

# Purposes of the Advent: To Prepare for the Second Advent

Text: 1 JOHN 3:8

Scripture Reading: HEBREWS 9:27-28

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*In 1 JOHN 3, we find two verses* that very clearly state the goals God had in mind when He took on human flesh to be born in Bethlehem and to live among men for 33 years and to sacrifice His life upon a cross. Those two goals were to destroy the devil's work and to take away our sins.

But, 1 JOHN 3 also suggests two other purposes of the Advent. One is to reveal the Father, and the other is to prepare for the Second Advent. Last week we considered how the Advent revealed the Father. Through Christ, the supreme ideal of fatherhood was actually lived out. I am talking about the special characteristic of fatherhood that causes a father to suffer and sacrifice everything to bring a child home when the child has gone astray. As a result of the Advent, our Heavenly Father's love has been lavished upon us in a way that revelation through prophets or angels could not have accomplished.

*Today we will focus on the fourth* and last purpose of the Advent implied in 1 JOHN 3. In the last half of verse 2 we read this: "But we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." This is a reference to a future appearing of Jesus Christ. It is a reference to His Second Advent that will come at the end of this present age.

Today, I want us to consider three things about the Second Advent. First of all, I want to stress just how important the Second Advent of Jesus Christ was in the minds of the people who wrote the New Testament. I will use several verses from the Bible to do this. Second, I want to understand the differences and similarities between the First and the Second Advents. The main text I will use to do this is HEBREWS 9:27-28. Then, last, I want to see how longing and waiting for the Second Advent should practically affect the way we live from day to day. I will return to 1 JOHN 3 to do that.

Think, first of all, how important the thought of Jesus Christ returning again to this earth was in the minds of the people who wrote the New Testament. The reason I need to emphasize this point is that there are many people in our world who profess to be Christian but who do not live with the conviction that the second Person of the Godhead will return again to this earth. And for many other people who do give lip service to the doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ—to

them it really isn't that important of a doctrine.

But, there can be no mistake about the fact that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ was an extremely important event in the minds of those who wrote the New Testament. I have chosen a sampling of verses that I hope will emphasize how important this truth was to a number of New Testament writers. In 1 THESSALONIANS 4:16, the Apostle Paul wrote, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." In JAMES 5:7 we read these words, "Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming." Jude encourages his readers to 'Keep themselves in God's love as they wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring them to eternal life.' The apostle Peter in 2 PETER 3 warns his readers that people will begin to question whether Christ's promise to come again will actually come true. He tells his readers that the reason why they must wait for Christ to return again is to give more people a chance to come to repentance and be saved. But he assures them that the day will certainly come, and it "will come like a thief." Luke records how two men in white clothing appeared to the disciples right after Christ ascended into heaven. They said, "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven (ACTS 1:19)." One of the visions of Jesus the apostle John recorded in the book of Revelations is that of His second coming. He saw Jesus on a white horse coming to judge the earth (REVELATIONS 19:11). And, in our scripture reading, we saw how the writer of the Book of Hebrews very clearly states that the 'Christ who was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people...will appear a second time.'

It is really impossible to not believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and, at the same time, believe that the words of the New Testament are the living, final, and absolutely infallible Words of God. No wonder the creeds of the early church included the Second Coming of Jesus Christ as one of the main points. The fact that this truth is a fundamental part of the Christian faith is unmistakable. And there are few things needed more in the church today than a

return to a strong desire and anticipation on the part of the church to see Christ come again. The people who were the strongest and most steadfast in their faith during the days when Jesus was born in a manger in Bethlehem were those who were waiting for the coming of the Messiah with great expectation. Likewise, the people who are the strongest in their faith today are those who are waiting for the Second Advent of Christ with great expectation.

***It is good for us to understand*** or be reminded just why the truth of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ was so important to the New Testament writers and why it should be so important to us today. The way I have decided to emphasize the importance of the Second Advent is to set it in contrast to the first Advent. By looking at the differences and similarities between the two Advents, I hope to increase our level of anticipation for the return of our Lord. So let's now place the two advents side by side and compare. We will use Hebrews 9:28 as a starting point.

The first half of verse 28 is all about the First Advent which is also all about sin. When Jesus came the first time He was given (or offered) by God to bear the sins of many people. When I say 'Christ was given by God to bear the sins of many' I am choosing words that I believe are closer to the original language. These words convey a broad meaning of what took place as a result of the First Advent. Two weeks ago I shared how Christ's sacrifice on the cross specifically made it possible for our sins to be taken away. That is one way Christ was given to bear our sins, and it is the most significant way. It is also the way that is emphasized in the NIV translation of HEBREWS 9:28.

But, today (in order to clearly set forth the contrast between the two Advents) I want you to see that Jesus was subject to the burden of sin even before He went to the cross. His suffering and sacrifice culminated at the cross, but it began before the cross. All through His life Jesus bore sin. All through His life Jesus put Himself underneath sin in order to take it away. He subjected Himself to the limitations that come from sin. Those limitations included poverty and sorrow and loneliness.

***All poverty is the result of sin.*** We must not forget that. In our schools we are taught that the reasons for poverty are social and political. But that kind of teaching only scratches the surface. Beneath the social and political problems is the problem of sin. All poverty is ultimately the result of sin. It is either the sin of the man who is poor or the sin of another person who is robbing him. When God entered human experience in the Person of Jesus Christ, He subjected Himself to the sin of poverty.

And, He also bore the sin of sorrow. ISAIAH 53:3 calls the Messiah "a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering." Sorrow and grief come when that which is precious to us is taken away. We suffer sorrow when the person we love dies or must leave us for some reason. Christ suffered sorrow and grief in the Garden of Gethsemane at the thought of being separated from His Father in heaven. I am sure He suffered great sorrow when Judas betrayed Him.

And, related to sorrow was loneliness. While on the cross Jesus cried out "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" On the cross He was completely alone. But, even before the cross, Jesus experienced loneliness. When Jesus was arrested, all His disciples fled. And during His public ministry there were many times that those around Him failed to understand who He was and the truth He was preaching. Even in the midst of the crowd, Jesus was often alone.

So, the first Advent had everything to do with bearing sin. In contrast, the Second Advent will have everything to do with victory over sin. HEBREWS 9:28 tells us that, when Jesus comes a second time, He will not come to bear sin. In the place of poverty, there will be great wealth. In the place of sorrow there will be unspeakable joy. When Jesus comes again, He will not be lonely. He will gather around Himself all the trusting souls who have looking and serving and waiting. When He came the first time, there was no room for Him in the inn. When He comes again the whole world and the whole universe will hurry to make room for Him. At the close of the first Advent we saw Him holding a reed and wearing a purple robe with a crown of thorns on His head. He was surrounded by a mob of people mocking Him. When He comes again, He will hold the scepter of the universe in His right hand; upon His head there will be a crown of glory; He will be clothed with all the splendor of God and surrounded by ten thousand times ten thousand angels. The First Advent was all about bearing and defeating sin. The Second Advent will be all about claiming the victory and setting up a kingdom.

Those are the differences between the two Advents. Now we must consider the similarities. HEBREWS 9:27 states that "man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment." All men have a dual destiny. Death and judgment are unavoidable. But, in the face of this dual destiny, God responds with two Advents. The First Advent is God's response to man's appointment with death. He responds by saving people from sin that causes death. The Second Advent is God's response to man's appointment with judgment. He responds by turning the judgment of men into salvation.

So, one similarity between the two Advents is

salvation. The First Advent provides salvation from sin in the form of mercy and grace. And, the Second Advent provides salvation from the ultimate and final punishment. At the Second Advent, God will save all those who have received mercy and grace by physically removing them from everything that is evil so they will never experience sin again. All those who have rejected mercy and grace will have to live with the result of their choices. Because they have chosen to live in fellowship with evil; therefore, throughout eternity their wish will be granted. At the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, true justice will be imparted to every man and woman created in the image of God.

“Man was destined to die once.” “Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people.” After death, “man is destined to face judgment.” Jesus will appear a second time (at the final judgment) to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him. And who are waiting for Him? They are those who have received salvation from sin in the form of mercy and grace as a result of the First Advent. Thus, salvation is one thing that both Advents have in common.

The other thing they have in common is love. Both Advents are an expression of God’s love. We often miss this, because we tend to equate love with mercy and not with justice.

Last week, I talked to a mother whose son is in jail. The mother has decided to do something very difficult for a mother to do. She has decided that it is best for her son to remain in jail and serve out his sentence. The son is pleading with her to use her influence to get him out of jail. He is pleading for mercy. The reason why he is in jail is because he has violated the law. But it is not the first time he has violated this particular law. He has done so repeatedly. In the past he has been shown mercy, but he took advantage of the mercy. Instead of changing his ways, he repeated the same mistake. Now mercy has run out and justice has taken over. The mother has decided that her son needs justice more than he does mercy. He deserves to be in jail for the crime he has committed. Is there no love in this mother’s decision? Of course there is. The very thing that is motivating her is love.

Christ’s first appearing was to show mercy. Christ’s Second Coming will be to exercise justice. Love is the primary force behind both the showing of mercy and the exercise of justice.

Salvation and love are themes that run strong with both Advents. The First Advent had to happen for there to be a Second Advent. And without both Advents salvation will remain incomplete and love will remain incomplete. Until salvation and love have been revealed in their entirety, the whole universe will

continue to groan as in the pains of childbirth (ROMANS 8:23).

Throughout the centuries people of the Jewish faith have placed their hope in only One Advent. They are still looking forward for the Messiah to come for the first and only time. They believe he will bring them justice. But justice without mercy is nothing but an incomplete form of salvation and love.

And, it is not only people of the Jewish faith who groan in pain waiting for justice to come. Many people in Asia and Africa and India and throughout the world are groaning in agony waiting for justice to come. Some still place their hope in politics or in military force or in evolution to bring about justice. Others have lost hope. It is such a tragedy to see people waiting in fear and with little hope for justice to come because they have failed to experience the First Advent.

***The Second Advent is certain.*** And, it will certainly bring justice. Those who are waiting with confidence and hope are those who have already tasted salvation and love as a result of the First Advent. Their first taste has left them craving for more. Their first experience with salvation and love has created in them a longing to experience salvation and love in their completeness.

When I first started dating Janiene at the age of seventeen, I experienced feelings I had never had experienced before. Love was awakened in my heart and we began a sweet relationship. It was five and a half years before we were finally married. During those five and a half years there was a constant craving in my heart for our love to be consummated in marriage.

In the Bible, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is likened to a marriage. As people who have had a taste of love and salvation, there should be a constant craving in our hearts for the final consummation of the love we have begun to experience with our Savior. When He comes again, He will come as a Bridegroom receiving His bride.

In the years prior to my marriage with Janiene I felt it was very important to prepare myself in every way possible for the wedding day. I was most concerned that I become as spiritually strong as possible, because I considered that to be the most important qualification of a husband.

And, preparation is also a very important part of getting ready for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. The parable of the ten virgins recorded in the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of MATTHEW is all about the need for us to

prepare for the Second Advent.

And, the words of 1 JOHN 3:3 emphasize exactly what kind of preparation is needed. Those words tell us that 'everyone who has the hope of the Second Coming purifies himself, just as God is pure.' Those who truly hope for the Second Coming will want to make themselves worthy for the One who will be coming as the Bridegroom to receive His bride, and they will do so by pursuing holiness. That is the first practical application the truth about the Second Coming should have on our daily lives. The second practical application has to do with anticipation.

The big difference between my own marriage with Janiene and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ has to do with the wedding date. Janiene and I set a specific date for our wedding. It was June 14, 1975. As the wedding day approached our excitement and anticipation grew. But I have no idea when my Savior is going to return. This means that my level of anticipation should remain constant. I should be constantly longing and waiting. Remember the stories of Simeon and Anna. The second chapter of the gospel of Luke tells us that Simeon was an old man who was righteous and devout looking for the consolation of Israel. Anna was also advanced in years. Like Simeon she was also looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. Both of them were blessed to see the baby Jesus before they died. Just like Simeon and Anna, we need to keep our level of anticipation at a constant high.

But, this is not easy to do for people like ourselves who have much in the way of material goods and look forward to getting more. It is much harder for people who are caught up in the world to maintain a high level of anticipation than it is for a person who is poor or who has no way of entering the fast track of life that most of us in this auditorium are on. Nevertheless, this is the second thing concerning the truth about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ that we must strive to apply to our lives. To do it we must force ourselves to accept the reality that everything we possess, including the relationships we have with family

members, are temporary. We must discipline our emotions so that our joy will be based on our hope of the Second Advent when we will meet our Savior rather than our hope of fulfilling the American dream. The American dream is a dream that cannot last forever.

The truth about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ is meant to motivate us to strive to be holy and it is meant to help us maintain a high level of anticipation. Such anticipation should fill our hearts full of joy. There are few things that this church and this world need more than a renewed vision of the Second Advent. Many people have trouble getting excited about the Second Advent because they think that the possibility of it happening before they die is extremely small. But whether or not we die before Jesus comes again should matter little. If I die waiting, then I will enter a period of rest where I will be 'absent from the body...and at home with the Lord.' There I will continue to wait in all of heaven's light and joy for the Second Advent.

All of heaven is waiting for the Second Advent and the waiting in heaven is characterized by complete joy. All of earth is also waiting for the Second Advent. But the waiting on earth is a mixed bag of confidence and hope on the part of those who have experienced the First Advent mixed with fear and doubt on the part of those who have not experienced the First Advent. Finally, all of hell is waiting for the Second Advent, but the waiting in hell is characterized completely by fear and dread. All of creation is groaning. Can you hear it?

During the silent time we have before we take communion today let me suggest that we not only remember what Jesus did for us as a result of the First Advent, but that we also take time to consciously enter into the spirit of the Second Advent. Let's try to listen to the groaning of all creation. Then, let's examine our own hearts to determine our level of anticipation and our level of readiness for that great event. Jesus will come again. Let us not be ashamed when He does.