

Sermon for Advent 1 (Series C)

Text: Luke 21:25-36

Preached on 12-02-2007

Introduction:

I'm sure that your list of things to do before Christmas still has quite a few items on it. There are things like: Putting up the lights, trimming the tree, purchasing gifts, sending out Christmas cards, attending any number of parties, and perhaps doing some entertaining of your own. Not only are most of us wondering how we are going to get everything done, but sometimes we get so exhausted doing all of our Christmas preparations that we end up losing the real focus of the season. We get so caught up in the glamour and commercialism that we forget to prepare our hearts for the Lord. That is what makes Jesus' words to us today extremely timely. Jesus says that in the midst of the hustle and bustle of the Christmas Season there are some things that deserve a higher priority than the other items on our pre-Christmas "to-do" list. Jesus actually presents us with a different list all together. We call it...

The me: Our Advent To-Do List!

Part I: To Watch

Part II: To Listen

Part III: To Pray

Part I: To Watch

The first item on *Our Advent To-Do List* is to watch. That is, we are to watch for Jesus' return. At the beginning of this chapter Jesus and His disciples were at the temple in Jerusalem. The disciples were remarking how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God. That's when Jesus took this pleasant conversation in a more serious direction. He said, "**As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down**" (Luke 21:6). As you can imagine, the disciples wanted to know when this would happen and what signs would signal that it was about to take place. So Jesus spoke in more detail about the coming destruction of Jerusalem. But He also spoke about the cataclysmic events that would announce the end of the world. That is why we include watching on *Our Advent To-Do List*!

Application:

Even as we're preparing to celebrate Jesus' first coming through His birth in Bethlehem, it's important to remember that His second coming will take place in a very different fashion. Not quiet, but with the

thunderous sound of trumpets. Not unnoticed, but impossible not to notice as His glory fills the sky. The first time Jesus came, a single star served as a sign for the Wise Men. The second time Jesus comes, **“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars” (v. 25)**. We’re pretty good at picking up on some signs. When the temperature drops, the snow flies, and the decorations go up, for example, we know that Christmas is right around the corner. So also, when we see the signs in the sun, moon, and stars; when we see the heavenly bodies being shaken, we should conclude that, **“Our redemption is drawing near” (v. 28)**. That is what we are to watch for.

But do we live each day in anticipation of Jesus’ coming? I’m not sure we always do. I’m reminded of the commercial in which a fellow answers his door and it’s the sweepstakes prize patrol. He casually says, “Thanks, I’m good” and shuts the door. Is that how we feel about the second coming of Jesus: “Thanks, I’m good”? A response like that is just another indication that we are not thinking about how desperately we need a Savior. The time is coming, though, when earth’s joys are going to grow dim and its glories are going to pass away. Without Jesus, we would pass away too. BUT Jesus changed all that by His first coming. That’s why when the heavenly bodies are being shaken and the unbelieving world is fainting from terror, we can stand up and lift up our heads in joy and confidence. Until then, we are called upon to watch.

Transition:

Being well prepared for Jesus’ coming is a matter of using our eyes and watching for the signs of His return. But there is also a role for our ears in preparing for Jesus to come. The second item on *Our Advent To-Do List* is...

Part II: To Listen

To emphasize what He’s been saying, Jesus adds, **“I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened” (v. 32)**. Some people think this passage refers to that specific *generation* or group of people Jesus spoke these words to. But 2000 years have passed. Not only did that *generation* pass away, but many other *generations* have passed away since. So Jesus must have been wrong. But as the footnote in the NIV indicates, the word for *generation* here can also be translated “race.” It makes sense that Jesus would be talking about the Jewish race here. Earlier He had described the destruction of Jerusalem and how the city would be trampled by the

Gentiles. Nevertheless, the Jewish people would not be extinguished. Their race would continue to exist until Jesus' return. Then Jesus added, **"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away"** (v. 33). This text is proof of that. Here we are, about 2,000 years after Jesus said these things and we are still listening to His words. That is why we include listening on *Our Advent To-Do List!*

Application:

The Bible's message is timeless. Its Good News is for every *generation*. Since that is the case, it's important that we listen to it. Unfortunately, that's frequently one of the first casualties of this busy season. We shrug and say, "There's just no time." No time to sit at Jesus' feet. No time to let His Law rebuke us or His Gospel comfort us. We convince ourselves that it's not possible to carve out an extra hour of time on Wednesday evenings to allow God's Spirit to speak to our hearts. By staying away from God's Word when we could be in it, we're showing God exactly where He ranks on our "to-do" list.

That's why to listen is at the top of the "to-do" list God has prepared for us. This is the spirit that says with the boy Samuel, **"Speak, for your servant is listening"** (1 Samuel 3:10). This is the spirit of Mary, **"Who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said"** (Luke 10:39). This is the spirit that recognizes that the Savior who is going to return one day meets with us regularly in His Word to prepare us for that day. He prepares us by leading us to repent of our sins and by assuring us that our sins ARE forgiven and that Heaven IS ours. That is why we can't get enough of God's Word. We want to listen to it often.

Transition:

Because our redemption is drawing near, we have every reason to stand up and to lift up our heads in joyful anticipation of Jesus' return. But what if we are still apprehensive of that day? The answer then is the third item on *Our Advent To-Do List*. It is...

Part III: To Pray

Jesus says to, **"Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man"** (v. 36). Watchfulness and prayer go hand-in-hand. What Jesus said to His disciples at that critical hour in Gethsemane, He still says to us today. When Jesus came back from praying in the Garden, He wanted to find His disciples praying. So also, when He comes back from Heaven, He wants to find us praying.

As we pray, we acknowledge our dependence on God to turn our fears and apprehensions into joyful anticipation of His return. That is why we include praying on *Our Advent To-Do List!*

Application:

During this season there is just so much evidence that people are being, **“Weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life” (v. 34).** The thing about using alcohol as an escape is that the problems are still there afterwards. Very likely they are made worse by the person’s excessive drinking. Excessive drinking, though, isn’t the only thing that dulls our awareness to the certainty of Jesus’ return. Any behavior that has mastered us rather than our mastering it: Whether it’s excessive time in front of the television; excessive time on the computer; or excessive Christmas preparations, can get us sidetracked from focusing on the real reason for the season.

In the frenzy of choices of how we spend our time, God calls on us to spend it in prayer. Prayer never weighs us down! Those who pray with a believing heart have the assurance that God will hear and answer. Specifically, He will answer our prayers by enabling us to escape all the horrible events that will come upon our world and then to stand before Him on the Day of His return in confidence. Each time we pray, “Deliver us from evil,” we are asking our heavenly Father not only to deliver us from evil, but also to grant us a blessed end and to graciously take us to Himself in Heaven. Until Jesus’ return, that is our prayer.

Conclusion:

Today marks the beginning of a brand new Church Year. It is also a time when it is difficult to stay focused on the whole point of the Season. Advent aims to prepare us for Christmas by directing us to God’s grace in keeping His promise to send a Savior. But very easily the focus of the Season can be misdirected to other things. We spend most of our time thinking about all the things we have to do these next few weeks. That’s why it is good, at the beginning of Advent, to set our sights on what’s most important. Otherwise we might emerge on the other side of the Christmas Season just relieved the whole thing is over, with little more to show for it than thinner wallets and thicker waistlines. To prevent that, Jesus urges us (1) To Watch, (2) To Listen, and (3) To Pray. This is *Our Advent To-Do List!* Amen!