

Mark 13:24–37

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[0:00] Mark 13, 24-37. From the fig tree, learn its lesson.

As soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near at the very gates.

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 concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven nor the sun, but only the Father. Be on guard. Keep awake.

For you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.

[1:24] Therefore, stay awake. For you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight or when the rooster crows or in the morning, lest he come suddenly and find you asleep.

And what I say to you, I say to all, stay awake. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning.

Glad that you are here with us this morning, worshiping with us. We are continuing in our series, Mark Following Jesus.

Yes. Quick question as we begin. Has anybody in here ever dozed off at an inappropriate time? It happened to me. I had an early flight. I got to the airport in plenty of time. Made it through security.

[2:35] Found my gate. Sat down. And I decided I had enough time to take a quick nap. You know how that goes.

I'm not going to sleep. I'm just going to rest my eyes. Well, I rested them so well that I woke up, looked around, and the gate area was empty.

My plane had boarded. The door had closed. And they were pushing back from the gate. I had been sitting a few feet from where I needed to be.

I had a boarding pass in my pocket. Carry-on bag at my feet. And still missed the flight because I fell asleep at the wrong time.

There are some things you can sleep through and recover from. But there are other moments when being asleep can cost you something you can't get back.

[3:49] Falling asleep on your couch after Sunday dinner with the game watching you. No big deal. Fall asleep in a meeting at work.

Maybe some embarrassment. Fall asleep during this sermon. I need to see you after church. But you don't want the pilot falling asleep while you're 30,000 feet in the air.

You don't want the surgeon falling asleep in the middle of the operation. Or your driver falling asleep behind the wheel. Because here it is, church.

The seriousness of falling asleep depends on what you're supposed to be doing while you're awake. That's what takes us this morning from an airport story to a spiritual warning.

Because Jesus says there are moments in the life of faith when you can't afford to be asleep. That's where we are when we arrive at the end of Mark chapter 13.

[5:02] Jesus has spent the bulk of this chapter answering his disciples' questions about what is ahead. Trouble. Uncertainty. Uncertainty.

Uncertainty. And now when he gets to the end and is about to answer when these things are about to happen. He essentially says to his disciples, look. There's too much going on.

There are too many things at stake. Too many things are on the way. There's too much work left to do for you to be taking a nap.

in fact Jesus keeps saying it at the end of this chapter verse 33 be on guard keep awake verse 34 the master commands the doorkeeper to stay awake verse 35 therefore stay awake verse 37 and what I say to you I say to all stay awake four times in five verses if Jesus had been texting this would be in all caps the challenge isn't simply waiting around for things to happen and for Jesus to return the challenge is staying awake while you wait it's my sermon thought for this morning stay awake while you wait now let me admit from the beginning as Pastor Nee mentioned last week Mark chapter 13 is easily the most challenging chapter in the gospel of Mark as you heard last week there are wars and earthquakes there are abominations desolation there's tribulation in our passage this morning you'll see the sun goes dark the moon stops shining stars start falling from the sky the son of man comes in clouds angels start gathering up people there's another fig tree story and some homeowner goes away on a trip by the time you get to the end you may be tempted to say Jesus I think I need a powerpoint presentation or some kind of a chart or something to get through this passage and to be clear we have some scholars in this room smarter than me that could do just that for you but interestingly enough Jesus never gives them a chart you see biblical prophecy like here in our passage is not merely to satisfy our curiosity about tomorrow it really is to help produce faithfulness today so as we approach this text with some humility we acknowledge that there are faithful Christians who understand much of this passage as referring primarily to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD others see these verses pointing towards events exclusively surrounding the final return of Christ and there's still others who see it describing events that have a near historical fulfillment while simultaneously pointing toward an even greater fulfillment to come but here's what I don't want us to do don't want us to become so fascinated with when everything happens this passage does address that

I don't want to be so fascinated about when everything happens that we miss what Jesus tells us to do until it happens because whether Jesus is describing the fall of Jerusalem the end of the age or using one to anticipate the other his pastoral concern is unmistakable trouble is coming hard times are coming things you thought were permanent are going to fall but God is still sovereign Jesus still reigns and his word will still stand so rather than getting lost in the fog of what we do not know Jesus gives us solid ground in this passage to stand on if I could put our passage in one sentence I would say this because you don't know when everything is coming but you do know who is coming stay faithful stay focused and stay awake while you wait

[10:06] Jesus gives us three great truths in our text to keep us awake verses 24 and 25 but in those days after that tribulation the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light and the stars will be falling from heaven and the powers in the heavens will be shaken now if we don't understand the Bible's prophetic vocabulary we can immediately start trying to turn every phrase into a specific modern event but we have to read this language with our Old Testaments open the prophets regularly use cosmic imagery to describe earth shaking judgment Isaiah uses language like this concerning Babylon and Edom Ezekiel uses similar language concerning Egypt

Amos even uses language like this concerning judgment on Israel in other words when God intervenes in judgment and kingdoms come crashing down the prophets sometimes describe it as though the whole universe is shaking maybe that's not so foreign to us we still use exaggerated language to describe major events we say somebody's whole world came crashing down what we mean is something happened that shook everything they thought was stable and Jesus says there's going to be a whole lot of shaking going on if you don't know that line is a reference from a song way back in Pastor Helm's era the temple that looked permanent would not be permanent Jerusalem would be shaken earthly kingdoms would be shaken and ultimately everything opposed to the kingdom of God will be shaken but shaking is not the climax of the scene Jesus moves our eyes from everything that is falling apart to the one that holds everything together verse 26 says and then they will see the son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory that language reaches back to Daniel chapter 7 Daniel says I saw in the night visions and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man and he came to the ancient of days and was presented before him and to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom his dominion an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom one that will never be destroyed so after all the turmoil

Jesus essentially says don't get so distracted by what's shaking that you forget who's reigning that's the good news of the passage whatever else is happening in these verses don't miss the main character Jesus the sun may stop shining but Jesus hasn't lost his light the moon may lose its glow but Jesus hasn't lost his glory stars may fall but Jesus still stands powers may be shaken but Jesus is still reigning church sometimes we need to be reminded of that because if you watch enough news scroll Facebook long enough listen to enough commentary you can start thinking that history is hanging by a thread but here church we have inside information there is a throne above every throne there is a king above every king there is a kingdom that can't be voted out during the midterms it can't be invaded or overthrown

Jesus reigns whatever interpretive position you take concerning the precise fulfillment of verse 26 every orthodox reading ultimately brings us to the same great Christian hope Jesus Christ is king and Jesus Christ is coming again if I can take just Pastor Helm a preacher's point of privilege when he comes he's not coming like he did the first time the first time he came in humility this time he's coming in glory the first time he was wrapped in swaddling clothes this time he's coming clothed in majesty the first time only a few shepherds knew he arrived but when he comes again there won't be any confusion about who he is they will see the son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory

[15:24] I have to go ahead and tell you here's the spoiler alert this whole story ends with Jesus now the picture gets even better the king who reigns is also the king who gathers verse 27 says and then he will send out angels and gather his elect from the four winds from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven I love this because when everything starts shaking God doesn't lose track of his children north south east west across nations languages and generations he knows exactly where his people are and not one who belongs to him will be overlooked don't miss the grace in that word gather these aren't people who earned their way into his kingdom or got everything right these are people who accepted him and belong to him because actually

Jesus first came looking for them that that's the gospel before he ever comes again in glory he first came in grace to seek and save lost sinners like you and me and through faith in him those who were once far from God are brought near and made his own so the return of Christ is not bad news for those who belong to him that's the completion of the good news the one who came to save us is also coming to gather us the one who made us his own will not leave his own behind so when the world gets dark don't spend all your time staring into the darkness keep your eyes on the king stay awake while you wait secondly stay awake and keep trusting his word now Jesus brings the camera down from the clouds to something as ordinary as a tree after showing us the son of man and glory he points to a fig tree and says in effect you already know how to read signs in creation learn to read the moment with spiritual discernment verse 28 says from the fig tree learn its lesson this ought to sound familiar because we just dealt with the fig tree back in Mark 11 but this time Jesus isn't cursing it he's teaching from it he says when the branch becomes tender and the leaves start appearing you know summer is near the opposite of what's about to happen in Chicago you don't need a meteorologist you don't need an app the leaves tell you something Jesus says learn to recognize what is happening around you he presses him further in verse 29 so also when you see these things taking place you know that he is near at the very gates in other words you need to pay attention the Christian life is not supposed to be lived with our eyes closed Jesus calls his people to spiritual discernment we don't panic at everything that happens we don't turn every earthquake into a prophetic conference we don't turn every war into proof that Jesus is coming on next

Tuesday but neither do we live as though history is wandering around aimlessly without a destination God is up to something and God is taking history somewhere Jesus knows that this discernment can sometimes easily turn to speculation so he gives them a word meant to steady them verse 30 truly I say to you this generation will not pass away until all these things take place now now admittedly this is one of the most debated statements in this chapter some understand this generation to mean the generation standing right in front of Jesus strongly connecting these events to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD others understand it as a future generation that will witness the final events leading up to Christ's return yeah I get it

I tend to lean towards the understanding that these things are talking about the things he just got done talking about primarily speaking of events that unfold within the lifetime of his original hearers but it also makes sense that those historical events point us toward a greater reality of Christ's ultimate return look faithful Christians have disagreed over the details whatever questions we may

have about the timing in verse 30 Jesus anchors us in certainty in verse 31 heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away in other words you may wrestle with when these things will happen but you don't have to wrestle with whether or not Jesus is telling the truth the timing may challenge us but his word should steady us

[21:38] Jesus says my words will not pass away everything else you think is permanent is actually temporary buildings come down governments change markets fluctuate bodies grow old technology becomes obsolete some of us have a drawer at home right now full of cords and chargers and have no idea what they go to everything else will fail but 2000 years later we're still reading the words of Jesus spoke sitting on the Mount of Olives and that's more than an interesting historical observation that's something to build your life on when culture changes his word still stands when public opinion changes his word stands when people walk out your life his word will still stand and even when creation itself passes away his word will still stand so don't build your life on what is passing away stay awake while you wait and build your life on what is still standing when everything else is gone that raises the obvious question his word is certain but the timing is not how are we supposed to live in the meantime

Jesus answers that in the final movement of this passage you need to stay awake because the master could return at any time now we get to the heart of the passage notice an important shift in Jesus language in verse 30 he spoke of these things that his generation would witness but now in 32 he speaks of that day or that hour pointing ultimately to his ultimate return whose timing remains unknown they started this conversation back in verse 4 asking Jesus when and after everything he has spent this entire chapter telling them Jesus finally says no one knows we want a date Jesus gives us a duty we want a calendar

Jesus gives us a command we want him to tell us when Jesus tells us how to live until then no one knows not the angels Jesus even says nor the son but only the father I know brother Ben that raises a theological question if Jesus is God how can the son not know and the answer takes us into the mystery of the incarnation Jesus never stopped being God he's fully God and fully man here but in becoming truly human the son willingly humbled himself and lived in perfect submission to the father Philippians chapter 2 says he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant he didn't surrender his deity he willingly accepted the limitations of humanity and the role of a servant that actually helps us it strengthens the point because church if the angels don't know disciples don't know

Jesus says not even the son knows then I promise you the dude on YouTube with a white board seven charts and a calculator from the book of Daniel he doesn't know either Jesus says no one knows and church that's okay because God never asked you to know when he asked you to be ready whenever verse 33 says be on guard keep awake where you do not know when the time will come don't miss the logic the uncertainty of the timing creates the urgency of staying awake not knowing when Jesus will return is not an excuse for being unprepared look if Jesus has said I'm coming back

November 17th at 3:30 in the afternoon you know exactly what some of us would do we live however we wanted to live until November 17th about 2:45 in the afternoon then we start praying we start forgiving everybody we open that big Bible and set it out on the coffee table we put on some gospel music now Lord I'm ready come come get me but Jesus says you don't know therefore stay awake stay ready and if you stay ready you don't have to get ready Jesus does more than issue a warning he gives us a picture of what readiness looks like verse 34 it's like a man going on a journey when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge each with his work don't miss that phrase each with his work the master gives every servant an assignment that means waiting for

[28:04] Jesus is not passive waiting means working biblical watchfulness isn't standing around staring at the clouds it's doing what the master told you to do until the master comes home you've got work to do I've got work to do this church has work to do somebody needs the gospel somebody needs encouragement somebody needs teaching some grieving person needs comforting each with his work let me make a note here your assignment is not supervising everybody else's assignment the question isn't whether they're doing what they're supposed to do are you doing what the master gave you to do because when the master returns he's not going to ask me why you didn't do your work he's going to ask me what

I did with mine Jesus then puts urgency on the assignment the master could return in the evening at midnight when the rooster crows or in the morning these are actually the four Roman watches of the night I wish I had time to show you how those four watches of the night echo the events we're about to see unfold in Mark's gospel leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus we'll save that for another sermon for now the point is this you don't know when he's coming home verse 36 says lest he come suddenly and find you asleep suddenly the whole passage becomes more personal the question isn't merely when is Jesus coming the better question is what will Jesus find you doing when he comes will he find you faithful serving praying worshipping loving will he find you forgiving will he find you doing your work or will he find you sleep

Hackley reminds me of an old spiritual that has a line that says don't let him catch you with your work undone he's coming again so soon to be clear sleeping here isn't about closing your eyes you can physically be awake and spiritually be sound asleep you can come to church and be asleep my uncle was a deacon when I was growing up had mastered the art coming to church sitting on the front row with his bible open head bowed as if he was praying in the presence of the lord but he was actually in the land of nod sound asleep it's not what

Jesus is referring to spiritually you start falling asleep when prayer becomes optional you start falling asleep when scripture becomes occasional you start falling asleep when sin doesn't bother you anymore when worship becomes routine when you become more passionate about what's happening in the world than about what God has called you to do in the world the danger isn't that we have completely abandoned Jesus maybe we've just gotten sleepy we've been waiting so long for Jesus to come that we've stopped expecting him Jesus says wake up because the master is coming and now with one final sentence in verse 37 Jesus takes a private conversation and turns it into a word for every generation and what

I say to you I say to all stay awake not just Peter James John and Andrew not just the first century church all that means this command traveled from the Mount of Olives through Jerusalem through Rome through generations of believers across seas and centuries until it walked into Christ church Chicago this morning and Jesus says stay awake I don't want to get too far ahead of ourselves in Mark because this scene is still coming in our series but if I can I peek around the corner for just a moment because before long Jesus will take Peter James and John into a garden called Gethsemane and tell them remain here and watch in other words stay awake while you wait and the very disciples who heard this commandment in chapter 13 will struggle to obey it in chapter 14 that detail ought to humble us because he hearing the warning is not the same thing as heeding the warning it's also a danger for us because spiritual sleep rarely begins with somebody deciding [33:48] I'm done with Jesus more often it happens quietly attention drifts convictions dull holy habits become occasional the heart that once leaned forward starts leaning back you're still showing up still going through the motions but somewhere along the way you started dozing off which takes me back to my story at the beginning I wasn't in the wrong airport I wasn't at the wrong gate I didn't lose my ticket I was close to everything I needed and still missed the flight because I slept through the moment that mattered and that's the warning Jesus leaves hanging in the air proximity is not the same thing as readiness you can be around the things of God and still become spiritually drowsy so

Jesus doesn't end Mark 13 by saying hey figure all this stuff out he ends it with a wake up call stay awake maybe today the alarm is ringing for somebody not because Jesus is trying to frighten you but because he loves you enough to wake you at the airport I could go to the counter and ask for another flight but Jesus point here is that there is a moment that's coming that can't be rescheduled the master will return we don't control the itinerary we don't know the arrival time our responsibility is simply to be found awake when he comes so let him find you church at your post let him find you faithful in the ordinary things nobody applauds you don't have to know the hour in order to be faithful in this hour and when the day finally comes may the master not have to wake us up to tell us he's arrived may he find a church already awake eyes open lamps burning hands working hearts ready the world may be uncertain but his promise is not the hour may be unknown but the master is not so until he comes don't sleep through your assignment don't sleep through the moment church stay awake while you wait let's pray father we thank you for your word thank you for your promise that you are coming again so soon but you won't leave any of your people behind so god thank you for this wake up call this morning may we be alert ready to do our work may we be found faithful until the day you return thank you for this assignment thank you for this church and what you have

given our hands to do father our prayer is that you prompt us poke us prime us to stay awake while we wait on your glorious return your son's name we pray and give thanks amen let's