



"I shall tell you a great secret, my friend. Do not wait for the last judgement, it takes place every day."
—Albert Camus

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Watching Is Not Passive

Herbert W. Armstrong often turned to Ezekiel 33 to expound upon being a watchman over Israel, saying that if he did not warn Israel about the approaching "time of Jacob's Trouble," its blood would be on his head when the trouble came. If he warned the people and they did not heed, then their blood would be on their own heads. This aspect of watching related to Israel's national [repentance](#), and his approach to encourage its repentance involved watching world events to verify that the end of this age was near.

Judging from how few are left in the church today, it seems that watching end-time events through the news far outpaced church members' endeavors to repent. And if we are not careful, we could stumble into this same error today. Many of us wish to know what is going to happen relative to prophecy, and various church groups that purport to have prophecy figured out are very attractive to many church members.

Indeed, the Bible includes prophecy to spur us on as we see events unfolding that point to the return of Christ. Yet, Jesus Himself stresses that, more important than just watching the news, each of us has an important work to accomplish. We all know that [Luke 21:36](#) instructs, "Watch therefore, and [pray always](#) that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." Prior to the church's breakup, the prevailing view of this verse was that we were to watch world news so that we would not be caught flat-footed as the end approached. We truly need to be aware of world conditions as a motivator, but in His admonition,

Jesus has much more on His mind.

The apostle Paul's statement in I Corinthian 13:2 captures the gist of Christ's intent: "And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, . . . but have not love, I am nothing." In other words, knowing everything about world events is worthless if we fail to develop the loving character of [God](#) in the time given to us.

In [Luke 21:34](#), the term *take heed* means "to hold the mind or ear toward someone," and in a nautical setting, it connotes "to hold one's course toward a destination." Jesus says we are to set our minds on the correct course and carefully watch that we do not wander off it. Why? To ensure that we are not distracted by the pulls of our flesh or by anxiety over filling basic needs. These things tend to dull our spiritual senses, blinding us to how far we may have regressed.

So Jesus tells us in verse 36 to *watch*, which literally means "to go without sleep." The underlying Greek word is used only three other times in the New Testament ([Mark 13:37](#); [Ephesians 6:18](#); [Hebrews 13:17](#)), each with the connotation of being alert and praying for spiritual growth. The sense in Luke 21 is that we are not just to sit back and "watch," but we are to put our backs into our calling, working to overcome in taking on the very nature of God.

Similarly, in [Matthew 11:12](#), Jesus says, "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the [kingdom of heaven](#) suffers violence, and the [violent take it by force](#)." How is this accomplished? Physical blessings or promises were given to Israel for keeping the *letter* of the law. Then, for those whom God calls and gives His Spirit, it is required to obey the *spirit* of the law also, which obligates us to control our hearts or minds, the seat of all thought and action. The effort to accomplish this is truly great. We must struggle violently to overcome and grow in character.

We can all relate to the struggle that Paul describes in [Galatians 5:17](#): "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish." Paul faced this in his own life, as he admits in [Romans 7:14-23](#). Overcoming is a terribly difficult process. The key is to struggle, to strive, to put whatever effort is necessary to do what God wants us to do, not to give in to any compromise. It requires work not to be lackadaisical, thinking that just because we know about God, His laws, and the future He has for mankind that we are a shoe-in for His Kingdom.

The prime example of one taking the Kingdom by force is that of [Jesus Christ](#) Himself,

who was in all points tempted as we are, yet He fought Himself that He might live without [sin](#), and thus be the perfect Sacrifice so that we could have eternal life ([Hebrews 4:15](#)). Even a shallow reading of [the gospel](#) accounts shows that He put everything He had into being our Savior and Example.

The apostle Paul is another good example. In [I Corinthians 9:26-27](#), he describes his approach to living the Christian life: "Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified." Paul prayed, studied, fasted, and lived his life as close to the standard of Christ that he could, so that he might please God, and in doing so, set a proper example for each of us. This is how we are to take the Kingdom by force.

[Mark 13:32](#) reminds us that no man knows when Christ will return: "But of that day and hour no man knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Verse 33 tells us to "take heed, watch and pray," connecting these two ideas. Not knowing the timing of His return should be incentive to us to be vigilant and attentive to spiritual things—to be prepared always. Then Jesus instructs us in verse 34 that we each have a work to do. In plain words, we have each been given the task of achieving what is expected of those whom God calls.

Over the years, many have started on this course, excited at the prospect of the [return of Jesus Christ](#) and the setting up of the [Kingdom of God](#). But time has gone on, and consciously or unconsciously, the "Lord has delayed His coming" attitude has set in. As a result, large numbers of our former brethren have neglected to watch their spiritual growth and drifted away from their awesome calling and potential.

Neither God the Father nor Jesus Christ wants us to miss out on the wonderful future they have prepared for us, thus the many admonitions to watch and pray. So we need to consider deeply the warning Jesus gives in [Mark 13:35-37](#):

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—lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!

- John O. Reid (1930-2016)

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[Praying Always \(Part One\)](#)

by Pat Higgins

Many of us know Luke 21:36 by heart: 'Watch and pray always. . . .' We think we know what it means because the church has traditionally taught that it refers to watching world events. But does it? Pat Higgins contends that there is far more to this verse spiritually than meets the eye.

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