

Christ Is the King

Mark 13:32-37

by Michael G. Lilienthal

Dear servants of the King,

We've heard that the Judgment is coming. But we are comforted in this, because when that comes that means the Triumph of the Saints. The facts are now expounded even further: we are on this earth as servants of the King, keeping house until he returns. Yes, his return will mean our joy. But that does not mean we become lazy. Rather, it means that we should be diligent, because

I. We have work to do before he returns

Jesus says this explicitly: "It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work." The parallel passage in Matthew's Gospel contains an extended parable, the parable of the talents: the master of the house, before going on his journey, left to each of three servants five coins, two coins, or one coin, "to each according to his ability" (Matt. 25:15). Two of the servants were wise with their talents and increased what was entrusted to them, while the third, who had only one talent, buried it out of sight until the master's return. When the master came back, he congratulated the first two servants and rewarded them by saying, "Enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21, 23). But to the last servant he said, "You wicked and slothful servant!" (Matt. 25:26), and he took the coin away and "cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 25:30).

Understand this whole parable as an expounding of the statement Jesus makes in Mark's Gospel that each servant has his work, and understand how it applies in your personal situation. You yourself have been entrusted with an allotment of coins, treasures. Perhaps your treasure is actually finance, money which you are able to use to support the work of God's Church. Perhaps your treasure is a musical ability with which you are able to beautify the service of God, or another talent in the arts that might be similarly used. Perhaps your treasure is the ability to speak with people, to sit and shoot the breeze in a way that makes people comfortable around you. Perhaps your treasure is free time you can use to clean the church building, or to carry flyers about upcoming church events around town. The point is: each person has been made a steward of certain treasures. See to it that you do not bury these treasures out of sight, but rather put them to use in your appropriate work before the master returns to his house.

And yet, while each of us has his individual work to do assigned by our Lord, we all share one task: Watch. He says, "And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

II. Watch, because he will come unexpectedly

There's a simple train of logic in Jesus' command to stay awake and watch: 1) "no one knows" the moment of his return. 2) Because of that, and because it could happen at any moment, why risk being unprepared? 3) Always be prepared and watch.

This is actually the fourth time in this discourse that Jesus issued the command: "Watch." Over the last couple of weeks we'd been told to watch, to be on guard. Jesus was building up to this point wherein he actually tells us what he means. To be on

guard means “to stay awake,” to be vigilant and not caught sleeping. Jesus uses the illustration of the master coming at an unexpected time, “in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning,” the four times through the night that it is *hardest* to stay awake, to emphasize the need to attend with deliberateness to this task.

It’s easy, even for Christians, to think, “Yeah, I know that the end is coming. I’m good.”

There’s an interesting balance that we have to strike here:

First, we know that when this end comes it means that all will come to their final destinations: the cursed “into eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life” (Matt. 25:46). We likewise know that this eternal life comes by faith: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). So the watershed of eternity is steered by faith. And we further know, “by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8-9). Our first conclusion, therefore, must be that it is not our concern to be sure that we generate and maintain the proper faith, but it is God’s.

Second, though, Jesus commands us to “Be on guard, keep awake,” so that we don’t slip into sleep and forsake the faith which keeps us ready for the master’s return. The balance is this: we rely on God’s work, not our own, but not so that we fall into complacency. Christ is the King, and we are his subjects. This King has done everything for us: having died on the cross to purchase this nation peopled by his saints, he rose triumphant. And now that King is in heaven, arranging all things for our

triumphant journey home, and he is also here on earth, working in us and with us to maintain us in faith.

But we are not in that glory yet. While on this earth, yes we are saints washed clean in him, but there is an enemy which still tries to pull us down. It is that enemy who coaxes you into complacency, telling you that you have everything in hand, and you don't need to worry *that* much about the master's return. It's so hard to remain vigilant; he can't mean that. There's no harm if you shut your eyes for a couple winks.

Have you ever driven in the middle of the night down a boring and empty road? It's so easy for that quiet darkness to lull you into a doze. The spiritual doze that the Devil is trying to lure you into is just as dangerous as falling asleep at the wheel. No matter how straight the road, no matter how good the alignment on your wheels, no matter how void of other cars or obstacles, there is no one in his right mind who would consider falling asleep at the wheel a good idea. Falling asleep at the door, dozing in our faith and regarding it as being of only secondary importance is just as terrible an idea. To impress this on us, Jesus tells us that "no one knows" when he will return. Who knows but he may come at the moment you let your faith slip and you are in the act of committing some great sin? How do you want your Lord to find you when he comes back? "Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come."

There are several who try to pick a fight over the fact that Jesus says that "the Son" is one of those who do not know the day or hour of the Judgment. They would seek to prove by this statement that Jesus cannot be God. These are loud voices, and so

because of their objections, I'll tell you now how one of our greatest theologians has phrased the answer; Martin Chemnitz, shortly after the Reformation, wrote:

As a result and because of His humiliation, His human nature could be ignorant of certain things and could increase in wisdom. But now, after He had laid aside His humiliation, when Christ's soul was placed personally in the brilliant light of divine wisdom, as iron in fire, what is there that it would not see, what is there that it would not understand or not know, since this soul possesses the whole fullness of God and all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge dwelling personally within it and brightly shining in itself?¹

See, we can't understand the nature of God, especially not when that divine is united to the human in the person of Jesus Christ. We only know what has been revealed to us, what has been revealed in this Book of books we call the Bible. Is it troubling that there are things unknown? That's where faith comes in, faith and trust: as the writer to the Hebrews famously puts it, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). By faith we believe these unknown things, and are sure of them. How can we be so sure? Christ is the King, and he won our salvation by his death on the cross, and he rose victorious to be our king, and he has revealed the love of God to us, and urges us to trust in him. Rely on him. Who would you rather rely on: the God of the Universe who is so powerful that he can in fact become a human being and cover the evil of all mankind with his own holiness, or your own sinful self, who sometimes cannot control your own drooping eyelids?

¹ Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 329.

So beware complacency. Stay awake. At this end of the church year, when the nights are growing longer and the sun sets some nights by 4:30, when the darkness is a more constant companion than ever before in the year, let that darkness remind you of the end of the world, which will come when you least expect it. Therefore *always* expect it. In the parallel passage in Matthew's Gospel we hear Jesus compare this end of the world to "the days of Noah.... For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matt. 24:37-39).

Think of these last days as the last days before the Flood. To be on guard and to stay awake is to remain standing in the ark, where it is safe. What madness would lead you to step out onto the dry ground, especially if this deluge will come at an unexpected moment? What is there out there that you would risk your soul's security to save?

Even as men in [the time just before the Flood] lived in unthinking security, buried themselves in worldly cares, and failed to heed the signs of the times, so it shall be among the masses even now; moral laxity and gross materialism will spread like wildfire.²

Because the belief in the end relies on faith, men deliberately blind their hearts to it and secure themselves in the things which are seen. It makes sense to the material world, for we are all material beings (i.e. beings made up of material components). But we

² Ylvisaker 618.

have the testimony of God, and we can see the signs. We know that the **Judgment Is Coming**. Because of our faith we know that we **Saints Are Triumphant** when it comes. And likewise we know that **Christ Is the King** and will rule all when he comes. Trust in him, therefore. Stay awake, not in terror, but in eagerness for his arrival, as children can't relax when waiting for a visit from Grandma and Grandpa. The arrival means love, gifts, joy – and in the case of Christ the King's coming, all these are eternal, everlasting, never-ending.

Amen.