be prepared for that unknown hour.
2. Because we will be released from the testing and temptations of this sinful place called earth.
3. Because when Jesus returns, all those who believe and have been granted forgiveness are going to be given a life which makes the best offerings of this world seem second-rate.

The promise of the permanence of the phrase, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will by no means pass away," has sustained Christians throughout history. Jesus came through times when his enemies tried to attack and trap him. They failed, and so will everyone who tries to find flaws in anything he says. He proved that his words are true. He can now say they are eternally sure.

The passage portrays the application of vigilance. Being on guard, being alert and watching, means more than expectant waiting. It means standing ready and being prepared for the Messiah's return. Christ's return is a forceful incentive for faithful discipleship. Our faithfulness is determined by our faith in Christ. We are saved by grace through faith, not by works. We must rely on Christ all the time.

What will Jesus find when he returns? Jesus has charged us with the responsibility for the household of faith. If we fall asleep so that the household misses his coming, God will hold us responsible.

Christ warned us to always be alert. We as believers don't have in ourselves sufficient resources to be alert to spiritual dangers that can so easily surprise us.

God gives each of us our own work to do. He expects us to faithfully carry out the duties He has given us in Jesus' absence. Things will get worse before they get better. Properly understood, waiting for Christ's return should help us live vigorously as we do God's work in our world. Our lives will be very different if we live in the continual awareness of his coming. Being awake to Jesus gives meaning to our lives.

The Bible is still relevant today. It tells us about God, and God never changes. Because God doesn't change, we can depend on his word and turn to it for the guidance and help we need. Also, human nature has not changed. Just as God's word spoke to generations past, it still speaks to us-rebuking us, guiding us and turning us toward God.

If we don't prepare ourselves ahead of time for Judgment Day, we won't have time to prepare on that day. Either we will be ready, or we won't. On that day we will acknowledge Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, or we won't. On that day we will have been forgiven of our sins, or we won't. Jesus is coming, and we have to make sure that as many people as possible are prepared for that day.

Whether Jesus comes again in our lifetime or not, we would do well to be prepared. Whether or not we will be alive to see the end of the world as we know it, we will see the end of our own lives. We need to be spiritually prepared for the Second Coming, but we also need to be spiritually prepared for our own death. We can be prepared by reading our Bibles daily.

God's word doesn't merely show us our sins; it also cleanses us. It shows us the problem and then gives us the solution.

By reading God's Word daily, we will reap its benefits. We can't simply skim through our favourite passages when we need a pick-me-up. We must devour every page and glean every truth.

We need to keep our eyes fixed on the cross and the Saviour's empty tomb. It was there, as well as throughout His life, that Jesus paid the price that won our salvation. If we look at Jesus' sacrifice and if we continue to pray for deliverance and assistance, the Holy Spirit will help shut our souls to that which is sinful.

During the season of Advent, the church calls the world to look again at stories that have somehow become comfortably innocuous, to rediscover the disruptive signs that someone has been here moving about these places we call home, to stay awake to the startling possibility of his nearness in this place even now. Considering all the problems in the world today, Advent presents a unique opportunity for the church to stand in the gap and proclaim the Good News of Christ Jesus through word and deed. Now is the time to be diligent in proclaiming the Good News in word and deed.

God has prepared something wonderful beyond our world and time. Is that more difficult to believe than the resurrection? Shouldn't we believe that God will redeem the world?

The passage from Mark should make us eager for what is to come. Christ's death and resurrection have assured us of our future. That future has been made present in and through us. We yearn to see the promised future now. The self-centered, careless values of the world will be replaced by new values. The reality of Jesus' return is greater than the reality of shadows cast by our world.

When we travel over life's troubled seas, we have hope because Jesus will bring peace and calmness. When we feel captive by life's problems, we have hope because Jesus will set us free.

The theme of the First Sunday of Advent is always this: be alert, be always ready to meet God because suddenly the end of history is going to be here. How can we be ready?

1. Live with the assurance that as children of God, we will be with Jesus when we die.
2. Show God's love to everyone we meet.
3. Do the tasks God has given us to do. Our watching implies that we are faithful to our task and calling, even during opposition and life's trials. Watching takes on the shape of expectancy.
4. Be loyal to Jesus Christ.

During this season of Advent, we are waiting for Christmas, but we are also waiting for something else. We are waiting for Jesus' return. He told us that he would come again, and he told us to watch and be ready for Him. What should we do while we are waiting? We should worship and praise him, love and serve him, and share his love with others. When we do these things, we will be ready for his return, and we will find joy in the waiting place. Amen