

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Mark 13: 28-37

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. Today, we'll continue to read Mark chapter 13, verses 28 to 37.

At the end of the age, there will be great tribulation, and after the tribulation, Jesus Christ will come with glory, riding on the clouds. These prophecies are very certain. During the great tribulation, if God did not shorten the days for the sake of the elect, no flesh would be saved. But after the great tribulation, the public coming of Christ will be a historic event that everyone can witness; it cannot be missed. If we do not prepare, stay alert, and wait, we will suffer loss when Christ comes again.

Some saints hold erroneous beliefs, thinking that once they are baptized, they have obtained a ticket to heaven. They may think they can lie down today, do nothing, and when Christ comes again, they can joyfully enter the kingdom of heaven and enjoy glory. However, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, it tells us that when Christ comes again, there will be a shout, the voice of an archangel, and the trumpet of God. The dead in Christ will rise first, and then those who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, we shall always be with the Lord. Being 'with the Lord forever' means being in the new Jerusalem, in the eternal realm of the new heaven and earth where there is no more time. However, what happens after we meet the Lord in the air is not explicitly mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4.

We must look at other passages of scripture. In 2 Corinthians 5:10, it says that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. After we meet the Lord, we will be brought before the judgment seat of Christ, a place of judgment where each person will receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. This is the judgment that Peter talks about in 1 Peter 4:17, where judgment begins at the household of God and each person is judged according to his deeds. It means that every Christian is saved by grace alone, not by works, but once saved,

the works or the life's work after being saved will determine whether one receives rewards.

But what exactly does a Christian's work entail? In 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, it tells us that each Christian's life is a construction project, and it depends on what you build on it. Some build with gold, silver, precious stones, while others with wood, hay, straw. Before the judgment seat of Christ, everyone's work will be revealed. At that time, there will be fire to test each one's work. If one's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, though only as through fire. If one's work survives, he will receive a reward. So, our lifelong alertness and preparation are like building a project. How do you know when you're prepared? Others cannot measure it, but you should know in your own heart.

If you long for the Lord's return, you should be prepared. A person who longs for the Lord's return possesses two characteristics: firstly, he is a faithful servant, meaning his life is holy, and he does not do things that displease God; he lives each day according to the teaching of the anointing. Secondly, he is a loyal servant, developing the gifts God has given him and faithfully fulfilling what God has entrusted to him. If you are a faithful and loyal servant, you will long for the Lord's return. Based on our relationship with the Lord, we should know whether we are prepared. On the other hand, human history is also in God's hands, and in the flow of history, God has set some milestones or signs to remind us that the time of Christ's return is getting closer. Let's read verse 28.

Verse 28: "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near."

Just as we discussed yesterday, this refers to the restoration of Israel in 1948. When the branch of the fig tree begins to sprout and put forth leaves, we know that summer is near, meaning the time of God's restoration of all things is drawing near.

Verse 29: "So you also, when you see these things happening, know that it is near—at the doors!"

Continuing, he said, "So whenever you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened."

At that time, we must be alert in our hearts. We should know that the Son of Man is near, right at the door. Mark's Gospel uses a very realistic approach. The Son of Man is Christ; He is the rightful owner of the household. When Israel was restored, He was already near. Mark adds another statement, "right at the door," not yet inside. How long will He remain at the door? No one knows.

Verse 30: "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place."

The "generation" referred to here is not the usual sense of a twenty-year period, but rather it speaks to the time after Jesus' departure, when the entire generation is held in the hands of the evil one. Therefore, it is a time of corruption, wickedness, perversion, and absurdity. This generation has not yet passed away, and all these things will come to pass. It speaks to Jesus' return to transform this generation, bringing about His revival and establishing His kingdom.

Verse 31: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

The words spoken by God stand firm in heaven. One day, heaven and earth will pass away, but the words of God will never pass away. As we know from the Gospel of John, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." All things were made through this Word, so the words spoken by God are more reliable than all the things He has created. One day, heaven and earth will pass away, but the words spoken by God will never pass away.

Verse 32: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

Jesus knows the thoughts of people. When He spoke so confidently, saying that when the fig tree buds and its leaves come out, you know that its return is near, it is already at the door. He also knew that people would be curious and would try various methods to figure out which year, month, or day He would return. Therefore, Jesus straightforwardly tells us that no one knows that day or hour. Thus, He tells us not to focus our thoughts on knowing the exact day of His return because neither the angels nor Jesus Himself knows, only the Father knows.

We know that over the years, many different religious groups have tried to predict the exact day of Jesus' return. Some have even sold all their possessions in anticipation of that day, only to find out later that none of the predictions were accurate. We truly need to understand God's words. Jesus unequivocally tells us that no one knows the day or the hour, not even the angels, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Verse 33: "Take heed, watch and pray; for you do not know when the time is."

God's withholding of the knowledge of the day when that day will come is actually according to His will. It teaches us to be cautious, vigilant, and to pray continually. We should live each day on earth as if Jesus were to return today. In fact, throughout church history, all mature and experienced Christians have been those who awaited the Lord's return. Especially when we read the New Testament, in Paul's letters, he seems to think that Jesus is about to return. When we read John's letters, it also feels like Jesus is about to return, as it is with Peter's letters. Even in more recent times, many Christians have been like this. There are many examples of people who love the Lord and await His coming. Brother Watchman Nee himself was one who awaited the Lord's return. He wrote many beautiful hymns about eagerly awaiting the Lord's coming and led others to fulfill and receive grace. This elderly sister would often take young brother Nee for walks in the garden, and she would frequently say, "Maybe when we turn the corner, the Lord will return." They were both cautious

and vigilant, eagerly awaiting the Lord's return. In fact, for every vigilant person eagerly awaiting the Lord's return, the waiting time is not long. And because of this, there are so many beautiful hymns about eagerly awaiting the Lord's coming.

Verse 34: "For the Son of Man is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch."

Jesus says He is that man who left His homeland, originally Israel, and now is the Church. He sojourns among the nations, entrusting authority to His servants, which are us, assigning each of us our work. He also commands the doorkeeper to stay alert. Mark uses simple words to clearly illustrate our service in the church today. It's as if Jesus left His homeland, sojourning among the nations, entrusting authority to us, His servants, who serve in His household. And He assigns each of us our work. Of course, in Matthew's Gospel, it tells us that according to our abilities, each person is given talent to work for Him. Then, He commands the doorkeeper to stay alert. The doorkeeper represents those who lead in the church, those who are entrusted with various responsibilities, they must stay vigilant.

Verse 35: "Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming—in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning—"

Jesus has departed, and His return is certain. In terms of timing, indeed, no one knows whether it will be in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster, or in the morning. In other words, Jesus also implies here that when He leaves, we enter into darkness. How long will the night last? It is until the fourth watch. According to Roman timekeeping, the night is divided into four watches: from sunset to 9 p.m. is the first watch, from 9 p.m. to midnight is the second watch, from midnight to 3 a.m. is the third watch, and from 3 a.m. to sunrise at 6 a.m. is the fourth watch. So, when Mark describes evening, midnight, and morning, he

means from 12 a.m. to 3 a.m. for midnight and from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. for morning. Even though Jesus has departed, this perverse and absurd generation seems to have entered into darkness, but His return is certain, although no one knows the exact time of His return.

Verse 36: "Lest, coming suddenly, He find you sleeping."

Finally, Jesus emphasizes once again.

Verse 37: "And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"

In these few short sentences, Jesus repeatedly emphasizes the need to stay awake, fearing that those of us who serve as His servants in His household or those who keep watch might inadvertently fall asleep and miss His coming. Therefore, Jesus reminds us again and again to stay vigilant. As we read the prophecies on the Mount of Olives, may each of us have the desire to remain alert before God, eagerly waiting. And while we wait, let us pray on the one hand and perform the tasks assigned to us on the other hand. According to the gifts God has given us and the tasks He has assigned to us, let us faithfully fulfill our duties in His household.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You for Your repeated reminders. Help us to be people who earnestly pray and eagerly await in Your household. Enable us to be faithful in the tasks You have assigned to us, so that when You return, You may call us faithful and good servants. Lord, help us to live each day in vigilance, in prayer, and in faithful service. Thank you! we pray in Jesus Christ's holy name.