

Stay Awake

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[0:00] Be on guard. Stay awake. For you do not know when the time will come.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. So, my brothers and my sisters, Happy New Year.

Happy New Year. The church year, unlike the secular year, begins on the first Sunday in Advent, which is, of course, this morning.

Now, this celebration of Advent is not marked by watching the ball drop, or busting open this champagne, or making resolutions that will only last for a week at best.

No. We are celebrated by preparing our hearts to celebrate our Savior's birth. And we are preparing our hearts for His coming again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

[1:12] Now, Advent is a little bit of a strange thing, because on the one hand, we have the expectation of the season, right? That Christ has come, and He is coming, and that is something that we celebrate.

But on the other hand, that expectation can't be separated from the call to repentance. Jesus came, He's coming again, but we have to remember that He is coming in judgment.

That is something that we can't forget. Now, just a little bit of a disclaimer, I am going to talk about God's judgment this morning.

It's not a topic that I particularly enjoy. I've heard some preachers who seem to just love preaching fire and brimstone. That is not me. But, I am responsible for preaching and teaching the whole counsel of God, and I can't ignore it.

Christ is coming again, and Christ is coming as judge. We read about that in our Gospel reading for this morning. We see that He is coming.

[2:24] We see that we don't know when, but that He's coming. We see that we are called to be ready for it at any moment. And we see that we don't want to be among those who are found sleeping when Jesus returns.

So, I want to focus in on Mark 13, 32 through 37 this morning. So, if you would, look there with me. Now, it's interesting, isn't it, that Jesus is clear that His return and the judgment that accompanies it is going to happen.

But He's equally clear that we really don't know when. We read, Now, I do have to say, here is something that we as Christians have so often been tempted to mess up.

So, I want to underline a little bit. Concerning that day or hour, no one knows. Again, concerning that day or hour, no one knows.

And one more time. Concerning that day or hour, no one knows. So, it's alright to put away our end times charts.

[3:52] Because, let's be honest, we don't know. Even Jesus in His humanity didn't know. And if He didn't know, I don't think I'm going to figure it out. Now, why is this an important point?

Well, if we're judging from what we see in the biblical text, it's important because we're supposed to be living as Christians in such a way that it reflects that we're aware that He could come at any moment.

There's a sense of urgency, isn't there? Repent now. Believe the gospel now. Live your life to God's glory now.

Because now might be the very last moment before the judgment comes. Jesus uses an analogy in 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, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake.

[4:58] So, the Master has gone on a journey. The Word of Jesus ascended into heaven, and He'll be returning. What is it He'll find when He returns?

Really? When it's all said and done, He will find two types of people. Those who are awake and those who are asleep. So, Jesus warns us.

We read in our text, 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.

Unless he comes suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you, I say to all. Stay awake. So, have those who are sleeping, and those who are awake.

We have to ask, which one am I? The answer matters, doesn't it? Because it is a fearful thing to be found sleeping when the Master returns.

[6:11] It is time to wake up. Because the day of His return is drawing nearer with every moment. That's what Paul reminds us of in Romans 13, beginning in verse 11, where we read, You know the time that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep.

For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. Advent provides us with this opportunity to remember, if we will listen, that now is the hour to wake from sleep, because salvation is nearer than it was when we first believed.

So what do we do? Well, Paul tells us, Live as those who are awake instead of those who are asleep.

That's what Paul is telling us. What does that look like? Well, Paul goes on, Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires.

Salvation is nearer than when we first believed, my brothers and sisters. We do well to remember that. The time for continuing or persisting in sinful lifestyles to dishonor God, that time is over.

[7:59] The time for quarreling, the time for hatred, the time for gratifying the desires of the flesh, it's past. So Paul reminds us, Cast away the works of darkness and put on the armor of light because the day of the Lord's return draws near.

In 2 Peter 3, we're reminded as well that judgment is coming. We'll be reading part of this passage next week, but not this part.

Peter reminds us that some will be so deeply asleep that they'll not only ignore the reality that it's coming, but will scoff at it. They will say, Where is the promise of His coming?

Forever since, the fathers fell asleep. All things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation. For they deliberately overlooked this fact that the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these, the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished.

By the same word, the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and the destruction of the ungodly.

[9:25] That's no joke. The heavens and the earth that now exist are stored up for fire. They're going to burn because the day of judgment is coming and on that day, the ungodly will be destroyed.

So what do we do with that? We read in Acts chapter 17 that God commands all people everywhere to repent because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom He has appointed.

And of this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead. What do we do with that? Repent. Repent. That's what we do.

Now who can tell us what repentance means? Anyone? Confessing our sins. Announcing one's sin. Turning completely to the Lord. Stay always in an attitude that I am capable of returning to it because I'm a sinner by nature.

[10:40] So to repent is to turn from that way that leads to destruction, to turn from our old way of life, to turn to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Repent and believe the gospel. That is the only way to escape the judgment that is coming. Now, it's become pretty commonplace for people in our culture to say something along the lines of only God can judge me.

Ever heard that one? Now, there's some real truth in that statement, but I sometimes wonder if the people who are saying it have stopped to think about what that means.

Once I saw someone respond to that statement by saying only God can judge you. That should scare you. On one level, it's terrifying, isn't it?

Do you feel confident that your life can withstand the perfect and righteous judgment of a God who sees all? I don't. My righteousness is nothing but filthy rags.

[11:55] If God should mark iniquities, who could stand? Certainly not me. I have been vile, wretched, unclean, and unworthy. And forgive me for saying so, but I bet you have too.

So what can we do? There's only one answer to the question, and it marks the difference between waking and sleeping. Top Lady, in his classic hymn, Rock of Ages, explained it this way. Nothing in my hand I bring simply to thy cross I cling. Naked come to thee for dress, helpless look to thee for grace.

Foul I to the fountain fly. Wash me, Savior, or I die. I'll be real with you. In light of the coming judgment, there is nothing of our own that you or I could do that could justify us.

Nothing. Only the death of the Son of God could do that. Our finest garments can't make us acceptable to God. Only being clothed with the perfect righteousness of Christ can do that.

[13:07] We have been filthy. We have been unclean. But the blood of Jesus is able to wash away every stain. And nothing but the blood of Jesus can wash away our sins.

Nothing but the blood of Jesus can wash away my sins. But the blood of Jesus cleanses me from all unrighteousness. Thank you, Lord. And that's why we can say with confidence that salvation is nearer than when we first believed.

So in light of these things, how are we supposed to live? Our catechism actually takes up this question. So I'm going to take a moment to defer to it.

We see the question, how should you live in light of Jesus' coming return for judgment? The answer we find is this. Because I do not know when Jesus will come, I must be ready to stand before Him each and every day of my life.

I should eagerly seek to make Him known to others. And I should encourage and support the whole church as best as I can to live in readiness for His return.

[14:24] Now we see a follow-on question immediately after that. Should you be afraid of God's judgment? And this is the answer that we find there.

The unrepentant should fear God's judgment, for the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness. But for those who are in Christ, there is no condemnation.

I have no reason to fear the coming judgment from my judge is my Savior, Jesus Christ, who loves me, who died for me, and who intercedes for me. So for the believing Christian, for the one who's awake, the one who knows Jesus is Lord and Savior, the call goes out to be ready for His return every day of our lives by living for His glory.

Not to be afraid because our judge is the one in whom our sins are forgiven. But to live to His glory. But, the other side of that is that for the unbelieving and the unrepentant, I would be lying if I said that there would be no reason to be afraid.

No, the unbelieving and the unrepentant should be afraid of God's judgment. As Peter reminded us, destruction is what awaits the ungodly.

[15:57] If we find ourselves in that place, the only answer is to turn to Jesus Christ. because it doesn't matter who we are or what we've done, Jesus is able to save.

We can have eternal life in Him and we will have eternal life if our trust is in Christ. If we ask Him, we can know that He will save us. That's important to keep in mind because when Christ returns, there will be only those who are awake, those who are saved by the blood of the Lamb of God whose sins are forgiven, who have eternal life.

There will be only them and those who are asleep and unprepared. For those who are awake, it will be a day of joy beyond all description, but for those who are asleep, it will be a day of destruction.

So in love and in concern, I ask us to consider this morning, am I sleeping or am I awake? And if I have new life in Christ, if I am awake, I am to remember to live as those who are awake.

To, as Paul instructs us, to reject quarreling or jealousy or sexual immorality or drunkenness or gratifying the desires of the flesh or anything that dishonors God.

[17:38] And if we find that we're sleeping, the call goes out to us to believe in Christ, to repent of our sin, and to receive salvation in His name.

so that we may not be afraid or ashamed when He comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.