

**Mark 13:24-37**

December 7th...that's the day when Interstate 64 into downtown St. Louis will re-open. No more detours. Mid-December...that's when the Missouri River bridge into Washington will open again for two-way traffic. No more delays. We like knowing these kinds of things. We make plans. We live by schedules. Thanksgiving Day is always the fourth Thursday in November. How frustrated wouldn't we be, however, if that date changed every year, and we were not told until the day before! How could we invite company to come to our home for a Thanksgiving meal? When should we defrost the turkey? When should we purchase airline tickets?

We live by calendars. We need to know when important events are going to happen. But think of this...the most important event of all is a complete mystery to us. We have no clue when Christ will return in Judgment. If we did, wouldn't that be on our calendars? If God had revealed to us the exact day that the world would end, wouldn't we prepare for that event like we've never prepared before?

Every Sunday for months prior to the end, church pews would be packed; there would be standing room only. People everywhere would get their affairs in order. Pastors would be hearing confessions around the clock. Anyone who had a grudge against their neighbor would seek them out to make peace. Adulterers would stop fooling around. Thieves would return stolen goods. We wouldn't worry at all about gas prices and what the stock market was doing. We would be spending our time compelling neighbors, friends, and loved ones to repent of their sins and would tell them the good news of Jesus.

So why didn't God do that? Why didn't He reveal to us the day of the last Judgment? A lot of good things would happen before that final day. Maybe He didn't because until that day got close we would all have a "who cares" attitude toward His Word and Church. It would be just too tempting to say, "I'll repent later...before the end comes...but now I'm going to have my fun." Church pews would fill up close to the end, but hardly a soul would bother coming to hear the Word of God before that time.

And so we would all fall into such a deep spiritual sleep, not worrying about repentance and faith in Christ until close to the end, that we would forget it is God's action alone (not ours) to bring us to repentance and faith, and He may very well choose to withhold His Word and Spirit from us when the end does finally come. That's why the Scriptures warn, "Now is the time to repent;" tomorrow may be too late, because we really don't even know if there will be a tomorrow.

But now if you will bear with me for a moment and not yell out the words, "false prophet!" when I tell you something, but just keep your cool and listen carefully, I'm going to reveal to you when Christ will come again. Are you ready? It's this coming Wednesday evening at 7:30 p.m. And next Sunday morning. And the following Sunday morning, and the following, and the following...and I'm not just being silly about this. Christ will return here to His House to be with you to grant you repentance and faith every time His Word is preached and taught; every time His body and blood is given. I did not say I will reveal to you when Christ will come again visibly in Judgment. I revealed to you when He will come again. Are these dates on your calendar? The date of Jesus' final coming would be on your calendar if you knew it. But you do know the exact dates and times when He will be here for you in the power of His Word--every one an important event. Are these dates circled in red on your calendar?

Why am I speaking in this way? There is a very close parallel between the way we prepare for worship and the way we are prepared for Christ at the end of time. It is the very same Jesus who comes to us now every time we gather for worship, who will come in the clouds of Judgment at the end. Our posture toward His coming now will be our posture toward His coming then. The way we greet Him now is the way we will greet Him then.

The Price is Right game show has been on television for years. I'm sure we've all seen it. And so you know the routine. A contestant who wins their way up on stage is shown a fantastic prize, and then they play a pricing game to win that prize. How foolish for that contestant to say, "I don't care if I win all the little prizes in my pricing game. I'm here to win that expensive car." The contestant wins the car only by winning all the little prizes. To win the pricing game is to win the car. To lose the pricing game is to lose the car. No contestant hopes to get up on stage and win a box of cookies, a bottle of vitamins, and some detergent; but the way they play the game to win these items determines whether or not they drive home in a brand new Cadillac.

And so it is with the end of the world. The way we play the pricing game now determines whether or not we are given the big prize at the end. How foolish that so many people are saying, "I'm holding out for the prize of heaven at the end," but they couldn't care less about the preaching and teaching of God's Word today. The big prize is not given to those who play the game poorly or who refuse to play it at all. To sleep through the pricing game is to be asleep when the prize is awarded at the end.

That's why I ask, "What's on your calendar?" You cannot mark the date when the big prize is given out at the end. We do not know it. But we can mark the dates and times of when we play the pricing game. We cannot circle in red when Christ will come again at the end, but we do know exactly when He comes to us now. And Jesus warns us to stay awake. Do not sleep through the pricing game. Listening attentively to God's Word week after week may be about as exciting as winning a box of cookies on the Price is Right. But to win the cookies is to win the car. And for us, to faithfully hear the Word--repenting of our sins when the Law is preached; trusting in Christ as His good news is proclaimed--is to play the game well and is to be given the crown of life in the end.

A Price is Right contestant has to guess at the prices of the prizes they are shown. But there is no guesswork involved for you. You know the price right now. The blood of Jesus shed on the cross of Calvary is the price that was paid to win heaven for you. You don't, like a contestant, have to try your best to match the prices to the prizes. The Bible tells you that the price is the same for all people. Whether you are young or old, rich or poor; whether you are a stubborn sinner or terrified in your conscience over your guilt, the price of the death of God's Son is full payment for all your wrongs. You do not have to cross your fingers and hope the price is right. God tells you it is right; that you are right in His eyes because you are baptized into Christ's death and resurrection. He assures you that you are forgiven; that no sin of yours is left unpaid. Jesus' blood cleanses you of all sin.

"Heaven and earth will pass away," He says, "But My words will not pass away." And so His word to you that you are forgiven will always be His word to you. As the pages of your calendar are torn away; as important events come and go, the word of forgiveness remains the same--it will not pass away. You don't have to worry that you may lose the pricing game and miss out on the prize of heaven in the end. It's not what you do that matters here; it's what Jesus already did for you. His death and resurrection can be circled in red on your calendar. It's done. Nothing can change that or do away with it. He died and rose for you. Your baptism can be circled in red because the blood of Christ which was poured upon you then still covers you today.

It doesn't matter when Christ will return in Judgment. He is here for you now, not to judge you, but to grant you repentance and faith; to shower you with His grace and mercy. The bridge into Washington may fully open up next month, but the bridge into heaven is open now for you. Christ is that bridge. He is the pricing game and He is the prize. He keeps you awake now so that you will be awake in the end; so that you will awaken to the dawn of the Son shining in heaven. We do not know when that day will come, but that's okay, because today the same Jesus who will take you there is here now for you. Amen.