# Hard sayings 2: Of that hour, the Son of Man does not know

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Mark 13:32-37

It’s always interesting to see how the popular media and now people on the social networks will take up some theme; it’s especially interesting to us when it’s some out of the way Christian group that’s getting attention for doing something stupid, like predicting the exact day when Jesus will return. And since I’m giving this teaching this morning, the prediction seems to be untrue.

I’m wondering what your reaction was this week to all the hoopla. Was it a topic of conversation among your friends? How did you handle it?

It seemed useful to me to look a bit at one of the passages of relevance to this discussion. If you will turn your Bibles to Mark 13:32-37, we’ll look at a part of a longer passage in which Jesus is referring to future things.

**32**"But concerning that day or that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. **33** Be on guard, keep awake.[[a](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=mark%2013&version=ESV#fen-ESV-24743a)] For you do not know when the time will come. **34** It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants[[b](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=mark%2013&version=ESV#fen-ESV-24744b)] in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. **35** Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows,[[c](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=mark%2013&version=ESV#fen-ESV-24745c)] or in the morning— **36**lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. **37**And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake."

Our guide FF Bruce actually focuses his discussion on another part of this passage, where Jesus says that the current generation would not pass away until big doings would unfold.

Bruce helpfully points out that there are two separate events that Jesus is referring to. One is the destruction of the Temple. Skip up to verse 1, and you’ll see that it’s a discussion of the beauty of the Temple that prompts the discussion, and Jesus foretold its destruction. Bruce points out that, within a generation, the Temple was, in fact, destroyed. This is well-attested as an historical fact. The Romans tore down the Temple, and all that is left is the Wailing Wall, a portion of the ancient wall that surrounded the Temple. It is called the Wailing Wall, of course, because pious Jews come to pray there, remembering and lamenting the Temple’s destruction. This happened in AD 70—forty years or so after this statement by Jesus. Forty years is practically the definition of a generation in Jesus’s culture.

So, the first event really isn’t such a hard saying: it came to pass as Jesus said it would.

The second event is “the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory” One thing that seems hard about this is that it acknowledges that Jesus did not know, according to his own admission, when this would happen. It is particularly surprising to me that anyone would think they could predict the day Jesus returns given this statement, but not much surprises me anymore. But still, how can it be that Jesus did not know when he would return?

Again, this doesn’t seem particularly hard. We don’t, and can’t, know the particulars of what it meant Jesus’s humanity to be “assumed” into God (as the Athanasian Creed has it). It’s a unique thing. But it’s no more surprising that Jesus didn’t know of his return date than that he ate, and drank, and experienced pain. Part of being human is being ignorant, and Jesus shared that with us.

So, is there anything hard in this passage, besides its vivid imagery and slightly confused chronology?

Jesus tells us what is hard: he tells us *three times*: we need to stay awake. We need to be aware of the work of God that God has given us to do, so that when—at some point—Jesus *does* return, he finds us faithfully fulfilling our Christian duties. One of my friends tweeted that most white evangelicals believe Jesus will return before 2050, and therefore don’t have to take any responsibility for the world today. But of course, Jesus’s thrice-repeated *Stay awake* tells us to do exactly the opposite: to be awake to the tasks God presents us with.

Staying awake is hard. We can’t do it alone. We need one another, to wake us up when we should be awake. We need one another because we have to rest at times, and some one needs to tending to the watch.

Some of us are saddened by the thought of many earnest Christians who thought they were “awake” when, in fact, they were being hoodwinked, or fooling themselves. So, let us pray for our sisters and brothers in error. My favorite Rapture tweet was from the writer Paul Ford: “Awesome news, rapturers: You now have your WHOLE LIFE to read the New Testament and practice a sincere loving faith.” Amen! And so do we: we have our whole life ahead of us, too.