

Matthew 24:36-44

Matt. 24:36 “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

37 For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, 39 and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man.

40 Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. 41 Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.

42 Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43 But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.

44 Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Romans 13:11-14

Rom. 13:11 Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; 12 the night is far gone, the day is near.

Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; 13 let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

A WAKE UP CALL

It's time to wake up.

That's our message for today.
It's later than you think.

It's time to wake up.

Sometimes we are asleep to the importance of the moment. The Bible's message of apocalyptic vigilance falls on deaf ears.

Jesus tells us to wake up, but we want to roll over and sleep a while longer.

We have been lulled to sleep by complacency. We think that tomorrow will be just like today.

But, of course that's just not true. Each moment is filled with unique possibilities and problems.

The Bible looks at time differently. The word that is translated time (or "moment" in the RSV) is the Greek word "kairos."

Kairos refers to more than just the passing of time, seconds, minutes, hours and days.

Kairos refers to the moment of decision. Kairos is God's time.

During the season of Advent we keep time differently. We go on an eternal clock that collapses eternity into a moment of momentous change.

A sleeping people are charged to wake up to the dawn of God's kingdom. In the darkness there shines a great light.

ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

This past week I saw news stories about people waking up. They were waking up to go shopping!

These were committed people. They were determined to get the best buys, and if they had to skip sleep after a large Thanksgiving meal, then so be it.

Each year it happens all over again.

Advent is swallowed up by Christmas. We go from one holiday of excess to another holiday of excess with no respite in between.

From Thanksgiving to Christmas we are bombarded with a confusing mixture of Christmas carols, jingle bells, images of the sweet baby Jesus and a jolly old saint by the name of Nicholas.

But, the celebration of the season has not always been such an innocuous indulgence in hedonism and sentimentality. In the middle Ages, Advent was a time when people considered the four last things: death, judgment, heaven and hell.

And hell was the assigned topic for the Sunday preceding Christmas!

O for the good old days! Right?

One commentator described this rather grim celebration of Advent with a parody of a familiar carol. He said that back in those days they sang, "Angels we have heard on high, warning it is time to die."

Apparently the good old days weren't always so good. I might not like the commercialization of Christmas, but I'm not so sure I want to turn Advent into a time of unbridled pessimism either.

Advent is a time between the times. Advent is a time to catch our breath and look with wonder at the blessings of God's past and cast our eyes toward the hope of God's future.

THANKSGIVING

In a way it's good that we begin the season with Thanksgiving because gratitude more than any other emotion can wake us up to the importance of the moment.

Think about the blessings of this past year: the new job, the baby that was born, the wedding, the illness that was overcome, or the new friend that came into your life.

Your life has changed forever because of those blessings. Those events have started you down a new path. That's Advent. That's the wonder of God's time.

In the Old Testament whenever God's people looked toward the future, they always looked first toward the blessings of the past. They recalled their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. They remembered the first time they entered the Promised Land.

They had a whole list of past blessing that they recounted every year.

And the memory of those past blessings reminded them that God was not done with them yet. God was leading them to a new place and a new hope.

CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS

That's still true you know. The blessings of the past remind us that God is always doing a new thing, if only we could wake up to the power of the moment.

Paul had it right. The salvation of God is nearer to us now than ever before. This moment in time is precious and holy. Our salvation does indeed draw nigh.

Each year we hear a call from some to put Christ back into Christmas. But, I would suggest that we don't have to put Christ back into Christmas. He never left.

You can't spell Christmas without Christ.

And even the shortened form, the so-called "x"-mas is not an "x" at all. It is the Greek letter "chi" which was an abbreviation for Christ in the ancient world.

I like that. Even when the world thinks that they have eliminated Christ from Christmas, he's still there. He keeps showing up, and shaking things up.

You see, we begin the season by remembering past blessings, but the season is about more than just the past. Advent is about the intrusion of God's "newness" into our tired old world.

Advent is not just about more of the same or a little better of the same. Advent is about a new heaven and a new earth, a new creation.

The prophet Isaiah talked about the new age of God in this way, "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland."

HOW TO PREPARE

How should we prepare for this new day? How should we celebrate Advent?

Albert Einstein said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. And I sometimes think that we do this when it comes to the season of Advent. We say that we want the newness of God but we approach the season in the same old way.

In order to make the season more meaningful we have to change something.

What is one thing that we could we do differently this year in our celebration of Advent? What one thing could help us wake up to the importance of the moment?

Our Scripture lesson for today suggests that spiritual alertness is connected to moral purity. Putting aside the deeds of darkness allows us to put on the armor of light.

What deeds of darkness do we need to leave behind in your life in order to welcome the light of God's coming kingdom? That's a question that all of us need to contemplate this Advent season.

PUTTING ON CHRIST

In this passage Paul is reminding Christians who are spiritually asleep that they have been saved for a purpose. They have been saved to live a life that is different, a life that is holy.

In Advent God enables us to give up the old way of life in order to embrace the new. When we leave the darkness behind we are enabled to put on the sparkling new clothes of Christ.

That phrase, "putting on Christ" refers to our baptism. When we are baptized we put on a whole new way of life.

In our baptism we are clothed first of all with the robe of forgiveness. And it is this gift of forgiveness that carries us from darkness into the dawn.

It is God's forgiveness that makes something new possible. It is God's forgiveness that allows us to turn lose of a painful past and embrace the possibility that God is taking us to a new place.

It is God's forgiveness that allows us to believe that God is near.

The vision of the prophet is not just a far off dream. Now is the time when swords are beaten into plowshares and the love of neighbor becomes a reality in our own lives.

It is dark now, but the light is about to dawn.

TURN ON THE LIGHTS

The Christmas season is filled with light. And that's a good thing.

Those lights shining in darkness remind me of what God is doing, that God is in the business of letting the light shine in.

The Bible tells us that when the world was created it was created when God said, "Let there be light." And the rest of salvation history is about the shining of that good light into a dark world.

And though we prefer the darkness God will not leave us in our sins. Out of love God continues to interrupt our lives. God continues to shine the light of Jesus into our lives afresh this Advent season.

A family toured Carlsbad Caverns on their vacation. The mother, father, nine-year-old son and five-year-old daughter were in a large tour group in one of the huge rooms within the cave.

The guide, after explaining the various formations inside the room announced that he would turn out the lights for a few moments so the group could experience total darkness.

The lights went out. The room went black.

After a few moments the five year old reached nervously for her brother's hand. The group heard the boy say softly to his sister,

"Don't worry. There is someone here who knows how to turn on the lights!"

This is the message of Advent. Things might look pretty dark right now. But, there is someone here who knows how to turn on the lights. His name is Jesus.

As we clothe ourselves with Jesus, as we begin to make his will ours, the light begins to dawn. The darkness begins to fade away.

AUGUSTINE

I am reminded of the conversion of Augustine as he recorded it in his Confessions. Augustine was struggling with the darkness of his own desires. He just didn't want to give up the old way of life.

His famous prayer was "Lord, make me chaste but not just yet."

But, as he read our text for today, the light began to dawn on Augustine. He read,

"... let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14 Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

The text cut him to the heart. In a moment Augustine realized that he did not see the light because he did not want to see the light.

He did not want to change.

But, God turned the lights on anyway, and Augustine was converted.

Friends, has the light gone out in your life? Is your life filled with darkness?

Hear the good news of Advent.

Someone is coming who knows how to turn on the lights. Someone is coming who can lift us out of our old way of life. Someone is coming who can change us into the kind of people that we should be.

Someone is coming who will enable us to see in this dark world.

NIGHT VISION

A speaker from the Air Force was demonstrating a special pair of goggles to a group one evening. In somewhat technical language he told how these goggles helped military personnel “see” in the dark.

After the meeting a few of those present were allowed to join the speaker in a dark room to try on the goggles. It was amazing. In a totally black room they could see other persons, pictures on the wall and other objects.

Those goggles picked up and concentrated unseen light so that they could see. They had night vision.

This Advent God wakes us up and asks us to put on the spectacles of faith in Christ Jesus. Like those witnessing the demonstration of the night goggles we too are given the amazing ability to see in the darkness. We are enabled to see the bright hope of a salvation that comes soon.

What was once obscure, we now see clearly. And often what we thought was important, no longer seems important at all.

I like the way Barbara Brown Taylor put it,

“Every morning when you wake up, decide to live the life that God has given you right now. Refuse to live yesterday over and over again. Resist the temptation to save your best self for tomorrow.”

She warns us that there’s no need to get lost in the technical details of when exactly the dawn will come or try to know something that even Jesus himself did not know. Instead, she encourages us to focus on how we live today. She wrote,

“Live a caught-up life, not a put-off life, so that wherever you are ... you are ready for God...”

... Ours may be the generation that sees him ride in on the clouds, or we may meet him the same way generations before us have—one by one by one, as each of us closes our eyes for the last time.

Either way our lives are in God's hands."

Friends, I too encourage you to wake up and put on the spectacles of faith.

Time is short and the kingdom comes.

Amen.