

The First Sunday of Advent

November 29, 2015

Prayer of the Day: Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Protect us by your strength and save us from the threatening dangers of our sins; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come Lord Jesus. Alleluia! (Revelation 22:20)

Sermon Text: Luke 21:25-36

Have you started preparing for Christmas yet? Usually, the day after Thanksgiving [Black Friday] marks the beginning of the Christmas season. You see Christmas trees clinging to the roofs of cars. Christmas lights outline houses and bushes. Malls become stuffed with shoppers. A steady stream of UPS and FedEx trucks zip around streets, delivering packages purchased from online retailers. Television and magazine advertisements use the Christmasy red and green colors to flag in buyers. If you include today, you have 27 days until December 25th. No one wants to be caught unprepared, right? No one wants to wake up Christmas morning only to realize that they forgot to purchase a tree. No one wants to sit in the car at 7:00pm on Christmas Eve, wondering which store might still be open in order to load up the car with presents. No one wants to have family show up, only to realize they did not bake cookies or prepare that festive Christmas dinner. No one wants to be unprepared for Christmas. So, have you started preparing yet?

I am sure that most, if not all of you, have begun preparing in some way or another. Yet, in the midst of all the shopping, all the baking, all the schedules, how do you, as a Christian, prepare for Christmas? What is it that you are really preparing for?

Luke 21:25-36

²⁵ "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. ²⁶ Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. ²⁷ At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

²⁹ He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. ³⁰ When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. ³¹ Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

³² "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

³⁴ "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

I mean, Jesus has already come. Angels already filled Bethlehem's nighttime sky and rejoiced over the birth of their newborn king. Jesus has already been wrapped in swaddling cloths and placed in a manger. Shepherds already praised him; wise men already found him. Jesus has already grown up and ministered to many; he has already suffered, died, and rose again. He already entered heaven. All that happened 2,000 years ago! So, what is that you, a Christian, are preparing for this Christmas season?

The next four Sundays of Advent answer that question for us. "Advent" is a Latin word meaning "coming" or "arriving." During these next four weeks, we get ready for Jesus' "coming to" our world. Yes, we will go to Bethlehem and we will see how God brings his Son into the world at just the right time. Yet, we are not going to pretend that we are arriving at that Bethlehem scene for the first time. We do not need to act surprised as if we are meeting Jesus for the first time. No, we who live far removed from Jesus' Bethlehem birth prepare to welcome Jesus in another way.

Jesus prepares you for his arrival. In today's reading, you find him sitting with his disciples. He knows that he would be leaving them soon. In just a few days he would be betrayed, sentenced to death, and then die. Yet, his crucifixion and death was not the climax of his life. No, he would come back to life and proclaim his control over death, his mighty power to restore life. Then he would enter heaven itself and hold control over all things.

Then what? You know that Jesus will not remain in heaven forever. He promises that he will come back for you, so that you may be with him in heaven ([John 14:2-3](#)).

He does not leave that promise hanging by itself. He makes sure that you are always ready for his second arrival. Jesus gives you the signs in the skies and on the earth below. He says, **"There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.** Notice that Jesus does not tell you the exact year, month, day, hour when he will return. Nor, does he tell us these signs He so that curious minds might try to crack the puzzle of his return or so that imaginations can run wild. No, he tells us quite plainly and quite clearly that his creation will begin to break down— and you will see it in the way the skies and waters function. Instead of telling us when he is coming, he tells us to expect so that **"When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."**

Sometimes your neck gets stiff from watching, does it not? You and the other disciples watched Jesus rise into heaven— and he was only 33 years old! That means he has been in heaven over 2,000 years! That means the signs announcing his arrival have been set in place for 2,000 years!

It has been a long time! It is not as though you feel that Jesus has forgotten about you and that he will never welcome you into heaven. You know that you will meet your God face-to-face and be with him for all eternity. Sometimes, you realize that Jesus has been in heaven for so long that it feels like he probably will not come any time soon— at least, not during your lifetime.

So, it is easy to forget what you, a Christian, actually spend your entire life preparing for. It is easy to find more importance, more significance, more meaning in what the world has to offer you. Your schooling, your job, the schedules your kids have, all those things can drag your eyes down from the heavens and drag you away from spending time in the Word of God altogether. Worrying about the future— about when you can retire or how much money you have in retirement or how well your health will hold up— those things can pry your eyes off of the precious power of your God.

It is not as though you never need to prepare for your future or your job or your children's events. Those are blessings God gives you to enjoy in this world. Yet, he warns you, do not let those things take your focus off of what you prepare for during this Advent season. Do not let the things of this world overtake your heart so that your love for your Savior is choked out or removed or kicked off to the side. Do not let the things of this world prevent you from continuing to look forward to the Savior who died for you, to the Savior who opens heaven for you! Jesus makes it explicitly clear: **“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth.”** Jesus will not return as he did the first time— as a humble baby. He will come in the clouds, with the angels accompanying him; he will arrive to bring all things to an end, and to judge the living and the dead!

So, how do you, as a Christian, prepare for Jesus' coming? You prepare just like your fellow believers did thousands of years ago.

Throughout the entire Old Testament believer after believer looked up for their Savior-King's first coming. The moment Adam and Eve brought sin into the world, they longed for the coming of the Savior ([Genesis 4:1](#) and the verses after). Abraham, that father of believers, longed for the spiritual rest from sin that Jesus was coming to bring ([Hebrews 11:8-19](#)). See his son Isaac pass the promise of Jesus down his family lines— to Jacob to Judah to Boaz ([Matthew 1:1-17](#)). Earthly king David sings about his coming King Jesus ([Matthew 22:43-44](#)). Prophet after prophet pleads with Judah and Israel to remain anchored in the one true faith. For over 2,000 years, the believers of old eagerly looked forward to the day when the Son of God would arrive in Bethlehem!

When the time had fully come, God did send his Son into the world. For the next 33 years of his life, Jesus locks his eyes on the cross. He easily could have been shifted away from the reason for his coming. He sees many things, talks to many people. His own country wants to crown him as their earthly leader. He could have campaigned against the politics of the Roman Empire. He could have struggled under all the pain, the difficulties, the troubles of this world and ran away from death on a cross! Instead of becoming an earthly king, he lifts our eyes to his kingship of heaven and earth. Instead of entering worldly politics, he comes to crush the serpent's devilish head. Instead of groaning under bodily pain, Jesus puts one foot ahead of the other all the way to Calvary.

There he hands over his life in order to open heaven for us. God abandons him instead of us. God pours out his wrath on Jesus instead of on us. Because Jesus keeps his eyes focused on living a perfect life to forgive our sins, you and I are set free from sin. That is what “to redeem” means: to “buy back.” Jesus pays for our freedom out of hell by giving

his Father his perfect life (since God wanted us to have a perfect life). Because he did that, he is called our “Redeemer.”

You know, those long line of Old Testament believers looked forward to the day when their Savior would cover over all of their sins with his blood ([Genesis 15:6](#)). You and I now take our place in that long line of believers. We know Jesus has died and rose again. We know that he ascended into heaven. Now, we lift up our heads and look for our “Redemption”; we look forward to Jesus delivering us into eternal life.

So, knowing that Jesus could return at any time, what kind of lives do you live? How do you, as a Christian, prepare for the coming of the Son of Man?

Jesus has the answer. **“Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”** Never give up watching for your Savior. Continue remembering that you are guaranteed life in heaven! Continue keeping your minds centered on the promise of Jesus—he can return at any moment.

So, when you see these signs continue raging all around you, lift up your heads to the heavens, remembering that Jesus is coming for you. Continue making every effort to remain in God’s Word. Make sure that nothing takes away from the time you have to hear God speak to you. Continue making it your habit to worship with your fellow believers. Continue reading those brief devotions in the *Meditations* booklet. Follow the bulletin Bible-readings or follow your own Bible reading schedule. Ask questions if you are unsure about something you read. Reread the same Bible accounts— even if you have read them earlier. Most of all, in whatever you read, remember to observe what Jesus has done to save you. See how he kept his promise to remove your sins. See where he unveils the glimpse of an eternally joyful life in heaven. Grasp those promises of his—those promises where you trust by faith that he will bring them to fulfillment.

Because your Savior will arrive soon. Yes, soon you will go back to Bethlehem and you will see what great lengths God takes to bring your Savior into the world. You will again have a chance to marvel at how he kept his thousands-of-years-old-promises. When the time was right, God sent his Son into our world.

When the time has fully come, the heavens will be rolled back as a scroll. **At that time [you] will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.** There is no fear. Your sins have been forgiven. No judgment rests on you because Jesus has removed that judgment. So, **STAND ALERT! THE SON OF MAN IS COMING!**