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<sup>35</sup> “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. <sup>36</sup> If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. <sup>37</sup> What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ ”

In the name of our Returning Lord Jesus, dear friends,

You and I should not be here right now. In fact this beautiful planet we live on should not be here right now...at least according to Chris McCann, leader of *eBible Fellowship*. October 7<sup>th</sup>—not even two months ago—is when the End was supposed to come. But let’s back up a little bit, so that we can truly appreciate what Mr. McCann and others do when it comes to prophesying the end of the world.

Back in 2010, McCann was hyping the end of the world for another Christian prognosticator by the name of Harold Camping. They predicted May 21, 2011. Obviously, that didn’t happen. But they had an explanation. They were correct, they said afterward, because it was a “spiritual judgment” and not the BIG Judgment Day. They then set the date for *that* as October 21, 2011. Well, that didn’t happen either. Camping came face to face with Jesus on his own personal judgment day in December of 2013, but McCann is still at it...and still wrong every time he predicts the end of the world and the return of Jesus.

Those guys are not the only ones to boast of some insight into the end of the world and the return of the Savior. It goes all the way back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century when many Christians listened to a man named Montanus and abandoned all they had and gathered on a plain to welcome the coming of the New Jerusalem. And many have made similar predictions over the years and based their predictions on numbers in the Bible, planetary alignments, solar eclipses, calendars—all kinds of things!

Why do people feel they know when the end of the world will be? Why do Christians, who can read what the Bible says, still presume to know the mind of God or listen to people who say they do? We’re left with far more questions about these individuals than answers, I’m afraid. Although God does not give us every answer we may be looking for, he does give us a promise.

The words of Jesus that we look at today were spoken on Tuesday of Holy Week—the week he died. In the whole 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark’s gospel, we find Jesus discussing the end of the world with his disciples. In the words we’ll explore today from that chapter, we receive, as those disciples did,

**THE PROMISE OF CHRIST’S RETURN** It is...

**1. A MYSTERY FOR YOUR SOUL’S PROTECTION (32-33)**

**2. A REVELATION FOR YOUR SOUL’S SALVATION (34-37)**

Today is the first Sunday of the Advent season of the Church year. Advent comes from a Latin word that means “coming”. The season is so named because we are looking forward to Christ’s coming in several ways over the next few weeks. We look forward to celebrating Jesus’ coming into the world as our Savior at his birth. It’s a time to prepare for our hearts for Christmas. We also celebrate the way Jesus comes to us regularly in Word and Sacrament. And it is also a time to prepare our hearts for Christ’s return to this world on the Day of Resurrection or Judgment Day. It is that third focus that is our primary concern as we study Jesus’ words this morning.

You and I are accustomed to lots of hype and promotion before big events, right? For instance, if you were watching at halftime of the Monday Night Football on ESPN on October 19<sup>th</sup>, you got the first glimpse of something that got everyone talking about something that is to occur on December 18, 2015. Some of you know what I'm talking about because you've already made plans for that day. That's the first day *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* opens in theaters. And certainly, you and I have been bombarded for weeks with Black Friday alerts—and maybe they got you out a couple days ago for that big day. Lots of promotion, lots of hype.

Well, what about God? Does he work that way? You might expect God to crank up the promotion machine for an event like the return of Christ to the world. Certainly Jesus would want everyone to know that he is coming! God does tell us in his Word about some of the things that precede his return, and all those signs have been fulfilled. But that's about all the hype you're going to get.

See, we advertise events to ensure great turnouts, but God knows what the turnout will be for the Last Day. You decided whether you'd battle the crowds on Black Friday and you can decide whether you'll go to see *Star Wars*, but as for the Last Day, you're going to be there. ALL people will be there—they have no choice. The advanced notice has been given in Scripture. But you say, *"No date or time or even year are given in the Bible for Jesus' return!"* That's right. And God keeps it A MYSTERY FOR YOUR SOUL'S PROTECTION. He wants you to have the promise of Jesus' return to take believers to heaven, but he protects you by NOT telling you exactly when that will be.

Now, you may not agree with his method, but it's actually pretty brilliant of God! Think of it this way: people often procrastinate, don't they? Some people like to operate that way—like my roommate back in college. Some people can't help it, but get in positions where lots of things are last-minute. Sometimes we miss deadlines or events even when we don't mean to. Often it is sin in us and in the world that causes our imperfect timing and motivation. Now imagine us, imperfect people, with the knowledge of the year and specific day of Christ's return to judge the world. Just what do you think many of us would do—maybe even intentionally?

Oh, of course, we love God so much that even if we knew that Jesus would not return for 5 years, we would continue to serve him every moment of those 5 years! Sure we would! I suspect you know better. Our sinful nature would make the most of that information and urge us to live for ourselves, to do what we want, instead of doing what pleases God. The sinful side of us would fancy itself a great procrastinator and planner if it knew how much time it had before Christ was to come back. We would figure that we could get serious about God during the last year or last month or even the last week! Surely we are saved not because of the way we live our lives, but by faith in God. All that matters at the end is whether we believe. And so the sinful lightbulb goes on—we could have the best of both worlds—do whatever we want on earth, and by means of a spiritual sprint of faith down the homestretch, slide in safely to our eternal home! How perfect!

Oh, the devil would have a field day, wouldn't he?! He'd keep working away on us, encouraging us to put off a life of faith and trust in God until the last possible moment. You see, here are the dangers: We could get to like that life of reckless spiritual abandon, so much so that we never shake it off at the end. Or we could die before we get a chance to turn it around. Oops! And the thing that we would also be forgetting all the while is this: We don't make ourselves come to faith and we don't encourage ourselves to live a life of faith to God. Only God's Holy Spirit, working through the Word of God grants us faith to believe and power to live for God. A person can't just wake up one day and decide to believe!

God has found you, not the other way around! And because he found you and me, we don't want to let go of him. Some of us know what it's like to be without God in our lives. When we consider what that was like and compare it to what we have now—we never want to lose our Savior! I would imagine that

you who have believed your entire lifetime, feel just the same. And God feels that way too. He doesn't want to lose even one soul.

And so, when it comes to Jesus' return on the Last Day, God eliminates this dangerous temptation to live for ourselves and try to time our trust in him at the end by leaving his return A MYSTERY FOR YOUR SOUL'S PROTECTION.

These words of Jesus make it pretty clear: ***No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.***

Jesus tells us that we won't know when he's coming. He even said that He didn't know. That seems odd coming from Jesus, doesn't it, since he is the all-knowing Son of God? But remember that he said that during his human existence on earth. During his earthly life, he often laid aside his divine qualities. Just as he chose to not do miracles all the time, so he here chose not to even know when Judgment Day would come. It is an expression of his humility—his willingness to truly live as a human being, under God's law. Remember that it was for us that Jesus did that.

And so if Jesus said that he didn't know, and he says that none of us will know, it's absurd to believe that any person will successfully predict when Christ will come again. Instead Jesus says, ***"Watch!", "Be prepared!" "Be alert!" "Expect me at any time!"***

It's worth mentioning that when Jesus spoke these words, he was on his way to Calvary to offer that humble life of perfection on the cross. There he would pay for the sinful imperfection that would cause us to not live for God if we knew when the Last Day was.

We know our sinful selves too well. God knows our weakness too. So he keeps that temptation to away from us. Besides, there's no reason we need to know when Christ will come again. That's why he has left the time of his return A MYSTERY—FOR YOUR SOUL'S PROTECTION.

There are reasons to know some things, though—so God does give you a REVELATION FOR YOUR SOUL'S SALVATION. The PROMISE OF CHRIST'S RETURN is given because God does want you to know that the day will come. Jesus promises to return to take all believers to be with him in heaven. We will be welcomed into eternal joy and filled with the blessings of God forever. He has also promised to condemn those who refused to believe in him as the Savior. God does not want anyone to go to hell for eternity, but clearly says that that's what will happen to those who refuse him. All who do not want God in their lives now, will not have him in their eternal lives either—hell awaits those souls.

Considering that wonderful promise of eternal life and the sobering promise of divine judgment, we must agree that the message of salvation in Christ must be shared. It's how you came to faith in God; it's how other people will too. The most exciting, uplifting, hopeful thing a person can know is that they will, without a doubt, be going to heaven! God wants us to be confident and happy about that! He wants us to look forward to that! He also wants us to share that promise with others so that they can experience that same joy and hope and confidence.

There's a little something in this text that can sometimes be overlooked, so I wanted to be sure to point it out. It's what comes next and it's almost a mini-parable almost. ***It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.*** The disciples needed to see Jesus departing and returning to this world in just that way, and so do we. Jesus is the master who is going away. The servants left in charge till he returns are believers. The time he is gone is the time from his ascension into heaven until his return in judgment. Listen again, ***It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in***

**charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.** That's easy enough to understand, but the element that can sometimes be missed is this: each believer (or servant) has an assigned task and a Christian leader, maybe a pastor (the one at the door) is to keep watch, in order to remind the other servants to keep at their assigned task and to watch for Jesus' return. You get the impression there that it's not enough for Christians to simply sit around and wait for Jesus to come back. There's work to be done! Jesus has given us "assigned tasks". We don't have the time today to discuss all of those, but you know God says that he gives each of his children gifts and abilities with which to serve God and his people. He expects us to be doing those things in his absence. The ones watching at the door—pastors, we might say—are to remind about being faithful while Jesus is gone. They are to keep everyone prepared so that when Christ does return, he'll find his people living their faith and fully prepared to meet him!

Jesus keeps impressing upon us the importance of being prepared with the last verses: ***Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!'***

When will Jesus return? He makes it clear that we will not know WHEN to expect him, but we are told that we ARE to expect him. And that's A REVELATION FOR YOUR SOUL'S SALVATION. Jesus mentions all the watches of the night (from 6 PM to 6 AM) to highlight the fact that it will be an unexpected time. What a wonderful surprise that Day will be! Not a surprise in the same way that "caller #9" on the radio is surprised to win the contest, but in that the Day will finally be here! We've been told *what* to expect, just not *when* to expect it!

While we wait in hope for that day, we are to take on our assigned tasks of faith with spiritual energy! We are to watch for his return and be prepared! He warns us not to be caught spiritually 'sleeping' on that day. So if you have been, today is the day to get back on track. There is no excuse for not being prepared to meet your Savior upon his return. These words of Jesus regarding the Last Day are A REVELATION FOR YOUR SOUL'S SALVATION!

With them he promises that he will return. When he does come again he will take all of us who believe to eternal life. Heaven, as he describes it in Scripture, is a place without sin, sorrow, pain, crying, death, temptation, or anything evil; it is a place where we will be with our Savior and all believers and all of God's eternal blessings—whatever he might have in store for us. And it is forever.

Don't get too caught up in when Jesus' second coming will be, but focus on the wonderful promise of love God has given. He will return and take us to be with him. The PROMISE OF CHRIST'S RETURN is what keeps us alert, watchful, spiritually alive and active—so that when that day does finally come, we are found living for Christ and prepared to meet him—whenever that day may be! Amen.