

# The Last Days (Part 4) -- Mark 13:28-37

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Please bow your heads with me for prayer.

*Lord, we need You just now. We want to see Jesus. We long to experience Him in a very real, power and meaningful way. Change us on the inside to live like He lived. Speak directly to each person here and help us to be good listeners. In Jesus' name, amen.*

I was living in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania at the time. And in order to continue pursuing a relationship with Cesilia I decided to drive down and spend a week with her in the Chattanooga, Tennessee area. She had connected me with a friend of hers who agreed for me to work on his carpentry framing crew for that week. So to save on gas and to spend as much time together as possible, she let me drive her car to work after dropping her off at the hospital where she worked. At the end of the day I drove back to the hospital to pick her up. I called her from the parking garage, and she said it would be a few minutes before she could leave. So I decided to wait for her in the car. Listening to a Christian radio station, I reclined the seat back to relax while I waited. The next thing I remember was waking up and seeing the lights on the cell phone blinking. To my dismay I discovered that I had missed several calls from Cesilia. I quickly called her back and apologized for falling asleep while waiting to see her. As you can imagine, she had been quite distressed not knowing how to find me. It was hard for her to understand how I could fall asleep if I was really looking forward to seeing her. I can tell you from personal experience that it is not pleasant to be caught sleeping, when you are supposed to be waiting expectantly for someone very special and important to you.

Today as Christians we are waiting to see Jesus. And in today's Scripture Jesus closes His message on the last days with an admonition. He does not want us to be caught unprepared when He returns.

Our passage today is from Mark 13:28-37. We are going to divide this passage into three parts. The first part is Mark 13:28-29. I invite you to follow along in your Bibles as I read these verses. (Read) Jesus begins in verse 28 by relating a parable of the fig tree. You may remember that this is not the first time Mark has recorded a story about a fig tree. In chapter 11 we looked at a passage that described Jesus cursing a fig tree that had lots of leaves but no figs.

The fig tree is quite a popular tree in the area around Jerusalem. And it is also quite unique. Each year two crops of figs are harvested. The first usually ripens sometime in June while the second ripens sometime in August or September. The first crop is produced from the previous year's branches, while the second crop grows from the new spring shoots. After spending the winter barren of leaves and fruit, the fig tree produces new leaf buds in late March. At the same time the first crop of figs appear in the leaf axils. The fig leaves then begin to develop through April and May.

So when Jesus pictures the branches of the fig tree becoming tender (Mark 13:28), the season would be early spring (i.e. late March). And when He describes the fig tree as putting forth leaves, the time would be soon after that (i.e. early April and into May). The budding fig tree was one of the first signs of spring. And as the leaves grew large and green, people knew that summer was not far away. And so Jesus used this as a parable. He has just described in Mark 13:24-25 the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light, and the heavens being shaken. And He says, "Watching the fig tree bud and fill out with leaves is like watching these events take place." That's what a parable does. It takes something that needs explained. And it puts it alongside something that is common and well-understood. And you see that "this is like this". The visual sheds light on the idea that needs explained.

So, in Mark 13:29 Jesus says, "When you see these things happening, know that it is near – at the doors!" In other words, when we see the signs in the heavens described in Mark 13:24-25 taking place, we should take note. What is about to happen? Mark 13:26, 27 makes it clear. The Son of Man is about to come in the clouds with great power and glory! God's people are about to be delivered!

Our second section in this passage is Mark 13:30-31. I invite you to follow along with me as I read it now. (Read) A couple questions surface in reading verse 30. First, what generation is Jesus talking about when He says, "This generation shall not pass away..."? Second, what things is He talking about when He says, "till all these things take place"? In considering these two questions notice Jesus' words of confidence. He is very bold. In verse 30 and again in verse 31 He uses double negative verbiage. This double negative is translated "by no means". He declares very emphatically, "This generation will not, not pass away..." (Mark 13:30) And again, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not, not pass away." (Mark 13:31) Jesus leaves no room for maybe's or possibilities. Statements such as, "This generation might still be around when all these things take place," or "My words might still be true when the end of the world comes" have no place here. Jesus is either a lying lunatic or He is the Son of God. Those are our only two choices here. And there is way too much evidence for Jesus' divinity in the Scriptures and in history for us to choose anything else other than to believe He is God's Son.

So, what generation and what "things" is Jesus referring to in Mark 13:30? The "things" refer to the nine predictions He has just made in Mark 13:5-27. We have looked at those in detail in the first three sermons on Mark 13. As to what generation, some might interpret Jesus as referring to the generation listening to His instructions. But that generation has long since passed away. And all the signs in the heavens and the coming of the Son of Man mentioned by Jesus in Mark 13:24-27 have still not taken place. So the only possible generation that Jesus could be referring to is the generation that sees the events in Mark 13:24-25 take place.

Here is the really cool part about all this. The advice given by Jesus in Mark 13:28-37 is especially for the final generation on earth. It's Jesus' message particularly for those who are alive when He returns! This has really been impressed upon me strongly as I have studied this passage, and we will come back to this in our conclusion today.

The third section of our passage today is found in Mark 13:32-37. I invite you to follow along in your Bibles as I read it. (Read) In this passage Jesus uses another parable to shed light on another word of advice that is especially for the last generation on earth before Jesus returns. This is the Parable of the Doorkeeper.

But before we look at this parable, notice a couple things about this passage in comparison with the passage in Mark 13:28-29. First of all, in the parable of the fig tree Jesus calls attention to what we know. From the fig tree, we know when summer is near. From seeing the predictions of Mark 13:5-25 fulfilled, we know that His coming is near. But in Mark 13:32-35 Jesus mentions three times what we don't know. In verse 32 He declares that we don't know the day or the hour of His return. He repeats this same point in verses 33 and 35. He wants us to know when His coming is near so we can live like it and prepare for it, but He is clear that no one knows the certain day or the exact hour. And that's ok. Jesus Himself said that He didn't know. So, why should we feel a need to know?

Yet another point of that Jesus makes repeatedly in Mark 13:32-37 is to "Take heed" and to "watch". "Take heed" simple means to "watch out". Be alert! The word "watch" is repeated four times in this passage. This first "watch" is a Greek word that means to "be or remain sleepless". The other three times Jesus commanded us to "watch" a different Greek word is used that means to "stay awake". Somehow Jesus knew that we would have a hard time staying alert and awake while waiting for Him to return.

Now let's consider the parable of the doorkeeper itself. Throughout the Old Testament doorkeepers and gatekeepers (the same word is used for both in the Hebrew) played an important role in society. 2 Samuel 18 records the death of Absalom, King David's son. Two different men ran to the city of Jerusalem where David was waiting to hear how the battle against his son had gone. They were bringing the news to him of his son's death. The watchman on the wall saw the men coming and yelled to the gatekeeper. He was the man who would open the gate and let them into the city. In 1 Chronicles 9:17-27 we discover that there were four Levites who kept the gates of the temple during the night and opened them in the morning. In the New Testament we also find references to door and gate keepers. John 10:3 mentions that a gatekeeper kept the gate of sheepfolds. In John 18 Jesus is brought into the court of the high priest for trial. Because John

personally knew the high priest, he was allowed to go in through the gate. Peter, however, had to stand outside the gate because the gatekeeper, who happened to be a woman, would not let him in. But when John spoke to her, she allowed Peter to come in, too.

Back in Mark 13:34 Jesus told the story of a man who was leaving his home. The man's instructions to his servants are distinct from those to the doorkeeper. He gave authority and job assignments to his servants. But to the doorkeeper he gave a simple command – "Watch!" In other words, "Stay awake!" I think the servants had it easier. As the doorkeeper, I would have wondered, "For how long?" In verses 35 and 36 of Mark 13 Jesus reveals the horror of being caught "sleeping" when the master of the house returns. "He might come at sunset. He might arrive at midnight or at the early crowing of the rooster. Or He might come at sunrise. You don't know. You have to stay awake all night. The last thing you want is for him to come home and find you sleeping!"

As a hospital chaplain who is on-call at night, I know the challenges of the night shift. If you have not slept during the day, it is hard to stay awake at night while waiting for a family member to arrive. I know that even during the day after a hard day's work, it's hard to stay awake. I found that out in a car garage in Chattanooga. (See story at the top)

And so Jesus closes His discourse on the last days in Mark 13:37 with these words, "And what I say to you, I say to all, "Watch!" What a sobering charge is this!

As I have studied and meditated on this Scripture, the thought of being the last generation on earth before Christ returns has stirred my heart. If I was convinced that my generation was the last one before Christ's return, what would my life look like? Another thought has crossed my mind. Is there anyone who has set the example for me? Who has lived like this?

In trying to answer these questions, I invite you to look at one more Scripture with me. Please turn to 2 Peter 3:3-7. (Read) There is a man who was a part of the last generation before the earth's destruction by water. And that's Noah. There's a striking parallel between the last generation before the flood and the last generation before Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. Noah has a lot to teach us about how to live like we are the final generation on earth. He sets the bar. If you study his life from Scripture and read [Patriarchs and Prophets](#) p. 90-104, the chapter entitled "The Flood" by Ellen White, you will learn that we fallen away from where we should be. Here are several contrasts between Noah and most of us Christians:

- 1) Noah knew what God wanted him to do – build the ark. But most of us don't know what God wants us to do. Many of us are unsure of God's plan for our lives.
- 2) Noah knew what God wanted him to say. He had a specific message warning people that God was going to destroy the world with a flood. But many of us don't know what we're supposed to be telling people. We don't know what God wants us to say.
- 3) Noah put everything he had into building the ark – his time, energy and resources. Many of us don't have anything to invest after paying all our bills and working all day.
- 4) Noah didn't quit preaching or building when he was called a fanatic. Most of us hate the thought this happening to us. We don't want to be different from everybody else.
- 5) Noah stood out as a man of holy integrity and unwavering faithfulness. If we are honest with ourselves, I think we all would have to admit that we have to some extent been influenced by the world. It is more difficult today to tell a distinct difference in the character and lifestyle of Christians and that of the world.
- 6) Noah got God's special attention. God personally came to him and told him what He was going to do. He found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Many of us don't know how to live in God's presence. We're doing good to take time to pray and read the Bible a few minutes a day.

So, how do we get to where Noah was? How do we stay awake or wake up while waiting for Christ to return? Here are five suggestions on where to start:

- 1) Ask God what you can do to spread the gospel. Start every day asking Him. Be honest with Him if you don't know what He wants you to do. And even if you think you do, it wouldn't hurt to check with Him. You might be mistaken.
- 2) Study the message that God wants spread around the world. Search the Scriptures. Become sure of what the gospel is that He wants preached to every nation on earth. Make sure you know what you're supposed to be warning the world about.
- 3) Reserve your resources for items 1 and 2. Don't give all your energy and money away. Save some for the Lord's work.
- 4) Enjoy being God's delight. Experience what it's like knowing that God accepts you, loves you, is excited with you. Be God's BFF! Then being unpopular with the world won't matter so much.
- 5) Determine to be a world changer. Instead of conforming to the world around you, be someone who changes the norm. Be an example of what the world should become.

If we do these things, I guarantee you, we won't have any problem staying awake until Christ returns.