

Advent

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[0 : 00] Today is our third Sunday in the season of Advent. It feels like Christmas, though. The culture all around us is pretty much celebrating Christmas, more or less.

So that Christmas Day on the 25th feels like the last day of a season of parties, of feasting, of decorations. But the church has historically observed this season differently.

Historically, the season of Advent, which begins on the first Sunday of the four Sundays before Christmas Day, is a season of waiting, of preparation, of hope.

We remember the days of Israel in exile, awaiting a Savior, a Messiah who would come and gather up Israel and deliver her from all her enemies. At the same time, we as the church await the second coming of that same Savior, one who will at last set all things to rights.

You could say that the season of Advent is simultaneously the first month and the 13th month of the Christian year. So in this season, generally, we don't sing Christmas carols that say, Jesus is come.

[1 : 17] We sing in Advent, come Lord Jesus. In the passages from the Bible tonight, aren't the accounts of Jesus being born and the events following.

We read passages about waiting for a Savior to come and about preparing ourselves for that day. Now, one of the passages that was read was from a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to a young church, to what was a young church, in the ancient city of Thessalonica.

The recipients of that letter were eagerly awaiting the return of Jesus. They thought it would happen any day. And so Paul's instructions for them was on how to wait.

What should we do as we wait? What can we expect when he comes? So we're going to focus on that passage from 1 Thessalonians this evening. We'll also look at the passage in Isaiah.

We're going to find that our situation is very similar to the Thessalonians. So we're going to answer three questions. What time is it? What should we do in this time?

[2 : 21] And how should we pray in this time? Basically, when, what, and how. So let's pray. Come, Lord Jesus.

Come in our midst and speak to us. And would your words in us produce faith and hope and love and joy and patience as we wait.

And come Holy Spirit. If there's anything that you would like to say to us that I haven't prepared, would you make it clear to me?

Please don't let this frail and clumsy instrument impede what you would have to say to your church, the bride.

Amen. Amen.

[3 : 36] all right well and i think the first thing we need to do is to orient ourselves to where we are in our place in the story of the universe like what point in time are we at in the history of the world at the beginning of the first millennium jews like in jesus's day jews would have jews would have had said that we live in the current age and the current age is marked by conflict by being subject to foreign unjust powers and by suffering injustice and oppression and then a messiah would come to set all things to rights this messiah would conquer all of israel's earthly enemies and inaugurate an age to come and this age to come would be a purely good era when god would rule the world now we believe that a messiah did come but his coming was different than what was expected um he didn't come as this charismatic military leader who would lead israel to defeat the roman empire and be crowned the king he came as a poor humble unattractive carpenter from the hillbilly part of palestine he came to deal with the real enemies of god's people sin and death he conquered sin by dying for our sins on the cross taking the punishment that our sins deserved and he conquered death by rising from the dead and on the day to come in the future all of god's people will themselves experience a resurrection that day will coincide when jesus comes again on that day he

will finally destroy all powers that oppose the good just and peaceful rule of god so history has unfolded similarly to how the ancient jews expected except that this current age has yet to fully pass away we're still in the current age and we are in the age to come that has already been inaugurated but not fully inaugurated so just like we're in the first and 13th months of the christian year at the same time right we are in the age to come and the current age at the same time it's an already but not yet period now jesus confirms this in the way he read the 61st chapter of isaiah one of the passages that aj read earlier so i'm going to read from luke chapter 4 this is where jesus is attending synagogue and he reads from isaiah 61 but if we could have uh isaiah 61 on the screen while i read luke chapter 4 okay jesus came to nazareth where he had been brought up and as was his custom he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day and he stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet isaiah was given to him he unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written the spirit of the lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor he has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind to set at liberty those who are oppressed to proclaim the year of the lord's favor and he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him and he began to say to them today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing jesus boldly claims to be the fulfillment of this prophecy from isaiah but look what he doesn't say

he doesn't say the day of vengeance of our god he finishes right before he gets there now this day of vengeance is what the jewish people were waiting and hoping for and jesus is effectively saying i've come to inaugurate the new age but not fully not yet this part is to come later the kingdom is breaking in now with good news for the poor the captives the blind and the oppressed the kingdom will be finally consummated at a later date and so we find ourselves ourselves in this in between already but not yet era living simultaneously in both the current age and the age to come so that's when we live now how do we live how do we live in this already and not yet time so in the letter to the the the thessalonians paul is giving the thessalonian christians instructions on what it means to live in light of some specific issues they were facing paul really loved this church it was a dynamite church like if you attended you would you would feel the warmth and the love people had for one another you would feel greeted they were full of hope and love and joy and you would have heard that they were facing tough times but still they were full of joy now now some members of their church have died and it really distressed and confused them because they believed that jesus's return would happen before any of them had physically died so when they physically died they were um confused distressed now it's probably the hardest thing to deal the the hardest thing to deal with in the already but not yet is is suffering this problem of suffering whether it's due to the brokenness of the world or the brokenness or frailty of our bodies or due to injustice or due to oppression or persecution and the thessalonians were facing all of this and we're wondering how does this fit in with what we had expected to happen some had had their property confiscated some were prevented from practicing their trades because of their confession as of jesus is lord some were shunned by their families some were insulted some were beaten some were put to death this was persecution of the worst kind so how were the thessalonians to respond how do we live in the midst of brokenness and pain and injustice well paul's letter builds in pace and tone until he gives these rapid fire instructions in first thessalonians chapter 5 verse 16 rejoice always pray without ceasing give thanks in all circumstances now the verse delineations here make it seem like these are three separate commands but these are all one thing in the midst of sorrow we maintain constant joy by never failing to pray and by always giving thanks now logically i mean these these instructions seem destined for a shipwreck i mean how does one wake up each morning to be reminded again of the death of someone dear to them and remain joyful how does um how does one wake up every morning and once again face the constant suffering of their own child and rejoice or to deal with the constantly aching psychic scars of previous abuse and to be joyful always i don't i have an idea some of my suffering isn't as extreme as yours nor as extreme as many of our brothers and sisters around the world um but from personal experience and from what paul says here um i think the key is is in verse verse 18 paul is um paul is not saying we won't ever be sorrowful and he doesn't present himself this way in in second corinthians he presents himself as sorrowful yet always rejoicing both at the same time right he also doesn't say we are to be thankful for all circumstances but thankful in all circumstances right i mean jesus is presented this way too um when his friend dies we don't find jesus saying ah lazarus died thanks be to me right he uh he wept he wept he he snorted he was angry and indignant at this death what

unlocks these instructions to be always rejoicing and praying and being thankful is found here in verse 18 this is the will of god in christ jesus for you now paul uses this phrase in christ over and over in his letters and if some of you are english teachers um and if paul was one of your students you might get the red pen out and start scratching out all these times he uses the word in christ redundant redundant redundant but paul's like making a point uh when he says in christ over and over he wants us to know and believe and trust something he's very insistent that we understand that what is central to our existence in this in-between time is our union with christ our intimacy with him our sharing in his sufferings and his life and his death and his resurrection happiness comes and goes but lasting joy is experienced when we find ourselves fully and utterly dependent on him this is what god's will is for his people right it's not to have our acts together to look good it's to be completely and fully dependent on our creator happiness may be impossible to have during suffering but it seems that joy is tied inextricably to sorrow and suffering joy is grounded in hope and hope is produced and even sustained by suffering this is one of these um ironies these paradoxes the christian faith we live in a time of already but not yet we are to be both joyful and suffering or we are to be joyful while we're suffering so this joy um produces perseverance and character and ultimately hope so with that in mind having discussed when we live the time we live this already but not yet and what we are to do in this already but not yet this always rejoicing always praying always being uh thankful uh let's ask what are we to pray for and if we're to pray continually uh what should be the content of those prayers paul said we should give thanks in all circumstances this is one thing

give thanks in all circumstances um now remember how i said not give thanks for all circumstances i can tell you how our family does this we use like this kind of watered down ignatian spirituality light um when we gather around the dinner table um i don't know if you know anything about ignatian spirituality but there's this thing called the daily examine um where you go through these steps and you review your day and you review your emotions and then you pray from one of these moments in your day um and when you review your day you're gonna generally feel one of two things you're gonna feel consolation that um god was present in the situation showing his goodness to you or you're gonna feel a desolation you're gonna be angry or resentful about something or sad or depressed like god wasn't present right um so i've i've done this before and there's a lot of new people in our church since i did this two years ago um so i'm gonna do it for you again uh the idea that we would in our suffering still experience joy or still be able to be thankful is a bit of a paradox right and paradox sounds like pair of ducks so when we gather at the table we we have some dinner and this is our ritual at dinner time um we talk about our yuck ducks and our yuck ducks for the day and so we we say like what what were like the great things that happened and that's our yuck ducks um and then we thank god for those good things that happened and then uh we talk about our yuck ducks um and then uh we talk about those and then and then we ask like well actually how how was god being good to us what what did we learn in that so if something happened that was bad oh but my uh my friend was there for me or my mom was able to uh hold me and cuddle with me like let's give thanks to god for that so um this is the way our this is the way our family tries to uh be grateful in all circumstances and you can do this as as you go to sleep at night review your day um review your yuck ducks and your yuck ducks and uh and give thanks for both the good and the ways god showed his goodness to you in the bad um so that's that's giving thanks um in addition to uh thanks and praise is there something that we should be consistently asking for prayer like asking god for stuff is probably the easiest thing to do out of all the different ways to pray right um because we feel like we want and need a lot of things so we ask for those things um but uh is there a refrain that we could have is there some kind of content the content that could uh train us and disciple us into hope right well the bible gives us a refrain for our prayers and it's one that i rarely use i don't pray this very often i venture to say and guess that very few of us pray this prayer regularly and it's a prayer that we're taught to say in this season of advent and we've prayed it a number of times already tonight and it's a prayer that issues from the holy spirit himself right paul writes in romans eight likewise and this is in a passage where god where paul is talking about this already but not yet uh time like creation is groaning for the sons of god to be revealed and paul writes likewise the spirit helps in our weakness for we do not know what to pray for as we ought but the spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words so it might remain a mystery so we'll never know what the spirit is groaning for actually we do we do know one thing and it's found in the last chapter of the bible in revelation chapter 22 verse 17 this verse says the spirit and the bride say come the spirit and the bride say

come come come come come come lord jesus do you pray for that do you pray for the lord to come back do you want him to come back quickly i hardly ever do and it just seems absurd that i don't and it leads me to question like how deep really is my love for my king that I'm not asking for him to come on a regular basis.

[20 : 58] Now, the verse says, the spirit and the bride say, come. Spirit and the bride say. So the spirit and we, the church, who are called the bride say, come.

We are the bride. Well, what is a bride? Now, I used to think that bride was synonymous with wife. It's not. Those are two different words, different meanings. The bride is the one who is on the cusp of getting married.

Imagine a bride fully adorned in her dress, beautiful, ready to walk down the aisle and not care if the groom showed up. Absurd, right?

Nah, that's all right. He can take his time. I'll just watch some Netflix, drink some beers, take a nap, smoke some stogies, whatever. The bride says, come.

She cannot wait for her groom to arrive and for the wedding to take place. She can't wait to feast and to party and to consummate this marriage.

[22 : 03] Do we want that? Are we yearning for that? Or are we too attached to this world to really want it? Come, Lord Jesus.

But not too soon. I still haven't progressed in my career like I want to. I haven't done this or that. I haven't visited the Hermitage in St. Petersburg. And I'd really like to see how this Star Wars trilogy wraps up in the year 2019. So soon, but maybe January 2020.

Thank you. When we pray, come Lord Jesus. This is how praying, come Lord Jesus, can disciple us into hope, into expectation, and to disciple us into a number of things.

When we pray, come Lord Jesus, we detach ourselves from the things that we love that compete with our love for God. When we pray, come Lord Jesus, we chip away at our cynicism, and we're more aware of the transcendent, expecting God to supernaturally break into this dimension at any time.

[23 : 19] When we pray, come Lord Jesus, we are kept from misplacing our hope in earthly institutions to ultimately cure the world's evils. when we pray, come Lord Jesus, we're strengthened for holy living, right?

Because we are preparing for his return. When we pray, come Lord Jesus, with other people, it makes us sensitive to others' needs and sense of hopelessness.

We rush in to care for them and for their needs. When we pray, come Lord Jesus, we are shaped into a people of hope. For this particular doctrine is integral to our faith.

It's as integral as the Father creating the world, Jesus dying and rising again. This is in our creeds. To not believe this is to not be a Christian, right?

We believe that he will come in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom shall have no end. In this in-between time, when rejoicing and prayer and thanksgiving are constantly on our lips, let's learn to make, come Lord Jesus, a constant refrain, not just in the season of Advent, but throughout the year.

[24 : 45] In his little book called The Saints Everlasting Rest, the English Puritan pastor, Richard Baxter, reflects on the new heavens and the new earth and the day that Jesus will come in glory.

And I will close with his words. Oh, fellow Christians, what a day will that be when we, who have been kept prisoners by sin, by sinners, by the grave, shall be brought out by the Lord himself.

It will not be such a coming as his first was in poverty and contempt to be spit upon, buffeted, and crucified again.

He will not come, oh, careless world, to be slighted and neglected by you anymore. Yet that coming wants it not its glory.

If the heavenly host for the celebration of his nativity must praise God, with what shoutings will angels and saints at that day proclaim glory to God and peace and goodwill toward men?

[26 : 12] If a star must lead men from remote parts to come to worship the child in the manger, how will the glory of his next appearing constrain all the world to acknowledge his sovereignty?

If, riding on a donkey, he entered Jerusalem with hosannas, with what peace and glory will he come toward the new Jerusalem? If, when he was in the form of a servant, they cry out, what manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?

What will they say when they shall see him coming in his glory and the heavens and the earth obey him? Shall not the saints with inconceivable gladness cry, yonder is he whose blood redeemed us, whose spirit cleansed us, whose law governed us, in whom we trusted, and now we see we have not waited in vain.

O cursed corruption that would have had us turn to the world and present things and say, why should we wait for the Lord any longer? Now we see blessed are all they that wait for him.

And now Christians, should we not put up that petition heartily? Thy kingdom come. The spirit and the bride say, come.

[27 : 40] Let him that hears say, come. Our Lord himself says, surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.