



[Luke 21:36](#)

(36) Watch therefore, and pray at all times that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

A Faithful Version

[Luke 21:36](#) is frequently interpreted to mean that we should be closely watching current events so we know how close we are to Christ's return. The common paraphrase of this command is "watch world news, so that as you begin to see prophecy unfold, you can escape the horrors of the Tribulation."

This interpretation has led to a cottage industry of sorts within the church. A tremendous amount of effort is put into commenting on world events and tying them into biblical prophecy. The underlying assumption is that [God](#) wants us to have our finger on the pulse of the news, and this knowledge—combined with prayer—will make us worthy to escape all those prophesied things. But does this assumption agree with Scripture?

In fact, the Greek word translated "watch" has nothing to do with looking at events or keeping world news under close observation. Even without examining the underlying Greek, we can tell from the context that [Jesus](#) has something else in mind. Verse 36 begins, "Watch *therefore*," signaling that it concludes or summarizes previous material. We cannot understand verse 36 until we know what preceded it.

Verses 34-35 provide the context for Jesus' command to "watch":

But *take heed to yourselves*, lest *your hearts* be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.

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Clearly, Jesus' message is not an admonition to watch world events so that we will know when He will return. Instead, His instruction is to watch *ourselves*, which is what "*take heed to yourselves*" suggests. He is talking about being vigilant about our own spiritual state, as well as being circumspect and spiritually awake as we go through life. The danger is that, if we do not "watch" ourselves—that is, continually take stock of our condition and responsibilities—self-indulgence and material concerns will distract us, and we will find ourselves spiritually unprepared when the end comes.

[Luke 21:36](#), then, is not an injunction to be glued to CNN, FOX, the Drudge Report, or any other news source. In fact, a subtle danger exists in being too caught up in current events, as it can distract us from the more vital *spiritual* preparation. The upshot is that the Day will come, and we do not know when.

Watching events unfold is not what makes us "worthy to escape," but our cooperation with God as He forms His character image in us does. Thus, in addition to [prayer](#), we have to be vigilant in our covenant with Him. We have to "take heed" to ourselves constantly, examining our walk and how we are seeking and imitating God.

The Greek word translated "watch," at its most basic, means "to be sleepless," implying continuous and wakeful concern, such as being on watch when a loved one is ill. It means to be intent or to exercise constant vigilance over something, as a shepherd watches over his sheep or a leader watches over his charges ([Hebrews 13:17](#)). Watching signifies a state of being untouched by any influence that may cloud the mind; one "watching" guards against drowsiness or confusion. Hand-in-hand with "[pray always](#)," it denotes being alert for spiritual dangers and beguilements. Obviously, this state will not transpire from following—or even deeply analyzing—current events.

— David C. Grabbe

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