

Mark 13:35

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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:

Analysis

Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh

—The imperative grēgoreite (γρηγορεῖτε, 'watch/stay awake') appears repeatedly in this discourse (vv. 33, 35, 37), the keynote of eschatological ethics. Jesus lists four Roman watch-periods: opsios (ὀψίος, evening, 6-9 PM), mesonyktion (μεσονύκτιον, midnight, 9 PM-12 AM), alektorphōnias (ἀλεκτοροφωνίας, cockcrow, 12-3 AM), and prōi (πρωί, morning, 3-6 AM).

The four watches structure monastic prayer (Lauds, Matins, etc.) and symbolize comprehensive vigilance—the Master may return at any hour. The phrase ouk oidate (οὐκ οἶδατε, 'you do not know') echoes verse 32's divine sovereignty over timing. This uncertainty is purposeful: it keeps believers in constant readiness rather than calculating schedules. The verb grēgoreō implies spiritual alertness, not mere sleeplessness—actively engaging kingdom work, not passive waiting.

Historical Context

Roman military watches governed nighttime security. Guards found sleeping at post faced death (Acts 12:19). Mark's Roman audience would grasp the life-or-death stakes of vigilance. The four watches also recall Jewish three-watch system (Exodus 14:24, Judges 7:19), showing Jesus bridges Jewish and Gentile contexts. Early Christian worship included all-night vigils, practicing literal watchfulness anticipating Christ's return.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What does 'watching' look like practically in your daily life—how do you maintain spiritual alertness?
2. How does uncertainty about Christ's return timing cultivate holy urgency without anxious calculation?
3. In which 'watch' of life (youth, middle age, old age, death) might you be tempted to let down your guard?

Interlinear Text

γρηγορεῖτε	οὖν·	οὐκ	οἴδατε	γὰρ	πότε	ὁ	κύριος
Watch ye	therefore	not	ye know	for	when	G3588	the master
G1127	G3767	G3756	G1492	G1063	G4219		G2962
τῆς	οἰκίας	ἔρχεται	ὁπὲ	ἢ	μεσονυκτίου,	ἢ	
G3588	of the house	cometh	at even	or	at midnight	or	
	G3614	G2064	G3796	G2228	G3317	G2228	
ἀλεκτοροφωνίας	ἢ	πρωῖ					
at the cockcrowing	or	in the morning					
G219	G2228	G4404					

Additional Cross-References

Mark 13:33 (Parallel theme): Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.

Matthew 24:42 (Parallel theme): Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

Matthew 24:44 (Parallel theme): Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.

Mark 14:30 (Parallel theme): And Jesus saith unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

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