

December 1, 2013 – First Sunday of Advent
“Be Ready”
Matthew 24:36-44

[Joke]

That’s no way to treat an unexpected guest.

My sister was dating the man who would become her husband. He wanted me to meet his parents. We drove out to Brooklyn, he lived on 86th Street. We went in to his house, but before he could say anything his mother said, “I don’t want your friends in here, they have to leave, everybody out!” And he said, “No, mom, this is my girlfriend’s brother.” And she said, “I don’t care who he is, I want him out of here.”

That was not a very nice way to treat me, was it? Maybe it would have been different if she knew I was coming.

Imagine you have a brother who lives a great distance from you in another state, so you don’t get to see him and his family much. He calls to tell you he and his family (wife and children) would like to come and spend a week with you during Christmas. You’re thrilled; you haven’t seen him and his family in two years. Think for a moment about how you would prepare for their coming. Perhaps you would plan to make his favorite meal; you’d plan where to take them, perhaps to the city, Rockefeller Plaza to see the tree. Maybe you would plan to buy a few more gifts so they can open presents with your family on Christmas morning.

Now, think about how the situation might be different if on Christmas morning you wake up exhausted from getting home so late on Christmas Eve. You are still in your pajamas, so is the rest of the family. Your hair is sticking up all over the place. The kids are in a frenzy ripping open their gifts. Just then, the doorbell rings. You go to the door and there stands your brother and his family, announcing that they are there to stay a week to celebrate the holidays with you. “Surprise!” How would you feel?

Most of us would agree that we would rather be prepared for a visitor than be caught off guard by someone’s arrival.

Today begins Advent, a time of preparation, expectation and great anticipation, but what exactly are we expecting and anticipating? What are we getting ready for?

- Decking the halls or trimming the tree?
- Emptying our bank accounts with a month long shopping spree?
- Wrapping gifts?
- Baking cookies?
- Anxiety, stress, rage, exhaustion, maybe even depression?
- A truth of a child born some 2000 years ago, a truth that has become abstract, religiously and unrealistically cleaned up, and second in importance?
- The end of the world, the second coming of Jesus, and judgement?

Advent means, "coming." During Advent we anticipate Christmas when we will celebrate the coming of Christ, born in Bethlehem, in a dirty stable, cradled in a manger, which the animals of the stable ate from. A birth announced by angels and surrounded in mystery. A child who is God in the flesh, come to give His life in the tragedy of the cross, to take away the sin of the world.

But there is another Advent. We do anticipate a second coming of Christ. Not a baby born in a stable, placed in a manger, sent as a sacrifice; but Jesus, Our Savior, Lord, and King; coming not to die on a cross as in His first coming, but to reign forever as King.

At Christmas, we celebrate Christ's coming to earth. Today, we will look at what Jesus said about being prepared for His second coming.

Matthew 24:36-44

36 "However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows.

37 "When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah's day. **38** In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. **39** People didn't realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes.

40 "Two men will be working together in the field; one will be taken, the other left.

41 Two women will be grinding flour at the mill; one will be taken, the other left.

42 "So you, too, must keep watch! For you don't know what day your Lord is coming. **43** Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would keep watch and not permit his house to be broken into. **44** You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected.

In this story, Jesus gathered the crowds around Him, and announced to them that they should always be prepared for the coming of the Son of Man (a term Jesus used often to describe Himself). He spoke of the ways we should be prepared for His second coming.

1. We must live in a state of preparation and readiness for the second Advent (coming) of Christ.

- (v36) "However, no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows."

Jesus said no one knows the day or hour of His return, only the Father. When He became human, even Jesus didn't know the day or hour, perhaps He does now, but He didn't know then because of His human limitations. Jesus gave signs to watch for, but no one knows the exact time. No one can predict by Scripture or

any other means the day and time of His return. If anyone predicts it, don't listen to them, they are false prophets. Jesus is letting us know that calculation is not what's important, what's important is preparation. He wants us to be watchful. What might happen if people knew the exact date? They could be tempted to become complacent and lazy in their service to the Lord. Or worse, they could be tempted to go on sinning, planning to repent at the very last minute.

- (vv37-39) "When the Son of Man returns, it will be like it was in Noah's day. In those days before the flood, the people were enjoying banquets and parties and weddings right up to the time Noah entered his boat. People didn't realize what was going to happen until the flood came and swept them all away. That is the way it will be when the Son of Man comes.

Again Jesus is warning us to be vigilant. Just as in the days of Noah, today there are many who disregard God and His Word. Just as in the days of Noah, people go about their daily business, not aware or not caring about the warning signs. And just as when the flood came and people were caught by surprise, and it was too late, so it is the same for the second coming of Christ. He will return when people least expect it.

- (vv40-41) "Two men will be working together in the field; one will be taken, the other left. Two women will be grinding flour at the mill; one will be taken, the other left.

People today go about their business without thinking about Christ's return. However, in an instant He will return; even as people are going about their daily routines of working, playing, and socializing. Some will be taken and some will not, why? Because one was ready, one was not. Some are prepared for His coming, some not. People's choices determine their eternal destiny, and those who are prepared will live eternally with God.

2. Being prepared means that we must be watchful; not with impatient and anxious waiting, but by seeking to give honor and glory to God in all areas and aspects of our lives.

- (v42) "So you, too, must keep watch! For you don't know what day your Lord is coming.

Jesus' reason for speaking to the crowd about His return is to warn them to be ready. This same warning applies to us today. Keep watch, for you don't know when the Lord is coming. His coming will be sudden, there will be no time for last minute repenting or bargaining. Be alert and constantly ready.

- (vv 43-44) Understand this: If a homeowner knew exactly when a burglar was coming, he would keep watch and not permit his house to be broken

into. You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected.

The reason Jesus tells of His return is to warn His people to be ready. A homeowner does not know if a thief might break in, therefore he must always be prepared and keep watch. We do not know when Christ will return and must be vigilant in keeping watch for His return.

3. Being prepared means living every day following in the footsteps of Christ.

- Being prepared means making sure our heart and life is right with God. We must be prepared to answer the question: Have we given our lives fully to God? Answer it today! Have you given your life fully to God?
- Being prepared means living every day in commitment to Christ. Not being caught by surprise means we follow the Holy Spirit's leading, read the Word, and pray—keeping our hearts in tune with God. We must follow Paul's words,

Philippians 4:8-9

Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned...

- Being prepared means we must share the good news of salvation with others. Christ came, died, and rose again in order that those who place their faith in Him could receive the forgiveness of sins, have a restored relationship with God, and live eternally with their heavenly Father. What role can you play in helping people near and far to come to faith in Jesus?
- Being prepared means helping others in their faith. Building others up, encouraging them, inspiring them. How can you help other Christians?
- Being prepared means we reach out to others with the love Christ—serving and ministering to the needs of others. God's people should be everywhere shining the light of Christ, sharing the love of Christ: Home, school, neighborhood, job. What are you doing about it?

Jesus did not share the message about His second coming with people to make them paranoid or to make them spend all their time and effort trying to predict when He would return. The message to the crowd that day, and to us, is that if we live every day in relationship with Christ, we will be prepared. May we live every day ready for His return!