

Watching and Waiting

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[0 : 0 0] Good evening everybody. I want to extend a very warm welcome to everybody this evening as we join in to worship God. And we pray that we will hear God's word and that it will be blessed to our souls.

We're going to begin with a short reading. This is from Mark's Gospel, chapter 13. And as he came, that's Jesus, came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teacher, look what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings.

And Jesus said to him, do you see these great buildings? There will not be left there one stone upon another that will not be thrown down. And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?

Jesus began to say to them, see that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, I am he, and they will lead many astray.

And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. This must take place, but the end is not yet. For a nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.

[1 : 2 0] There will be earthquakes in various places. There will be famines. These are but the beginning of the birth pains. But be on your guard.

Amen. May God bless to us this reading of his word. Let us engage in prayer. Lord our God, we pray to bless us. And we give thanks as we come this evening to your word, that your word will be a source of blessing to our souls.

Lord, we need you, and we need your word. And we cannot separate you from the word, because this is the way that you have revealed yourself to us. And it is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy you.

Help us, Lord, to realize that it is in the word that we come to know you. Although your creation in itself reveals to us your eternity and your power, your Godhead, yet the word is your special revelation to us, where you have made known to us so much about who you are, about the glory and the wonder, and how awesome you are and passion.

And we marvel so often as we come to your word. And one of the many, many things we cannot get over is someone who is so great and mighty and powerful and glorious in his being, yet has an interest in us individually, personally, intimately.

[2 : 4 5] And we give thanks, O Lord, for that. And we pray, Lord, that you will bless us then as we wait upon you. And help us, Lord, to have that spirit of waiting. We live at a time when waiting is not something that we like to do, but waiting is an essential part of Christian life.

It is not waiting idly. It is not waiting just carelessly. But it is waiting attentively and waiting to hear, ready to listen, ready to hear what God the Lord will speak to us.

We ask, Lord, that you will bless each and every one of us. Bless every home and every family. We commit everyone into your care and keeping. Pray for those, Lord, who are struggling in life with all the different issues that they face.

And these are, again, sometimes so personal and private. They are so individual. And yet, Lord, you know, and they know. And sometimes they don't even know just how much the depth of the issues that they face.

Because sometimes what we can see on the surface is but a reflection of something that is far deeper. Lord, we come before you confessing our sin and we recognise that we are sinners through and through.

[4 : 00] Your word tells us that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it? We certainly don't. And we do not know the other deception that takes place within our own heart.

But we give thanks, Lord, that you know us and that the provision that you have made in Jesus Christ deals with that deception and deals with the fruit of that deception which is seen in our sin.

And so we confess our sins before you again today individually and collectively. Lord, bless us as a congregation here. And we give thanks, Lord, for your goodness and mercy towards us in these days.

And we pray that you will continue to watch over us and keep us and protect us and be a shield around us and that we might know your grace, your mercy and your peace. Pray, Lord, for those who are ill, those who are going through difficult times or battling ill health, whether they are receiving treatment or not receiving treatment or undergoing surgery or whatever.

We ask, Lord, that your healing, gracious hand will be upon them. We pray for our nation and ask, Lord, that you will bless us. We seem to have moved so far away from you.

[5 : 15] We are all guilty. Help, Lord, us as a church not to have a them and us attitude with regard to our communities and with regard to our nation, but that we will see that we are, every single one of us is responsible before you.

And like Daniel in Babylon, as he prayed, and prayed for himself personally and for his people. He asked, Lord, that you would forgive our sins.

And that's what we pray, all our sins. We come before you and pray that you will have mercy upon us nationally. Grant wisdom to our leaders, to those in authority. And we pray, Lord, that you will raise up your people in places of prominence, places in advisory capacities where they will bring the influence for good to bear upon our legislations and upon the laws of our land.

And we pray, Lord, that you will protect your people and raise them up. And even on a difficult day, a day where we're being suffocated more and more, the Christian faith is being suffocated.

But we ask, Lord, that you will protect your gospel, your word of truth. Watch over us nationally, then we pray. And we ask, Lord, that a vaccine will soon be found to prevent this coronavirus, that the worst of it will be eradicated.

[6 : 42] And, Lord, we pray that we will soon be able to get back together again in church to worship you in the way that we love doing. And so we pray for your people throughout the land and indeed throughout all the nations of this world.

We pray for the persecuted church and ask, Lord, that you would bless them. Bless our young people as they're now on holiday. We give thanks for them. We give thanks, Lord, for the Sunday school that they had, the virtual Sunday school.

And we give thanks for our teachers and all who made provision, who did so much over these weeks and months. We give thanks, Lord, for their dedication and love and pray that you'll watch over them.

And so bless all the children and all the families. Pray, Lord, for those whose jobs are threatened and those, Lord, who may already have lost work. And we realise we live in a very uncertain, fragile world.

We pray that provision will be made, that work will be found and that you will guide us and guard us and keep us. So as we come to your word in a minute or two, again, we pray that you're blessed and cleanse us, we pray, from our every sin.

[7 : 50] In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. And just a wee word to the young folk. I read once of a minister, a preacher, his name was Mr. Gibson, and he did a lot of preaching away.

He travelled, in fact, he travelled all over the world. And he had himself, and Mrs. Gibson, he had one little girl, she was very young, young little girl, and she was a real daddy's girl.

And she was longing terribly for her daddy to come home because he was away in a preaching trip. In fact, he had been away down in Africa. And anyway, the day was coming when he was due to come home.

And so her mum got her dressed and there was a really good dress that she had for very special occasions. We talk about a Sunday best. Well, she had the best, this was her, she only got special occasion put out of this dress.

So she put it on, and they were just going to go off to the airport to meet Dad, Mr. Gibson, coming back, when they got word that he wasn't able to come that day.

[9 : 02] She obviously, both Mrs. Gibson and we girl, were very disappointed. But then the next day, again, she got ready in the morning, put on the new, the lovely dress and they were, they headed off to the airport.

Only to be told that there was a terrible fog in the airport that Mr. Gibson was flying from and that the plane would not likely come that day.

Though they weren't too sure that plane didn't come that day. So then on the third day, she got up, put on her lovely dress again and went with her mum to the airport.

And this time, Mr. Gibson did come back. He arrived. They were all so happy, big hugs, so pleased to see one another again. And Mr. Gibson was saying to him, oh, it's lovely to see you again.

And you look so beautiful in that lovely, clean dress. It's so beautiful. Mrs. Gibson said, it really is quite amazing because you know, our daughter, that she's always running around, always falling, always getting things dirty.

[10 : 10] But she has managed to keep this dress clean like it just came out of the wardrobe off a hanger. Just, it's sparkling for three days because she has had this dress on the three days waiting for you to come.

And you know, that's lovely to hear because she so loved her daddy and she so wanted to look her best when dad came home.

And that's a wonderful picture to us of how we should be as we wait for Jesus to return. Because Jesus is coming back again and he wants us to be like that.

He doesn't want us to be careless and dirty and doing all the wrong things. He wants us every day to be, as it were, with our best on, to be clean and to be watching and to be waiting and doing just what he would want us to be doing when he returns.

That's who Jesus wants us to be. To be prepared and ready and doing our best for him, loving him and with clean hearts and you ask that the Lord would help you and I must ask too because sometimes it's very difficult and sometimes we're ashamed of what we say and what we do and what we think and we say, oh I'm glad Jesus didn't come back when I was doing this or when I was thinking that or when I was saying this or whatever.

[11 : 47] Jesus says, I'm going to come back very suddenly. That's what we're going to look at today in the sermon. So let that little girl the way that she waited with her lovely clean dress and she was so careful every day so that she would be spotlessly clean when Dad came back and she was.

And that's how Jesus is wanting us to be waiting, watching, ready when he returns. I'm going to say the Lord's Prayer. Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever. Amen. And we pick up our reading in Mark chapter 13 and in verse 24.

Mark chapter 13 and reading from verse 24. 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 and then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory and then he will send out the angels and gather his elect from the four winds from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

[13 : 13] From the victory 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 Son 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 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 cock 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. Amen and may God bless to us this reading of his own holy word. Right we are going to look at Mark chapter 13 and it is the last verse it is verse 37 Jesus' words and what I say to you I say to all stay awake.

[14 : 47] Stay awake. Now at the beginning of the chapter we find Jesus and the disciples coming out of the temple and as we know the temple was an absolutely magnificent structure and the disciples draw Jesus' attention to the stones and to the magnificence of the temple.

I am not big on architecture but I must say that I do enjoy looking at some of the amazing buildings the old buildings in the cities whether you are in Glasgow or in Edinburgh or even down in London are going into some of the great cathedrals you go in and you just kind of stand in and you think wow the mines that planned it and the brilliance of the putting together the work that we did and some of it is so intricate and amazing well that's how it was the disciples were highlighting and pointing this out to Jesus but Jesus tells them that however magnificent the temple is going to be and he says to them I'm going to tell you something there will soon not be one stone left upon another of course that kind of took their breath away and why Jesus says that he is really showing to us just how unpredictable and how changeable the world is things just happen in a moment the world that we know can change so quickly we've come across that ourselves with regard to this virus the world that we were used to the world the world that was or was changing the changes in this world that have taken place even the last number of years have been almost breathtaking but our world radically changed with this virus breaking out and it shows us that life is though we often think it isn't it is incredibly unpredictable things happen very quickly and that's one of the things that Jesus is talking about and when the disciples were alone with Jesus they began to question about this the destruction of the temple and so

Jesus told them that there were certain things going to happen before his return now when Jesus talks about the return this might have confused them a bit because he hadn't gone away and they at that point hadn't understood it that he was going away so when he talks about his coming his coming back or his return to the disciples sometimes they were a bit confused or nonplussed about it all because at this point Jesus hadn't died and been resurrected or ascended to heaven or been in the intercession all that he was still here on earth with them but Jesus says that it tells them very simply and repeatedly that he is going to return again now when Jesus talks about the return he tells us over and over again that it's going to be quite an awesome spectacle that it's going to be very different to when he came into this world the first time it's not going to be as if he returns it'll be very different because he's going to come in all his awesome glory and it's going to be in the most amazing spectacle for those who are alive when the Lord Jesus

Christ returns now one of the things that Jesus in the Gospels likens his return to is like the lightning now we had one of the worst thunderstorms that we've known for a long long time just the previous week there and Jesus tells us in Matthew and he says for as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west so will be the coming of the Son of Man so he likens it to lightning and there's two things about lightning first of all is its suddenness you and I cannot predict when the next flash is going to be cannot predict it even when the thunderstorm is there we can't say it'll be it's going to come now it just it just happens and the second thing is the power of that flash is so great that everybody will see it when if the lightning is kind of overhead the brilliance of that flash is so powerful that it's not just at night that you can see it but you'll see it during the day and you don't have to be just outside you can see it inside the house and in fact even if your eyes are closed when lightning is just above it still even registered registers with you so this is what

Jesus is saying is when he describes its return like lightning it's going to be so sudden nobody can predict when and it's also going to be a coming that everybody is going to see the Bible tells us that over and over again that the coming of Jesus isn't going to be something that's localised in one place it's going to be a spectacular coming and I cannot understand everything that will happen but we believe that the very the whole world will reverberate that there will be a great noise and great glory that's going to be the most amazing spectacle but he's going to come and there's going to be a different reaction from his people and from his enemies those who love Jesus at the return will find that this is the answer to the prayer and revelation even so come Lord Jesus the enemies of Christ for them this is going to be the worst day ever and that's why it tells us that they would rather that the rocks and the hills fell on them to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb because there will not be one atheist or one agnostic or one doubter on that day because all eyes will behold him and see him and it will be as we say an extraordinary event but it's a suddenness of his appearing that Jesus is continually driving before them and he tells them in verse 35 you do not know when the time will come and elsewhere he says in such an hour as you don't think the Son of Man comes it's the very time that you don't think he's going to come that's when he's going to come so Jesus is telling us that we ought to be watching and waiting for his return we find that the early church right at the very beginning they were living in expectation you find that for instance when Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica that some of them had actually stopped working and that every day they were waiting for the return of Jesus and Paul tells them no get back to work it's not a good witness to be idling away there even although you are waiting the return of Jesus but we've got to be about our normal

[21 : 54] Judean business but spiritually still spiritually alive and alert and down throughout the centuries in the history of the church there have been periods when the church has been living in the light of the Lord's return we find that very much in the days of McChain and Boner they were people who were looking for and waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus I don't know if we today are living with that expectation living thinking it could be today do we get up every day thinking it could be today that Jesus returns I'm going to be watching and waiting I'm going to live in the right way because Jesus is coming back do we live like that or are we living slumbering and sleeping and kind of forgetting that he's returning well I feel well that's not I feel that's not I feel but going from what the scripture would indicate it would almost appear that when Jesus does return that the church is slumbering and sleeping

Jesus just for one instance of that is I know it's a parable but Jesus gives the parable of the ten the five wise five foolish virgins of bridesmaids and they all slumbered and slept and then the bridegroom came so that they were sleeping and Jesus at various points talks about just that possibility of the church slumbering and sleeping at his return and he keeps saying to us I want you to be awake I want you to be watching I want you to be vigilant so we're told that we must be on guard and that's why Jesus tells us in verse 35 stay awake because you don't know when the master of the house will come for the evening midnight and the rooster crows of the morning Jesus is going by the four watches of the night that the Romans have there was from six to nine nine to twelve twelve to three and three to six in these four watches so that's

Jesus is saying it could be at any time you and I don't know when he's going to come back so Jesus is saying don't let me find you asleep that is spiritually negligent and so Jesus then says what I say to you I say to all watch now this word watch kind of mean sleepless it comes from two words to chase and sleep so in other words it's to chase sleep away so that's what Jesus is saying and he's talking here spiritually it's not that we aren't to have our sleep but he's saying I want you to be spiritually alive and active and so he tells us to watch this is what he keeps saying watch so what are we going to watch well if we could speak to believers here what are we to watch well first and foremost we begin with ourselves watch yourselves that's very important if you begin watching others you will become very judgmental and censorious and you will be finding you'll be very critical and you will be seeing people's faults and failings and all these things and watching others is not what Jesus tells us to do we're told quite often take heed to yourself you watch yourself

I must watch myself and I think we can say that those who are constantly passing judgment on others those who are watching others critically all the time I would almost guarantee are not watching themselves at the same time because if you're really watching yourself and you're watching into your own heart and you've seen who you are the last thing you do is become critical of others because you know there's nobody that you're more critical of than yourself it's an amazing leveler when you begin to discover what you are that will soon stop you pointing the finger at somebody else because the seed of every sin is here within our own hearts and that's one of the most painful discoveries and it's something that stops us pointing the fingers at others so watch yourself that's where we begin with watch watch yourself and we need to watch again what we do because we live if we're

Christians then we obviously have to have to live in keeping with the profession that we make because our lives are really Jesus tells us are open books that are open letters read by all people and Jesus wants us to live out our life with him displayed that's what Jesus is wanting that our Christian life will impact society will impact other people for good because remember Jesus impacted this world for the greatest good and he wants his people similarly if Christ is in you then you should be impacting you should be acting like salt and like light in this world and if we're living like that then we want to be judgmental of other people we want to be critical of other people remember Jesus in exaggerated language he likened that to people are critical you have this person coming up and he says you have a wee speck in your eye do you know that you've got a speck in your eye but they don't realise they put a plaque in their own eyes now obviously it's exaggerated language but Jesus is just showing how ridiculous it sometimes is how people who are so judgmental and critical they're worse themselves but as we seek to live out our

[28 : 09] Christian life let us seek to live it so that we are engaged in the right things when the Lord Jesus Christ returns that we're saying to ourselves because I'm sure as we look back over our lives there are many times that we've said I am so thankful the Lord didn't return then so that we're living in such a way that when the Lord returns that we're able to say I'm so pleased to see you Lord but not only are we to watch what we do we are also to watch our tongue watch what we say because the Lord tells us that we will be judged by our words so that's very solemn when you think of all the wasted words and judgmental words and critical words and gossiping words when we think of all these things we're to be judged by our words and that's why the psalmist said I will take heed to my ways that I do not sin with my tongue it's amazing if you go through the

Bible you'll find how much a reference there is to the sin of the tongue the tongue causes so much havoc and so much pain so much sorrow so much damage in this world and that's why we must take heed to our tongue that I do not sin with my tongue watch your heart this is this is somewhere an area we really have to watch because there is so much twistedness and deceit within our heart in fact we're told in the Bible that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked who can know it that really is a stopper when you think of all the deceit and all the twistedness that's in this world and you see many things out there and you look over the history of life and all the things that were done in scheming twisted conniving ways and then to realise that your heart my heart is that fountain of cesspool

I should say of utter deceit and there are times we get a little glimpse into who we are and it's frightening and that's why like David after his great sin he realised that his sin was a result of the twistedness of his heart and that's why he prays create a clean heart within me Lord renew a right spirit within me and we need to pray that as well so watch your heart because it's forever see the great problem is we by nature already side with sin we have sympathy to sin we love sin and it is only through the ministry of God's spirit that we're able to fight against sometimes we don't fight sufficiently sometimes we lose out watch watch your development and growth as Christians we ought to be growing that's what the Bible tells us to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord

Jesus Christ sometimes people say are you growing are you growing and you say yes a Christian and you say yes I don't think so and you mean that with all sincerity and you know the reason is this is that our growth is very often it's down and the more we grow the more light we have the more knowledge we have and it's great when we have more light and knowledge of God because that's where our main growth ought to be but in keeping with the light and the knowledge that the growing light and knowledge we have of God is also a greater knowledge and light of who we are ourselves and the more we see of ourselves we say I'm getting worse but that is an evidence of actually the light and the growth that's taking place in your heart watch temptation and ask for grace when temptation comes because you know the most dangerous time is when you are being tempted and you find yourself being drawn into the temptation and the alarm bells go off and you know that you ought to pray and say

Lord deliver me here but you don't you don't because you're already siding with the temptation and that is a dangerous time so we need to be watching in all these areas so how do we watch well we have to watch in prayer be much in prayer prayer and watching go together you would find so often Jesus saying that watch and pray the two you can't really separate them and remember what we said chase sleep chasing sleep and you and I know how often when we begin to pray that we get drowsy we feel tired it's often an unnatural tiredness because beforehand you are fine and you could read a paper or you could read a magazine or look at this look at that and you're alright till you begin to pray and then this tiredness comes over but we've got to remember this is part of the enemy of our soul doesn't want us to pray so it's vital that we're watching so that's we're recognising

[33 : 33] Jesus said when he found the disciples he told them to watch and pray they were slumbering and sleeping when he came back and that's why he says the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak and that's how so often we find ourselves but we need also to be watching with God's word because the word is key to our discovery of how things are and if we are living our lives watching and praying and watching and in the word we will find that there will be a freshness to our lives that there will be this sense of being alert that we will be keeping up with the Lord as it were as we go along it's key to our Christian growth and development and we need to be watching that the world doesn't suffocate us we're living in very difficult times and the world seems to be suffocating the church more and more and more we find that we're being stifled and strangled and there's often a heavy spirit upon us today and it can be very difficult it can be hard going at these times and so we have to guard that we don't allow the world to come in and to take over because remember in the parable of the sower that it was the world these were the weeds that began to strangle the good seed so you make sure that the world isn't taking over in your life and again we need to watch because as we're saying all along the Lord is coming it's coming soon and you know one of the things Jesus reminds us again elsewhere that when he returns it's going to be at a time just of normality and he likened it to the days of Noah when the flood came and he said in that day and at that time they were marrying and giving in marriage they were doing all they were working they were eating they were drinking they were marrying they were giving in marriage in other words he was talking about the ordinary run of life everything was as nobody got up in the morning and said wow the day of the flood you know something there's going to be a real flood today because it just seemed a normal day

Noah had told him Noah had preached Noah was in the ark if they had eyes to see and ears to hear they would have understood but they didn't they laughed they mocked where is the promise of this flood same as people are saying today where is the promise of his coming one day he's going to come and so Jesus is saying watch be ready so that when I come you're not going to be ashamed that you're going to be about the master's business it's so important and if you don't know Jesus today then I would urge you that you come to know because it makes life life meaningful and it makes your future meaningful and you will live your life with hope in your heart hope and you know hope and you will have hope in this world and that's not a good situation to be in so you ask the

Lord Jesus to come into your life and to bring his light and his hope and his love and to grant you the strength and the grace every day to be working for him and living your life in the light of his return we're going to conclude singing in Psalm 130 and this is from the Scottish Psalter Psalm 130 from the Scottish Psalter Lord from the depths to thee I cried my voice Lord who do thou hear unto my supplications voice give an attentive ear Lord who shall stand if thou O Lord should mark iniquity but yet with thee forgiveness is that feared thou mayest be I wait for God my soul doth wait my hope is in his word more than they that for morning watch my soul waits for the Lord I say more than they that do watch the morning light to see that Israel hope in the Lord for with them mercies be and so on the whole

Psalm 130 Lord from the depths to thee I cried Lord from the depths to thee I cried my voice Lord do thou hear unto my supplications void give give an attentive ear Lord who shall stop if thou o'er choose mark iniquity with thee but yet with thee forgive let's end that fear thou mayest be

I wait for call I wait for call my soul doth wait my hope is in his word more than may that for morning war my soul wait for the Lord I say more than may that do walk the Lord is for the Lord I say more than they love to walk the morning light to see let Israel hope is for the

[40 : 23] Lord I say hope in the Lord for with him mercy be on plenty of redemption is ever found in the Lord for with mercy is ever found with him and from all his in in equities he Israel shall redeem he is shall redeem he is shall redeem now may the grace and mercy and peace of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest and abide upon each one of you now and forevermore. Amen.