

Waiting for the Day of the Lord

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Date: 06 December 2020

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[0 : 00] Good morning. We are in our second Sunday, the season of Advent. We're keeping Advent. I just learned that actually last week, late to the game.

We don't celebrate Advent, we keep it. Because we are awaiting Christ's return, his second Advent. So we're keeping, watch, we're keeping vigil, we're keeping Advent.

We're not celebrating his first Advent, that's what Christmas is for. Though we do see a lot of similarities between those in a previous age who are waiting for Christ's first coming, and ourselves who are also awaiting Christ's second coming.

We are both awaiting a Savior, a Rescuer. Now if you haven't listened to Kevin's sermon from last week, you really need to do it.

Go ahead, when this is over, go ahead and listen to it. It's so good. He was looking at the story of Lazarus, and we learned about a type of prayer that we pray in the season of Advent.

[1 : 06] Lament. Advent teaches us to ask, why, Lord? How long? This week, we'll see how Advent teaches us to pray, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Today I'm preaching right from our prayer guide, the Advent and Christmas prayer guide that we distributed last week. And so today we're looking at the New Testament reading from today's readings.

It's 2 Peter chapter 3, verses 11 to 18. They're the last eight verses of this book. And they were written by the Apostle Peter.

This letter is an amalgamation of different types of writing. It's part letter. It's part speech or sermon. It's also part testament. Because Peter is facing his last days, as tradition tells us, before he's executed in the city of Rome under the reign of Nero.

[2 : 11] Like many other letter writers of the New Testament, he's urging his readers to write belief and to write behavior.

So this morning, we'll look at the belief and behavior of God's beloved. Let's pray. Let's pray. Come light our hearts, Lord.

Come. Come light our hearts. Come light my heart, Lord, as I preach these words. Come light the hearts of those who would hear these words, both in this room and at home.

Come light our hearts and bring joy and peace and comfort as we wait. We've been waiting so long. So now in the season of Advent and in this next hour together, teach us how to wait. For your glory and our good, we pray in Jesus' name.

[3 : 28] Amen. So let's get our bearings and review this letter together. Peter begins in chapter one with a really deep and astounding claim.

He reminds his readers that through God's power and promises, that his readers are partakers in God's divine nature.

What an astounding claim. Partakers in God's divine nature. And because they have this union with God, they are to be diligent to share in his qualities, particularly and supremely love.

Peter then affirms his own authority by reminding his readers that he was a witness to the transfiguration and glory of Jesus on the Mount of Olives. And then he affirms the authority of Scripture, whose prophecies came about by writers carried along by the Holy Spirit.

In contrast, in chapter two of second Peter, Peter condemns false prophets and false teachers. And these false teachers are guilty of two things.

[4 : 37] First, they deny the second coming of Jesus. These teachers would say, did he really say he was coming back?

Because we haven't seen him. And there are those who believe that he was coming back in their lifetime and they've already died. So why the delay? Things seem to be going on as they always

have.

Why shouldn't they just continue to go on and on? So that's one false teaching. That Jesus is not coming back. The other is this. That if there is no second coming, then there is no final judgment. And if there is no judgment, well, we can just do whatever we want. There are no consequences. So be sexually gratified in whatever way you like.

And so some Christians were led astray by these false teachers into sexual immorality and pagan idolatry, while these false teachers profited from it.

[5 : 37] So let's look at the second coming, as we see in chapter three. Peter's very concerned that his readers believe the right things concerning Jesus' second advent.

In verse 12, about the second coming, we read this. The heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn.

And then in verse 13, But according to his promise, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. At first glance, this might seem to say that God is going to detonate some kind of reality bomb, completely annihilating the existence of everything, and then creating a new heavens and a new earth from scratch.

But we know from the rest of Scripture that God prefers to cleanse what exists, and then to renew and grow what's left. In Romans 8, Paul tells us that creation is groaning, that it waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will what? It will be set free from its bondage to corruption.

[6 : 55] We see Peter here in his letter that he's not focusing on world history per se, but on judgment. We know this from verse 10, where Peter writes, Peter is writing about a purification, Peter is combining both the association of fire with judgment, and the Greek first century conception of the cosmos, in order to drive home the point that when Jesus comes back to judge, nothing will escape his notice.

The commentator Peter Davids puts it this way, to bring about judgment, the Lord must peel back all that stands in the way. And this means removing the heavens and burning up the bodies that are in those heavens.

The picture is that of stripping off everything that stands between the eye of God and the earth.

Now, we all want this, don't we? Whether you are a committed, believing Christian, or you're a complete skeptic, and you don't know what to think of any of this, we all want this.

We all want evil to be exposed. We want justice to be done to all those who, without ever having been caught, participated in the murder of millions in Hitler's Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union, Mao's China, POTS Cambodia, and Hutu Rwanda.

We want the exposure and judgment of those who have participated in the 21st century genocide of Yazidis in northern Iraq, and the ethnocide of China's Uyghurs. To all this, we say, come quickly, Lord Jesus.

[8 : 58] If you read the New York Times closely this week, you want accountability and exposure for all those who have made a fortune off of the success of Pornhub, which gets three and a half billion visits per month, three billion ad impressions a day.

It's the 10th most visited website in the world, all the while monetizing child assault, revenge pornography, and racist and misogynist content. Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

And if we're honest, we want justice and accountability for those who have mistreated us and never had to answer for their mistreatment.

Not wanting revenge, but for everyone to know the truth, to know the truth about a family member who abused us, to know the truth about someone in authority who took advantage of us, or for some of us to know the truth about someone with power who mistreated us or discriminated against us for the color of our skin.

Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Come and expose. Come and judge. Come and vindicate. What are the implications of a second return of Jesus for those who are expecting it?

[10 : 14] Peter says right belief in a coming judgment leads to right behavior. It's in verse 14. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish and at peace.

So let's take a quick assessment. How are you doing with this? How diligent are you to be found without spot or blemish?

And to be at peace. I'd like to think this means something else, but it means what it says. In chapter one, verse five, Peter says to make every effort.

Are you making every effort to be found without spot or blemish? Every effort. You may be saying to yourself, this is the last thing I need to hear.

If you're watching from home, maybe you're tempted, well, I'll just pause it right here because he seems tone deaf. Our nation is not just in the middle of a health crisis coupled with a financial crisis, but it's a worse, even mental health crisis and spiritual health crisis.

[11:24] And he seems to be saying, well, I just need to pick myself up by my bootstraps.

Nevermind that I'm about to crack as I deal with loneliness and stress and anxiety and fear and guilt over how I treat those around me and shame that I have no motivation to read my Bible or to pray.

Well, I feel the same way you do. This season has been so hard. Advent has reminded me I'm not very good at waiting. I have not made every effort.

So here's some good news. You are beloved. Peter says it four times in this chapter. And if the reader is beloved by Peter, the apostle who was ordained to feed Jesus' sheep, the apostle on whose confession Jesus builds his church, if the reader is beloved by Peter, then the reader knows they are beloved of God.

You, Christian, are God's beloved. You are beloved even when you are not diligent. Here's the good news. It's actually from Ta-Nehisi Coates in an Atlantic article that he wrote about Kanye West a couple years ago.

He drops in this gem. He wrote, the most essential function of love itself is protecting the beloved from destruction. The most essential function of love itself is protecting the beloved from destruction.

[13:07] So how are we, God's beloved, protected from destruction? Well, he took our spots and our blemishes and the destruction they deserve upon himself.

And now we have God's unconditional love, favor, and delight. A woman tells a story.

She writes, one day when I was very young, I saw my older sister hanging up my father's white business shirts on the clothesline to dry. I was suddenly filled with the urge to hang up one of my daddy's white shirts.

He was my daddy too, and I was his daughter. I loved him in my childlike way and wanted to express it. I couldn't reach the clothesline. It was too high, but I saw a wheelbarrow in the yard and its handles were just the right height for me.

I didn't notice how rusty it was, and I rather joyfully clothes pinned the wet shirt to the handles.

When my dad got home and saw the shirt on the wheelbarrow, he became very angry with me.

[14:14] He punished me severely for ruining his shirt. I had not realized the impact that event and others like it had made on me. This memory returns to me as I realized my disbelief concerning God's delight in me and the gracious nature of my relationship with him.

As I remember these scenes from the past, I see that through the years, I have not believed that my father in heaven was any different than my earthly father. I have not listened when he described himself.

In short, I haven't believed the gospel that by faith in Christ and his perfect atoning sacrifice, he now loves me and is forever for me and delighted in me.

In Christ, he has made me beautiful and pleasing to him forever. So I told my counselor that I thought I was beginning to understand. I told him the memory and said that I guess if the father saw me standing next to the wheelbarrow with a ruined shirt on it, he would forget the shirt and hug me. My counselor said, you still don't understand fully. The counselor said, God would not overlook the shirt, but he would take it on. He would put it on and he would wear it to work.

[15:26] And when someone commented on the rest marks, he would say, let me tell you about my little girl and how much she loves me. Beloved, you have nothing to fear on the day of judgment.

Your identity as God's beloved rests not in your ability to live without spot or blemish, but rests in what Jesus accomplished on the cross.

Further, God has united himself to you. In chapter one, Peter writes that we partake of his divine nature. Yes, effort is required in the Christian life.

Paul writes in Philippians two, to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, but by virtue of your union with him, he writes, it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

So how does this relate to Jesus' second advent? Well, Peter tells us that our obedience, our acts of gratitude, thankfulness for what God has done for us, our obedience that comes from partaking in God's divine nature.

[16:41] He says our obedience hastens Jesus' return. The church has the privilege of participating in the coming of the kingdom.

God listens to us and responds to us as we pray, come quickly, Lord Jesus, and thy kingdom come. We participate with God in the redemption of society and the renewal of all things.

We hasten the coming of the Lord through sharing the gospel with those who don't know him, through our works of mercy and justice, through our repentance and our obedience.

Okay, we've talked about belief, behavior, and being God's beloved, so what? So what? What do we do tomorrow about all this? How does this help me tomorrow?

As I sit at home, working, raising my children, or all alone in my apartment where nobody is, how does this help me tomorrow?

[17:47] Well, Peter concludes his letter with this admonition, but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is through personal encounter with Jesus.

As Savior and Lord that the Christian life begins. So listen, it is through continued personal encounter with Jesus that we grow.

We grow through continual, personal encounter with Jesus. Jesus. So, put it on your calendar to talk to God and be in his word.

Look, you, you put everything else in your calendar, right? And you do it because you're diligent. You make every effort to succeed at work, so right now, put it on your calendar.

If you're watching this after our worship time, you can pause it right now. Put it on your calendar and write in or type in time with Jesus. Use the prayer guide and the Bible reading guide that we distributed for Advent.

[19:00] This is how we prepare for Jesus' second coming. So that's one. The second is during the season of Advent, be praying. Come Lord Jesus. Say it a lot.

Pray it a lot. And be attentive. What is that doing to you? What is that doing to your heart? Pray, come Lord Jesus. I would expect that this prayer, prayed many times over time, will produce longing, which will produce joy.

And that will help us get through this pandemic as it has helped Christians in previous pandemics. So let me close with this story from a previous pandemic.

It occurred in the year 1597 when the bubonic plague ravaged the town of Unna, Germany. The pastor of the church in Unna, Philip Nikolai, lived in the parsonage that lay on the other side of the cemetery from the church.

And from his window, Pastor Nikolai could see up to 30 people a day buried in that cemetery when he wasn't actually the one burying these people. And by the time the plague subsided, over half the town's residents had died.

[20:19] Half. Imagine the sights that he saw from his window and the sounds, the continual shovels digging, the steady stream of mourners and the sound of their weeping and sobbing.

Imagine the smell of death barely masked by the smell of lime. Now in the midst of this death, Pastor Nikolai would intensely meditate on eternal life.

He began to write devotionals based on his meditations and would soon publish them for his suffering congregation. He included three songs in the devotional and one of them originated in this way.

It was said of Pastor Nikolai that one morning in great distress and tribulation in his quiet study, he rose in spirit from the distress and death which surrounded him to his Redeemer and Savior and while he clasped him in ardent love, there welled forth from the inmost depths of his heart this precious hymn of the Savior's love and of the joys of heaven.

He was so entirely absorbed in this holy exaltation that he forgot all around him, even his midday meal, and allowed nothing to disturb him in his poetical labors till the hymn was completed. And he titled this hymn A Spiritual Bridal Song of the Believing Soul Concerning Jesus Christ, Her Heavenly Bridegroom.

[21:49] It has become a favorite Advent hymn of the German people and of Christians all around the world. And I'll close with reading to you the last verse and then we'll get a chance to sing this.

In the midst of death, distress, and at times despair, Nikolai wrote, O joy, to know that thou, my friend, art Lord, beginning without end, the first and last, eternal. And thou at length, O glorious grace, will take me to that holy place, the home of joys, supernal. Amen. Amen.

Come and meet me. Quickly greet me. With deep yearning, Lord, I look for thy returning. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. Lord, we long for your return. We long for an end to sickness and to death.

[23 : 05] An end to grief and despair. An end to abuse and oppression. An end to addiction and depression. An end to war. An end to hate.

But most of all, Lord, we long for you. Jesus, we long for you. You have loved us all our lives and never done us anything wrong.

We long for you. We long for you. We've talked to you in the middle of the night in our darkest times and the first thing in the morning. We long to see your face.

The face of our king, our rescuer, our friend. So come quickly, Lord Jesus. Come quickly, Lord Jesus.

Come quickly, Lord Jesus. Amen. Amen.