REGULAR LESSON · ABOUT 50 MINUTES

The Doorkeeper: Ready Without a Date

BIG IDEA	Jesus will return in glory. Instead of guessing the date, his people stay awake by doing the work he gave them.
MAIN READING	Mark 13:24–37
MEMORY VERSE	Mark 13:31, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away."
YOU WILL NEED	Bibles, whiteboard, three index cards per student, a map of Jerusalem in Jesus' day (optional)
BACKGROUND TO READ	The Olivet Discourse and The Jewish War, about 10 minutes each

1 Spoiler alert 5 min

Ask: "Would you rather know exactly when a test is, or have it be a pop quiz? Why?" Most will want to know the date. Ask why: so they can cram the night before.

Then: "Jesus gave his followers a pop-quiz kind of promise. He told them he would come back, but not when. Let's see why."

Set the scene: this is Jesus' last long teaching before his arrest. He is sitting on the Mount of Olives, looking across the valley at the huge, gleaming Temple. His disciples have just admired its stones, and he has told them not one stone will be left on another (Mark 13:1–4).

2 Read and answer 20 min

Mark 13:24–27 But in those days, after that oppression, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. Then he will send out his angels, and will gather together his chosen ones from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the sky.

1. **What happens to the sun, moon and stars?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> They go dark and fall. The prophets used this picture language for God shaking the whole world when he acts (Isaiah 13:10; Joel 2:10). Students may ask if it is literal. A good answer: "It may be, but the point is that when Jesus comes in glory, nothing else will shine as bright."

2. **Who gets gathered "from the four winds"?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> His chosen ones: all believers, from every direction and every nation. "Four winds" means north, south, east and west, so the whole earth.

Mark 13:28–31 "Now from the fig tree, learn this parable. When the branch has now become tender, and produces its leaves, you know that the summer is near; even so you also, when you see these things coming to pass, know that it is near, at the doors. Most certainly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things happen. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

1. **What does a fig tree with new leaves tell you?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> That summer is near. In Israel most trees stay green all year, but fig trees lose their leaves in winter, so new fig leaves are a clear sign of the season changing. Signs point to what is near.

2. **Jesus says heaven and earth will pass away. What won't?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> His words. That is why we can trust the Bible's promises. Connect to the memory verse.

3. **Challenge question: "This generation will not pass away until all these things happen." What could Jesus mean?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> This is a hard verse; praise students for wrestling with it. Many teachers think it refers to the destruction of the Temple, which happened in AD 70, about forty years later, within one generation, just as Jesus said. That event was a preview of the end. Another view: "generation" means "this kind of people." Don't insist on one answer.

Mark 13:32–37 But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Watch, keep alert, and pray; for you don't know when the time is. "It is like a man, traveling to another country, having left his house, and given authority to his servants, and to each one his work, and also commanded the doorkeeper to keep watch. Watch therefore, for you don't know when the lord of the house is coming, whether at evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he might find you sleeping. What I tell you, I tell all: Watch."

1. **Even Jesus said "nor the Son" knows the day. Why might that be?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> Christians have long taught that Jesus is fully God and fully human. As a true man, he lived with real human limits, and the Father kept that day hidden. It is a mystery; it is fine to say so. The practical lesson: date-setters are always wrong.

2. **What two things did the master leave his servants?**

> **TEACHER'S NOTE**
> Authority and work (verse 34). Being ready isn't sitting and staring at the sky; it is doing your job faithfully until he comes.

3 Why is this good news? 8 min

Write on the board: **Who is coming?** Then read this answer from the Heidelberg Catechism (1563) and have students underline the words that make Jesus' return comforting, not scary.

> "That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person, who before offered himself for my sake, to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as judge from heaven."
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> Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 52 (1563) · Read it in the Reading Room

Point out three phrases: "with uplifted head" (not hiding), "the very same person" (the judge is our Savior), and "has removed all curse from me." Lutherans say the same in the Small Catechism: Jesus "has redeemed me … in order that I might be His." Reformed and Lutheran Christians agree completely here.

4 Job cards 10 min

Give each student three index cards. On each they write a "work" Jesus has given them right now: one at home, one at school, one with friends. Ask a few to read theirs aloud (only with permission).

Then ask: "If Jesus came back tonight, would he find you doing this work?" Make clear that this isn't about earning heaven. We do our work because we love a Master who loved us first.

> **Keep the balance.** Christ's coming is good news because he comes to save sinners, not to reward the good. But "watch" is a real command. Grace that makes no one watchful is not the grace of the New Testament. God forgives us in order to make us like his Son (1 John 3:2–3).

5 Pray 5 min

Maranatha! (“Our Lord, come!” 1 Corinthians 16:22)
“Lord Jesus, keep us awake. Help us do the work you have given us. Amen.”

Explain that “Maranatha” is Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, and was one of the earliest Christian prayers.

Scripture: World English Bible (public domain). Free to print and copy.