

Out of curiosity, I googled the phrase “End of the World.” Can you guess the number of results that produced? How about 5 billion, 50 million? Yes, it is safe to say that lots of people are keenly interested in, if not obsessed with, the end of the world. Just think of the disaster movie genre—if it’s not a volcano or flood, it’s a radioactive monster or alien invasion that threatens to destroy the world as we know it. A few years back, the hip end-times date was the year 2012. Because of an ancient Mayan calendar, many thought that’s when the flying saucers would descend, others said that’s when the mega-asteroid was going to slam into earth. I am not making this up. If you can find an actual bookstore and walk into one, you’ll find these books often filed under the heading: Speculation. And that is precisely what they are. Speculation. Guesses. Daydreams in print. Human beings go to extremes when their thoughts turn to this world coming to an end.

Now, that doesn’t mean that it won’t happen. It will, without question. The master teacher Jesus tells us that it will. He doesn’t tell us this to scare us out of our wits, though. He wants us to be prepared. I even think he wants us to look forward to it a little, because of what will happen after this world’s end.

Jesus tells the story captured Mark 13 in order to make the larger point, “You don’t know the day or the hour when I will return, so stay awake.” His Kingdom has values that drive everything, and the kingdom value he is teaching here is watchfulness. Jesus wants his people to be watching and waiting for His return. But what does that mean? What does this watching consist of?

Well, one thing it does not consist of is speculation. Nowhere in Scripture does Jesus challenge his followers to unscramble the puzzle that reveals the secret date of the world’s end. That hasn’t stopped people from trying. In the first generation of the church, the Apostle Paul had to correct the Thessalonians on this very point. At the end of the first millennium there were those were convinced that Christ would return in the year 1000. In our day, there have been no shortage of those who have attempted to set a time for Jesus' return only to be put in a position of having to recalculate. As surely as our Lord came in flesh and blood to suffer and die for the sins of the world, so surely will He come again as King. But His consistent teaching is that we do not and will not know and we do not need to know the day or the hour. God calls us not to speculation but to preparation.

Jesus says, "Stay Awake. Be watchful." What does this watching consist of? Let’s not imagine that it means gazing up at the sky day after day or being paralyzed with fear that “today might be The Day.” Our watching is active and purposeful. Our watching consists of vigilant attention to the voice of our Good Shepherd as He speaks to us in His Word. We are living in that evil age which Paul spoke about when he said, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from the truth to wander into myths" (II Tim. 4:3). We

are to watch wisely by focusing our attention on God's Word, hearing it, learning it, taking it to heart, and living it out.

But to use the language of Jesus' story, have we fallen asleep on God? Are you procrastinating when it comes to paying attention to God's Word? Do you think of God's Word as something you'd like to get into "once things slow down a little bit"? If so, I plead with you to reconsider. The workers in Jesus' story probably believed that there would always be enough time to get their work done. They were wrong. Imagine their shock if the master were to show up unannounced.

One of the things Jesus is saying through this story—and He's saying it pretty gently in this case—is that his household could potentially fall asleep on the job. It is totally possible for the household of God to be very busy and distracted and to fall asleep waiting for the Master's return. As servants in the household of God we definitely have tasks to do—but there is something more important, namely, looking for Jesus. And I think that means more than just waiting for someone to arrive—waiting for someone who appears to be late—it means looking for Jesus now. Today. Looking for Jesus in the current situation. When there's a task for us to do, that he's given us to do, we should be thinking, How would Jesus want me to do this? How would Jesus want me to serve this person? How would Jesus want me to make this decision? In other words, it's possible to do work in the kingdom and forget who you're doing it for. It's possible to so involved in the work that you stop looking for Jesus right now or in the future. Watchfulness means the eyes of your faith are on Jesus. Staying awake means don't sleep on what the main thing is. The main thing is making Jesus known to the people around us.

Let's pray today that the Holy Spirit would ignite a watchful urgency in us—an urgency that causes us to take action—an urgency that causes us to obtain the spiritual fuel that we need—an urgency to break through the things that hold us back from serving Jesus—an urgency that keeps us awake for the One for whom we wait.

If Jesus' words have convicted you today—and you feel as though you have been caught napping—there is good news. Forgiveness purchased by Jesus through His death on the cross—is there for you. There is no shortage of supply, no decrease in production of His grace and mercy. This grace is distributed now in the preaching of the Gospel along with Jesus' body and blood in the Holy Supper. This mercy is distributed in blessings of your baptism that continue to bear fruit. This power is distributed now through Christian people looking to make a difference in their families and churches and communities. Those watching for Jesus cannot get enough of these things for they give us more of Him. Stay looking for Jesus and your heart will be wide awake.