

Advent I

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Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 0 0] In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Well, today is Sunday, December 1st, and you know what that means.

We now only have 24 shopping days left until Christmas. Now don't try to deny it, we all were thinking it. We all have plenty of things to do this time of year.

Whether it is Christmas shopping, Christmas baking, Christmas decorating, or Christmas whatever else. 'Tis the season to be busy. Fa-la-la-la-la-la-la-la-ug.

Christmas is exhausting. I love it, but there's so much preparation. So much stress. So much investment in a bunch of things that really don't matter all that much.

At least, that's the moral of every Christmas classic, isn't it? The ghost of Jacob Marley tells Ebenezer Scrooge that mankind should have been his business rather than dollars and cents.

[1 : 0 9] An angel named Clarence teaches George Bailey that despite all of his hardships, it is still a wonderful life. And the Grinch learns that maybe Christmas doesn't come from a store, but maybe Christmas means just a little bit more.

The secular world has its lessons it wants us to learn this holiday season, and so does the Christian church. But we would do well not to confuse the lessons each institution is trying to teach us, or to consider those lessons one and the same.

They are not. Good morals and kind deeds might in some ways make a person good, but they don't make a person a child of God.

Only God can do that. And that's why the season of Advent is really all about God. It is about Christ and preparing the world for his coming.

And not just the world for his coming on Christmas, but preparing the world for his coming on the last day, on the day of judgment, on that day when Christ will come again to judge both the quick and the dead.

[2 : 2 2] For if we want for there to be true and everlasting change, both in our world and in our lives, then we need to focus on Jesus.

Only Jesus can bring about true change. Only Jesus can soften a hardened heart. Everything else is a work of fiction, a bit of tinsel on the tree, some elaborate ornamentation put up in an attempt to disguise the poverty of an impoverished hearth or heart.

But true change is more than just decoration. True change is Jesus Christ barging into the temple of Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, casting out money changers and overturning their tables in order to make their den of thieves his father's house of prayer once again.

And that is also the beginning of Advent, which is not something the secular world expects or even wants us to hear around this time of year.

Nevertheless, Jesus Christ is coming. And this time he is not coming to play nice. He is coming to bring about some very real and distinct changes.

- [3 : 43] Not that the world didn't change at his first coming. It did. But in his second coming, the changes will be even more pronounced and more drastic than ever before.
- For Christ's first coming was like God giving the world a great and wonderful present. But Christ's second coming will be like God opening up that present for all the world to know and to behold.
- So let us prepare for our Lord's coming by honestly striving to observe this season of Advent, which is about much more than just decorations, good deeds, kind manners or pleasant feelings.
- Advent is about Christ and the kind of change that only he can bring. For Jesus Christ has come and Jesus Christ is coming again.
- Therefore, husbands and fathers, as heads of your households, I encourage you to set aside some time every day this season to lead your family in prayer.
- [4 : 49] And if your children are grown or you are unable to be with them, then pray with your spouse for them. After all, this is the season of Advent.
- And wives and mothers, I encourage you to lovingly remind your husbands of their responsibilities in this regard as well. For you are your husband's God-given helper.
- And where he is weak, you have been called to be strong. After all, this is the season of Advent. And to all who are unmarried or married without children, tis the season to once again dedicate your lives to a life of prayer and await the beautiful coming of our Lord.
- After all, this is the season of Advent. For if anyone has fallen out of the habit of praying or leading their families in prayer, then might I suggest that Advent, Advent is the perfect time to get all of our spiritual houses back in order.
- After all, after all, isn't that what our Lord did when he cleansed the temple on Palm Sunday? And isn't this why we hear about our Lord's cleansing the temple each and every year at the beginning of Advent?
- [6 : 08] For Advent is both the beginning of a new church year as well as a season of profound hope and possibility. So repent and rejoice, for change is coming, for the Lord Jesus Christ will return, for today is Sunday, December 1st, and you know what that means.
- The church's joyful and expectant season of Advent has just begun, and we would all do well to observe it with great diligence and spiritual care, and not just Hollywood's secularized version of it.
- For Christ our King is coming, and he is coming again. And today the church encourages us all to prepare, to prepare for our Lord's coming.
- After all, this is the season of Advent. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Amen.
- Amen. Amen.
- [7 : 29] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.