

*Sermon: Ready or Not, Here I Come*  
*Text: Mark 13:24 – 37*  
*Date: November 30, 2008*  
*Place: Jesup First UMC*

Are you ready? You know, when we were kids, we played Hide –n– Seek. And one person was always “it”. Now, it was important that the person who was “it” could count, because “it’s” main job was to count to 100 and then, scream out “*Ready or Not, here I come.*”

Are you ready? That’s a question you’re going to be hearing more and more in the weeks to come. People are going to walk up and ask you: “*Are you ready for Christmas yet?*” And what that means is: Is your house decorated? Are the cards addressed and in the mail? And are the gifts bought, wrapped, and placed under the tree? Are you ready? Well, ready or not, here it comes!

Mark 13 tells the story of Jesus’ last trip to the Temple. Jesus and the disciples were leaving the Temple that day and the disciples said: “*Teacher, just look at all these tremendous buildings with all these massive stones.*” And Jesus said: “*Surely I tell you, there is coming a time when not one stone will be found on top of another in this place.*” Now, this just blew the disciples’ minds because the Temple had always been the center of their lives. For as long as they could remember, the Temple had stood as the center of their faith and the center of their national identity. And so, it was only natural that they began to think that the world was coming to an end.

Surely, if the Temple was destroyed, the world must be coming to an end. And they said to Jesus:

**“When is this going to happen? And what are the signs that will show us that the time is near?”** And Jesus said: **“In those days, there will be terrible suffering ... the sun will turn dark and the moon will not shine and the stars will fall from the sky. And then, you will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory ... but no one knows the day nor the hour ... so keep watch; stay awake.”**

Today is the First Sunday of Advent. For over 1600 years, the church has celebrated Advent, a season of preparation leading up to the high and holy day of Christmas. It is a time of anticipation in which the church is challenged to search the scriptures, to take a new look at the prophecies that led to the First Advent, Jesus' coming as a babe in Bethlehem, and the prophecies that tell of His Second Advent, His coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

Did you know that Jesus is coming again? He told His disciples: **“I am going away to prepare a place for you and if I go away and prepare a place for you, I will surely come again.”** Then, after His resurrection, He met with His disciples on the mountain and as He was talking with them, suddenly He was taken away from them into the clouds and two angels appeared and said: **“Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking up into the sky? This Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will return to you in the same way you saw Him go.”** Jesus is coming again! Ready or not, here He comes!

Now, since that day, the day Jesus ascended, His disciples have been confident of His quick return.

In fact, Paul was confident that Jesus would return before he died. He told the church at Thessalonica: **“The Lord will come down from heaven ... the dead in Christ will rise first ... and we who are alive and remain will be caught up with them.”** And so, Jesus is coming; and like the disciples, we tend to focus on the “when” of His coming. We want to know: *“When is Jesus coming? What are the warning signs? How will I know when it is about to happen?”*

And it seems that every generation has had its fanatics. When I was president of the Ministerial Association in Wrightsville, we went around the room at various times and shared a brief synopsis of how our different denominations were formed. And I’ll never forget the pastor who said: *“My denomination was started by a man who was sure Jesus would return on a certain day. So, he and his followers got together and went and camped out on a hillside waiting and watching for His return in the eastern sky. And when Jesus didn’t return like they expected, they couldn’t go back to their churches anymore. So they just formed a new church.”*

It seems someone is always making predictions. In 1988, Edgar Whisenant published a book, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Happen in 1988*. And the book basically predicted Jesus would return during Rosh Hashanah. The book sold 4.5 million copies, but Jesus didn’t return. So, he went back and studied the Bible some more and revised his predictions and published another book, *The Final Shout – Rapture Report 1989*, predicting Jesus’ return during Rosh Hashanah 1989.

We're obsessed with "when"! You see, it appeals to the procrastinator in each of us. If we only knew when, then we'd be prepared. If we only knew that when we left our home this morning, someone was going to break in and steal everything, then we would have been ready. We would have locked the windows and the doors and turned on the security system. But when Jesus talks about His Second Coming, He doesn't focus on the when. In fact, He said: "*Nobody knows when ... not the angels, not even me ... only the Father knows when.*"

You see, while the disciples focused on "when" and while we continue to be obsessed with "when", Jesus focused on the "how". While we continue to ask: "When is Jesus coming?" Jesus suggests that we should ask another question: "How do I live my life in light of Jesus' coming? And in these verses, Jesus concentrates on how His disciples are to live their lives in light of the fact that He is coming again!

**First, we are to watch with diligence!** In Mark 13, Jesus continually urges His disciples: "*Watch Out! I have warned you ... stay alert and keep watch ... Keep a sharp lookout ... watch for His return.*"

You know, Jesus told a story about the coming of the Bridegroom. And He said, there were ten virgins who were expecting the Bridegroom to come. Five of them were alert and prepared and the other five weren't ready because they weren't diligent enough in keeping their lamps trimmed and filled with oil.

And the reality is that the church doesn't long for His coming anymore. You see, as bad as things can

be from time to time, the reality is that you and I have it so good that we no longer dream of a better place.

On one of my mission trips to Mexico, we were packing the car, getting ready to leave and like all good southern people, someone said: “Ya’ll come go with us.” And one of the ladies said: “We not have papers.” And someone else said: “But one day, we will be together again and there, we will need no interpreter.” And the lady said: “And there, we will need no papers.” You see, she had her mind fixed on a better place.

Oh friends, I’m thinking of a better place this morning. I’m thinking of a place where sin no longer influences our lives, a place where sickness doesn’t rob us of the best days of our lives, a place where I never have to preside over a funeral for someone I’ve grown to love and respect. I have my mind fixed on that place this morning. And one day – it might be today, it might be next week, next month, next year, or 1000 years from now – but one day, Jesus is coming. So I’m watching ... I’m watching diligently for His return.

**Second, we are to watch in dependence!** There is a sense in these verses that bad times are coming. Things are going to get bad. But verse 11 says: *“But when you are arrested and stand trial, don’t worry about what to say in your defense, just say what God tells you to. Then it is not you who will be speaking, but the Holy Spirit.”* There is an underlying sense here that in the midst of hardships, we are to depend on God.

That's why prayer is always a part of watching. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told His disciples: "Watch and pray." You see, it really is God who sustains us through the infilling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit not only guides us in what to say, but it empowers us in how we should live. And the wise Christian is the one who has learned to depend on God.

**Third, we are to watch with discernment!** Mark 13:5 says: "Keep watch! Be careful that no one fools you ... for many will come in my name. They will claim, 'I am he!' and they will fool many people."

Now, you don't meet too many people on the street who claim to be Jesus Christ ... although I did meet a few at Eastern State Hospital in Lexington, Kentucky. But it does seem the Christian world is sometimes overrun with those who seek to capitalize on a certain theological perspective on the Second Coming. Millions of people invested in Tim LaHaye's Left Behind Series, a series of books about the second coming. Before Tim LaHaye, it was Hal Lindsey. And in their own way, many have come saying, "Look over here" or "Look over there." And many have been fooled because they lacked discernment. We are to watch for His coming, but we are to watch with discernment.

For you see ... "when is He coming" is not as important as "am I ready for His coming." We must be ready for His coming! We begin that preparation by accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior. And we continue that preparation by growing in grace and

godliness, by loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving our neighbor as we love ourselves, by striving for holiness of heart and life. For you see, when Jesus comes, He's coming for a church that is ready, a church that is watching and waiting for His return. Ready or not, Here He comes!

A few years ago, I met a remarkable woman. Her name was Miss Carrie; she was 103 years old and she had come to the Johnson County Crusade for Christ. Now, it's not every day that you meet someone like Miss Carrie, so everybody had to talk with her and in the midst of all the conversations, somebody asked her: "*Miss Carrie, are you ready to go to heaven?*" And she said something that I'll never forget; she looked up and smiled and said: "*I stays ready to keep from having to get ready.*"