



## **Prophets: Preparation and Expectation Expected Delivery**

Officially we have twenty-four days of shopping until Christmas. Don't worry because, now it is possible to shop 24/7.

And with online shopping it is just click and send – although we often have to wait for the packages to arrive in the mail. This may take a while but eventually they arrive - we just have to be patient.

Christmas is certainly a time of waiting and expectation. You can feel it all around and this year, I think we have become practiced with waiting as we move out of Covid restrictions. It seems that the vast majority of our lives is filled with waiting and preparation and less with actual experience, celebration or doing stuff. Often when we think we are finally doing stuff, we are actually just waiting and preparing for stuff in a new location.

But preparation IS actually the doing. The short time we spend on earth is in preparation – preparing our hearts to become more like Jesus and to help other people get prepared to meet Jesus in heaven. Many people gloss over or entirely skip the Old Testament and just read the New Testament. Some only attend Church at Christmas and Easter – thus never fully understanding why God created us in the first place and why He came to earth in human form as Jesus to show us the way.

Tell me, would you pick up a novel and start reading in the middle – what sense would that make? Have you ever arrived late to a

movie, missing the first part and then trying to catch up with what is going on. Or you may have walked in on a conversation, assumed you knew what it was about, then you say something and realize you had missed the point of the conversation.

It is like God's story in the Bible - you can't start in the Christmas story because you are actually starting in the middle and there will be things that don't make any sense. Why the celebratory songs of the angels? Why the fearful anticipation of the shepherds? Why the inquisitive journey of the kings? Why the political panic of Herod? Why? You have to begin in the roots of the story and that is what I am hoping to do over the next few weeks.

The primary point of the Old Testament is preparation - what some call the protevangelium near the very beginning of creation points to this fact. *Protos* is the Greek word for "first," and *evangelion* means "good news or gospel." So, the protevangelium is what most followers believe to be the first declaration of the Gospel. It takes place directly after Adam and Eve fell into sin. God declared to the serpent in

***Genesis 3:15: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."***

The serpent's work began when Adam and Eve consciously chose to sin which would one day be crushed through the arrival of her offspring. That offspring, of course, is the One whom Christmas points to and celebrates. From the moment of the first sin onward, the entire Old Testament prepares and points us to the great

moment when our Saviour and Messiah came to save us from the curse of sin. The law and all the temple sacrifices show our need for a Savior. The slavery and sorrow of the Israelites point to the bondage we all face before we acknowledge His arrival. The prophets looked and longed for His coming.

Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophet Micah was inspired by God to look forward to His birth.

***In Micah 5:2, he wrote, “But you, Bethlehem though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”***

The one from ancient times whom Micah wrote about has more than one hundred different names in the Bible. He’s called the Alpha and the Omega, the Word of Life, the Bright Morning Star, the Light of the World, I Am, the Ancient of Days, Jesus. His name Emmanuel means “God with us.”

And when Jesus arrived, He came humbly, quietly, in a small and forgotten town but let’s not allow the circumstances He chose to fulfill these prophecies confuse what child this is. He is the Ancient One, the Creator, the Author and Giver of Life, the Word of God. For hundreds of years, the Israelites and the prophets looked to Him and waited for His rescue.

**Advent is the perfect time for us to wait and prepare.** As the prophets waited for Jesus’s arrival, we wait and prepare for His Second Coming. In some ways we know what Micah, Isaiah, Moses, and so many who looked for Jesus went through. Like them, we know Jesus is coming again, and we don’t know when.

Like them, we need to prepare our hearts to receive and grow in Him now as we anticipate the day when we will meet Him face-to-face. While He may indeed tarry longer, you can be certain that we all are in our own Last Days. We will soon witness His arrival, or we will soon meet Him at the end of our own lives. Either way, we must be prepared!

### **Preparation Begins with Repentance**

John the Baptist was the last prophet who had to wait for Jesus's first arrival. He shows us how to prepare our hearts for Jesus in our lives now and how to prepare our hearts for Jesus's return.

***In Matthew 3:2, John says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Verse 8, "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance." Verse 11, "I baptize you with water for repentance."***

*Repentance* in its simplest definition means "to turn." John isn't calling out, "You all better start feeling really guilty for all the things you've done." He's not saying, "I want you to feel really bad."

Repentance can begin with feeling really bad, but what John is saying is, "Change your approach. Reconsider how you think about things and begin to think and act differently."

Advent gives us an opportunity to consider our approach and make a change. Is this Christmas going to be like all the rest? Filled with anxiety? Rushed? Stressful? Overwhelming? Or will we take our cue from the prophets of old who were waiting and preparing for His arrival? Will we allow this season to be one of reflection, adoration, and repentance? There is no better footing on

the road to Jesus than a broken road with humility, understanding of our need, and repentance.

***Psalm 51:17 “A broken and contrite heart, you God will not despise”***

Despite the vast array of Old Testament prophecies describing the birth, life, death, and purpose of the Messiah, there was at least one idea that caused the vast majority of the religious leaders to miss the gift when it came. Strangely enough, they didn't really understand the significance of original sin. We know that regulations were incredibly important to them and avoiding sin was paramount. But redemption for sin was nearly ignored.

When they looked for salvation, they weren't really thinking about their need for salvation from sin. Instead, they were looking for salvation from foreign rule and oppressive government. And their mistaken belief about the mission of the Messiah became their most important conviction about Him.

**Let's not make the same mistake.** Let's remember that we are in desperate need. Although our feelings may tell us otherwise, it's not the need for a way to pay all our Christmas bills. We're not so desperate for a way to get everything done that needs to be accomplished before Christmas. We are desperate for a Saviour who will cleanse us from our sin once and for all. We are in need of the Messiah who came to die for what we have done and how we have failed.

## **Preparation Increases with Expectation**

Have you ever considered how you would prepare for your life if you expected **Jesus** to be sitting at your house when you got home?

How would you prepare for church if you knew that **God Almighty** was going to show up and meet you when you got there?

How would you spend your time getting ready in the morning if you knew the **Holy Spirit** was just waiting to tell you something amazing as soon as you were ready to listen?

If you knew you were living in the **Last Days**, would you do things differently?

If we had such expectations, surely it would affect our preparations for each season and each day.

God is always ready to meet us as we reach out to meet Him. God's Word is alive and active, and God is willing to speak to us if we are willing to read and listen. We can be certain that all of us are in our own individual Last Days regardless of how long it takes for Jesus to return. Perhaps knowing that Emmanuel is here with us now, was here with us yesterday, and will be here with us tomorrow should change the way we prepare for our life today and into the future.

## **Preparation Brings Fruit**

There is one test that demonstrates whether or not you or another person has repented: your behavior will change. Suppose someone commits a sin against you but then apologizes. You forgive. But what happens if they do the same thing again – have they really repented? We are not talking about forgiveness here. Forgiveness is found in the strength of the cross, not the strength of our apologies or will. We are talking about repentance.

To witness true repentance you look for the fruit of the person's life. This reflects if they have had a change of heart. In the same way, the fruit of our lives shows our preparation through repentance. Sometimes the change is incremental, and it takes time until it's complete. But if you aren't walking away from the sin, you haven't repented of the sin.

I think the difference between feeling sorry for your sin and truly repenting is found in understanding how ugly and damaging the sin really is. We're sorry, but the need the sin meets, the draw the sin has for our life, or the habit we've built is stronger than our repulsion to the sin. That's why people often have to hit rock bottom before they can turn around. We have to see the real impact and ugliness of the sin. Its ugliness has to become great enough for us to say, "I'll do whatever it takes to never go there again. Lord God, please help me and show me where I can go and what I can do to turn my back on it and to be free of it." Our sincerity is proven in the way we live, the help we seek, the prayers we offer, and the choices we make.

Do you want to know if you're preparing for Christ's arrival? Do you want proof that you are getting ready for Advent? Just answer this question: **"Is my life bearing fruit?"** The test for a heart that is active in its preparation to meet Jesus is the test of whether or not we see evidence of fruit in our lives. There are all sorts of varieties of spiritual fruit: increased service, a closer relationship with God, a greater ability to encourage or care for others, a stronger family life, victory over sin, greater peace, deeper love.

**Think of your life three or four Christmases ago.** Do you have more fruit in your life? If so, keep going. You're getting ready. You are effectively preparing. If not, it's not too late to start bearing fruit. Repent of complacency, religion, or anything else holding you back. Draw near to Him in expectancy and look for ways to fruitfully live out your faith. Christmas is coming. The Second Advent is coming. In our expectation, let's get prepared.

### **Expected Rescue**

The promise Malachi and all the other prophets clung to was that they would be rescued. It's so important that we remember our preparation is not our salvation nor is it our rescue. Rather, our preparation is our response to what Jesus has already done for us and in us.

One thing I hope we understand about Christmas in the midst of the sentimentality of nativity scenes, in the soft sweetness of "Away in a Manger" is that Christmas was a rescue mission. And the One who came to our rescue wasn't some outgunned, outclassed, or hopeless underdog.

The One who came to our rescue was Emmanuel—God with us—who had the power and authority to call down all of the angels of heaven for His purposes and desires. The Ancient One humbled Himself to become fully man because we were the hostages being held captive by sin. Christmas was the beginning of a rescue mission that was conceived and carried out on our behalf by none other than God Himself.

Emmanuel. God with us. God has come. We have been rescued. And through His rescue, we have been saved and brought back home. Because the rescue is complete, our best response is to prepare in great expectation of the realization of all that Jesus has accomplished when we see Him at the Second Advent.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, this Advent let us not expect or prepare to be stressed out or overwhelmed; to have things fall apart or be defeated. Help us to wait expectantly for You to come through for us; for You to be revealed in our lives; to know that He is preparing us for heaven and chiseling away at the hardness of our hearts. Lord help us to wait expectantly for the plans You have for us and our church; for Your kingdom to advance; for the lost to be found and the blind to see; for Your love to be made known to a hurting and dying world through us as individuals, as a church and as a community and for Jesus to return and to claim His bride.