

The Manner of Jesus' Coming  
Gene Hawkins

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." (Mark 13:31-37)

The truth of Jesus' coming strikes great fear into the hearts of some Christians. They assume that when He comes, all Christians will be caught away to heaven and the sinner will be left behind to eventually endure the torments of hell for eternity. Some years ago, a woman came to me after I had preached a message on the coming of the Lord, and declared plainly, "I do not want Jesus to come yet, because I have so many loved ones who are not saved."

It is vitally important to understand the manner, or order of Jesus' second coming. Acts 2:19-21 dispels the myth that no one will be saved after He comes for the Church. "And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that WHOSOEVER SHALL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED." The time spoken of here is well into the tribulation, and even in the midst of all these judgments, men will still have the opportunity to call on the Lord and be saved. In fact, the tribulation is designed to bring about such brokenness and repentance, and indeed, some will not bow to Him until such devastation begins to afflict them. As is the case today, tribulation is actually an expression of Divine Grace to bring men to their knees.

"But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left" (Matthew 24:37-41). Many people misunderstand these verses and have formed a misconception of Jesus' return. They assume that the one "taken" was translated to heaven, while the one "left" behind stayed on earth to suffer eternal judgment. Notice that Jesus likens these days to those of Noah's time, but those taken away in Noah's time were not taken to heaven, but swept away in the flood waters. Likewise, in the days of Jesus' coming, the one who is taken away, will be destroyed by judgment. Those who remain will be preserved to continue in the Kingdom of God on earth, even as Noah and his family were left in the ark to begin anew after the flood. The time of which Jesus speaks here is well into the tribulation period after the Church has already been taken to heaven.

Another problem that many have concerning the second coming of Jesus is that they do not see His multiple appearances. In our opening text, Jesus describes His coming like unto

a thief; however, in Matthew 24:27, He declares boldly that His coming shall be "as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west ... and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." Revelation 1-7 corroborates this same scenario: "Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him." The verses declaring that He shall come as a "thief" and those asserting that every eye shall see Him are not contradictory. They simply illustrate that Jesus will appear to different people at different times and manner.

Our text in Mark 13 mentions four distinct possibilities as to when Jesus will come: at evening, midnight, at the cockcrowing, or in the morning. We might think that the Master is saying He will come in only one of these four night watches, which together depict the long night of tribulation. Scripture points out His appearance in each of these times, and the same pattern is set forth in all of them. There are those who are watching for Him and are ready, and there are those who are taken unawares and He comes to them as a thief.

The first watch is referred to as "even." It refers to that time just after the tribulation officially begins. Those coming out of this watch are seen in heaven before the throne (Revelation 7). They are known as the innumerable company and are described in verses 14-15: "And he said unto me, these are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God." Some believers will not be ready for an earlier appearance which we will see later and they will remain on the earth to go through a portion of this tribulation period.

The next watch is "midnight." This one is specifically described in Matthew 25:1-6: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the Bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the Bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight, there was cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go ye out to meet Him." The five wise virgins are often portrayed as those who are saved and the five foolish virgins presented as sinners. Though the five wise are indeed believers, we cannot conclude that the five foolish virgins are not. All ten of them are saved. Note the similarities and differences. All are called "virgins," a term never used to describe sinners. All of them slumbered and slept. A sinner is never said to be sleeping, but rather dead in trespasses and sins. All of them had lamps, meaning that they all had some light, or testimony. When the cry came at midnight, all the virgins "rose and trimmed their lamps." The only difference now is that the five wise had oil in their vessels, a sign of being filled with the Holy Ghost, and the five foolish did not, resulting in their outward testimony waning, or going out.

The five foolish virgins were caught unawares, for when the Bridegroom came, they were gone away to obtain oil. When they returned, the inference is that they had obtained the oil they needed, but it was too late to get into the wedding. The Scripture never states that they went into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, but only that the door of entrance to the wedding was shut. This midnight hour corresponds with the midst of the week where we see the translation of the 144,000, as figured by the man

child of Revelation 12. This group was sealed with the Holy Ghost in Revelation 7, and is represented by the five wise virgins who were prepared with oil in their vessels.

The third watch is the "cock crowing," which refers to the darkest hour of the tribulation period, after the middle of the week. It is described as "the time of J a c o b s trouble." Jesus referred to it in Matthew 24:21-22 as a time of great tribulation such as was not since the world began. He further stated that unless those days were shortened, no flesh should survive. The beginning of this period is marked by the abomination of desolation being set up in the midst of the week (Daniel 9:27 - Matthew 24:15-22). The Lord will appear to a people who are ready to receive Him during this awful hour and He will preserve them throughout the rest of that time. This is the time when Jesus words in Matthew 24:13 will be fulfilled: "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved;" that is, an enduring to the end of that devastating period.

The fourth watch is the "morning," and once again Jesus will appear. It is the dawn of a new day, both for Israel and for the world. The tribulation is past and the Kingdom is at hand. This undoubtedly coincides with the time when "every eye shall see Him and they also which pierced Him." The nation of Israel will be born in a day and will be prepared to become the head of the nations -- His world-wide evangelists during the Millennium.

There is another appearance of Jesus which is all important to us, but is not mentioned directly in the accounts given in the four Gospels because it was hidden from the Kingdom apostles, but revealed to Paul, the apostle to the Church. It follows exactly the same pattern we have seen in the night watches. "But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child and they shall not escape" (I Thessalonians 5:1-3).

The difference here is that Paul is writing to people who have been promised deliverance BEFORE the night watches of tribulation begin. He states in Verse 9: "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." The wrath of which he speaks is not the wrath of God on the sinner, but the judgment of the tribulation. Revelation 3:10 reveals the promise: "Because thou has kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth." In Thessalonians, Paul addresses those brethren who are "not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as do others but let us watch and be sober" (5:4-6).

Some people conclude that the apostle is making a distinction between sinner and saint, but such is not the case. As noted previously, only Christians are ever referred to as being asleep. Sinners are indeed dead in trespasses and sins. Paul addresses them all as "brethren," and warns the sleeping Christians, who may not only be drunk on the wine of worldliness and pleasure, but also on the wine of religion. It is a loud shout to WAKE UP! lest Jesus come to them as a thief in the night and they be left to endure the evening watch of the tribulation period. What Jesus said in M a r k s Gospel, "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch," applies to all of us who would be ready for the first appearance

of Jesus.