

Christ is Coming:
Get Ready
Luke 3:1-6

Last week we talked about how Advent is the season for preparing to celebrate the coming of Christ. Which raises the question, which coming of Christ: Christ's coming two thousand years ago on Christmas Day or Christ's coming some day at the end of this age? And the answer is, yes. During the Advent Season we remind ourselves that just as certainly as Christ came over 2,000 years ago to establish this present age, he will come again someday at the end of this age to lead us into a new age.

John's message to the people of his time was that it was very important to prepare for the coming of Christ. If he were here today, he would be saying very much the same thing to us. It is vitally important that we prepare for the second coming of Christ.

Why is it so important? Because, the way we prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ is to prepare the way for Christ to come. Remember Isaiah's prophecy: A voice will cry out in the wilderness, telling the Lord's to people to prepare the way for his coming by building a road for him to travel on as he comes to us. We are to make a path that is straight and level, filling in the low places and leveling the hills, smoothing the rough places. We are to build a highway for Christ to travel when he comes to us again.

Now, obviously neither Isaiah nor John meant that we were literally to build a road. But we can do something to prepare the way for the coming of Christ. What is that? John told the people to prepare for the first coming of Christ by changing their ways and living more righteous lives.

That's exactly what we need to do. We are to prepare the way for the coming of Christ by living more righteous lives. How does that prepare the way for the coming of Christ? Well, let me explain with a story.

When my children were small, I had to go to a conference which lasted several days. I hated to be gone so long, because I really enjoyed being with my family. When the conference ended, as I was driving home, I pictured the scene when I got home. I imagined throwing open the door and stepping in, and my family all jumping up in joy and surprise and running to greet me with loving arms.

When I finally got home, I went to the door and was about to throw it open and surprise everyone. But about that time I heard my daughter yell something at my son, and my son screamed in fear. I could hear clumping and banging, as she chased him through the house. I knew that if I went in then, I would have to come in as the stern father to scold them and punish them. That wasn't the homecoming I wanted or had in mind. So, I waited. My wife grabbed them before they did any harm to each other, and I heard her talking to them. Whatever problem they were having, she helped them get it worked out. Then, when they were quietly behaving themselves, that's when I made my grand entrance to be greeted joyfully by my loving family.

When Christ comes, it will be Judgment Day for the world. Christ will have to rebuke the cruel, the mean-spirited, the greedy, the uncaring, the selfish, those who are petty, the grudge-holders, and all the others who have allowed evil to overcome them and work through them to diminish the goodness of life.

That is not the scene Christ wants at his coming. Christ wants his coming to be a day of joy and celebration for as many as possible. He wants to be able to say to as many of us as possible, "Well done, thou good and faithful servants. Enter into the joy of your master."

I once heard a preacher make the statement that people are praying for Christ to come soon, but not him. He said, "I know too many people who aren't ready for Christ to come. My prayer is, 'Lord, give us a little more time while we try to help those people get ready for your coming.'"

How do we prepare for Christ's coming? John told the people to prepare by repenting and changing the way they acted. He said that those who have two coats should share with those who have none. The tax collectors should stop collecting more taxes than the people are due and keeping the extra for themselves. He told soldiers to stop threatening to falsely accuse people in order to extort money from them. In other words, John told them to prepare for the coming of the Messiah by living more righteous lives.

What we are to do to prepare for the coming of Christ is a bit more. Jesus taught us that the way we live reflects the condition of our hearts. We are to prepare the way of the Lord by repenting of who we are, not just what we do.

I have a pocket watch my wife gave me. It's a beautiful pocket watch. The problem is that it doesn't keep time very well. I have to reset it several times a day. But that's not the real solution, is it? You see, there's something wrong with the internal workings of this watch. What I need to do is take it to a watch repairman and have him repair it.

When we simply try to change the way we act, we are resetting a broken clock. What we need to do is have our hearts repaired. We prepare the way of the Lord by bowing before Christ and saying, "Lord, forgive me a sinner." Then we place our hearts in Christ's hands and allow him to mend our hearts. Righteous living follows a righteous heart.

Christ is waiting for the world to decide for righteousness. Whenever one of us decides to repent and to live a better life, we bring the day of Christ's coming a little closer. We are preparing the way for the coming of Christ.

So, during this Advent Season, John is challenging us to look at ourselves. Are you committed to the highest standards justice and righteousness? Are you being fair and honest in all your dealings? Are you reaching out to all your neighbors, throughout our community and throughout the world, with love and kindness?

John called upon the people to prepare for the coming of Christ by repenting. That is still the way to prepare for the coming of Christ. Repentance is to take a long, hard look at yourself and to pray, "Lord, I'm not satisfied with the person I am and the life I am living. I want to be a better person, and I want to live a better life. Here are the changes I need to make to be better and to do better. Lord, forgive me for what I have been and what I have done. I have decided to live a better life with your help."

When we pray the prayer of repentance, Christ hears and forgives. And Christ will help us to change. We can't do it on our own. But if we sincerely want to change, Christ will enable us to make those changes.

And when we make those changes, we are building a straight road for the coming of Christ. We are filling in the valleys and leveling the hills that are impediments for the coming of Christ. We are straightening out our crooked ways and smoothing our rough places.

And when Christ comes, we will be able to celebrate without reservation. Christ's coming will be a day of jubilation and not a day of fear and shame.

So, here is the question we should ask ourselves during the Advent Season. Are our lives roadblocks to the coming of Christ? Or, are we preparing the way for the coming of Christ in the way we live?

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