# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“Watch for Him!”**

**Mark 13:32-37**

 **March 21, 2021**

Today we are in the thirteenth chapter of the Gospel of Mark where Jesus speaks prophetically about the future. While biblical prophecy is often presented as a detailed look into the future, that is not how prophecy functions in the ministry of Jesus or in the Bible as a whole. We are not meant to use God’s revelation to determine a linear progression through historical events that point us to some particular end time scenario. Prophecy is not about “when” and “how.” It’s about “why.” What biblical prophecy reveals is that God is at work in the world. He created the world, and he will continue to be at work until the end of the world. In particular, God is at work reconciling his creation to himself, saving people from their sin so they may live with him in eternity.

What biblical prophecy proclaims is that God has ordained the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, a series of events that took place some 2,000 years ago, and that the consequence of those events will continue until Jesus returns, an event that has not yet taken place. The Bible considers these two points in history to be held together within the will of God in order to redeem people, and the reason that they are separated in time is to give people opportunity to repent and believe. God is not slow to fulfill his promise of Jesus’ second coming, says Peter in his biblical letter. He is being patient for he desires that no one perish. But, the day will come when the door will shut and the opportunity for salvation will no longer be available. That day is Jesus’ return. So, inquiring minds want to know, when will that be? When will that day come, the day that signals the end of time? I invite you to join me in Mark 13:32-37

**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 that time will come, be on guard! Stay alert! **34**“The coming of the Son of Man can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. When he left home, he gave each of his slaves instructions about the work they were to do, and he told the gatekeeper to watch for his return. **35**You, too, must keep watch! For you don’t know when the master of the household will return—in the evening, at midnight, before dawn, or at daybreak. **36**Don’t let him find you sleeping when he arrives without warning. **37**I say to you what I say to everyone: Watch for him!”

So, when will Jesus return? What does Jesus himself tell us? “No one knows.” You and I don’t know, the angels in heaven don’t know, even Jesus himself doesn’t know when he will come back. He seems perfectly fine with not knowing, and so should we. What Jesus does tell us is that he will return and, in the meantime, we need to be on guard.

Earlier in the chapter, in the fifth verse, Jesus warned his disciple to be on guard against those who would mislead them during this time between his first and second coming. First, he warns them of religious pretenders who claim to speak in the name of Jesus. They will teach things that Jesus never taught including the denial of his resurrection and return. Then he instructs them not to listen to those who name events such as wars, earthquakes and famines as indicators of his imminent return. They are not end time signs but ordinary world events, and using them to figure out the day of Jesus’ return only leads to disillusionment as each prediction fails to come true. Thirdly, he tells them that those who follow him will be persecuted for their faith and will be tempted to desert him so as to avoid persecution. False religions, world events, and persecuted Christians have been around since Jesus’ first coming and will persist until his second coming. Be on guard against the influences of these things so you will not be deceived into abandoning Jesus.

In the passage I read earlier, Jesus gives an illustration which summarizes the point he has been making throughout the chapter. The master of a house goes on a long journey – Jesus is about to ascend into heaven and he will be gone for a while; no one knows how long, not even Jesus. The master instructs those in charge of his house to take good care of it because he will return – you and I are to take care of what Jesus has entrusted to us for he will return. But, while he’s away in heaven, we will be tempted to abandon him by those who say he’s not coming back; we will be tempted to discouragement because it seems to be taking a long time; we will be tempted to live like the rest of the world because it feels like he is no longer paying attention to what is happening in our world. What are we to do?

Jesus concludes the chapter with these words: “I say to you what I say to everyone: Watch for him!” We are to watch for his return, hoping and praying that he comes back soon. What a glorious day that will be. And, we are to watch for those who would lead us astray from him. And, we are to watch for the work that he has given us to do in his name.

Matthew chapter twenty-five parallels Mark chapter thirteen. In Matthew, while speaking of these prophetic truths, Jesus declares that during this time while we await his return, we will encounter the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, and the prisoner, and we are to care for them in his name. Our work is not to try to figure out when he will return by looking for signs. Our work is to be signs, signs of his love.

Faith, hope and love, says Paul, these three remain. So, as we await his return, let us remain faithful to him. As we await his return, let us place our hope in him. And, as we await his return, let us love him and love our neighbor with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.