

Caleb Evans (5)

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[0:00] Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So my brothers and my sisters, rejoice this morning because the Lord is coming soon. You didn't sound very joyful about that.

Now we might ask, how soon? I'll be honest with you, I don't know when, but God does, and I'm not worried if his timetable is a bit different than my own. I think he's got it covered.

But for now, and we remember this particularly in Advent, we live in a time of expectation. The kind of expectation that should shape us into the kind of people that God has called us to be.

Because we know this, in a world that seems dark, there is light that will never be extinguished. In a world where it seems that there is no peace, we know that peace can in fact be found.

[1:36] In a world where we fear that we might be headed for disaster, we know that the story against all odds has a glorious ending. How do we know?

How do we know? Because of what Jesus has done, and because of what Jesus has promised to do.

Whereas we're about to express in the liturgy in a few minutes, because Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. That's how we know.

We know that our God will never leave us. We know that our God will never forsake us. We know that the Lord is at hand. This is what I want us to think about this Gaudete Sunday.

The Sunday where we are supposed to be rejoicing. What I want us to think about is this. What it means that the Lord is at hand, and how we should respond to this glorious truth.

[2:45] So, we read just a minute ago in our Philippians passage for this morning that the Lord is at hand. What does that mean? Why does it matter? Well, let's start with what it means.

There's a bit of a double meaning in this phrase, the Lord is at hand. I think certainly it's talking about the union that we have with Christ as Christians through the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

I definitely do not want to diminish the importance of that. But it being Advent, I really do want to focus in on the other sense of what we mean when we say the Lord is at hand.

We mean, what? That Jesus is going to come back, right? That he's going to return. And that is good news. Now, I have to be honest, it is not good news for us that Jesus is going to return if we remain in a state of refusal to repent and believe the gospel.

But it is good news for everyone who comes to Christ in faith and in repentance. Why is it good news that Jesus is returning?

[4:03] I think that we find a great answer to that question in the book of Hebrews where we read this in chapter 9. Just as it is appointed for man to die once and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

So Christ is coming again, and when he does, it will be for what purpose towards us? To save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

We might be scratching our heads now and saying, why is the second coming of Christ for our salvation? Doesn't the creed say that Jesus is coming to judge the living and the dead?

Yes. Yes. It does say that. The reason that Christ's return is good news rather than bad news for the Christian is that Christ came the first time to bear our sins, and through his sacrifice of himself on the cross, has taken away the sins of all who have been saved by grace through faith in Jesus. So his coming to judge the living and the dead, to establish his kingdom on earth, is not bad news to those who have received Christ as Savior.

[5:36] Because our sins have been dealt with, the debt has been paid by Christ's one sacrifice of himself. And so we can look forward to the kingdom that Jesus is going to usher in when he returns, where the dead will be raised, all believers will be transformed to be like Jesus, and we will dwell with God forever, free from sin, free from pain, free from grief, in perfect bliss, enjoying the presence of God, which will satisfy the very deepest desires of our hearts, because that is what we were created for.

Now, when we know that the story ends that way, that changes the way we look at absolutely everything, does it not? When we know that no matter what else happens, Jesus is going to come in glory to reign forever and ever, that gives us a different perspective than we might have if we're thinking that the story merely ends with humanity doing the best we can for as long as we can before the inevitable happens and we all die and humanity suffers extinction.

No. Instead, the Christian can look around at all of the wrongs in the world, all of the suffering, all of the evil, all of the death, all of the grief, and be able to say, it is not always going to be like this.

That's why we need to remember that the Lord is at hand. To remember that just as He promised, Jesus is going to come back, and not simply come back, but if we are in Christ, to come back to save us who are waiting for Him.

To give us final victory over death and sin. To dwell with us forever. Remember, remembrance of that truth and that reality should do two things for us that I want us to think about this morning.

[8:01] It should cause us to rejoice, and it should cause us to be reasonable and gentle people as we await His return. Let's start with rejoicing.

Now, given what we've already talked about, the salvation that we have in Christ, the promise that it will be brought to completion with His return, when even our bodies will be raised from the grave, do you have any doubt that the only proper Christian response is to rejoice in the Lord?

My brothers and my sisters, I'm going to be honest with you and simply say that there is not enough joy in the world that we're living in these days. There's a lot of anger, there's a lot of despair, there's a lot of hatred, there's a lot of strife, not a lot of joy.

But if the world is going to know true joy, it will be because the gospel of Jesus Christ is proclaimed and believed. There is no other source of joy that lasts forever and can never be taken away.

Not one. We look for joy outside of Christ, but do we ever find it? We don't. C.S. Lewis put it like this.

[9:26] All that we call human history, money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery, is the long, terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.

Human history shows that human beings so often look for joy in all of the wrong places. And I think my daughter's trying to preach with me.

But human history shows that human beings so often look for joy in all of the wrong places. Now if you're not convinced of that, think about your own life for a second. Raise your hand if you've ever done something stupid because you were looking for something other than God to make you happy.

I'll raise mine. When we look to the Lord for our joy and look to Christ's return as the promise that joy will have the last word, we are set free from the bondage of trying to find happiness in the things that will fade away and the things that will let us down and ultimately disappoint us.

Now, does that mean that I'm saying that pain doesn't hurt and that suffering isn't real? No, I am a Christian preacher and not a Buddhist preacher, so I'm not saying that.

[10:56] Pain hurts. Suffering is real. But it does mean that we can have joy that isn't diminished by the changes and chances of this life because even at its very worst, we can say, as the scriptures say, this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

And so we can, we should, and I would say we must rejoice in the Lord when we remember that the Lord is at hand. Now, the promise that the Lord is at hand is also connected in our text with an instruction about reasonableness or gentleness.

Reasonableness is a little bit of a tricky word to say. It doesn't roll off the tongue very easily. But our text says, let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.

The promise of our Lord's return should remind us that Christians are called to be gentle and reasonable people as we wait.

That should characterize our witness to the world and I am certain that if it does, it will certainly stand out and be noticed. Now, do any of you happen to think that we're living in a particularly reasonable or gentle culture at the moment?

[12 : 23] Anyone? No, probably not. Gentleness and reason always stand out but they will especially stand out in the culture we're living in now. Now, here is a mild example of where we are culturally at the moment.

About a year ago, I put up a post on social media about how we should try to treat those who disagree with us with respect. Almost immediately, it turned into a giant internet slugfest characterized by people saying, well, you can't treat fill-in-the-blank people with kindness because they're evil and they're stupid.

Well, it turned into a real mess, let me tell you. But let me be clear, that is not the attitude that Jesus told Christians to have towards anyone.

He said to love our enemies and even to pray for those who persecute us. And our passage this morning tells us to let our reasonableness be known to all. And Christians around the world are doing just that in the most trying of circumstances.

In Egypt, for example, recently, at a funeral where for multiple Egyptian Christians who were killed by Islamic militants, the priest said this, we would like to tell them, he means the attackers here, that we still love them despite what happened.

[13 : 53] It's one recent example. Here's another. A Chinese pastor who was recently arrested as the Chinese authorities are cracking down on Christianity in China.

He wrote a letter to be released in the event of his arrest, which did in fact happen, and so the letter was released. The attitude that he takes towards those who are responsible for persecuting him is absolutely striking.

Here's what he writes about them. Those who lock me up will one day be locked up by angels.

Those who interrogate me will finally be questioned and judged by Christ.

When I think of this, the Lord fills me with a natural compassion and grief towards those who are attempting to and are actively imprisoning me. Pray that the Lord would use me, that he would grant me patience and wisdom, that I might take the gospel to them.

He is being locked up for no other reason than his commitment to Jesus Christ, his boldness for Jesus Christ.

[15 : 06] And what is his prayer? That the Lord would give him patience with those who are keeping him in prison, and that the Lord would work through him for the salvation of those who are persecuting him.

You want to know what knowing Jesus and really trusting him does in a person's heart? There is a great example of the difference that it makes.

Because knowing that your sins are forgiven in Christ, that you have victory over the grave, and that Jesus is coming again to make all things right, sets you free.

Free to be loving, to be gentle, to be reasonable, even to the people who hate you, and even if they want to kill you. Because people can do their worst to us.

And that still won't stop Jesus from coming back. Nothing, absolutely nothing, can take the Lord off of his throne.

[16 : 18] Nothing can keep his throne from descending to make this broken world new. Nothing can stop the kingdom of this world from becoming the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.

nothing can stop him from reigning as king forever and ever. Absolutely nothing. And this isn't mere optimism.

This isn't simply hoping for the best. This is trusting in the certain promises of God. J.I. Packer put it this way, optimism hopes for the best without any guarantee of its arriving and is often no more than whistling in the dark.

Christian hope, by contrast, is faith looking ahead to the fulfillment of the promises of God. As when the Anglican burial service inter the body in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Optimism is a wish without warrant. Christian hope is a certainty guaranteed by God himself.

Optimism reflects ignorance as to whether good things will ever actually come.

[17 : 41] Christian hope expresses knowledge that every day of his life and every moment beyond it, the believer can say with truth on the basis of God's own commitment that the best is yet to

come.

My brothers and my sisters, it's what I want us to take away this morning. The best is yet to come. That's the message I want us to hear this God Ate Sunday.

That is why we should rejoice. That is why we are free to be gentle and to be reasonable because when we remember that the Lord is at hand, we hear the certain promise of God that truly the best is yet to come.

And so we pray, come Lord Jesus. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.