

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³Watch! Be alert and pray, because you do not know when the time will come. ³⁴It is like a man going away on a journey. When he left his home, he put his servants in charge and assigned what each one was to do. He also commanded the doorkeeper to keep watch. ³⁵Therefore keep watch, because you do not know when the owner of the house is coming: whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or early in the morning. ³⁶If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷What I say to you, I say to everyone: Keep watch!” (EHV)

Theme: What the Certain Uncertainty of the Last Day teaches us

1. About Christ
2. About Us

How many days till Christmas? By my count it's 26. How are your Christmas preparations going? Is your tree up, what about your other decorations? Did you buy all your Christmas presents already? What about your Christmas letter—have you written it yet? Or your Christmas cookies—when will you make them; and what will you have for Christmas dinner? Many people have a list of what they want to get done by a certain date; and they are finished well in advance of Christmas Day. Then there are those who like to procrastinate. They might do some things here and there; but life gets busy and all of a sudden, it's a few days before Christmas and they are scrambling to get it all done in the end.

The thing about Christmas is that you always know when it is going to be. It's December 25th every year! Of course, this year is a little bit more uncertain because of the pandemic, you're not sure if, when, or, how you'll get together with your family or go out with your friends to celebrate. There is a lot of uncertainty surrounded your holiday celebrations—as there has been all year. Nevertheless, this much is certain: Christmas is on December 25 and you have 26 days left until the celebration of the coming of our Savior, God's Son, Jesus Christ!

But you can't say the same thing about the Last Day. It is certain that the day is going to come, but it is completely uncertain as to when that day will be. When it comes to the Last Day, there is a certain uncertainty!

Jesus warns his disciples and us, **No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.** No one knows when Christ is going to come again—no one knows the day or the hour of the Last Day. The angels in heaven don't know. Jesus even says that he didn't even know. Now, how can Jesus not know? Isn't he God; doesn't he know all things? How can he not know? And how can he not know the day of his return? This is something he talked about, prophesied about on a regular basis, it is obviously a major event—the culminating event in the history of the world. He is going to come again in his full glory and everyone will see him as he truly is and every knee will bow down to him and every tongue will confess that he truly is the Lord, the God of all the world. So how can Jesus not know when such an important day is going to happen?

This is one of the things the certain uncertainty teaches us. It teaches us about the dual nature of Christ—that he is both God and man. It teaches us about Jesus' states of humiliation and exaltation.

When Jesus was born as the baby in Bethlehem, he gave up full use of his divine power and knowledge. He remained fully God, but he was also fully man at the same time. And so, the Almighty God had to learn to walk and talk, he was fed, he grew stronger in wisdom and stature.

Jesus was very much like us in every way, he humbled himself to be one of us. Sure, he would perform miracles from time to time, giving us a glimpse of his power as God. He displayed his omniscience at times as well, knowing things that it would have been impossible for a mere human to know. And, at times, such as on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus shows us a glimpse of his divine glory.

But all of those instances were just glimpse, a peak behind the curtain so to speak, to prove to us that he truly is God. But for the most part Jesus hid his divinity behind a veil of human flesh. The first passage we turn to in order to talk about Jesus' humiliation is Philippians 2, **Though he was by nature God, he did not consider equality with God as a prize to be displayed, but he emptied himself by taking the nature of a servant. When he was born in human likeness, and his appearance was like that of any other man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.**

So here Jesus is in state of humiliation, not making full use of his divine nature. And in this state of humiliation, he did not know. He chose not to know when he was going to return again. Of course, now in his state of exultation since his resurrection, he is making full use of his divine knowledge; so, now he knows the exact day and the exact hour of his return.

And he could come at any time. He gives us signs of his return—Mark covers a few of them earlier in chapter 13, **Whenever you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled. Such things must happen, but the end is not yet. In fact, nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be earthquakes in various places. There will be famines. These are the beginning of birth pains.**

All of these things have been taken place for years and so we know that Jesus could come at any time. A few weeks ago in my sermon on Last Judgment Sunday I quoted the end of the Bible, the last Words recorded of Jesus, **Yes, I am coming soon.** "I am coming soon," Jesus says. And when he comes, it will be in his full glory—with the trumpet call of God, the voice of the archangel, and every one will see him in his fully divine glory and know that he truly is God and our Savior, who has come to take his people home.

But we are impatient people. We aren't used to waiting for anything, and we've been waiting for almost 2000 years for Christ to return. Unbelievers scoff at the idea that we have been waiting all these years. They try to convince us that if he has been so long in coming—and he said that he is coming soon, then he's not going to come; it's all made up. The Lord knows the temptation we face to doubt his promise, so he says through Peter, **For the Lord, one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day.** It may seem to us that Christ is taking a long time—but in his eyes it's only been a few days—"soon" to the eternal Lord!

In Matthew 24 Jesus says, **If the master of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. You also need to be ready for this reason: The Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect him.** Not only do we not know when Christ is going to return, but he is going to come suddenly and unexpectedly. When we least expect him, like a thief in the night, Christ is going to return.

Everything that the Lord reveals to us—and everything that he does not, is for our benefit. That stands for everything found on the pages of Scripture, especially about the timing of the Last Day.

If we knew the exact date we'd have the tendency to become lethargic in our faith. We may think that we have plenty of time till such and such date; and as that date gets closer, then I'll get serious about my faith; or as the day gets closer I'll really start to share my faith. You have some people who like to plan ahead, and others like to procrastinate; both are dangerous when it comes to faith. Some may think that they prepared in the past so they don't have to worry about God's Word, and they fail to remain in the gospel and their faith eventually waivers and they die before

the Last Day comes—and as the Writer to the Hebrews writes, **it is appointed for people to die only once and after this comes the judgment.** Procrastinators are like the five foolish virgins who were caught unprepared when the groom came for the wedding feast.

And how easy it is to become distracted in our faith! We have so many things going on in our lives—so many things that vie for our attention on a daily basis, that it's so easy to become distracted and lose sight of the proper priorities in life. Just think about the Christmas season—we are typically so busy running around buying presents, attending get-togethers, concerts, baking cookies, writing letters, and so on, that we barely have time to think about Christ's coming at all! And this just a microcosm of our entire faith-life—it's all too easy for us to become distracted. Like a man standing guard through the night, it's easy to become distracted or even fall asleep.

Since we don't know when he is going to return, and since he could come at any time, it's important for us to be ready at all times because we don't want to get caught unprepared and perish forever. So the Lord warns us again and again in our text to be alert, to keep watch for his coming, so that when he does come we are prepared and enter into eternal glory and join the never-ending wedding feast!

And how are we properly prepared? Only through faith in Christ as our one and only Savior! And this faith is a gift of the Holy Spirit, worked in us by the gospel. Through the Word and sacraments, the Holy Spirit creates saving faith in us and he strengthens and keeps us in that one true faith. So if we want to be properly prepared for his second coming, whenever that may be, we have to be in the means of grace—the gospel in Word and Sacrament, so the Holy Spirit can do his work!

And it is through faith that we are saved—through faith we receive all the blessings Christ won for us. And when Christ returns on the Last Day, he will take with him into eternal glory all who believe in him. The writer to the Hebrews writes, **Christ was offered only once to take away the sins of many, and he will appear a second time—without sin—to bring salvation to those who are eagerly waiting for him.**

Christ will come again with salvation to take his people home. And there in his heavenly home we will be forgiven and live a life without sin; restored to a new and perfect life as God created, we will see him as he is—in his full glory, and we will sing with all the saints and angels his eternal praises! The Lord loves us and doesn't want us to miss out on this eternal glory and so he warns us to be prepared at all times that we are ready for the Lord returns!

How many days till Christmas? 26. What preparations do you have to get done before you are ready? How many days until Christ's second coming? Christ's return is certain, the timing of the Last Day is a certain uncertainty! It could be 26; it could be 1000 years, or one day. Are you prepared—are you ready for his coming? Through faith, worked in your hearts through the gospel, you are. Remain in the gospel so that Lord will find you ready for when he returns. Amen.