

**Title:** **-S-** Ready for His Return

**Object:** Calendar

**Scripture:** **-S-** [Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.](#) Mark 13:33

I am sure all of you know what this is. *(Show calendar on Screen)* That's right, it is a calendar. Most of us use a calendar like this one, every day. Sometimes we write important things that we want to remember on the calendar. Today I also have another type of calendar. *(Show the Advent calendar)* Have you ever seen a calendar like this one? It is called an Advent calendar. Advent means the arrival of an event or a person. Now, what event or person do you think we might be looking forward to at this time of year? Yes! The Advent calendar helps us to count down the days until Christmas and the celebration of Jesus' birthday.

Since some of you might not have seen an Advent calendar before, let me show you how it works. As you see, there is a picture of Joseph, Mary and baby Jesus and above it, there are twenty-five numbered stars. Today, I want you to color Joseph, Mary and Jesus when you get home. Then, beginning tomorrow, you will color one star each day, starting with star number one. Next week bring your drawing back colored, show me, tell something about the birth of Jesus and I will give you a surprise. Finally, you will color the large star that is right above Joseph, Mary and Jesus. That's when we will know it's Christmas day, the day we've all been waiting for!

While we are waiting for Christmas, we should remember that we are also waiting for something else. We are waiting for Jesus to come again. When will that be?

We don't know. We don't have a calendar that tells us when He will come again, but He promised that He would come back. Jesus said that even the angels in heaven don't know the day or hour of His return. Well, what should we do? We should do what the Bible tells us to do, “... you are all sons of light and sons of day ...<sup>6</sup> so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.” (1 Thessalonians 5:5-6)

What else should we be doing while we are waiting and watching for Jesus to return? We should be worshiping Him, praising Him, serving Him, loving Him, and loving one another as He commanded us to do. When we do those things, we will be ready, no matter when Jesus returns.

Dear Father, we are watching and waiting for Christmas when we celebrate the day that you sent your Son, Jesus, to earth. We are also waiting for Him to come again. Help us to be ready. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

**-S- The Effects of Light**

Sermon #71

***Last Call to the Light*** (Verses 35-36)

Our passage for study this morning is found in John chapter 12, verses 35 to 50. Brother Seth has already read this passage that takes us to the end of the chapter. Let me begin our study by reading verses 35 and 36, “So Jesus said to them, ‘For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes.’<sup>36</sup> While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.’ These things Jesus spoke, and He went away and hid Himself from them.”

The Jews had finished their response to Jesus back in verse 34 with a question, “Who is this Son of Man?” The answer to that question had been Jesus’ message throughout His ministry, but they chose to reject the gospel. John writes, “He came to His own (*Israel*), and those who were His own did not receive Him.” (John 1:11)

Jesus knew this was not the time for another debate with those who were spiritually deaf and dead. So, instead of answering the question of the Jews, Jesus issued a stern warning. The spiritual Light of salvation was with them just a little longer for the cross-loomed ever nearer. The issue was whether they would recognize the severity of the situation or be swallowed up in the darkness. Is this not exactly where we find ourselves today? Without the Light of Jesus people are swallowed up in darkness. Our mortal lives last 70 to 80 years, but without Jesus as our spiritual Light the darkness of sin lasts for eternity.

Light and darkness are not new themes in John’s gospel. Darkness cannot conquer the Light (1:5), but it can overcome fallen people. Like Nicodemus (3:2), these Jews

were living in the spiritual darkness of night. Jesus had proclaimed Himself to be the Light of the World; the long awaited Messiah and had called people **not** to walk in darkness, but in His light. “Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”<sup>(John 8:12)</sup> The Pharisees rejected Jesus and their spiritual blindness spread to many others. But unlike the blind man who Jesus gave the gift of sight because of his faith in chapter 9 (9:30), these people arguing with Jesus were in imminent danger of becoming just as spiritually blind as the unaccepting Pharisees who criticized the former blind man for his faith (9:39–41). The question I asked myself at this point is, “Why Jesus saved anyone?” From the time that sin came into the human race through Adam; God could have rightly destroyed everyone. But God patiently tolerated the people that He created in His own image and extended to them the hope of salvation. “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”<sup>(2 Peter 3:9)</sup> His patience continues to this day, but I ask, for how much longer? God’s patience continues only until the return of Christ. When is Christ returning? My beloved the Apostle Paul made clear how we are to live in anticipation of Jesus’ return. <sup>2</sup>“For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. <sup>4</sup>But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; <sup>5</sup>for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; <sup>6</sup>so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.”<sup>(1 Thessalonians 5:2-6)</sup> We are to live as Jesus will return today, prepared and ready, so that, when He returns it will not catch us by surprise – “let us be alert and sober!” For those who reject Jesus, the truth is

that when sinners doggedly reject Christ, God will at last remove His grace from their lives and judgment will come upon them. Their rejection is spiritually lethal.

### **Lethal Unbelief** (Verses 37-43)

Their unbelief in Jesus as the Christ was truly lethal. Reading verse 37, **“But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him.”** It seems implausible that the religious leaders who studied and taught the scriptures could have missed the implications of Jesus’ teachings and miracles. This shows the power of sin and Satan to blind people from the truth. However, we have progressed since the time of Christ and are now more enlightened. Beyond the scriptures there is science, nature, history and they all testify to God who created all and testify to the deity of Christ. But, most people still refuse to believe. The same was true at the time of Christ’s earthly ministry, even though there was evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, people refused to believe.

John reminds his readers <sup>37</sup> **“though He had performed so many signs before the (Jewish nation), yet they were not believing in Him.”** Jesus’ miracles proved Jesus was the Messiah and left no legitimate room for Israel’s unbelief. People then and people today have harden their hearts to the truth because they want to live the way they want to live and they do not want to be held accountable to God. So, even though they know He is real they harden their hearts and deny Him. In order to deny God people go to extremes; when Jesus healed the demon possessed, blind and mute man the Pharisees responded, **“This (Jesus) man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons.”** (Matthew 12:24b) What I find interesting is that the enemies of Christ do not deny the historical truth that He cast out the demon from this man or of the truth of Jesus’ miracles. This makes it obvious they are hard-hearted, spiritually blind and demonstrates the limitations of preaching

the Word of God, sharing the gospel message and apologetics. So, while evidence can clearly be given of the truth of the gospel, people will still reject it. However, the response of the sinner is NOT limited to the mind and human reason – salvation requires a regenerated heart and soul and that is the work of God the Holy Spirit.

John brings these causes of unbelief for Israel's rejection of Christ and the very same reason for people to reject Christ today, together – the divine and the human. Israel's unbelief and rejection of Jesus Christ was not outside of God's plan and it is not outside God's plan today when people reject the gospel truth. John wrote of God's plan being fulfilled. <sup>38</sup> *"This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: 'LORD, WHO HAS BELIEVED OUR REPORT? AND TO WHOM HAS THE ARM OF THE LORD BEEN REVEALED?'"* <sup>39</sup> *For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again,* <sup>40</sup> *'HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES AND HE HARDENED THEIR HEART, SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT SEE WITH THEIR EYES AND PERCEIVE WITH THEIR HEART, AND BE CONVERTED AND I HEAL THEM.'"* Israel's rejection and people's rejection today was not merely foreseen by Isaiah, but it was by God's sovereign plan. We read of this in Romans, <sup>10</sup> *"... there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins (Esau and Jacob) by one man, our father Isaac; <sup>11</sup>for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice (God loved Jacob and hated Esau) would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls."* (Romans 9:10-11) In God's sovereign grace He and He alone chose the elect and brought good from people's rejection and their willful rejection was used by God to fulfill His plan for mankind.

John adds what appears to be a footnote showing that Isaiah knew Israel's rejection of the Messiah was the will of God. Reading verse 41, *"These things*

Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him.” This verse contains several important truths: First, in John’s quoting Isaiah 6:10 he is referring to Isaiah’s vision of God. John is saying that both he and Isaiah have seen God’s glory and God’s glory is Jesus Christ. Secondly, these verses also demonstrate both John and Isaiah saw Israel’s rejection and unbelief and it specifically applied to Jesus Christ. Thirdly, Jesus who is God is the One who hardened Israel in judgment.

At the same time Israel’s rejection of Jesus Christ was the result of centuries of rebellion, turning their backs on God, misusing the privileges given to them by God and denying the divine truth found in the scriptures. The ultimate truth came to them in Jesus Christ, fulfilling every scripture, but because of their spiritual blindness they could not believe. Their tradition overrode the truth as Jesus said; “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.” (Matthew 15:14) The spiritually blind Pharisees guided Israel into the pit of eternal darkness.

This raises the question of God’s sovereign will verses man’s will or responsibility. Have any of you struggled with this? I certainly have and I believe this question is one that all believers and even unbelievers wrestle with. We struggle because we are trying to resolve this apparent conflict with human thought and logic. God is not human and I believe He gives us the answer in the scripture, even though there is tension. I will briefly deal with this to help us come to an understanding and be able to articulate our beliefs and thoughts to others. I think I should also get bonus points for attempting this. So here we go.

God’s sovereign hardening of the heart or blinding of the soul of Israel or any person does not reduce the liability of those who refuse to believe in Christ. As Leon Morris wrote, “When John quotes, ‘HE HAS BLINDED THEIR EYES...’ he does not

mean that the blinding takes place without the will, or against the will of these people.... These men chose evil. It is their own deliberate choice, their own fault.” Another theologian that I greatly respect, D. A. Carson said, “God’s judicial hardening is not presented as the capricious manipulation of an arbitrary potentate cursing morally neutral or even morally pure beings, but as a holy condemnation of a guilty people who are condemned to do and be what they themselves have chosen.” Adam chose sin and disobedience over living the will of God. It has been a sobering realization as I have grown in my spiritual walk that those who persistently harden their hearts against God may come to the point where they find themselves hardened by God Himself. Let me walk us through an example of one who hardened his heart against God and then God harden his heart in order for him to fulfill the sovereign plan of God. Remembering God would never harden a person’s heart against their own will, but uses the desires of their own heart. Although I could be talking about Judas, he is not the example I am going to use. I am dealing with the historical and scriptural record of God’s dealing with Pharaoh. Moses and Aaron approach Pharaoh to request he let the Jewish people go. Beginning in Exodus chapter 7 we read, “Yet Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.” (Exodus 7:13) This is **not** saying that God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, but that because of his anger, pride and self-importance that Pharaoh had hardened his own heart against Moses and his God. Over the six chapters of Exodus beginning with chapter seven there are ten verses dealing with Pharaoh hardening his heart against God. Then over 13 chapters there are 10 verses where God lets Pharaoh have his evil heart’s desire and God hardens Pharaoh’s heart. God tells Moses <sup>3</sup>“I will harden Pharaoh’s heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. <sup>4</sup>When Pharaoh does not listen to you, then I will lay My hand on Egypt...” (Exodus 7:3-4) God tells



Moses when Pharaoh does not listen because of his hard heart against God, then God will “lay My hand on Egypt...” God’s action to harden Pharaoh’s heart was, as D. A. Carson said, “but a holy condemnation of a guilty (*person or*) people who are condemned to do and be what they themselves have chosen” God does **NOT** harden peoples hearts against their will, but only after they have rejected who He is. The prophet Isaiah, one of the earliest evangelists cried out, “Seek the LORD while He may be found; Call upon Him while He is near.” (Isaiah 55:6) Those who had been exposed to the teachings and had seen the miracles of Jesus and yet rejected Him; for these people, especially the Pharisees, God hardened their hearts and gave them over to their evil desires. The Apostle Paul stated clearly, “For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” (Romans 1:20) What we see here is evidence that there is a Creator God that is seen by all mankind. People who reject God have no excuse. People reject God because of their sin and because they do not want to be held accountable to God. So, they harden their hearts against God. God reaches down and touches the souls of some people, regenerates their souls and they call out to Him, seek Him and are saved. For others God gives them the desires of the hard-hearts and darken souls and even hardens them further so that they act out and live in their sinful nature and this too serves the plan of God. Evil serves a purpose in the kingdom, for it is evil that demonstrates to mankind their wickedness and desperate need for God who is the opposite of evil. God created Lucifer knowing he would try to usurp God and become Satan the tempter of man. God created mankind knowing man would sin and fall into living in sin, thus creating their desperate need for Him. God did not create evil for He is pure and cannot possess evil in Himself. However, God did create beings that He knew would become evil

for they serve a purpose in His plan of salvation. We need to come to the acceptance that God created spiritual beings and people who give into their desire for sin and evil to the point God hardens their hearts against Him and goodness and they are lost to their own desires. The amazing thought then is not that God has chosen to save some and not others, but that God has saved anyone, for no one deserves His gift of salvation. Does this not make you realized how special and precious God's gift of His grace and mercy in your life is? Why has God saved you? None of us deserved to be saved. You were just as wicked and those God has not redeemed. The answer is you did not deserve to be saved, but that God in His sovereign will chose to extend His grace into you life for His purpose and plan. If what I have just said is true, then are you accepting this gift from God and living your life is loving obedience to Him and desiring that your life brings Him glory? If not, then you are foolish beyond description, selfish and unappreciative. Do not squander what was so very costly and yet given to you as a free gift without cost. When we look at God's sovereign will and that salvation is only given by Him and not earned by anyone and that God had made evident to all people His presence and they freely chose to reject Him – then we begin to get a handle on man's inability to deal with God's sovereign will and man's free will. We see conflict instead of God's gracious gift where none is deserved. Sometimes this relationship between God and mankind is also express by the acronym – T.U.L.I.P.

**T**otal Depravity (also known as Original Sin, because of sin all people are spiritually dead)

**U**nconditional Election (God's effectual calling – it is unmerited)

**L**imited Atonement (Jesus died for only those God has called, also known as Particular Atonement)

**I**rresistible Grace (When God's call His elect and regenerates their hearts they cannot resist Him)

**P**erseverance of the Saints (also known as Once Saved Always Saved)

Finally we close this section with believers who are still disobedient because they fear man more than God verses 42 and 43 tells us, <sup>42</sup> “Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; <sup>43</sup> for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.” The Pharisees had already decreed and had spread the word throughout Jerusalem that anyone who claimed to be a believer and follower of Jesus would be cut off from Jewish social and religious life. This may not sound all that bad for people today. We move around for jobs fairly often and we move from church to church with out any serious issues. Extended families are often made up of more than one religion. However, at the time of Christ if you were excommunicated by the Jewish leadership it meant you were not allowed to go to the village or town synagogue, your family – meaning parents, siblings, extended family of uncles, aunts and cousins would shun you have nothing to do with you. Local businesses would not sell to you and if you worked for someone they most likely would fire you. As far as the community and family were concerned you were dead to them. Because of the seriousness of following Jesus some people would not publicly acknowledge who He was and others kept their belief secret because they were more concerned about men than God. Yet, there were those who were bold for Jesus and willing to pay the price. How about you? Are you living boldly for Christ or are you more worried about what men think? Jesus made His standing on this attitude clear saying, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:26) We cannot expect God to honor those who do not honor Him. As John wrote earlier in his gospel the words of Jesus, “If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.” (John 12:26) This brings us

to the closing verses of chapter twelve.

### **Lasting Consequences of Belief and Unbelief** (Verses 44-50)

Back in verse 36 we read Jesus “**went away and hid Himself from them.**” Since Jesus had already left these words were not spoken at this time, but John included them to summarize Christ’s ministry to Israel as it had now ended. This summary includes simple but profound truths concerning Jesus’ ministry and the price for rejecting Him.

Jesus statement in verse 44 is similar to those found in Mark. <sup>44</sup> **And Jesus cried out and said, “He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me.”** Meaning it is impossible of believing in the Father apart from believing in Jesus as the Christ. Jesus adds to this thought saying, <sup>45</sup> **“He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me.”** These two sayings show that those who believe in Christ are given a personal relationship and knowledge of both the Father and the Son.

Jesus began telling people in John chapter eight that <sup>46</sup> **“I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness.”**

Those whom God calls are rescued from the domain of darkness and are brought into the Light and the kingdom of God by belief in His Son. What a marvelous gift this is.

Now in John’s summary he shifts from the blessings of belief to the terrible consequences of unbelief. Paul describes those who do not believe as “sons of disobedience.” In verse 47 Jesus says, **“If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.”** Jesus’ ministry on earth was to save the lost not to judge them.

However He will return and when He does He will judge, this is made clear as we

continue,<sup>48</sup> “He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.<sup>49</sup> For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment *as to* what to say and what to speak.<sup>50</sup> I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.” God the Father and Jesus the Son are both equally God, but Jesus as God incarnate submitted Himself to the will of the Father who remained in heaven and spoke only what the Father instructed.

The Apostle John in his recording the events and words of Jesus here in chapter twelve has made it clear for all that there are only two paths in this mortal life, as John’s fellow apostle recorded the words of Jesus, “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”<sup>(Matthew 7:13-14)</sup> As we rapidly approach the time of the year when even the fallen world is tolerant of Jesus it is now the time to reach out sharing the gospel of salvation of Jesus Christ with the lost. Will we be obedient? I pray the answer is yes, Lord, yes!