

Stir Up Expectations for the Coming Christ

1st Sun. in Advent – 12/03/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 Corinthians 1:3-9 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 4, [Paul says,] **“I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus...”**

v. 7, **“...so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ...”**

Introduction

✘ Historically in the Christian Church, the *Collect* (or prayer) of the Day for the Sundays in this season of Advent have been called the “Stir up” prayers, because they begin asking the Lord to “stir up” various things within or among us as God’s believers as we await the “coming” (or Advent) of our Savior in this season leading up to the celebration of His earthly birth in human flesh.

→ We prayed earlier in today’s *Collect*, “Stir up Your power, O Lord and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance...”.

✘ It is that same kind of language that the apostle Paul uses to begin his letter to the Christians in the town of Corinth, referring to the truth that Jesus did come to “enrich” them by His rescue and salvation from sin and poured out upon them every “spiritual gift” (v.7) they could ever need.

→ And in doing so, Paul through Jesus is stirring up within the saints at Corinth an eager expectation for the day when Jesus would visibly appear at the end of time as King of kings and Lord of lords. It is on that Day that Jesus promised to return as judge over all of mankind and bring about a new heaven and a new earth for all true believers. It really is a re-creation of God’s first, perfect Creation where all wrongs will be righted; were sickness and death will be no more; and not only these Corinthian Christians, but all Christians of all time will live face-to-face with Jesus in glory. He has gone there before them to prepare their place in the Father’s new heavenly home.

→ Paul sees people longing for Jesus to come back in the flesh. And so he writes to them to help them in their anticipation; to stir up their faith as he says in verse seven, to know that “you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I. Guiltless while waiting

✘ But a superficial reading of 1 Corinthians seems to paint a very different picture. It doesn’t seem as if Jesus’ return is really at the heart and center of who these people are. Paul reveals the fact that they have formed factions and cliques among themselves. They are fighting with one another. There is sexual immorality in their midst to the point that they are even celebrating it. They’re bragging, each person individually, about their own perceived importance and gifts at the expense of their fellow brothers and sisters in the faith. Not only are they lacking in love for each other, they are abusing the Lord’s Supper, and Paul has to warn them against their numerous temptations toward the worship of idols.

→ Yes, a quick reading of 1 Corinthians seems to indicate that the children of God at Corinth were not eagerly waiting for the revealing of Jesus Christ on the Last Day. Instead they seem to be living only for the here and now, just like all of their unbelieving neighbors do.

✘ Yet Paul begins his letter in verse two – just before our text today, by referring to these Corinthians as, “the church of God...those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints...”.

→ Is this how Paul is able to write then in verse seven that the Corinthians are believers who are waiting for the revealing of Jesus Christ, even though the rest of the letter seems to indicate that they could basically care less? As good Lutherans we are compelled to ask, “What does this mean?” Is Paul ignoring their day to day actions just so that he can say that they are eagerly waiting for the revealing of Jesus?

II. How does God see us?

✘ In order to answer these questions we need to first turn the questions back on ourselves. What about you and me as Christians here today? Would Paul say the same thing about us? After all, an honest look at each of our lives reveals that we are often living in conflict with how the Bible says we should live. What would Paul say if he were writing a letter about me; if he could accurately see into my thoughts and hear my words and witness my actions and priorities?

→ In the end though, it doesn't matter what Paul would see or think about us, does it? No, here's what matters above all else, “How does *God* see you and me? And what does He say?”

✘ To be honest friends, there is almost no difference between the Corinthians and us, is there?

→ We engage in quarrels and fights. We scheme to get ahead, sometimes at the expense of others. We sacrifice principles and family for careers because we want to get ahead. Sometimes we look the other way and go along with cultural norms when it comes to things like cohabitation and marriage and family. Yes, our lives are often in conflict with how God says we are to live. And just like the believers in Corinth, at times, it doesn't seem as if we are eagerly awaiting the revealing of Jesus Christ on the Last Day. Our day to day priorities – the things that grab our attention on our phones or TVs; the way that we treat our spouses, children, neighbors and coworkers; the things we say to them and the way we live our lives far too often reveals an unhealthy amount of careless, earthbound living. To sum it up, our focus too often is on a lot of other things and not on the “revealing of Jesus Christ” (v.7).

→ So, what would Paul say about us? How would he see us? More importantly, what would God say? How would He see us? This matters folks, because we often do not see ourselves as the redeemed saints that we are; because while God is always faithful, we're not. Yet Paul says in verse eight that “our Lord Jesus Christ...will sustain [us] to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

III. Paul sees the Corinthians as God sees them.

✘ How? How do we reconcile what seems to be a contradiction here in God's Word? Well, the answer runs throughout the Reading before us. Did you notice how many times Paul refers to Jesus? It's a lot. Verse 3: “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Verse 4: Paul says “the grace of God” is given to the Corinthians “in Christ Jesus.” Verse 5: Paul states the fact that the Corinthians are “enriched in Him”, that is in Jesus Christ. And he keeps going, all the way to verse nine. He says in verse 8 that the Corinthians will be sustained, “guiltless” at the end, “in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ”. And in verse 9, he assures them that they are in “the fellowship of [God's] Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” So, in seven verses, Paul refers to Jesus doing something for the Corinthians seven times.

→ Understanding this emphasis of Jesus' work in and among the Corinthians, it becomes clear that Paul does not see these people as they are on their own. Instead, he sees them as God sees them in Jesus Christ. Paul is not waiting for them to get their act together and do something for God. He already knows that God is the one who has done something for them in Jesus Christ. For it is only “in Jesus Christ” that these sinners can be considered as “guiltless”; only by the blood of Jesus that covers them in God's free gift of faith. This is how Paul sees the

Corinthians as eagerly waiting for the revealing of Jesus Christ, because that's the way that God sees them.

→ And my dear Christians, that's the way that God sees you and me too. He sees us as "guiltless" in Jesus Christ, as we wait eagerly for His coming at this very moment!

IV. Not lacking any gift

✘ And let's be clear, God was never waiting for us to do something for Him. There's nothing we could ever do on our own that would ever be enough. He's the one that waited from the moment of the first fall into sin by Adam and Eve to do something for us!

→ Galatians 4:4 says, "When the fullness of time had come..."; in other words when the time was exactly right according to God's supreme wisdom, "God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law." Why? to do something for us. He sent Jesus as a human baby to redeem us; to bring us into the fellowship that only His Son could bring about for us all.

→ Here's how it all worked out. When Jesus first came, He was in perfect fellowship with His heavenly Father – the second person in the One and only Triune God. He lived His entire earthly life of 33 years perfectly without sin. He eagerly anticipated the day when He would offer up His holy and perfect life as a sacrifice for all sin. And when Jesus hung and died on the cross in your place, God the Father looked at Him and saw His only Son covered with all of your sin. Jesus claimed that sin as His own so that He could pay the punishment that God's righteous judgment requires for all sin; for your sin and for mine.

✘ When that happened on Good Friday, Jesus gave you truly incredible gifts. He gave you everything that matters most in life. He gave you the gifts of His holy and sinless life. That's right; you received the last thing that you deserved – the very mercy and forgiveness of God Himself. This is how you were eternally "enriched," as Paul says in verse five, with the gifts of eternal life and a resurrection to come on the Last Day; on the Day when Jesus Christ will be fully revealed!

→ I know, it's hard to wrap our measly minds around it all, isn't it? When God looks at you, He does not see you as you are. He sees you as the apostle Paul saw the Corinthians. He does not see your faithlessness. He does not see the moments you stumbled in sin; the times you quarreled and fought; the times you schemed and plotted; the times you went along with the cultural ungodly norms of the day. No, God sees you as perfect in every way. He proclaims you righteous and beloved; justified and faithful because of His Son Jesus!

→ God calls you His beloved son or daughter; adopted into His family through His miraculous work in baptism. He has made you holy. He's the one who brought you into fellowship with His Son, Jesus. No matter who you are; no matter what you've done or not done, my dear Christians you are guiltless in God's eyes, because you are wrapped in Jesus Christ. As verse seven says, you "are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait" for Him.

V. We eagerly wait

✘ So, what difference does knowing and believing and confessing that truth make? It changes how you and I view and approach the future. Now there is not one ounce of hesitation or concern about our future; about Jesus' promised return. No, like the Corinthians, we are eagerly waiting for Jesus; waiting right now and every day, for Jesus to reappear visibly on the Last Day as the King of kings and Lord of lords.

→ We are eager for His return because of who we are in Jesus. We know that our judgement no longer depends upon our sin. There are no secrets; no surprises that Jesus will pull out and

surprise us with that Day. He has paid for and covered it all. Satan is conquered. Death has been overcome. The world will be entirely new; re-created for eternity!

→ On that day, not only Jesus, but everyone will see you as perfect in every way, without sin. You will stand tall in your resurrected and glorified flesh, because God's judgement of "guiltless" will be confirmed for you and all believers in Christ...for all to hear; for all to see; for all to celebrate without end in eternity. This is your heavenly inheritance, just as it is Paul's and the Corinthians' as well.

⊗ Now that stirs up my expectation for the coming Christ. I can't wait. Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.