

Mark: 13:32–37

From Catena Aurea:

32. But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.

33. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.

34. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.

35. 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:

36. Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.

37. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.

THEOPHYLACT. The Lord wishing to prevent His disciples from asking about that day and hour, says, But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. For if He had said, I know, but I will not reveal it to you, He would have saddened them not a little; but He acted more wisely, and prevents their asking such a question, lest they should importune Him, by saying, neither the Angels nor I.

HILARY. (de Trin. ix) This ignorance of the day and hour is urged against the Only-Begotten God, as if, God born of God had not the same perfection of nature as God. But first, let common sense decide whether it is credible that He, who is the cause that all things are, and are to be, should be ignorant of any out of all these things. For how can it be beyond the knowledge of that nature, by which and in which that which is to be done is contained? And can He be ignorant of that day, which is the day of His own Advent? Human substances foreknow as far as they can what they intend to do, and the knowledge of what is to be done, follows upon the will to act. How then can the Lord of glory, from ignorance of the day of His coming, be believed to be of that imperfect nature, which has on it a necessity of coming, and has not attained to the knowledge of its own advent? But again, how much

more room for blasphemy will there be, if a feeling of envy is ascribed to God the Father, in that He has withheld the knowledge of His beatitude from Him to whom He gave a foreknowledge of His death. But if there are in Him all the treasures of knowledge, He is not ignorant of this day; rather we ought to remember that the treasures of wisdom in Him are hidden; His ignorance therefore must be connected with the hiding of the treasures of wisdom, which are in Him. (Col. 2:3) For in all cases, in which God declares Himself ignorant, He is not under the power of ignorance, but either it is not a fit time for speaking, or it is an economy of not acting. But if God is said then to have known that Abraham loved Him, when He did not hide that His knowledge from Abraham, it follows, that the Father is said to know the day, because He did not hide it from the Son. (Gen. 22:12) If therefore the Son knew not the day, it is a Sacrament of His being silent, as on the contrary the Father alone is said to know, because He is not silent. But God forbid that any new and bodily changes should be ascribed to the Father or the Son. Lastly, lest He should be said to be ignorant from weakness, He has immediately added, Take ye heed, watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is.

THEOPHYLACT. But He teaches us two things, watching and prayer; for many of us watch, but watch only to pass the night in wickedness; He now follows this up with a parable, saying, For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave his servants power over every work, and commanded the porter to watch.

THEOPHYLACT. See again that He has not said, I know not when the time will be, but, Ye know not. For the reason why He concealed it was that it was better for us; for if, now that we know not the end, we are careless, what should we do if we knew it? We should keep on our wickednesses even unto the end. Let us therefore attend to His words; for the end comes at even, when a man dies in old age; at midnight, when he dies in the midst of his youth; and at cockcrow, when our reason is perfect within us; for when a child begins to live according to his reason, then the cock cries loud within him, rousing him from the sleep of sense; but the age of childhood is the morning. Now all these ages must look out for the end; for even a child must be watched, lest he die unbaptized.

AUGUSTINE. (Epist. 199, 3) For He not only speaks to those in whose hearing He then spake, but even to all who came after them, before our time, and even to us, and to all after us, even to His last coming. But shall that day find all living, or will any man say that He speaks also to the dead, when He says, Watch, lest when he cometh he find you sleeping? Why then does He say to all, what only belongs to those who shall then be alive, if it be not that it belongs to all, as I have said? For that day comes to

each man when his day comes for departing from this life such as he is to be, when judged in that day, and for this reason every Christian ought to watch, lest the Advent of the Lord find him unprepared; but that day shall find him unprepared, whom the last day of his life shall find unprepared.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

13:32a That Hour No One Knows, Not Even the Son

Ignorance of the Future Is Our Ordinary Human Condition.

Athanasius: When his disciples asked him about the end, he said with precision: Of that day or that hour no one knows, not even he himself—that is, when viewed according to the flesh, because he too, as human, lives within the limits of the human condition. He said this to show that, viewed as an ordinary man, he does not know the future, for ignorance of the future is characteristic of the human condition. Insofar as he is viewed according to his divinity as the Word who is to come, to judge, to be bridegroom, however, he knows when and in what hour he will come.... For as upon becoming human he hungers, thirsts and suffers, along with all human beings, similarly as human he does not see the future. But viewed according to his divinity as the Word and wisdom of the Father, he knows, and there is nothing which he does not know. *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 3.46.

Whether the Son Is Deficient in Knowledge.

Hilary of Poitiers: It is sometimes turned into a reproach against the only begotten God that he did not know the day and the hour. It is said that, though God, born of God, he is not in the perfection of divine nature, since he is subjected to the limitation of ignorance, namely, to an external force stronger than himself, triumphing, as it were, over his weakness. The heretics in their frenzy would try to drive us to this blasphemous interpretation: that he is thus captive to this external limitation, which makes such a confession inevitable. The words are those of the Lord himself. What could be more unholy, we ask, than to corrupt his express assertion by our attempt to explain it away? But, before we investigate the meaning and occasion of these words, let us first appeal to the judgment of common sense. Is it credible, that he, who stands to all things as the author of their present and future, should not know all things?... All that is derives from God alone its origin, and has in him alone the efficient cause of its

present state and future development. Can anything be beyond the reach of his nature, through which is effected, and in which is contained, all that is and shall be? Jesus Christ knows the thoughts of the mind, as it is now, stirred by present motives, and as it will be tomorrow, aroused by the impulse of future desires.... Whenever God says that he does not know, he professes ignorance indeed, but is not under the defect of ignorance. It is not because of the infirmity of ignorance that he does not know, but because it is not yet the time to speak, or in the divine plan to act.... This knowledge is not, therefore, a change from ignorance, but the coming of a fullness of time. He waits still to know, but we cannot suppose that he does not know. Therefore his not knowing what he knows, and his knowing what he does not know, is nothing else than a divine economy in word and deed. On the Trinity 9.58–62.

Whether the Son Knows All That the Father Knows.

Augustine: According to “the form of God” everything that the Father has belongs to the Son: for “All things that are mine are yours, and yours are mine.” According to the form of a slave, however, his teaching is not his own, but of the One who sent him. Hence “Of that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.” He is ignorant of this in the special sense of making others ignorant. He did not “know it” in their presence in such a way as to be prepared to reveal it to them at that time. Recall that in a similar way it was said to Abraham: “Now I know that you fear God,” in the sense that now I am taking you through a continuing journey to know yourself, because Abraham came to know himself only after he had been tried in adversity.... Jesus was “ignorant” in this sense, so to speak, among his disciples, of that which they were not yet able to know from him. He only said that which was seasonally fitting for them to know. Among those with mature wisdom he knew in a different way than among babes. On the Trinity 1.11.23.

Figurative Speech Concerning What the Son Does Not Will to Know.

Augustine: I am by no means of the opinion that a figurative mode of expression can be rightly termed a falsehood. For it is no falsehood to call a day joyous because it makes people joyous. A lupine seed is not sad because it lengthens the face of the eater because of its bitter taste. So also we say that God “knows” something when he makes his hearers know it (an instance quoted by yourself in the words of God to Abraham, “Now I know that you fear God”). These are by no means false statements, as you yourself readily see. Accordingly, the blessed Hilary threw light on an obscure point by this kind of

figurative expression, showing how we ought to understand the words that “he did not know the day,” with no other meaning than this: In proportion as he had made others ignorant by concealing his meaning, he spoke of it figuratively as his own lack of knowledge. So by concealing it, he so to speak caused others not to know it. He did not by this explanation condone lying, but he proved that it was not lying to use the common figures, including metaphors, as a form of speech available to all, a mode of expression entirely familiar to all in daily conversation. Would anyone call it a lie to say that vines are jeweled with buds, or that a grainfield waves, or that a young man is in the flower of his youth, because he sees in these objects neither waves nor precious stones, nor grass, nor trees to which these expressions would literally apply? Letter 180, To Oceanus 3.

The Time Not Disclosed to Flesh.

Augustine: No one should arrogate to oneself the knowledge of that time by any computation of years. For if that day is to come after seven thousand years, everyone could learn its advent simply by adding up years. What comes then of the Son’s even “not knowing” this? This is said with this meaning, that his hearers do not learn this from the Son, not that he by himself does not know it. It is to be understood according to that form of speech by which “The Lord your God tries you that he may know,” which means, that he may make you know. Again, the phrase “arise, O Lord” means make us arise. Thus when the Son is said not to know this day, it is not because he is ignorant of it, but because he causes those to know it not for whom it is not yet expedient to know it, for he does not show it to them. On the Psalms 6.1.

13:32b Only the Father

Whether Everything Is Already Revealed.

Irenaeus: The gnostics presumptuously assume acquaintance with the unspeakable mysteries of God. Remember that even the Lord, the very Son of God, allowed that the Father alone knows the very day and hour of judgment.... If then the Son was not ashamed to ascribe the knowledge of that day to the Father only, but declared what was true regarding the matter, neither let us be ashamed to reserve for God those enigmatic questions which come our way. Against Heresies 2.28.6.

The All-Knowing God.

Gregory Nazianzen: The last day and hour no one knows, not even the Son himself, but the Father. Yet how can the source of wisdom be ignorant of anything—that is, wisdom who made the world, who perfects all, who remodels all, who is the limit of all things that were made, who knows the things of God and the spirit of a person, knowing the things that lie deep within? For what can be more perfect than this knowledge? How then can you say that all things before that hour he knows accurately, and all things that are to happen about the time of the end, but of the hour itself he is ignorant? For such a thing would be like a riddle. It is as if one were to say that he knew accurately all that was in front of the wall, but did not know the wall itself. Or that, knowing the end of the day, he did not know the beginning of the night. Yet knowledge of the one necessarily implies the other. Thus everyone must see that the Son knows as God, and knows not as man (if we may for the purposes of argument distinguish that which is discerned by sight from that which is discerned by thought alone). For the absolute and unconditioned use of the name “the Son” in this passage, without the addition of whose Son, leads us to conclude: We are to understand the ignorance in the most reverent sense, by attributing it to his human nature, and not to the Godhead. Oration 30, On the Son, Second Oration 15.

Not for Our Good to Know All.

Augustine: It was not part of his office as our master that through him the day should become known to us. It remains true that the Father knows nothing that the Son does not know, since his Son, the Word, is his wisdom, and his wisdom is to know. But it was not for our good to know everything which was known to him who came to teach us. He surely did not come to teach us that which it was not good for us to know. As master he both taught some things and left other things untaught. He knew both how to teach us what was good for us to know, and not to teach us what was not for our good to know. It is according to this common form of speech that the Son is said “not to know” what he does not choose to teach. We are in the daily habit of speaking in this way. Accordingly he is said “not to know” what he causes us not to know. On the Psalms 37.1.

13:33a Take Heed, Watch

Daily Readiness.

Athanasius: The end of all things is concealed from us. For in the end of all is the end of each, and in the end of each is the end of all [on the last day]. Whereas this time is uncertain and always in prospect, we may advance day by day as if summoned, reaching forward to the things before us and forgetting the things behind. For who, if they knew the day of the end, would not disregard the interval? But if ignorant, would they not be more ready day by day? It was on this account that the Savior said: "Watch; for you do not know when the time will come." Four Discourses Against the Arians 3.49.

13:33b You Do Not Know When the Time Will Come

The Pretense of Knowing Something Unknown.

Augustine: A person does not go wrong when he knows that he does not know something, but only when he thinks he knows something which he does not know. Letter 199, To Hesychius 52.

13:35 You Do Not Know When the Master of the House Will Come

Sober Hearts.

Prudentius.

"Away," he cries, "with dull repose,

The sleep of death and sinful sloth;

With hearts now sober, just and pure,

Keep watch, for I am very near." A Hymn for Cock-Crow.

13:37 What I Say to You, I Say to All: Watch

His Second Coming.

Augustine: The first coming of Christ the Lord, God's Son and our God, was in obscurity. The second will be in sight of the whole world. When he came in obscurity, no one recognized him but his own servants.

When he comes openly, he will be known by both the good and the bad. When he came in obscurity, it was to be judged. When he comes openly, it will be to judge. He was silent at his trial, as the prophet foretold.... Silent when accused, he will not be silent as judge. Even now he does not keep silent, if there is anyone to listen. But it says he will not keep silent then, because his voice will be acknowledged even by those who despise it. Sermons 18.1–2.

Coming Suddenly to Those Unprepared.

Augustine: Who are the “all” to whom he says this if not his elect and his beloved, the members of his body which is the church? Therefore, he said this not only to those who then heard him speaking, but also to those who came after them and before us, as well as to us and to those who will come after us until his final coming. Is that day going to encounter only those currently living, or is anyone likely to say that these words are also addressed to the dead, when he says: “Watch, lest he comes suddenly and finds you asleep?” Why, then, does he say to all what concerns only those who will then be living? For that day will come to every single one, when the day comes for him to leave this life, such as it is, to be judged on the last day. For this reason, every Christian ought to watch lest the coming of the Lord find him unprepared. But the last day will find unprepared anyone whom this day will find unprepared. This at least was certainly clear to the apostles. Even if the Lord did not come in their times, while they were still living here in the flesh, yet who would doubt that they watched most carefully and observed what he said to all, lest coming suddenly he might find them unprepared? Letter 199, To Hesychius 3.