

The Advent of Jesus

Ever Ready

Luke 21:25-36

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Ever Ready¹

Scripture

In many churches, the several weeks prior to Christmas are known as *Advent*, from the Latin word meaning, “coming.” This preparatory season always begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. Thus, today is the *First Sunday of Advent*.

The observance of the season of Advent can be traced to the late fifth century in Italy and Gaul, and perhaps a bit earlier in Spain. Let me mention several features of Advent worth noting.

First, the *First Sunday of Advent* is regarded by many churches as the first Sunday of the Christian Year. Robert Webber, in his book titled *The Services of the Christian Year*, defines the “Christian Year” as the way in which the church “celebrates the saving events of God in Jesus Christ by marking those particular events in which God’s saving purposes were made known.”² Regarding the Christian Year, Webber notes:

The most common term for the yearly celebration of time in worship is the Christian year. The Christian year, developed in antiquity, was a vital part of worship until the Reformation, when Protestants abandoned much of it because of the abuses attached to it in the late medieval period. Protestants claimed that nearly every day of the year had been named after a saint. The emphasis on these saints and the feasts connected with their lives overshadowed the celebration of the Christ-event in the more evangelical pattern of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, and Pentecost celebrations. Consequently Protestants discontinued observing the Christian year and lost its positive aspects as they attempted to remove Roman excesses. The current return to the Christian year among Protestants advocates a very simple and unadorned year that accents the major events of Christ, a Christian

¹ The material for this sermon is from Bob Cline, “Ever Ready,” *Preaching* 25, no. 2 (Sept/Oct 2009): 50-53.

² Robert Webber, *The Services of the Christian Year* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Pub. Group, 1994), 79.

year similar to that of the early church.³

The alternate (and, unfortunately, more common) way of shaping the church's worship today is by using the "Hallmark" calendar: Advent, Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Independence Day, Grandparent's Day, Memorial Day, Labor Day, and so on. Clearly, the better way, it seems to me, is to use the historic pattern of the Christian Year.

Thus, the Christian Year begins with Advent. Advent is a time to anticipate the birth and incarnation of Jesus Christ. Historically, however, Advent is not just the season of anticipation but the season of penitential preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ.

Second, as a time for the preparation for the birth and incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Scripture readings during Advent have traditionally given special attention to prophecy, with a strong emphasis on repentance, as we will note in our Scripture readings.

Third, many churches use an Advent wreath during the season of Advent. The wreath lies horizontally and is adorned with five candles. The candles often have different symbolic meanings. One of the views is that the outer four candles symbolize the four millennia covered in the history of the Old Testament, and the inner candle represents the birth and incarnation of Jesus Christ. Perhaps the more common view is that the outer four candles symbolize hope, love, joy, and peace, and the inner candle represents the birth and incarnation of Jesus Christ, the light of the world.

Fourth, the traditional liturgical color for the season of Advent is purple. The color purple represents *royalty* (for the coming of the King) and also *penitence* (as befits a season of renewed repentance).

And fifth, because of the emphasis on repentance as the proper preparation for the coming of God, Advent is actually a season of great seriousness rather than great festivity. Historically, the season of Advent was a somber, reflective, repentant season in

³ Robert Webber, *The Services of the Christian Year* (Nashville, TN: Star Song Pub. Group, 1994), 79.

which God's people look forward to the time when God comes to his people in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ. Christmas Day was the start of the festive time, which traditionally lasts the twelve days of Christmas, from December 25 to January 6. Christians in earlier centuries would be surprised at the current emphasis on festivities prior to December 25.

Now, it is my intention to spend the four Sundays of Advent this year looking at one of the Scripture Readings which are read during the first four Sundays of the Christian Year.

Today's text is found in Luke's Gospel, in a section where Jesus foretells the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem (21:5-24), and also foretells his second coming (21:25-38).

Let's read Luke 21:25-36:

²⁵ "And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, ²⁶ people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

²⁹ And he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. ³⁰ As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴ "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. ³⁵ For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Luke 21:25-36)

Introduction

There was a time in my life when Christmas was an awkward time for me. I suppose I can trace these feelings back to the Christmases following my mother's death. She died suddenly of a heart attack on September 30, 1979 when I was almost twenty-three years old. After her funeral I returned back to the University of Cape Town for the final six weeks of classes and end-of-year examinations. I then returned home for the Christmas holidays. That was an awkward and empty Christmas without my mother. And I struggled to enjoy Christmas for the next few years.

I suppose my appreciation for Christmas was renewed with the arrival of our children. Christmas is a wonderful time of anticipation and expectation. And it was probably during those early years of our children that I really began to learn more about Advent, which, as I mentioned earlier, begins the fourth Sunday before Christmas. Advent is the Latin word for "coming," and refers to the four weeks prior to Christmas in which the church anticipates the coming of Jesus Christ.

For many churches Advent is the beginning of another year of walking through Scripture to experience the life of Christ together. And our church plans to do so this coming year too.

Advent is the annual reminder to be ready always for the coming of Jesus. It is the season of preparation to celebrate the first advent—or birth—of Jesus. It is the season to reflect on why Jesus came to earth 2,000 years ago. It is the season to repent of our sin and to believe that Jesus is the only one who has paid the penalty for all our sin and to bring us into a right relationship with his Father. Advent is a wonderful season!

But Advent is not merely the season to reflect on the first coming of Jesus. As we shall in our text today, Jesus is coming back again. And so Advent is also a time to anticipate, prepare, and be ready for the second coming of Jesus.

Lesson

So, how do we live ever ready for the Advent of Jesus in the busy 21st century? Our text for today guides us in recalibrating our lives in light of Jesus' priorities.

I. Face the Fear (21:25-26)

In Luke 21:5-24 Jesus was speaking to his disciples near the end of his earthly life and ministry. He wanted them to understand the things that would take place after his death. And so he told them about the destruction of the Temple (21:5-6), the signs preceding the destruction of the Temple (21:7-9), the wars and persecutions that would take place (21:10-19), and the destruction of Jerusalem (21:20-24).

And then in Luke 21:25-38 Jesus told his disciples about his second coming. He wanted his disciples to know that he was coming back again. And he wanted them to know what would happen prior to his return, and how to prepare for his return.

And so, first, Jesus wants his disciples to face the fear. Jesus said in Luke 21:25-26, **“And there will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth distress of nations in perplexity because of the roaring of the sea and the waves, people fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world. For the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”**

Exactly what these **signs in sun and moon and stars** are is not specified. What **the roaring of the sea and the waves** is referring to is also not specified.

However, there is a sense in which these verses sound like they came right out of today's headlines, isn't it? People are afraid.

We fear the economic recession as so much of our nest egg has evaporated like the morning dew when the sun rises.

We fear the international climate as nations and religions with a far different worldview rattle their swords.

We fear for our security as there seems to be no limit to who

will do what to take revenge or to prove a point.

But Jesus tells us these things will happen to reassure our hearts and to strengthen our resolve. Fear is not going away any time soon, but we don't have to be held captive by it. We can not only face fear by standing firm in Christ, but we can flatten fear by moving forward in faith!

God will see us through the difficulty of these days.

II. See Jesus' Second Advent for What It Is (21:27-28)

Second, see Jesus' Second Advent for what it is. Jesus said in Luke 21:27-28, **“And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”**

When Jesus returns, it will be a terrifying event for those who scoffed, chose to live as if it would never happen, or put off preparations for his Second Advent.

My understanding of the Bible's teaching on Jesus' return is that of *amillennialism*. *Amillennialism* “understands the thousand years of Revelation 20 to symbolize an indefinitely long period of time, which happens to correspond to the entire span of time from the first coming of Christ until his second coming.”⁴ Basically, when Jesus returns all of history will wrapped up and concluded. At his return there will be the resurrection of dead believers, the resurrection of dead unbelievers, the judgment, and the inauguration of the new heaven and the new earth.

The terrifying thing for unbelievers is that when Jesus returns they will not be able to change their status. In other words, when Jesus returns an unbeliever will not be able to become a Christian at that point—it will be too late. He may say, “Oh! Jesus! You really are alive. The Bible really is true. I have lived as if you did not exist. Now, I believe, and I want to become a Christian.” But Jesus

⁴ Steve Gregg, *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary* (Nashville, TN: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997), 2”.

will say, “I am sorry. It is too late. Your status cannot change.” And the unbeliever will be judged, found guilty of breaking God’s Law, and will be sentenced to hell for all eternity.

But for followers of Jesus, when we **see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory** it is a sign that our ultimate **redemption is drawing near**.

And so, in one sense, everything that unbelievers thought to be secure will be shaken apart. But in another sense, everything that saints have been eagerly anticipating for centuries will be happening before our very eyes.

So, be encouraged—it is good news!

III. Don’t Miss the Obvious (21:29-31)

Third, don’t miss the obvious. Jesus said in Luke 21:29-31, **“And he told them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree, and all the trees. As soon as they come out in leaf, you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.’”**

In referring to the trees, Jesus makes the point that the signs of his second coming are all around us. While the reality is that most people are not paying attention, the calamitous signs he foretold are indications that his return is drawing closer.

IV. Every Generation Has Seen the Evidence (21:32-33)

Fourth, every generation has seen the evidence. Jesus said in Luke 21:32-33, **“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”**

While the pace of the events seems to pick up in latter days, the fact is that these things have been happening and steadily pointing to his return all along.

Scholars have debated what **“this generation”** means. It

seems to me, however, that Jesus' words point to three important truths.

First, every person from the time of Christ has been able to see some of the evidence that points to his return. Every day is a day closer to the return of Jesus. And the things of which Jesus spoke that point to his return are a growing body of evidence that every person can look at and see that he will one day return.

Second, the final, ultimate victory of the Kingdom of God began with the first Advent of Jesus. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he lived a perfect, sinless life, and then he died on the cross to pay the penalty for sin. God the Father accepted the work of Jesus by raising him from the dead on the third day. Satan was defeated at Calvary. And now we are living between his First Advent and his Second Advent in the sure knowledge that Jesus won a great victory for his people by his death and resurrection.

And third, don't give up just because Jesus' Second Advent hasn't happened for 2,000 years. God's Word is sure. Just as sure as Jesus came 2,000 years ago, he will most assuredly come again!

V. Be Ever Ready (21:34-36)

And fifth, be ever ready. Jesus said in Luke 21:34-36, **“But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap. For it will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth. But stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are going to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.”**

The point of these verses is to be ready always for Jesus' return. There are many similarities between the First Advent and Second Advent of Jesus, but there is one significant difference. Even though few noticed his first coming as a vulnerable baby in a manger, Jesus tells us that no one will miss his second coming as the conquering King on the clouds.

So how can we live ever ready for his return?

First, if you have never done so, believe in Jesus. As I mentioned earlier, when Jesus comes back again it will be too late to change your status. Now is the day of salvation. Acknowledge to God that you have broken his Law and that you are a sinner. Repent of that sin. Turn from it. Desire to have nothing to do with it. Then, believe that Jesus paid the penalty for your sin. Believe that he will credit you with his righteousness so that you can stand before the Father on the Day of Judgment and say, “Father, my works and my righteousness are like filthy rags in your sight. They cannot get me into heaven. I am trusting only in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ to get me into your heaven.”

Second, focus on today. Just live each day faithfully serving Jesus and doing what he desires for that day, and then you will be ready every day for his return.

Third, be on guard. **“Watch”** means “to be vigilant and ever on the lookout for sin that sometimes creeps into our lives unnoticed until its claws are embedded in bad habits.” **“Watch”** also has a positive meaning, referring to a spirit of expectancy as we eagerly look forward to the day of Jesus’ return. I do not believe, as *postmillennialists* do, that the world will gradually get better before the return of Jesus. In fact, I believe that the Scripture is patently clear that things will get worse before Jesus returns. And in that respect, I believe our current world climate supports the imminent return of Jesus.

On the other hand, Jesus said in Matthew 24:14, the parallel section to our text for today, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, *and then the end will come*” (italics mine). There is a sense in which Jesus will only return again once the gospel has been proclaimed to all of the people groups in the world.

And finally, pray. This means much more than saying a few words to God with our eyes closed. It is living close to God, staying in touch with God, and bringing our desires in line with God.

Conclusion

Ever ready! The Energizer Battery Company began several decades ago as the Eveready Company. They promoted the image that their products would help us always be prepared for emergencies—things that happen suddenly and can catch us off guard. That’s the idea that Jesus is teaching in our text—be prepared for his sudden victorious return to happen.

There is a wise old saying about prudent living in preparation for lean times: “Stay ready so you won’t have to get ready.” That is great advice that we can glean for the Advent season, too. Amen.

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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The Advent of Jesus

PRAAYER:

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the First Advent of Jesus Christ. When it happened it caught most people completely by surprise.

May Jesus' Second Advent not catch us by surprise. Help each one of us to live ever ready for the Second Advent of Jesus Christ.

And for all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.