

WATCH, PREPARE, REJOICE AND BEHOLD

I Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 13:24-37

November 27, 2005

Gospel Lesson

²⁴ “At that time, after those horrible days end, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give light, ²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken.

²⁶ Then everyone will see the Son of Man arrive on the clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And he will send forth his angels to gather together his chosen ones from all over the world—from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven.

²⁸ “Now, learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its buds become tender and its leaves begin to sprout, you know without being told that summer is near. ²⁹ Just so, when you see the events I’ve described beginning to happen, you can be sure that his return is very near, right at the door. ³⁰ I assure you, this generation will not pass from the scene until all these events have taken place. ³¹ Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will remain forever.

³² “However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows. ³³ And since you don’t know when they will happen, stay alert and keep watch.

³⁴ “The coming of the Son of Man can be compared with that of a man who left home to go on a trip. He gave each of his employee’s instructions about the work they were to do, and he told the gatekeeper to watch for his return. ³⁵ So, keep a sharp lookout! For you do not know when the homeowner will return—at evening, midnight, early dawn, or late daybreak. ³⁶ Don’t let him find you sleeping when he arrives without warning. ³⁷ What I say to you I say to everyone: Watch for his return!”

This is the Gospel of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Today is the beginning of Advent. It is the day we begin to prepare for the coming of our Lord: not only for His birth, but also for His second coming. He came into our world as a little baby. When he reached manhood, He moved around the country spreading the Good News that He came to save all people. He came bearing the gift of eternal life. All we have to do to receive that gift is to say, “Yes” to Him.

The whole world is included in this proclamation of the gift of new life. We all need to wake up and watch for His return. In verse 33, Jesus says, “**And since you don’t know when they will happen, stay alert and keep watch,**” speaking of His return and when Heaven and earth will disappear. He states that only God knows when this will happen. Then in verses 35 – 37, He says, “**So keep a sharp lookout! For you do not know when the homeowner will return—at**

evening, midnight, early dawn, or late daybreak.³⁶ Don't let him find you sleeping when he arrives without warning.³⁷ What I say to you I say to everyone: Watch for his return!"

Jesus gives us these warnings before He is taken to the cross. He is warning us to watch and prepare ourselves for the time when He returns. All we have to do is open our eyes and ears to Him and accept the gift He is freely giving us.

He calls us to awake from our slumber, to stretch and grow and increase our action in love for Him and those around us. What is God asking of you in your heart? Listen intently and hear His message to you. Is He asking you to volunteer for something new at church, such as a teacher or Stephen Minister? Is He asking you to usher, be a greeter or sing in the choir? There are many ways you can serve Him right here in your own backyard. By doing these things you not only serve Him but you also serve those around you. When you share your gifts it give you the pleasure of reaching out to others.

When we look back to the time Jesus was born, we see a people who were awaiting the first coming of the Messiah. There was a sense of yearning and hope for God to bring them to a better place. The Romans used them as slaves and treated them very badly, they were praying for God to release them from their misery. I think we too look to God to bring us to a better place. In order for this to happen, we need to pray, study the Bible, and stretch ourselves to reach out for Him. This needs to be done from the inside out. The following is a story that gives us a visualization of what the Bible can do for us.

COAL BASKET BIBLE

The story is told of an old man who lived on a farm in the mountains of eastern Kentucky with his young grandson. Each morning, Grandpa was up early sitting at the kitchen table reading from his old worn-out Bible. His grandson, who wanted to be just like him, tried to imitate him in any way he could.

One day the grandson asked, "Papa, I try to read the Bible just like you, but I don't understand it, and what I do understand I forget as soon as I close the book. What good does reading the Bible do?" The Grandfather quietly turned from putting coal in the stove and said, "Take this coal basket down to the river and bring back a basket of water." The boy did as he was told, even though all the water leaked out before he could get back to the house. The grandfather laughed and said, "You will have to move a little faster next time," and sent him back to the river with the basket to try again.

This time the boy ran faster, but again the basket was empty before he returned home. Out of breath, he told his grandfather that it was "impossible to carry water in a basket," and he went to get a bucket instead. The old man said, "I don't want a bucket of water; I want a basket of water. You can do this. You're just not trying hard enough," and he went out the door to watch the boy try again.

At this point, the boy knew it was impossible, but he wanted to show his grandfather that even if he ran as fast as he could, the water would leak out before he got far at all. The boy scooped the water and ran hard, but when he reached his grandfather the basket was again empty. Out of breath, he said, "See Papa, it's useless!"

"So you think it is useless?" the old man said. "Look at the basket." The boy looked at the basket and for the first time he realized that the basket looked different. Instead of a dirty old coal basket, it was clean. "Son, that's what happens when you read the Bible. "You might not understand or remember everything, but when you read it, it will change you from the inside out."

Like the little boy, we may not remember everything we read but God's word will be in us and help us to change from the inside out. He'll give us the desire to reach out to others and to love them as we love ourselves.

Sometimes loving ourselves isn't so easy. Many of us tend to reach out and care for those around us and forget to take care of ourselves. We read in the Bible that God loves each one of us and is there for each one of us. We are to care for our bodies, as if it is the temple in which He lives. We are to be available for Him to use us. "Use me," you say! Just think about the stories in the Bible and how He used those who came before us.

- ~ Noah was a drunk
- ~ Abraham was too old
- ~ Isaac was a daydreamer
- ~ Jacob was a liar
- ~ Leah was ugly
- ~ Joseph was abused
- ~ Moses had a stuttering problem
- ~ Gideon was afraid
- ~ Samson had long hair and was a womanizer
- ~ Rahab was a prostitute
- ~ Jeremiah and Timothy were too young
- ~ David was an adulterer and a murderer
- ~ Elijah was suicidal
- ~ Isaiah preached naked
- ~ Jonah ran from God
- ~ Naomi was a widow
- ~ Job went bankrupt
- ~ John the Baptist ate bugs
- ~ Peter denied Christ
- ~ The disciples fell asleep while praying
- ~ Martha worried about everything
- ~ The Samaritan woman was divorced (more than once)
- ~ Zacchaeus was too small
- ~ Paul was too religious
- ~ Timothy had an ulcer
- ~ Lazarus was dead!

God is able to use each of our gifts to His glory. We just have to get out of the way and let Him work.

When we think of Advent we anticipate the birth of our Savior, but we also should be watching and preparing for His return. This morning's lessons urge us to be watchful. We can't predict when His return will be from watching the different events that happen in the world. Each generation thinks they can see the end times are near because of what is happening around them. We need to be watchful for two reasons, first there are false alarms from those who think they know what is happening. And second, only God knows when the end will come and Jesus will return to earth.

So, watch and prepare yourself for His return. Then Rejoice in His good new and behold all of the wonder and love He brings to each of us.

Amen.