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Dear Readers,

What follows is one man's weekly attempt to know the truth of God's Word and bring it to His people for their good and ultimately for His glory. Please regard these only as notes belonging to a busy pastor uploaded as they stand (for better or for worse, complete or incomplete, almost always with grammatical errors, and always with room for refinement in content, structure, presentation...) to support the ongoing study of God's Word. I firmly believe that the community of faith which is the body of Christ can and should bring their gifts to bear for the good of the rest of the body and that any one teacher can be taught by the others with an understanding of the truth. Therefore, should you have insight that would sharpen any of the thinking expressed here, know that I would be pleased to receive it. Clearly, the input that is most welcome and most helpful is that which is more concise than verbose, Biblically grounded and expressed with the goal of displacing misunderstanding and apprehending the truth of God's Word. Your thoughts of that nature are most welcome, certainly appreciated and will be thoughtfully considered. You are invited to send those insights to me at johnny@stoneharborchurch.org.
 In pursuit of truth and growing a shepherds heart,
 Johnny

Logical Structure of the Chapter 13

- 1-2 Jerusalem temple is exalted as an object of wonder by Jesus' disciples, and humbled as the object of coming destruction by Jesus.
- 3-4 Jesus' disciples ask Him **WHEN** "all these things" will take place, understanding Jesus reference to the destruction of the temple to indicate a larger more complex culmination of God's plan for His people.
- 5-37 Jesus Answer to His Disciple's Question
 - 5-23 Re: The Entire Inter-Advental Period (time bounded by Christ's first and second advents)
 Prevailing Tone of Warning against being Deceived
 - 5-13 Troubles Jesus' Disciples Would Face
 - 14-19 Abomination of Desolation
 - 20-23 Great Suffering and Deception
 - 24-27 Re: The Coming of the Son of Man in the Clouds (Jesus' Second Advent)
 - 28-31 Re: What We Know with Certainty – "Recognize He is near!"
 - 32-37 Re: What We Certainly do NOT Know -- "Be on the Alert!"

Transformation Card

This page provides an overview of the message and resources for individual and group study.

Date: October 18th, 2009
Series: Who Jesus Is & Why He Matters
Section: Jesus on Mission in Jerusalem
Topic: The End
Message Title: What Jesus Calls His Disciples to Until He Returns
Short Title: Until He Returns
Text: Mark 13:28-37
Key Words: Fig tree, all these things, recognize He is near, that day or hour, be on the alert

Message Outline

What Jesus Calls His Disciples to Until He Returns

Intro: Structure of Mark 13

- I. Regarding What They **Know** with Certainty
- II. Regarding What They **Certainly** do NOT Know

Related Scripture

1. Mat 24 (esp. 32-36)
2. Luke 21 (esp. 29-36)

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. What is the parable of the fig tree about?
2. What do “these things” in verse 29 refer to? Identify them by verse numbers.
3. From verse 28-31, what are Jesus’ two exhortations based on what is known?
4. In verse 32 Jesus begins a contrast. What is being contrasted?
5. What does this “Son of Man...clouds” language tell us?
6. What event does Jesus have in mind saying in verse 32 “that day or hour”?
7. What exhortation does Jesus give His disciples based on the uncertainty of the precise timing of that event?

Memory and Meditation Verses

“...recognize that He is near...” *Mark 13:29 NASB*

“Be on the alert!” *Mark 13:37 NASB*

What Jesus Calls His Disciples to Until He Returns

Intro

Have you seen those Bing.com commercials. One person says something to another and the spoken-to takes what they have heard and starts saying random bits of information related to the original topic only by a common word which has no bearing to the original context. [Show Video Clip] Well done commercials. They drive me crazy because they remind me of the craziness of some of my own internet searches. But beyond that they remind me of the general craziness of **the flood** of information washing over us that is our normal day to day life.

Our Lord Jesus has a very simple message for us in the passage we are considering this morning. I have considered it my personal mission to make it as complicated as possible for you. No, my true goal is to isolate Jesus' simple yet profound words from this weeks flood that will wash over you and showcase them as words of ultimate significance and ultimate value.

What makes the words in the Bible so valuable? They are words of truth that reveal God and His ultimate intentions for us – intentions that if we ignore we will go to the grave having “lived” only in the pale assessment of our peers but not in the fullness of God's intention. God's word is true-truth for ultimate life and it should be distinguished from “the flood” of:

- bland facts regarding sub-ultimate issues,
- partial truths from the partially informed and
- outright falsehoods from the confident babbling populace.

In stark contrast, Jesus' words for us are simple profound exhortations of ultimate value to us:

- Recognize that He is near!
- Be on the alert!

Let's give ourselves to understanding what Jesus intends us to know and do. Let's lean in and hang on His words as if they were matters of life and death spoken by God Himself – that is of course exactly what they are.

Let me read to you all of Mark 13 and then orient you to our passage.

Orientation of Mark 13:28-31 and 32-37 in the context of Mark 13.

- 2 Jesus prediction of the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem
- 3-4 The disciples question about when this and the events of the end of the age will happen
- 5-end Jesus response about the future that lies ahead
 - 5-23 Events of the Inter-Advental Period (I-AP)
 - 24-27 Second Advent (SA) of Christ
 - 28-31 Jesus instruction to His disciples on how to respond to the current events of the I-AP
 - 32-37 Jesus instruction to His disciples on how to respond to the future event of the SA

What Jesus Calls His Disciples to Until He Returns

I. Regarding What They Know with Certainty (vv. 28-31)

A. The Parable – (28)

A supporting story based on what is known to lend clarity to what is not known. Jesus charged His disciples to learn this parable about a fig tree so that they could better understand what lies ahead as followers of Christ in the future. Learning requires increasing knowledge. It was not good enough for Jesus disciples continue in their current level of knowledge, rather Jesus was calling them to increase their understanding by way of learning. We too must learn. Do not come to the Scriptures to have them confirm what you know. Come to the Scriptures so God can increase your understanding of Himself and how He has worked and chooses to continue to work in History. [Read 28]

1. When you see observable events related to a fig tree

a. Observable events:

- tender branch,
- leaves put forth

2. You DO know that the event/time of summer is **near**

a. Meaning of Near

The next season (summer) is in the cue...

3. Abstraction to General Principle

The nearness and sureness of a future event are known by the observable and present events which always precede it. (A stop light's yellow indicates red is next; what goes up must come down; summer is followed by fall, winter...)

B. The Application of the Parable's Principle (29)

1. When you see “these things” related to the future of God’s dealing with man

a. Observable events = “these things” (list from 2, 5-23)

- destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem (2)
- people claiming to be Christ and misleading many (6)
- wars and rumors of wars (7-8)
- earthquakes and famines (8)
- persecution of Jesus’ disciples by religious and secular authorities (9)
- preaching of the gospel to all nations (10)
- provision of the Spirit inspired words to share when disciples arrested (11)
- betrayal of disciples by family members even to death (12)
- great tribulation associated with the “Abomination of Desolation” – destruction of the temple and Jerusalem – during which time people should flee from the city and temple to seek refuge away from it (14ff)
- false Christs and false prophets showing signs and wonders to lead astray (21-23)

2. You SHOULD Recognize that Jesus' Coming is Near

a. The Act of Recognizing

If I run into one of my old high school buddies they might say, "Oh my gosh, I didn't even recognize you with all the gray hair and extra weight... you look, ah... great?!"

When you have to be told to recognize something it is because that something lies at least somewhat hidden. "Oh yeh, I see it, I recognize you." So we may have to lean in and take a closer look at something that might not be readily apparent but is none the less before us.

So Jesus commands us here to recognize all these observable events and make the less than obvious connection between them and what they indicate. And what is the fact they indicate?

b. The Fact We Are to Recognize: That Jesus is near -- Meaning of "near"

"...recognize that He is near, right at the door."

Near

- i. Near is NOT here
- ii. Near is the next major event (as summer follows next after spring)
- iii. Near is sure to follow (again as summer is sure to follow spring)

Right At the Door

- i. Right at the door is NOT in the house
- ii. Right at the door is ready and waiting to come in when the door is opened

Jesus wanted his disciples, when they saw these events happening (all of which did take place in their own lives), to recognize that His coming was "near."

How would it have impacted Jesus disciples to recognize His nearness, and for that matter, how does it impact us? What did Jesus want this recognition to lead to?

3. The Impact/Effect of Recognizing that Jesus is Near

In the parable of the fig tree the observable events of tender branches and new leaves indicated the nearness, sureness and newness of the coming season of summer and all that comes with summer – the end of the cold, longer days, warmer temperatures, growing crops, summer harvest... It is a very hopeful prospect. Good things lie ahead!

In the application of the parable to the future dealings of God with man, if we recognize that Jesus is near it encourages us in a similar way... I can bear difficulty with greater success if I know that there is hope coming – Jesus is coming in the near future and He is worth enduring hardship for, He is worth waiting for.

The focus of verses 28-29 is on recognizing that Jesus coming is near. This recognition engenders hope. The focus of verses 30-31 seems to be on the mostly difficult events prior to Jesus coming. They serve to add sober balance to our positive expectation of Jesus coming. The 3rd thing I'd like us to notice that Jesus wants His disciples to know with certainty is that...

C. Hardships Will Certainly Be Our Lot (30-31)

30 "Truly I say to you,

this generationⁱ will not pass away until **all these things** take place.

31 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.

1. The Sureness of "these things" Taking Place in "This Generation"

- Jesus to His Disciples: "These things (events of the I-AP, 2, 5-23) will all happen in your life time."
- In addition to the certain nearness of His coming again, Jesus also wants His disciples to know with certainty of **the difficulties they would face** ("These things" = events of the I-AP, 2, 5-23)
- This is a call to embrace the difficulty of life not thinking that you can escape "these things" but knowing that they lie ahead under the sovereignty of God.
- I hear Jesus saying to His disciples, "You will live out your lives preaching the gospel to all nations, in the context of deceptions, hardships, persecution, betrayal, ... but the Spirit will provide the words to share as you bear witness of Me."
- That is the certainty of your life.

What does Jesus call His disciples to until He returns? Based on the observable facts of their lives – both the difficulties they will certainly face and the certain provision of the Holy Spirit to aid them in their mission – they are to recognize that He is near, right at the door. And this recognition of His nearness is to yield both a realistic expectation of hardship and a hopeful expectancy of **His return** -- Jesus is coming "with great power and glory." That is the next move of God in His grand plan of redemption and restoration just as surely as summer follows spring.

Now the tone changes from certainty to uncertainty. Jesus wants His disciples to know that they will certainly face the difficulties mentioned in 5-23 and He wants us to know of the certainty that His coming is near. But in contrast to the certainty of these events, He now turns to what is not certain and how His disciples are to live with that uncertainty.

II. Regarding What They Certainly do NOT Know

32 "But

of that dayⁱⁱ or hour no one knows,
not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

33 **"Take heed, keep on the alert;**

for you do not know **when** the appointed time will come.

34 "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.**

35 "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--

36 in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep.

37 "What I say to you I say to all, **"Be on the alert!"**"

A. This Final Section (32-37) Refers to the Second Coming of Christ (24-27)

Write down: 32-37 describes 24-27

B. It Contrasts the Certainty of Jesus Near Return with the Uncertainty of the Precise Time

32 "But [in contrast to the certainty of the nearness of Jesus coming] of that dayⁱⁱⁱ or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

What is the event Jesus has in mind? The referent is to the precise time of Jesus second coming as described in verses 24-27.

Here is the contrast: Know for certain that the Son of Man is coming in the clouds with great glory and power (26) after (24) the hardships and mission spoken of in verse 5-23, "BUT of that day or hour" i.e., of the precise time of Jesus coming again, "no one knows."

Here is the fact: "no one knows" exactly "when" Jesus will come again. This fact is repeated in verses 33 and 35. The uncertainty of the precise time of His second coming stands in contrast to the certainty of the event itself and its certain following of the events of verse 5-23.

C. Jesus Exhortation to His Disciples in Light of this Uncertainty of the Exact Time of His Return

33 -- Take heed, keep on the alert;
 34 -- stay on the alert
 35 -- be on the alert—
 37 -- Be on the alert!

Jesus strongly and emphatically exhorts His disciples to **be in a constant state of alertness for His certain return!** You can't miss the general gist of that exhortation! But each of us can turn a deaf ear and remain or slip into "non-alertness." Each of us stands at risk of leaving this chapel this morning and not giving this 4-times-referred-to and 3-times-directly-commanded alertness a second thought. The difficulty is not in the interpretation of this command, it is in our taking heed to it, our believing it to be something that we need to do.

Let's look at the remaining verses and see if Jesus offers any help to the reluctant-alert in each of us.

D. How Jesus Helps Us Heed the Exhortation to Alertness

He gives us the reasons we need to be alert.

a) We don't know when He will return

Simply stated in verse 33 Jesus says, "**for you do not know when the appointed time will come**" (see repetition of the same reason in v. 35). We need to be alert all the time because **we don't know when He will return**. The "unknown-ness" of the exact time of any threat or any opportunity is remedied only by constant alertness and so it is here.

But this only becomes a reason if we care about His coming. I would say that most don't. They/we don't see the relevance. "As long as its not on a Monday night so I don't have to miss House, I'm good." Maybe this is a good place to remind ourselves what the coming of Jesus indicates: Final judgment and final consummation of God's plan to restore all things to His intent!

- i. Side Note: I take note that Jesus subtly discloses here that the time in fact has been "appointed." We are not privy to God's calendar, but He has booked the event.

He gives us another easy to understand story so that we can get the more difficult concept.

Verse 34 is a one verse story – "Its like a man who went on a journey..." [read 34]

- The "man away on a journey" is Jesus
- "The house" He left is His face to face presence in time and space with us
- The man's "slaves" are Jesus' disciples
- The assigned "tasks" given to each represent Jesus unique calling on each of His disciples
- The "doorkeeper" is every disciple – it is you, Christian.
- The command for every disciple: "stay on the alert."

With them embracing their character in the story Jesus says in v. 35, "Therefore, i.e., because you are those slaves and that doorkeeper, be on the alert, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming..." (repetition of first reason for alertness). Jesus lists several possibilities for the time of his return, any of which might be the time.

In verse 36 Jesus adds **another reason we need to be alert**: keeping His disciples in the drama of the story He says, "in case he should come suddenly and find you asleep."

b) To prevent Jesus coming and finding us asleep at the wheel.

This is the situation of the doorkeeper found sleeping by the one who gave him the job. We sense the bummer of this situation immediately. We wouldn't even want the boss of our secular job finding us in this situation. It is of course made all the more shameful when we realize that the master is Jesus and the doorkeeper charged to keep watch is you and me. May it never be that He finds us sleeping when we should be working, i.e., disengaged from the mission He has assigned us.

The last reason why we should be alert stems from why most of us are not. Most are not alert because we are the proverbial frogs in the slowly warming pot who are deceived into thinking all is well when it most certainly is not. This popular deception finds its way into our lives in a voice like this:

"It has been more than 2000 years since Jesus spoke these words to His original disciples. I see no danger in the pot of my spiritual life. The water seems fine, nice and warm, come on it. The thought of Jesus Christ actually coming again (to bring to consummation to all that He inaugurated at His first coming) is a vague and insignificant belief the fanatics hold more seriously than I. It has little to no

relevance in my life. My life is informed by the reality of my business, my family, my club, my friends... after all, He hasn't come yet!"

Into this pervasive sleepiness Jesus sounds the final alarm in verse 37.

c) This call to alertness is for all of us! (37)

37 "What I say to you I say to all, **Be on the alert!"**

We are part of the "all." This is not a call only to the hyper-religious. This is a call to all people of all times in all places who would regard Jesus as God with us. It is a call to you. And I pray that this is a call that you hear and heed so that you may be prepared and looking forward with positive hopeful expectation that in His coming, the end, the purposes of God, will be fully realized.

Conclusion

I said a little bit ago, "May it never be" that Jesus finds us asleep, but I fear that "asleep" is too often a fair description even of us who call ourselves believers in Jesus. What does one who is asleep look like if you take out the word picture and state it plainly. And conversely, what does the alert disciple of Jesus look like?

Context would argue that the disciple who is asleep is the disciple who does not live with the expectancy of the nearness of Jesus return and whose life would be correctly assessed by Jesus at His coming as a life lived without regard for:

- Him
- nor for the privileged position He secured for him or her as an adopted child in the family of God
- nor for the responsibilities of that privileged position.

On the other hand, the disciple who is alert is **one who**:

- is actively engaged in a vital relationship with God,
- regards Jesus as his or her king not in lip service but in actuality,
- regards himself as joined to God by His saving grace through faith in Christ and by His gracious gift of the indwelling Spirit,
- is increasingly being who God has recreated him or her to be
- is proving out that genuine being with effective doing of the "task" (34) Jesus has assigned.

Are you asleep or alert?

Let's Pray!

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Endnotes

ⁱ Generation – disputed meaning in different camps of eschatology – natural reading (Carson) the folks alive at the time of Jesus. This view supported by Mark and Luke parallels to Mt 24.

ⁱⁱ That day or hour – this refers to the day of the Lord's second coming of 24-27 and is contrasted to the time between the first and second advents of Christ discussed in verses 5-23.