

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ³³ Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come. ³⁴ It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.

³⁵ “Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back—whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn. ³⁶ If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. ³⁷ What I say to you, I say to everyone: ‘Watch!’ ” (NIV 84)

Theme: Be Alert for Christ’s Coming

1. He has put you in charge.
2. Keep your eyes focused on him.

When does the Christmas season start for you? For many of us it already began. For most of us the Christmas season and the season many refer to as the holiday season begins with Thanksgiving and lasts to New Years. During that time of about 6 weeks, our schedules are full of activities. Those activities can be so plentiful that we lose sight of what is truly important. We lose our focus on Christ. We may fail to stop and ponder the Christian Christmas in favor of the secular holiday of Christmas.

So today God calls on you to be alert for Christ’s coming. Jesus has put you in charge; keep your eyes focused on him.

Today marks the first day of the new church year—the first Sunday in Advent. We just finished with the season of End Times. During the season of End Times we focus on the second coming of Christ. We take a look at the last day. We talk about Christ’s judgment. And we look forward to heaven where we will be living with the king of kings. This season is called End Times because we take a look at the End of Time. And the beginning of eternal life.

During the season of Advent we also prepare for Christ’s coming. Like the season of End Times, we look forward to Christ’s second coming. And we also focus on Christ’s first coming. And because the season of advent is one that precedes Christmas, we focus especially on Christ’s first coming. We prepare ourselves for his birth. And our

preparation for Christ’s birth reminds us of why Jesus had to come in the first place. He came to save us from our sins. So Advent is a season of repentance. A time when we confess that our sins caused Jesus to live the life of a lowly human.

During Advent, then, we prepare ourselves for both of Christ’s comings. But our text for today is about the last day. It doesn’t mention the first time Christ came. But the lessons of preparation for the last day can be applied to our preparation for Christmas. Today, in six short verses we are told to be prepared for Christ’s coming four times. And another time in a short parable that Jesus uses we are told to keep watch. **Be on your guard, be alert, keep watch, keep watch,** and finally—**watch.** Five commands to prepare ourselves for his coming. Both of Christ’s appearance is something that God doesn’t want us to miss.

But our preparation is often lacking. That is because we often don’t have time. We often fail to make time. We are so busy. We simply don’t have time to think about much else than our schedules. The kids have a recital or concert. There are sports practices and games. There are work parties to attend. And get-togethers your friends put on. There is family to visit. And many feasts to eat. You still need to do a bunch of shopping. And you have to set up all the decorations some time.

This time of year is busy. It seems as if we are running all over the place. And we can’t keep up with our Schedules. We become so busy that we fail to prepare ourselves. We lose sight of the purpose of advent. We focus so much on the worldly aspects of a secular holiday that we miss Christ. We do what we want—not what God wants. So we go out and have fun, see cute things, or be entertained. We spend time more time with our family. Often at the expense of Christ. We focus on ourselves, and fail to prepare ourselves for Christ coming.

And you have no one to blame but yourselves. For Christ has put you in charge of your own life. You can prepare your heart and mind for his coming, or you can let yourself be overtaken by all secular enticements of this holiday. The choice is yours. It’s comparable to a land owner who left to go on a trip, Jesus explains. When he leaves he

puts his servants in charge. And he tells the door keeper to keep watch over things. But they do not know when the owner will return. Therefore the servants and the door keeper must be on their guard. They can choose to mess around and have fun. But they might be in trouble if the owner returns and find them doing so. In the same way, the choice is yours. God has left you in charge. You can let your heart and mind be overtaken by worldly things. Or you can focus and prepare for his coming. Now it is true that we know when Christmas is. And we can always prepare ourselves by the time the 25th of December comes around. But we don't know when Christ's second coming is going to be. It could be before Christmas; it could be tomorrow.

And if that's the case, we better be prepared. For all we know we are living in the last moments of the world. We want to prepare ourselves. And be alert. We want to be ready when he comes. Like a watchmen in the middle of the night, we must not become complacent. But we must not become sidetracked. We don't want to lose our focus. The things of this world will do that to us. The entice us everyday to have fun, sleep in, or go away on a weekend trip. There are many temptations that we face that try to get us away from God and his word. They try to make sure that we don't read our bibles, or attend bible class, or that we only worship God when it is convenient for us. Or when we actually do these things, we let the things of this world get us sidetracked. When we are reading the bible, suddenly you are thinking about something else. Or you go through everything you need to accomplish this next week during the sermon. And when you finally snap back into it, you realize you have no idea what you read or heard for the past five minutes. Or perhaps you are so tired from all the extra activities in your life that you can't stay awake long enough to prepare your hearts for Christ's coming. Try as you might, you just can't stay awake during the sermon. And soon, you find yourself woefully unprepared.

So how do you get yourself prepared? By looking away from the enticements of the world. But de-cluttering your life. And focusing on what is important. You can be alert for Christ's coming by making time in your schedules for his Word. By making his Word your top priority this season. For it is only through his word that you can be

truly prepared. It is only through the means of grace that you can be truly prepared for Christmas. By worshiping, by reading your Bibles, studying in bible class or Sunday School, by hearing the word—that is how you can be on your guard for Christ's coming. Through the Lord's Supper our sins are forgiven and our faith in Jesus is strengthened.

We can only be prepared through the means of grace. For the word tells us who we are and what Christ has done. It tells us that we are nothing but poor miserable sinners. The word shows us that we can do nothing to please God. That everyday we fail to obey his commands. It shows us that we deserve nothing but eternal punishment. That we should suffer with the devil forever. But the gospel shows us that Christ has removed the guilt of all our sins through his death on the cross. That we are no longer sinners, because Christ became a sinner for us. We know that because he rose from the dead we won't suffer in hell forever. But we will live with him in heaven.

The Word shows us that we need to repent and turn to Christ. It tells us why Christ had to come the first time and what he did when he first came. It promises us that he will come again. And what he will do when he comes again. Christ first came because of our sins. He came to remove the guilt of all our sins. He needed to come or we would be on our way to hell. And because he came we are considered holy and righteous in the eyes of God.

The word also tells us that Christ is coming again to judge the world. He is coming to take all believers back with him. He came to give us the gift of eternal life in heaven. All this is possible because he came the first time. God promised his people that he would send them a Savior. And years later he did when he sent his son. God has promised that our Savior will return again. And because he fulfilled his first promise, we know that he will fulfill this promise. We will live in heaven forever. So we repent and eagerly wait for his coming.

When does Christmas start? It hasn't started yet. First we have to wait. And as we wait we prepare our hearts and minds by putting off the distractions of this world and its secular holiday and focusing on Christ. We focus on his first coming, during which he died and rose for us. And we eagerly await, with repentant hearts, his second coming, during which he will take us home forever. Amen.