

“READY OR NOT, HERE I COME”  
Isaiah 64:1-9, Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19, Mark 13:24-37  
Advent 1, November 28 & 29, 2020

Children love to play the game “Hide and Seek.” Maybe you did, too, when you were a child. It’s a game where one person is “It” and has to count to 100 by fives while everyone else hides in places where they hope not to be found. So each round begins with the person counting; 5, 10, 15, 20, 25... and everyone scatters. The counting continues until “It” reaches the 100 mark, and it is then that they call out to everyone, “Ready or not, here I come!” The secret to the game is to prepare yourself in your hiding spot against being found and caught. But if the one who is “it” finds you, then you must be prepared to race back to the goal before they can get there, otherwise you become “it” and the next round begins again. With each round, the excitement begins with the words, “Ready or not, here I come.”

Today is the first week of Advent, and at the beginning of each Advent Season, we hear the prophecies of the coming of the Lord Jesus. These prophecies beg God to return to the earth so that the nations would see His strength and power, and would be intimidated by His majesty and glory. They beg the Lord God to “save us” from our enemies, and renew us again. The prophecies call out to us go get ready for the coming of the Lord.

In our Gospel lesson today of Mark 13:24-37, we hear Jesus tells us, “Ready or not, here I come!” “Just like the game of “Hide and Seek,” only this not a game, there is a counting and an accounting going on right now. It is a count-down before the blast of the heavenly trumpets announcing His appearance on the earth a second time to judge the world and to gather His faithful to Himself. He is coming soon, for the end of the world seems near.”<sup>1</sup> Listen to His words. (READ Mark 13:24-37)

In this text, Jesus is telling us to get ready for His return, His second coming. The key word throughout this section of Scriptures is, “Watch.” He finished His words with the warning, “*What I say to you, then, I say to all: Watch!*” (Mark 13:37). Ready or not, Jesus is coming. You’d better get ready

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<sup>1</sup> John R. Brokhoff, *Wrinkled Wrappings*, [Lima, OH: C.S.S. Publishing, 1975] pg. 14

or you might be caught unprepared. Question is, “How do we get ready for Jesus’ return? What must we do to be prepared for the coming of the Lord?” Our Scripture lessons help us, so let’s look at the advice they give to us.

First we must **Watch and Wake Up!** If we use the meaning of the Greek word for “watch” we see it says literally, “chasing sleep away.” That means we must take all the steps necessary to get rid of the sleep in our bodies, and our souls, so that we are completely aware of what is going on around us. To be awake is to be fully conscious of our surroundings, what is happening in the midst of our lives, and being ready to act according to what we see happening.

Every notice how many different things are advertised to help us wake up during the day? There are a ton of different soft drinks that have enough caffeine in them to wire up anyone. Any coffee store can give you their latest concoction of high powered drinks to arouse your system. And there are a jumble of different energy drinks providing a boost in our energy levels. And there are even narcotics like “No Doze” that offer a kick to our bodies that help prevent us from nodding off while we are at work, or while we’re driving, or while we are operating heavy machinery. Unfortunately, though, these still don’t keep us awake. So we are left nodding off again and again.

Spiritually, we have the same problem with being asleep. We are seeing a desperate low in the spiritual understanding and knowledge in the minds and hearts of millions of people today. There just seems to be this lulling of the spirit that prevents us from being awake with regard to being ready for Jesus to return. It seems that the whole world is in a deep sleep and nothing but a loud noise could cause a great awakening. We’ve been pacified with technology and media to the point that our spirits are so asleep that we are “dead to the world.” It works like this:

“In Yellowstone National Park there are large signs that say ‘DON’T FEED THE BEARS!’ Tourists always disobey it. They question, ‘Why can’t I feed the bears. They are so fun to feed.’ So they feed the bears, and every year the park rangers have to pick up dead bears. You see, the bears get used to being fed by the tourists and they lose their ability to fend for themselves in nature. They wind

up looking for a handout, and when the handout is no longer there, they die.

The same is true for us. “Satan offers us handouts – a party here, a relationship there, a thrill here, and he get us so used to him, that we forget God. When he stops handing things out, when you lose the job, when life turns upside down on you, [when a global pandemic occurs that stops everything in its tracks], then you don’t know where to go. Satan has a strategy of tricking people into relying on cheap substitutes.”<sup>2</sup> And we are placated with video games, cell phones, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and all forms of pleasures that dull our senses and cause us to give up on God.

Isaiah 64 states it like this, “*You were angry with us, but we went on sinning; in spite of Your great anger we have continued to do wrong since ancient times. All of us have been sinful; even our best actions are filthy through and through. Because of our sins we are like leaves that wither and are blown away by the wind. No one turns to You in prayer; no one goes to You for help. You have hidden Yourself from us and have abandoned us because of our sins.*” (64:5b-7)

Have you wondered why everything seems to have turned up-side-down? Because we refuse to acknowledge God, because we rebel against His commandments, because of our sin, our ears have become stopped up, our eyes have become blind to the truth, and our minds have become clouded with the stuff of this world. WAKE UP PEOPLE! We cannot sleep our way into Salvation! We cannot truly live and stumble around like zombies in a stupefied sleep and expect to find God’s blessings!

God is only pleased with “*those who find joy in doing what is right, those who remember how God wants them to live*” (Is. 64:5a). If we continue to allow ourselves to be quelled with the desires of the world, our hearts will continue to turn away from the Lord and we will die in our spiritual sleep!

No one knows the day or the hour that Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. It’s time to wake up and look around and to become truly aware of all that is taking place, because all of the prophecies are falling into place indicating that truly Jesus’ return is not far away. We need to become awakened by God’s Holy Spirit so that our sin becomes exposed, our rebellion highlighted, and our

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<sup>2</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publications, 2009] pg. 274, #816)

disobedience made clear, so that we have time to repent and be reconciled with God. It is time to wake up and watch, to become aware of the signs of the times and prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord. Don't settle for the pleasures of this life – they are hollow and empty – “*but seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness – only then will we receive all things!*” (Matthew 6:33)

When Jesus returns, it will be so sudden that we will not have time to do anything to prepare. His appearance will be like a flash of lightning, here at an instant when we do not expect. Who has time to prepare for a bolt of lightning? Who can predict when it will strike? But when you see the storm clouds building up in the sky, when you hear the rolling thunder in the distance, that is the time to get ready.

And the storm is boiling folks! The clouds are darkening and the sky is turning black and the roar of the thunder is all around us. Will you continue to sleep through it and be swept away? Wake up and Watch, for Jesus is coming soon.

Second, we must **Watch and Pray!** Not only do we need to watch and wake up so that we are prepared for Jesus, but Jesus tells us that we need to likewise “*Take heed...watch and pray*” (Mark 13:33). But many question, “What in the world does prayer have to do with us watching and getting prepared for Jesus’ return?” Well, it must have a lot to do with it, because Jesus states it.

Prayer is the way that we stay connected with the Lord God. Prayer is our internet connection that helps us stay in contact with The Lord. Prayer gives us a chance to evaluate our life and then seek the Lord’s guidance and direction in our everyday living. When we pray, we come to know what the Lord desires of us, and gives us a heads up on what we are to be doing.

Sadly, many of us pray like the little boy who’s “mother had fried chicken for supper. When it was his turn to pray, he prayed with his eyes open. He prayed to God for that thigh that he had his eyes on. Sometime during the middle of the prayer, he unfolded his hands and let one of them slip onto the table near the chicken so that he’d be halfway to his goal with the prayer was over. He wasn’t really thinking about God. He was thinking about chicken. He just had to get rid of God to get to the chicken.

“Sometimes we just use prayer as a way for us to get rid of God so that we can get to the real thing.”<sup>3</sup> And the real thing has nothing to do with God, but more about what we want. But prayer is our tool, our avenue to be connected to God.

Like a phone works to connect people to one another, prayer allows us communication with God, if only we pick it up and use it. Many of us have our spiritual prayer phones on silent, or maybe even turned off, so that we don't bother God, and that He doesn't bother us. Oh, we may go through the motions of prayer by talking at God, telling Him all about what we want, but prayer is a two-way communication meant for us to receive instructions and guidance from God as much as we are to give God our worries and concerns.

Prayer also allows us to keep ready for the Lord as we focus on Him. Not just in the difficult and stressful times, but even on a good day when everything is going smoothly. It is seeking God out, desiring to know His will and His way, wanting to prepare our lives for Him so that we can be ready when He calls us.

In particular, we need to watch and pray for the lives of those who have not yet trusted in Jesus, those who are not believers. Many people still do not have a knowledge of Jesus Christ. “While waiting for Christ to come, we can spend our time profitably by praying for those who need to confess Christ as Lord and Savior. If Christ should return and people are without faith, think of the doom ahead for them. It is our privilege and responsibility to prepare them for Christ's return.

“A boy was fishing with his grandfather in a boat off the coast. The lad noticed a flashing light from the lighthouse even though it was mid-day. The child said, ‘I thought they used the light only when there was a fog or a storm.’ His grandad replied, ‘No, son, they use it all the time. You can never tell when a fog or bad weather might come up. It's better to be prepared than to miss an opportunity to save someone's life.’ Prayer is an opportunity to save someone's soul. In good and bad times, in sunshine and storm we need to watch and pray that souls will respond to the love of God in Christ, that

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<sup>3</sup> (Tony Evans, *Tony Evan's Book of Illustrations*, pg. 233, #713)

they might be ready for the Lord's coming, too."<sup>44</sup>

That is what made the early Christians distinctive from others. They prayed for Jesus to come back again. They prayed for those around them, that they would receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They prayed, "Maranatha!" "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!" They were suffering hardships, persecutions, and oppression. Evil was very present in their world, too, and Satan seemed to be having a hay-day. They WANTED Jesus to come again so that it would be an end to it all. They wanted accounts to be settled so that they could be justified and vindicated.

But they realized that there were so many more who were not yet ready for Jesus, so they prayed for them. They watched and prayed that the hearts of even their persecutors would come to know Jesus so that they would not have to face eternal destruction when Jesus did come. The Christians prayed that Jesus would come for them to take them away from all the hardship on earth and bring them to heaven. This is known as the "rapture," where God promises to bring all the faithful to Him through Jesus Christ to be with Him in heaven. For the Christian, the greatest thing we have to look forward to is going to be with Jesus, to be included into the kingdom of heaven as one of the sheep of the fold, a child of God through Jesus Christ. It is not so much about judgement and condemnation, though that will certainly take place for the unbelievers. It is about finding our place in God's house, redeemed by the blood of Jesus, washed clean from our sins, and standing in the very presence of God, Himself, unashamed and unafraid.

I find myself praying "Maranatha!" on a regular basis these days. I have grown so tired of this world that I pray for Jesus to return, and quickly. But then I begin to look at how many people in this world are not ready for His return, so I begin to pray for them, too, hoping that someday they may find faith in Jesus and be included into the host of heaven.

Our verses in Psalm 80 today reflect this same urgency for the return of the Lord. The psalmist calls out, "bring us back, O God! Show us Your mercy, and we will be saved! How much longer, Lord

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<sup>44</sup> (John R. Brokhoff, *Wrinkled Wrappings*, pg. 18)

God Almighty, will You be angry with Your people's prayers? You have given us sorrow to eat, a large cup of tears to drink. You let the surrounding nations fight over our land; our enemies insult us. Bring us back, Almighty God! Show us Your mercy, and we will be saved!" (80:3-7). Many people are praying this, too, as they also eagerly await the return of Jesus. While we are waiting for Jesus to return, we are invited to prepare ourselves by praying.

First, watch and wake up! Second, watch and pray! Here He comes – ready or not! The third thing we are called to do is to **Watch and Work!** Each of us has been given jobs to do, occupations that prepare us for His coming. In Jesus' parable (Mark 13:34-36) we hear about the "*man who goes away from home on a trip and leaves his servants in charge, after giving to each one his own work to do and after telling the doorkeeper to keep watch.*" They were expected to keep working as if the man were there at home. The servants were to continue to do their work until the master returned home. Since they were not sure when the master would return, it was expected that they keep doing their assigned work so that, should he return unexpectedly, they would be found faithfully doing what they had been instructed to do.

So, while we are waiting, we are not to become lazy, sleeping in, expecting others to do the work assigned to us. We are not to be rioting, or demonstrating, or complaining, or even relying upon the government to pay us so that we don't have to work. There is not welfare in heaven! Everyone is expected to do their own work, to earn their own living and to wait for the Lord's return while they work.

Some of the first century Christians thought that they could just kick back and relax and wait for the Lord to come again. They stopped working, instead, relying upon the church to feed them and support them and care for them. It got so bad that the Apostle Paul had to write, "*He who does not work shall not eat!*" (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

So when Jesus returns suddenly, unexpectedly, what will He find you doing? Will you be taking a nap, or watching TV, or playing video games, or wasting time? Will you be found continuing in sin,

or conducting illegal business? Or will you be found working?

“John Wesley was asked the question of what he would do if he knew this was his last day on earth. He replied, ‘At 4 o’clock I would have some tea. At 6 I would visit Mrs. Brown in the hospital. Then at 7:30 I would conduct a mid-week prayer service. At 10 I would go to bed and would wake up in glory.’”<sup>5</sup>

Jesus tells us, “*Watch, then, because you do not know when the master of the house is coming – it might be in the evening or at midnight or before dawn or at sunrise. If he comes suddenly, he must not find you asleep. What I say to you, then, I say to all: Watch!*” (Mark 13:35-37). Jesus expects each of us to be about our work, so that when He does come, He will find us gainfully employed doing constructive work that builds into the life of another person. So there is no retirement in heaven, either. Jesus expects us to keep filling our time with meaningful activity as we await His return.

“Many years ago, a tourist visited the Castle Villa Asconti along the shores of Lake Como in northern Italy. Only the old gardener opened the gates and the visitor stepped into the garden which was perfectly kept. The visitor asked when the owner was last there. He was told, ‘Twelve years ago.’ Did the master ever write? No. Where did he get instructions? From his agent in Milan. Does the master ever come? No. ‘But, you keep the grounds as though your master was coming back tomorrow.’ The old gardener quickly replied, ‘Today, sir, today.’”<sup>6</sup> As Christians, we are to continue to watch and work as if the Master will return, even today, doing our work faithfully until He comes. We are to work to build a better world in all that we do.

“Ready or not, here I come” Jesus tells us. So we are to wake up from our spiritual slumber and get ready, we are to pray for the lives of those who have not yet come to know Jesus, and we are to work heartily until He comes again. When will He come? We don’t know, but we are to be found faithful in all we do. To the glory of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

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<sup>5</sup> (Brokhoff, *Wrinkled Wrappings*, pg. 19)

<sup>6</sup> (*Wrinkled Wrappings*, pg. 20)