

ADVENT *Waiting*



What is Advent?

For millennia, the Christian church has found it helpful to organize the rhythms of worship around various “seasons” which, together, make up the Christian calendar. Laurence Stookey comments on the power of the church calendar as an aid to our faithful discipleship.

The great festivals of the church celebrate in our present experience what has occurred or what we resolutely believe will happen: The birth, ministry, suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus; the reign of Christ in glory and the final sovereignty of God over all things. We keep this occasion not as busywork or (in the case of past events) out of mere reverence for our heritage. We keep these occasions in order that God may work in us through them and in our world through us....While the church’s worship is always an offering to God, worship is also a great gift bestowed upon us by God...a primary means by which we maintain contact with past and future, both so integral to our identity and sense of mission in the world as people of the resurrection.[1]

The term Advent, used to describe the season that precedes Christmas, is derived from the Latin *adventus* and means “coming” or “arrival.” Though its proximity to Christmas can cause some confusion, the intent of the Advent season is to cause Christian believers to ponder both Christ’s initial coming at Bethlehem in fulfillment of the promises of the prophets, and his future coming in fulfillment of his own promises and those of the apostles.

The 2nd century church leader Justin Martyr succinctly captured the dual nature of the term “advent.” He wrote, “The prophets have announced two advents of Christ. In the first one, which has already past, he came as a dishonored and suffering man. However, in the second advent, according to prophecy, he will come from heaven with glory, accompanied by his angelic host.”[2] In the season of Advent, Christians are invited to consider their place as people of the “in between place.”

What is this guide?

Advent uniquely focuses on the theme of waiting. Like ancient Israel waited for the revelation of Messiah, so Christians wait for the return of the Lord from heaven to bring about the fullness of the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. Advent, then, issues each believer an invitation to self-reflection and introspection that leads to preparation. The hope for these brief studies is to help move us along that pathway over the course of this Advent season.

The first two studies will direct us to New Testament passages that help us to consider the question, “What are we waiting for?” The second two studies will address the question, “How are we to wait?”

May your Advent exploration lead you to a place of greater worship and greater longing as you consider what it means to faithfully follow a King who has come and is coming again.

[1] Laurence Hull Stookey, *Calendar: Christ’s Time for the Church*, 33.

[2] Justin Martyr, quoted in *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, 369.

ADVENT *Waiting*



Waiting Intently - Revelation 22

Advent is a season uniquely preoccupied with waiting. Think of a time when you had to wait for something. Was it something good or something unwelcome? What emotions do you remember feeling at that time?

Have you ever found yourself waiting for something or someone, but not sure exactly what it was? Perhaps it was meeting up with someone with you had only met over text message or email and weren't certain what they looked like. Or maybe you knew a package was being delivered but didn't have all the details on what to expect.

Fortunately, Christians don't have to experience that kind of uncertainty as throughout the New Testament we are told clearly what—or rather, who—we are waiting for. Let's begin, appropriately, at the end.

Read Revelation 22:7-21 and make a note of anything that stands out, strikes you anew, or leaves you with questions.

ADVENT *Waiting*

The three chapters that precede this one fill in even more of the picture of the return of Jesus to complete his restorative mission for the earth and its inhabitants. (If you can, make time to read those chapters.)

Clearly, the return of Jesus is the main theme of this passage. What aspects of Jesus' character are on display in these verses?

What aspects of Jesus' character in these verses, if any, surprise you or seem to run counter to popular conceptions of Jesus?

Make a list of ways that the readers of this prophecy are called to respond to the promise of Jesus' return.

It's not just the book of Revelation that is concerned with the return of Christ. References to the second coming of Jesus can be found throughout the New Testament and in each instance the authors of Scripture treat it as something significant that ought to shape our minds, hearts, and even our way of life. For example, Paul calls the return of Christ the Christian's "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13) and the author of Hebrews writes that Christ's return is what all believers are waiting for (Hebrews 9:28).

What does it say about the early Christian communities that the return of Jesus occupied such a prominent place in their lives?

ADVENT *Waiting*

In what ways does your life reflect a similar devotion to the return of Jesus? In what ways might your life better demonstrate that the return of Jesus is your “blessed hope?”

Often, the return of Christ to bring an end to sin and to fully establish his kingdom of peace, righteousness, and justice seems especially meaningful in seasons of difficulty or suffering. Can you think of a season or time in life when the promises found in Revelation took on deeper meaning or resonance for you? Which aspects of the return of Jesus were particularly important to you during that time?

Over the course of this Advent season as we, together, consider anew what we’re waiting for, what practices might help you to grow an expectant heart? Considering sharing ideas with a friend or with your homegroup so that you can enjoy the benefits of waiting in community.

An Advent Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you are the right-now-reigning and someday-returning King. Though I believe that you will keep your promises and return to make all things new, whole, and glorious, I don’t always live as though that is my ultimate hope. Grant me clearer vision of the ways that all that I most deeply desire is satisfied in you both now and in the future. Would you, by the power of your Spirit, grow in my heart a deeper longing for the day that you return? And, as I wait, would you guide my hands and feet in ways of living that would demonstrate that my hope is in you? Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

ADVENT *Waiting*



Waiting Eagerly - Philippians 3:12-21

Not everything we wait for has immediate implications, but most of us can think of a situation in which something on the horizon influenced our day-to-day. Tell about a time when a future promise impacted the way you lived your life.

Let's turn our attention again to the promised future. In his first letter to the Christians in the ancient city of Thessalonica, Paul reminds them of what is to come when Christ is revealed and insists that the future has power to shape even the sorrowful aspects of our present.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. What resonates with you? What prompts questions for you?

Though there are elements of this passage that have caused major confusion or disagreements among Christians, it's important to keep track of the big picture of these verses. Paul places the return of Christ into the broader context of a concern within the Thessalonian church. What was the concern?

Though some have read verse 13 in a way that makes the Apostle sound callous about grief, that is not what is going on in this passage. New Testament scholar Gordon Fee clarifies, "[Paul's] concern is not that they should not sorrow at all, as has sometimes been suggested, as though Christian hope has eliminated all expressions of sorrow as such. Rather, his point is that believers who have hope in the resurrection do not sorrow in the same way as others, people who lack that hope."^[1]

ADVENT *Waiting*

Paul responds to the Thessalonians' concern in verses 14-17. See if you can summarize his message.

What does verse 15 suggest about Paul's perspective on the return of Jesus? In what ways does his perspective align with your own?

How might a heightened anticipation for the return of Christ impact your day-to-day life?

Try to fit this passage into the overall biblical story. Which aspects of these verses fill in the big picture of redemption?

Paul ends this passage with the command to "encourage one another with these words." Which aspect(s) of this passage, if any, do you find personally encouraging?

ADVENT *Waiting*

Let's return to the context of the Thessalonians' concern about the fate of believers who had preceded them in death. Paul's concern for this church is not merely doctrinal, it is also deeply pastoral.[2] How might Paul's instructions have ministered to their anxious hearts?

Do you know someone in a season of suffering or grief? If so, what are some ways that, in keeping with Paul's instructions to the Thessalonians, you could encourage them with the truths of this passage?

An Advent Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for the promise of your return and the reminder from the Scriptures that you intend to draw near to your people. Would you allow those promises to shape me in the midst of the day-to-day stuff of life? Grow in me, I pray, a greater sense of expectancy for your return. And, as I wait for the fulfillment of these marvelous promises, would you make me a conduit of encouragement and the hope of the gospel to those around me. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

[1] Gordon D. Fee, in *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT, 168-169.

[2] Paul's love for the Thessalonian believers is evident in chapter 2. If you make time to read it, you will discover a portrait of a pastor whose heart is deeply entwined with his people.

ADVENT *Waiting*



Waiting Hopefully - Romans 8

Though Advent is, by nature, a forward-looking season, Scripture insists that the glorious promises of the future have power to shape the here-and-now stuff of life. Most of us have experience with making a long-range plan and working to execute the plan. Whether planning an overseas trip, a months-long home project, or saving for college expenses, many things in life take intentionality and forethought. What is an example from your life?

In his letter to the church in the city of Philippi, the Apostle Paul talks about living his day-to-day life in light of future truths. What he says to that church is full of potential for the lives of those who long to follow Jesus faithfully in any age.

Read Philippians 3:12-21. As you do, make a note of anything that stands out to you.

How would you describe Paul's perspective on time in this passage? Is it similar to or different than yours?

What clues does this passage give for how the promises of the future impacted Paul's day-to-day living?

ADVENT *Waiting*

In verses 17-20, Paul draws a contrast between two groups of people. Who are they and what differentiates them?

Verse 19 paints a sobering picture of life for those who do not live for the kingdom of God. What problems can you imagine arise from living to serve one's appetites?

Look again at verses 20-21. What hopes inform Paul's way of life?

In what ways do these verses reflect your own experience of the Christian life? How might you grow in these things?

What might change in your thinking or way of life this week with an increased eager expectation of the coming of the Savior from heaven? How might this Advent season grow even greater longing in your heart?

ADVENT *Waiting*



Waiting Actively - 2 Peter 3

There are different kinds of waiting. Sometimes we find ourselves waiting passively and others require more out of us. Try to think of a few examples of each as we begin this Advent study.

Passive Waiting

Waiting for your number to be called at the DMV

Active Waiting

Waiting for the baby to be born during labor

This Sunday we looked at the book of Jude. This short letter is very similar in many ways to 2 Peter. Most biblical scholars don't think this is an accident. They believe that one was used by the other- the language borrowed to make the same point in different contexts. Unfortunately, there is not consensus on which came first, Jude or 2 Peter. In any case, if the Scripture we're going to think through in this study sounds familiar - it's no coincidence.

Read 2 Peter 3. As you read, try to outline these 18 verses. What are his key concerns/ points?

If you had to sum up the big picture of the chapter in one sentence, what would it be?

ADVENT *Waiting*

How would you describe the “scoffers” Peter warns about? What is the message with which they are endangering the church?

What is Peter’s counter-arguments in verses 5-10?

The ‘day of the Lord’ is term found in many places in both Old and New Testaments. Based on the following texts and what you read here in 2 Peter 3, what will this “Day” mean when the Lord returns?

Isaiah 2:12-19

Ezekiel 30:2-3

Malachi 4:1-3

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

In 3:11-18, Peter addresses the question- so what? More precisely ‘what sort of people ought you to be’ in light of the fact that Jesus is coming again?

Look at verses 14 and 18. How do these verses help us answer the question about how we are to be actively waiting for Jesus’ return? Try to describe what ‘diligence’ and ‘growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord’ looks like for you?

An Advent Prayer: Lord God, we thank you that you are not a passive God. You were active in creating all things. You were active in teaching us what it means to live justly and in holiness. You have actively confronted wickedness at certain points in history. Thank you that the delay in your coming to judge the earth and set things right is not a sign of your passivity or neglect but is a sign of your merciful heart and desire to see many turn back to you. May it be Lord! And may we not presume on your patience, but with thanksgiving live lives that honor you. Take our moments and our days- let them flow in ceaseless praise. Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.