

# Be Awake

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[ 0 : 00 ] Please be seated. This is my first time to preach this morning at 8 o'clock service and now 9 o'clock service.

Yesterday my wife told me, you always listen to your wife, before you preach, you should ask congregation to forgive you if you preach a poor sermon because it's not my fault, it's Jedidiah's fault.

Unfortunately, I should say thank God for his grace. I slept soundly through last night without hearing a baby crying. So I think I have no more excuse.

Let us pray to God and ask God's help. Lord Jesus, you have words of eternal life. And to whom we go, except we come before you and to feed on you.

As we open your word this morning, we pray that your Holy Spirit will teach us, speak to us, challenge us, so that we not only listen and understand, but we go and obey.

[ 1 : 15 ] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I would like to begin my sermon this morning with this question. In your Christian life, what religious symbol would you consider to be important and helpful to you?

There is every time when you see this symbol, it will remind you of God or Jesus and your relationship with him. I believe for some of us the answer would be the cross, while for others it may be the Bible, the church, rainbow, or even the fish emblem.

A few years ago I had a fish sticker. I started the back of my car. One day when I was coming out of my car, a Chinese guy came out to me and said, why are you having this fish sign?

What does it mean? Are you belonging to some fishing club? In fact, it became a great opportunity for me to explain the meaning of the fish sign, which relates to Jesus.

But I'm not going to do that this morning. The point I want to make here is that, to us, there are some symbols we find to be helpful in reminding us of who we are and to whom we belong, especially when you are driving with a fish sign or the name Jesus behind your car.

[ 2 : 37 ] Likewise, for the Jews in the Old Testament and during Jesus' time, there was one important religious symbol among others. It was the temple.

To the Jews, the temple was the dwelling place of God. It was the place where their prayers and sacrifices could be offered and accepted by God.

That's why in the beginning of Mark, chapter 13, when Jesus and his disciples came out of the Jerusalem temple and they went up to Mount Olive, overlooking the temple, the disciples said to Jesus, look, teacher, what large storms and what large buildings.

Two some days ago, our vicar, Paul Barker, had explained clearly to us how awesome and magnificent this Jerusalem temple was. however, Paul also made clear that what the disciples adored was not only the beauty of the temple, but the fact that this was the place where God chose to be his dwelling place.

Indeed, the temple was the visible center of their religious life. But to their surprise, Jesus didn't endorse their adoration. And he began to prophesize about the destruction of the temple and other events that relate to it.

[ 4 : 02 ] And from verse 24 onwards of this chapter, Jesus moved on to prophesize about his second coming. At first glance, it seems that he has departed from the theme of the temple.

But this is not so. We shall see later that Jesus continues to deal with this religious symbol, though he reinterpreted it.

Let's look at today's passage that is Mark chapter 13, verses 24 to 37, which Jesus prophesies about his second coming. I believe it would be helpful if you open the Bible to Mark 13 on page 826 of the Pure Bible.

In this passage, while Jesus tells us about his second coming, he also tells us how we can prepare ourselves for his return.

Firstly, focusing on Jesus himself, verses 24 to 27. Jesus begins this session with Old Testament vision of the future, which can be found repeatedly in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Joel.

[ 5 : 10 ] In verses 24 to 25, Jesus says, But in those days, after that suffering, 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.

The immediate context of these words in the Old Testament has always to do with the future end time, particularly the judgment day. Though the language here is symbolic, it clearly points to chaos in a cosmic scale.

In the Old Testament prophets and in later Jewish writings, the dissolution of the cosmic structure frequently refers to the intervention of God in history.

Therefore, Jesus is seeing his second coming as fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. It will be a divine act. And on that day, humankind will see the Son of Man coming in crowds with great power and glory.

Suddenly, this is reminiscent of Daniel's vision of the coming of the Son of Man to establish an eternal kingdom in Daniel chapter 7. One thing to note here is that this second coming will be visible and glorious, especially if compared to the first coming.

[ 6 : 31 ] though they are both entirely the word of God. And when he comes again, Jesus said, the Son of Man will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

As I mentioned before, from our first reading, it seems that suddenly Jesus has departed from his prophecy about the temple. However, if we study it carefully, Jesus actually continues to talk about the temple, though not the physical temple in Jerusalem.

He is now talking about a new temple of God's gathered people which will become a visible reality with the return of the Son of Man. On that day, the Son of Man will come with great power and glory and bring about the consummation of his temple, his church, and his people.

On that day, everyone will finally see Jesus for who he really is and consequently, his work on earth will be totally vindicated.

In a profound way, Jesus has shifted the focus of the physical temple to the new temple which will gather around the Son of Man in his glorious return. Here is traditional Israel's eschatological hope which revolves around the city of David and the temple is profoundly reinterpreted.

[ 8 : 00 ] Therefore, what Jesus wants his disciples to keep an eye on is not the supersede the temple no matter how glamorous it is, but the supreme Son of God, the one who is about to offer his own body as an eternal sacrifice, but later rise and ascend to heaven and to return again.

here we need to ask ourselves today, what are our eyes fixed on? The temple and its beauty? Retails and activities?

Or the Son of Man himself? Recently, I had this conversation with my daughter, Lydia. We were talking about how God has blessed us with baby Jadidia and how we should give thanks to God. But in reply, Lydia said, I thank God, I love baby Jadidia, I thank God for baby, but the more important baby I need to give thanks for is God's own Son, Jesus Christ.

What an insightful comment. But to my even more surprise are the following words. She then challenged me, she said, we are to place God first in our lives.

[ 9 : 12 ] We are to love him first and love others. Then she asked me, Dad, do you love God first and then love Mom and then us?

Thank God that through Lydia, God remind me again of the right parity. Sometimes we can easily lose our focus. We may look very religious and we try very hard to be a good person, yet we drift away from Christ and we do everything according to our own ways and own strength.

It's irony, isn't it? We can love God's temple and its ritual, but we ignore God totally. We can be religious without Christ. We can celebrate Christmas without Christ.

Just like the recent news that President Bush sent out his Christmas greeting cards without mentioning Christmas. He just said, have a happy holiday.

Or, yesterday news that US mega churches are closing down for Christmas even though this year Christmas will be on Sunday. And the reason is because of the predicted poor number of attendants and it's just not worthwhile, not valuable money to have service on Christmas.

[ 10 : 35 ] From Jesus' words about his second coming, these words remind us to keep focusing our eyes on him, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

And not to take him out of the picture, not to take him out of our life and our celebration, but to keep focusing on him and to watch, keep watch for his return.

Because this is where our hope, true hope, lies and where our lives should be gearing towards.

Keep focusing on Jesus. Secondly, to trust, trusting in Jesus' words, verses 28 to 31.

In the following verses, once again, Jesus draws a lesson from the fig tree, as he did in chapter 11.

Jesus said, From the fig tree, learn its lesson.

As soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see this thing taking place, you know that he is near at the very gate.

[ 11 : 41 ] The point Jesus is making here is that we are able to recognize the season by the branches and leaves of a fig tree. In simple language, you do not need a calendar when you have a fig tree.

This is because in contrast to most other trees in Palestine, such as olive, oak, or evergreen, the fig loses its leaf in the winter. And in contrast to the almond which blossoms very early in the spring, the fig tree shows signs of life much later.

Therefore, when the branches of the fig become softened by sap flowing through them and leaves begin to appear, one can be certain that winter is past and summer is very near.

From this experience of fig tree, Jesus says, so also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near. at the very gate. Truly, I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.

There are two interrelated interpretive issues we need to clarify here. First, what are these things referring to? And second, he is near at the very gate.

[ 12 : 58 ] Should it be translated as he is near or it is near since the original text can go both ways? I believe the natural reading of these things is to treat them as referring to the signs that Jesus has been talking about in verses 5 to 23, which includes deception, war, persecution, suffering, and the sacrilege of the temple.

And this reading is supported by verse 30, which Jesus affirmed his contemporary generation that they witness to the occurrence of these things.

So if this reading is correct, then the latter half of verse 29 should be translated as it is near at the very gate referring to the destruction of the temple.

Therefore, what these two verses are saying is the occurrence of all these things, the appearance of false teachers, false prophets, war, suffering, sacrilege of the temple will enable the disciples to know that the destruction of the temple is imminent.

Just as when the fig tree cover itself with leaf, summer is near at the gate. We know that what Jesus has foretold regarding the destruction of the temple was fulfilled in AD 70.

[ 14 : 24 ] But the question for us is, as post 70 AD readers of Mark 13, what else can we learn from this lesson of the fig tree if the lesson is primarily related to the destruction of the temple?

I believe for today's readers, we not only see the terrible fate of the temple and the Jewish people, in a deeper level, we see the reliability and certainty of Jesus' words.

words. That's why Jesus claimed in verse 31, heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

Here, Jesus' words are on a par with God's word, the word of the Lord in Old Testament, just as prophet Isaiah said, the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. In effect, Jesus is calling his followers to trust in his word. And the immediate implication in trusting Jesus' word is to prepare ourselves for his return, because he is going to return.

[ 15 : 35 ] Just as the temple was destroyed, as Jesus foretold, his return is also a sheer event to be occurred. In a way, for us post-70 AD readers, we can say the fulfillment of Jesus' word regarding the destruction of the temple became a sign itself for us that we know Jesus will return.

Now the question is, do we expect and prepare for his return? What should we do? And in the following verses, Jesus tells us that we are to keep awake.

We are to keep watching. from verse 32 to verse 37, this last passage is the conclusion to Jesus' discourse about the future event in Mark 13.

In verse 4, the disciples asked Jesus, tell us, when will this be and what will be the sign that all these things are about to accomplish?

Though Jesus has told the disciples signs before the destruction of the temple, as regard to his return, he said in verse 32, that no one knows about it, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father.

[17:02] Very early in the church history, different interpretations have appeared regarding the ignorance of the Son. Maybe one of the better interpretations is to see some element of subordination.

That is, Jesus had to live by faith and to make obedience and watchfulness the hallmark of his ministry. However, we also need to bear in mind that Jesus' purpose here is not to define the limits of his knowledge, but to encourage, to assault his followers to stay vigilant, not calculation. In fact, throughout this passage, three times Jesus said, no one knows about the date. Verse 32, no one knows. Verse 33, for you do not know.

And then verse 35 again, for you do not know. Jesus' emphasis here primarily is not to keep, not only to keep the secrecy of the second coming, but the fact that God is sovereign and we are to learn to submit to him and to keep awake.

therefore, in verses 34 to 36, Jesus tells another parable of the doorkeeper keeping watch for the return of the master of the house, to illustrate the suddenness of his return, and the necessity to keep awake.

[18:28] Therefore, Jesus' message to his disciples and to us is, beware, keep alert, verse 33. And then verse 35, therefore, keep awake, for you don't know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at court crawl, or at dawn, or else he might find you asleep when he comes suddenly.

And what I say to you, I say to all, keep awake, keep alert, keep awake. It's not idle, it's not doing nothing, but actively seeking God's will and do his work.

When I think of a person who keep awake, keep watch, I will think of the late Mr. Chen. My memory of the late Mr. Chen went back to our wedding banquet in 1993 back in Malaysia.

He was a relative of my wife Teresa. At that stage, he was around 90 years old. Mr. Chen was a successful businessman and a respected leader of our local community.

But what was most significant about this person is his faith in Christ. I can remember vividly when halfway through our wedding banquet, he threw up from his table with the help of wife.

[19:53] Initially, I thought he wanted to go to the restroom. But to my surprise, he was not heading that direction, but moved toward the neighboring table.

Again, I thought he might like to say hello to someone, but he wasn't doing that as well. Instead, he put his hands into his pocket, and he took out some gospel tracts and started to deliver to people on each table.

It was my wedding, you know. Since he was a respected leader of the community, and due to his old age in our Chinese culture, nobody dared to reject him by accepting the gospel tract gladly, happily.

And after the banquet, I also found out that no one dared to leave the tract on the table. All threw them into the rubbish bin.

They all brought the tracts home. For me, this is a man of God, a man who was constantly keeping watch for the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[21:08] Although he was old and retired, he never become sleepy. he never slumbered, but he kept awake until he met Christ.

What about us? Do we keep awake for the Lord's return? Indeed, in Mark 13, as Jesus prophesies about the future of the temple and his return, in reality, he is extending personal care to his disciples.

All these disciples will be facing great trials and temptation to forsake their faith in the days ahead. But the hope of Jesus' return will keep them persevering to the end.

Likewise, in our present context, there are great challenges and uncertainty lying ahead of us. What we need to do is to focus ourselves on Jesus and to trust in his words that he is coming back.

Just like famous Arnold Schwarzenegger would, I will be back. And to keep watch, keep awake for his return. Indeed, if we look on to the next chapter, verse chapter 14, we meet another two construct person.

[22:39] The first one is Mary. Mary, she came with an alabaster jar of perfume to annoy Jesus. And in recommending Mary's word, Jesus said, she has done what she could.

She has anointed my body before him for its burial. Mary, Mary was awake. Mary was able to see what other people didn't see.

And she did what many people would like to do later but was unable. There is on the Easter Sunday, few women, they want to come to annoy Jesus' body.

But his body was gone because he was resurrected. But Mary, before Jesus' death, she did that on the body of Jesus to use that opportunity to serve God.

However, in contrast to Mary, we meet Judas. Judas who went in and out with Jesus for three years.

[ 23 : 51 ] But he failed to see who Jesus truly was. He didn't keep alert. He was dreaming. He was sleeping.

He was so near to the kingdom of heaven, yet he was so far away. As we prepare for the coming Christmas, let's also not only look backward, but we look forward to the return of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May we be like Mary. May we be like the late Mr. Chan. May we focus on Jesus. May we trust in his word that he is coming back.

And to keep watch until he returns. May this be our daily prayer. Come Lord Jesus.

let us pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are our salvation and our hope. We know that you are returning to be the king and lord of this universe because you say so.

[ 24 : 59 ] May your spirit help us to fix our eyes on you and prepare ourselves for your return. Help us, especially in this Christmas season, to share this wonderful message with people around us.

Come Lord Jesus. Amen.