

God's Word Prepares Us for His Coming

1st Sun. in Advent – 11/30/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Matthew 24:36-44 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 37, **“For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.”**

v. 44, **“Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”**

Introduction

✧ Last Sunday we ended the Church Year with a focused eye upon what is called the “end times”; the final Day of Judgment. Now today we begin a new Church Year with the season of Advent; a season that focuses the attention of Christ's Church on preparation. But it's not just intended to prepare us Christians for the celebration of Jesus' first advent; that is His coming here to us in human flesh. It is also designed to prepare us for the journey we will take through each of the seasons ahead, recounting the life and teachings of Jesus; especially His suffering, death and resurrection in our place in Lent and Easter, all the way through the long season of Pentecost where the Holy Spirit works through God's Word to grow us in our faith and Christian life; to prepare and bring us back, full circle to the promises of Jesus' second advent when He will come to usher in the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God in all of its eternal, heavenly glory.

➔ You see, that's why this Gospel Reading today for the first Sunday in Advent begins the Church Year by preparing us for the day when our Lord Jesus will judge the living and the dead.

✧ Jesus here is sitting on the Mount of Olives with His disciples, in a private conversation; answering the question that they raised about what signs we should all expect that will alert us to Jesus' “coming” at the “close of the age” (Mt. 24:3).

➔ And Matthew records today's portion of Jesus' answer with Jesus pointing us all to the gift we already have in Holy Scripture, which prepares us for that day. Jesus even says in verse 25, just before our text, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away.”

➔ And then Jesus tells us that immediately before He comes, things in this world will be just like they have been every other day; just as they are today where the world just goes about its “normal” business; the same for Christians and unbelievers alike. There's eating and drinking; marriage ceremonies; men and women at work; with no noticeable difference between those who are saved and those who are not, until suddenly that final Day of Judgment is here!

➔ And it's then that the truth will actually be revealed that there was a difference among us, because some of the people actually were watching and were prepared for the Kingdom of God, while others were not.

I. God's Kingdom Comes in Two Ways

✧ So, how do we recognize God's kingdom? Well, the kingdom of God comes in two ways. First, God's kingdom comes to us here and now, by grace – that is God's undeserved, loving work. Then, on the Last Day, God's kingdom will come with power, for the righteous judgment of all souls of all time.

➔ These are two of the three “advents” or “comings” that we think about during this season. The first advent was when Christ was born in Bethlehem. We celebrate that at Christmas, but it is in the past. So, we can't experience it firsthand or prepare for it since it has already come. However, the second advent of Christ is a present tense reality for us all, right now when we hear God's Word; as we repent, and we receive His daily gift of grace. And third, there is Christ's final advent, when He comes to all souls in the final judgment.

✘ So it's helpful to remember what Luther's Small Catechism teaches about what we pray for when we say, "Thy kingdom come" in the Lord's Prayer. Luther leads us to ask, "How does God's kingdom come? God's kingdom comes when our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word and lead godly lives here in time and there in eternity" (SC, 2nd Petition meaning). In other words, God's kingdom of grace is not perceived with human eyes. You can't see it. But His kingdom is recognized by the ears. We hear so many different messages in this world. And it is by His gift of faith that we recognize and discern the gift of God's kingdom by His gift of faith.

➔ By faith, we discern that what the world offers to us is actually darkness. Everything that the world values – drinking parties, sensuality, gratifying the desires of the flesh; these are what St. Paul in our Epistle Reading today calls, "the works of darkness." "So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy" (Rom. 13:12–13). The opposite of that, according to verse 10, is love. "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (13:10).

✘ So, each one of us then needs to consider here today, "How would my life be characterized right now? Have I given myself over to the works of darkness – "orgies and drunkenness, ... sexual immorality, ... quarreling and jealousy"? "Or am I demonstrating the love that puts my neighbor ahead of myself?"

➔ Then consider, friends, this beautiful mystery of Advent: Jesus comes in love to you here and now; to you who have not loved; who have not obeyed the Commandments; who, up to this point, as Paul says, have made "provision for the flesh, to gratify your own desires" (13:14). It is to each one of us right there; right now in our guilt – in the fullness Christ's love, mercy, and forgiveness – that the kingdom of God is recognized and received through His gift of faith.

✘ Is that the kingdom that you are praying for this Advent? It's a stark contrast to the kingdom of the natural, sinful self, isn't it? Apart from Christ we desire wealth and riches and prestige and power and comfort and whatever else brings us personal pleasure. Yes, twisted by narcissism and self-love, our ideas of the kingdom only end up perverted and corrupt.

➔ But Jesus calls us sinners today to a kingdom of love and mercy. And how does that kingdom come? Well, when Jesus, in our text, calls Himself "the Son of Man" who comes to judge between believer and unbeliever, He shows that He is the same "Son of Man" that Matthew 20:18-19 speaks of earlier and says, "The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified, and He will be raised on the third day."

➔ Yes, hanging upon His cross, Jesus took our own curse upon Himself; the curse of death that seeks to remove us from God's kingdom, and He buries it. Most often we take sin too lightly, which leads us to imagine that it can be dismissed lightly. But friends, every one of our iniquities must be paid for, or else we remain in our guilt. Jesus used that strong language when He said in Luke 9:22, "It is necessary (δεῖ in the Greek) for the Son of Man to suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised." God's Word says it *must* happen; the Son of Man *must* suffer and die; and He *must* come under the Father's punishment if you and I are to be restored to God's kingdom. And we are!

✘ For those who reject and despise the gift of God's kingdom and mercy, then judgment comes suddenly. Jesus takes us back into the Old Testament with the example of the great flood. In the days of Noah, the unrighteous, all but those eight people in Noah's family were unprepared. They were too preoccupied with the things of this world. What about you and me? "As were the days of Noah," Jesus says in verses 37-39 of our text, "so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as

in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man” (Mt. 24:37–39).

➔ When the floods did come it was too late to prepare; too late to repent. God had been warning them constantly; for the 75-100 years that it took Noah to build the ark. Look, none of us knows when our last earthly hour will come. And Jesus is clear in His warning to us here today, the same is true for the Day of Judgment: “Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming” (vv. 40–42).

- ✘ The activities Jesus says will be going on at that time represent all of our daily cares and pursuits: eating and drinking stands for the pleasures of life; marriage stands for our relationships with others; and buying, selling, planting, and building indicate our possessions. Pleasures, people, and possessions – all wonderful gifts given to us by God. But, they can also end up driving us away from God if we are not careful. So Jesus tells us here in advance that we must beware that these things don’t distract us from God’s kingdom. Instead, He’s given them to us, for us to use, so that we are prepared for His coming.

II. God’s Word Prepares Us

- ✘ Peter says in 2 Peter 2:5 & 9, “If [God] did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly ... then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment.” Peter also says that God made Sodom and Gomorrah “an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly” (v. 6).

➔ Certainly, God did not cause Peter’s words to be recorded and preserved only to teach and guide the people of Peter’s day. No, these basic, simple Bible stories serve as God’s way of putting real life, historical examples in front of us, so that we will all be prepared for the Lord’s judgment; so that we won’t get caught up in the things that the world prizes so much instead.

- ✘ So then, how would God have you and me prepare this Advent? 1 Corinthians 1:6-8 says this: “The testimony about Christ was confirmed among you – so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

➔ That’s pretty clear, isn’t it? The Lord wants us to be “guiltless” and “lacking” in no spiritual gift. Well great! How do we do that? Jesus taught us in Matthew 6:33, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” In other words, “make sure that you have got your priorities in the right order: God and His Word and will first.” So, when He is your first love and focus, then as Romans 8:28 tells us, He works “all” other things “together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose.”

- ✘ In another sermon, Jesus warned believers, “Remember Lot’s wife” (Lk. 17:32). She’s the one who looked back; longing for the earthly possessions that perished when sulfur rained down on the city of Sodom. But God warned them all not to look back or they would die, and that is what happened when she did.

➔ That same principle still applies to you and me today. Now that we have been embraced by God and His grace; now that we have been wrapped in Jesus’ saving work so that our guilt has indeed been washed away by His blood; now that He has gifted us with His full forgiveness and eternal salvation in His heavenly glory, Jesus directs us today as we ride out the storms and chaos of this world in the safety of His ark, that is His Church: Don’t look back with longing to the things of this world; look only to Him, and His kingdom of mercy and love. Look to Jesus who shows us His mercy even before He comes in judgment.

- ✘ This then is how we begin Advent. We live in hopeful expectation; longing for Jesus' return, when Paul says, "we will always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). It's then and there that there will be no more suffering or sin; no more stress or strife; no more disease or difficulty, but only the perfection of paradise in the glory of our Savior forevermore!
 - ➔ And the beauty of Jesus is ... we don't have to wait for the Last Day for Him to come. Even now, His kingdom comes among us in grace. He comes to us, as He promised in Hebrews 1:14, with His angels and archangels, whom God sends "to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation".
 - ➔ Likewise He comes to us, not by a sign that the world can see; nevertheless He is truly present in our hearts and minds wherever and whenever we hear or read His inspired Word of truth to comfort us; strengthen us; guide us and protect us until He comes again in the flesh.
 - ➔ Which points us as well to Jesus' present-day coming right here at this altar, where we hear His promise: "Take, eat, this is My body, given for you. Take, drink, this is My blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."
- ✘ Yes, my dear Christians, here and now, in your very midst, you are blessed by the fact that God's kingdom of grace comes to you in His Word and Sacrament. And in that Word He has prepared you for the coming of His Son. Amen.