

Returning  
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Opening: What are some examples of special events we look forward to with great anticipation? While we anticipate those kinds of events we don't just sit in a chair and stare out the window. What do we do in the meantime?

While anticipating a great event, we engage in preparations for that event yet we still do the tasks of day-to-day life. [Illustration: An expectant mom who already has two kids.]

The other day Susan made a great statement (not knowing it would apply to this lesson): *"We NEED the anticipation of good things; to look forward to something exciting."* That's what keeps us going through the mundane tasks of life and the difficult seasons as well. Our anticipation gives us hope of something special that's on the way.

Jesus left the earth with a promise to His followers we can anticipate Him keeping. He said, *"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me...I am going to prepare a place for you...When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am."*

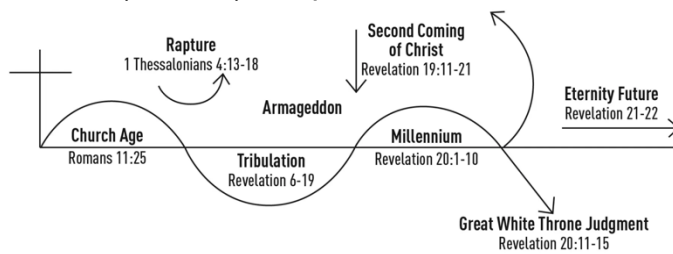
The point: Jesus promised He is coming back to earth to reign, and His followers will be a part of that eternal kingdom. He didn't give us the timing, but He DID give us instructions on how to live in the meantime so we will be ready for that great event.

Let's begin by reading verses 24-32, addressing some questions it raises, then (most importantly) understanding what Jesus has told us to do to prepare for His return.

**Mark 13:24–37 (ESV) — 24** "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, **25** and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. **26** And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. **27** 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. **28** "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts out its leaves, you know that summer is near. **29** So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. **30** Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. **31** Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. **32** "But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

- Mark chapter 13, Matthew 24 and Luke 21 record what is known as "The Olivet Discourse." Sitting with His disciples on the Mount of Olives Jesus gave an extensive teaching on trouble to come in those times (A.D. 70), and at the end of time when He will return to earth to judge humanity and reign as King of Kings.

- Since the day Jesus ascended back to Heaven, His followers have wondered when He will return “in like manner” as the angel told the disciples (Acts 1:11).
- In verses 5-8 of Mark 13 Jesus spoke of false messiahs, wars, earthquakes, etc.
- With every natural disaster, military unrest, and political upheaval people speculate [or dogmatically declare] the end times are near [or here.]
- Jesus said (v. 7&8): “...don’t be alarmed... the end is not yet...these are the beginning of birth pains.” The key commands: Don’t be alarmed or led astray.
- I’m not going to go deep into this much debated topic. By divine coincidence, Dr. Robert Jeffress of First Baptist Dallas is beginning a series on the “End Times” TODAY (11/5/23). He provides a chart and article that give a good overview.



<https://firstdallas.org/what-every-christian-should-know-about-the-end-times/>

- There are different views about the Tribulation and when the rapture (snatching away) of Christ’s followers on earth will happen.
- Some people will almost fight you over their position on timing of the rapture.
  - Pre-Tribulation Rapture – Occurs before the Great Tribulation.
  - Post-Tribulation Rapture – Occurs at the end of the Tribulation and is almost concurrent with the Second Coming of Christ.
  - Mid-Tribulation Rapture – Occurs after the first three and one-half years of the Tribulation.
- I subscribe to a Pre-Tribulation view, that Christ will take away His followers before the Tribulation starts, but I won’t fight you over it. ☺
- With that overview, let’s look at some specific questions raised in today’s text.
- Verse 24: What is “that tribulation”? In the first part of this chapter Jesus spoke about the destruction of the temple which indeed happened in A.D. 70. So, this chapter likely refers to that, however since Jesus didn’t come back to earth after that, this apparently also refers to the “Great Tribulation” yet to come.
- The word tribulation means “*pressure, anguish, persecution, tribulation, trouble.*”<sup>ii</sup>
- Daniel predicted a tribulation period of seven years (Daniel 9:24) when God will “*discipline...the nation Israel and judge the unbelieving, godless inhabitants of the earth (Rev. 6-18).*” The “Great Tribulation” is the last half (3.5 years) when “*the Antichrist, will be revealed, and the wrath of God will greatly intensify.*”<sup>iii</sup>
- Some believe no one can be saved after the rapture but scripture doesn’t say that and, in fact, seems to indicate some will be saved during the tribulation.
- Verse 26: “Coming in the clouds” is not the rapture but Jesus’ return to judge humanity. “*At the Rapture, the Lord comes secretly for His children. He appears in the clouds only to His followers, and His feet never touch the earth. However, believers and unbelievers will witness Christ’s return to the earth at the Second Coming.*”<sup>iv</sup> “Everyone will see...[His] power and glory” as Messiah and Lord.

- Verse 27: Who are “the elect” here (and in verse 19 also)? Wiersbe: “...for the sake of His elect, He shortens the days of the Tribulation. (The “elect” refers to Israel and the Gentiles who believe during the Tribulation. See Rev. 14.) To “shorten the days” means that He limits them to the three and a half years already determined and stops on time.”<sup>v</sup>
- Verses 28-30: Again, Jesus uses the fig tree as an illustration. He explains in verse 29, “When you see these things taking place, you know that he is near.”
- Our lesson writer points out that buds and leaves indicate summer is near (as Jesus said), but they don’t pinpoint the exact day summer arrives.
- Wiersbe again, “As Christian believers today, we are not looking for “signs” of His coming; we are looking for Him! [pre-tribulation rapture] But people living during the Tribulation will be able to watch these things occur and will know that His coming is near. This assurance will help them to endure (Mark 13:13) and to be good witnesses.”<sup>vi</sup>
- Verse 30: Who was/will be “this generation” who will “not pass away?” This can be puzzling. Clearly, it was not the disciples’ generation. Some say it is the generation living when the “signs in verse 29 take place. Others believe the word “generation” refers to the entire “church age” that extends until He returns.
- Verse 32: No one knows when, even Jesus. How could Jesus not know?
- The Life Application Study Bible: “The emphasis of this verse is not on Jesus’ lack of knowledge, but rather on the fact that no one knows. It is God the Father’s secret to be revealed when he wills. No one can predict by Scripture or science the exact day of Jesus’ return. Jesus is teaching that preparation, not calculation, is needed.”<sup>vii</sup>
- Another important point of verse 32, Jesus said: “no one knows when.” If they tell you they’ve figured it out, run from them because they are a false prophet.
- When studying what the Bible says about the end times there are generally three reactions: 1) Some want to obsess about the details. 2) Some just want to ignore the details. 3) And in the middle are those who acknowledge it’s an important topic but are more focused on what Jesus told us to do until He returns.
- Let’s begin with what Jesus DIDN’T say to do. He didn’t say, “No one knows when all this will happen so try really hard to figure out the specifics and fight with anyone who disagrees with your theories and timetable.”
- It’s human nature to crave the inside scoop on anything. We don’t just want to know what will happen, we want to know specifics of when and how.
- When a hurricane is approaching, we are rightfully concerned with where it will make landfall but what is the most important thing for people in the path to do?
- With a hurricane, some fixate on predicting when, where, and how; some ignore the warnings; some prepare. The second coming of Christ is like that.
- I subscribe to a simple approach: Don’t ignore end times prophecy, but don’t obsess about it. Don’t worry about what we don’t know, (exactly when He’s coming back) just do what Jesus said to do in the meantime, which we DO know because He told us in verses 33-37:

**33** Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come. **34** 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. **35** 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 rooster crows, or in the morning— **36** lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. **37** And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”

- So, how do we avoid being “asleep on the job” when Jesus comes back?
- When the boss leaves you should pay attention to the last words said. What was the last command Jesus gave His followers? What’s our “job” while we wait?
- Look back at verse 31 which is a famous memory verse: *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”*
- How do we embrace it as a part of staying alert till Jesus returns? What are we to do with His “words” while we are waiting?
- Quoting the Life Application Study Bible again: *“Mark 13 tells us how to live while we wait for Christ’s return: (1) We are not to be misled by confusing claims or speculative interpretations of what will happen (13:5-6). (2) We should not be afraid to tell people about Christ, despite what they might say or do to us (13:9-11). (3) We must stand firm by faith and not be surprised by persecution (13:13). (4) We must be morally alert, obedient to the commands for living found in God’s Word. This chapter was not given to promote discussions on prophetic timetables, but to stimulate right living for God in a world where he is largely ignored.”<sup>viii</sup>*
- Chuck Swindoll adds these words, *“People who are “on the alert” (Mark 13:33) aren’t simply awake and aware—they have a sense of urgency, not complacency. They stay informed, not ignorant. They are proactive, not passive. Because we don’t know when the Lord will return, we’re always “on the alert.” We keep our hearts and lives pure, our priorities straight, our minds and words holy. Why? Because we believe in the imminent return of Christ—not that He will come immediately but that He could come at any moment. So we stay alert.”<sup>ix</sup>*
- Other thoughts?

So, What’s the Takeaway?

- Jesus promised He is coming back to earth to reign, and His followers will be a part of that eternal kingdom. He didn’t give us the timing, but He DID give us instructions on how to live in the meantime so we will be ready.
- I would propose that we shouldn’t ignore end times prophecy, but not obsess about it. We shouldn’t worry about what we don’t know, (exactly when He’s coming back) just do what Jesus said to do in the meantime, which we DO know.
- At the top of that list is to feel a sense of urgency to tell others about Christ. Remember, the ultimate destiny for unbelievers will be the “lake of fire.”
- Finally, let’s end on an encouraging note. As Susan said, *“We need something exciting to anticipate; to look forward to.”* Here it is from Revelation 21:

**Revelation 21:1–4 (ESV)** — **1** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. **2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his

people, and God himself will be with them as their God. **4** He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

- Now THAT is something to anticipate with great encouragement!
- While we wait, let’s do what Jesus told us to do so when He comes back to take us away, He won’t find us sleeping on the job. He will find us alert and working!

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<sup>i</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [Holy Bible: New Living Translation](#) (Jn 14:1–3). Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>ii</sup> Strong, J. (2009). In [A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible](#) (Vol. 1, p. 36). Logos Bible Software.

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Great-Tribulation.html>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://firstdallas.org/what-every-christian-should-know-about-the-end-times/>

<sup>v</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [The Bible exposition commentary](#) (Vol. 1, p. 157). Victor Books.

<sup>vi</sup> *ibid*

<sup>vii</sup> Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 162837-162840). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

<sup>viii</sup> *ibid*

<sup>ix</sup> Swindoll, Charles R.. Insights on Mark (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 2) (pp. 334-335). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.. Kindle Edition.