

Our anticipation is about being real about what will happen and positioned to welcome Jesus' return rather than fear it.

QUESTION How would you explain in your own words to someone who doesn't really believe in God, that there's a day of judgment coming, but they can turn to Jesus who has made a way for them.

1 Thess. 3:9-13 – Be blameless and holy, anticipating the Lord's return

Live expecting the imminent return of Christ Jesus with His heavenly retinue.

9-10 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.

"Thank God... for you" – the church in Thessalonica had been tested, as Paul had himself, in strong local opposition and rough treatment in Philippi, 1 Thess. 2:2,14-16; 1 Thess. 3:7. Testing is part of Christian life and persecuting opposition is to be expected, Paul has already made clear, 1 Thess 3:3-4. However, he is greatly concerned for this church of believers new in their faith.

"Supply what is lacking" – the mission team's teaching was cut short when they had to leave suddenly, 1 Thess 2:17. Part of the purpose of the letter is to make good the shortfall.

11-12 Now may our God and Father Himself and our Lord Jesus clear the

way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

"May our God... may the Lord... may He strengthen" – Paul's lifestyle of prayer is such that he breaks into prayer in his letter. In this prayer he is in effect asking God, but in the manner of making a declaration in faith, in agreement with God's purposes.

13 May He strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all His holy ones.

"When our Lord Jesus comes" – in Paul's mind is the Second Coming which he will discuss more fully later in the letter, 1 Thess. 4:1-5:22. "With all His holy ones" – used of Christian believers, often translated 'saints', in many passages in the NT e.g. Romans 1:7. Could also refer to the angels who will accompany the Second Coming.

IN PRACTICE The church calendar and its seasons was an idea that arose many centuries after Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica. However, A for Anticipation in the ABCD of Advent was something that Paul lived out and taught. "When our Lord Jesus comes" is a clear statement of anticipation, the sense of keeping the house clean and tidy for the important visitor expected to drop in at any time. To personalise it, we can see the 'house' as representing our lives, so that 'clean and tidy' is about keeping short accounts with God in confessing sin and tidying up our wrong priorities.

QUESTION In the words of v. 13, will you be found blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father - if Jesus comes again now? Reflecting on the OT and Gospel readings and notes, how do you know the answer?

PRAYER Lord, show me what in me is getting in the way of the coming of the kingdom in its fullness? What in me needs to be put out of my life, put right with You, put in a better place spiritually or forgiven in my relationships with others? Amen.

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The Living Word

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The Bible readings for Sunday, Dec. 2, 2018, with commentary notes

Revised Common Lectionary readings for **Sunday, December 2**, in Bible order
Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand - read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Theme: **Advent ABCD: Anticipate - the coming of the kingdom**

Psalm 25:1-10 - Anticipation founded on confidence in God's goodness

Jeremiah 33:14-16 - The Lord to become our righteousness, foretold

Luke 21:25-36 - Anticipation of final redemption in end-times turmoil

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 - Be blameless and holy, anticipating the Lord's return

INTRODUCTION The Lord Himself will become righteousness for us, offering us a radical new relationship with God. Yet to come is the full and final redemption and its turmoil of end-time signs, but the anticipation for believers is not fear, but joy, living in daily expectation of Christ Jesus returning with His heavenly retinue.

Psalm 25:1-10 – Anticipation founded on confidence in God's goodness

A preface to the theme of looking forward to God's kingdom coming in full

1-2 In You, Lord my God, I put my trust. I trust in You; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.

"I trust in You... shame" – honour and its opposite, shame, were emphasised in Jewish culture and the psalms make frequent mention of trust in the Lord as the way to avoid being shamed, Ps. 22:5, 31:1, 69:6, 71:1 etc.

3 No one who hopes in You will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause.

"Hopes in You... shame" – hope, unlike the weaker, aspirational English meaning, is a solid confidence in God's good purpose, Ps. 33:22, 130:5. Hope, which is trusting in God's covenant goodwill, answers the threat of shame.

4-6 Show me Your ways, Lord, teach me Your paths. Guide me in Your truth and teach me, for You are God my Saviour, and my hope is in You all day long.

Remember, Lord, Your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.

"Your ways... paths... truth... great mercy and love" – language recalling God's covenant with His people. The Lord has promised to return again, at which time His Way will be fully established.

7 Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to Your love remember me, for You, Lord, are good.

8-10 Good and upright is the Lord; therefore He instructs sinners in His ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them His way. All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of His covenant.

"Good and upright" – because God is perfectly good and upright, He must extend mercy to humble, i.e. repentant, believers while not allowing the guilty and rebellious to escape judgment.

Jeremiah 33:14-16 – The Lord to become our righteousness, foretold

Anticipation of an ancient promise to be fulfilled in a radical new relationship

14 "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will fulfil the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.

"The days are coming" – looking forward from Babylonian conquest to a time of restoration, but also to a future time beyond that. The discussion of sheep and shepherds becoming visible again, Jer. 33:12-13, leads naturally into the prophecy of the Shepherd and Saviour of David's line to come, in what we know as the first coming of Jesus and we anticipate as the second coming of the Messiah king.

15 "In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; He will do what is just and right in the land.

"Righteous branch" – similar language to Jer. 25:5-6.

16 In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteous Saviour."

"Judah will be saved and Jerusalem..." – The Messiah's coming will be transformational.

IN PRACTICE In the ABCD of Advent, we start with Anticipation, not of Jesus being born at Bethlehem (that happened!) but of a potentially terrifying time when Jesus as the heavenly host will come again. How will we be counted on that Day of the Lord? Righteous or unrighteous? Jeremiah was prophesying in the first instance about his own people, symbolised by Judah and Jerusalem being saved by the 'righteous branch' of David's line, the Anointed One or Messiah – for us, Christ (anointed one) Jesus. Like many prophecies, this extends over more than one time and happening. Jesus will come again – which we are to hold as an immediate prospect, not a distant one. However, the heart of the Gospel is in this Old Testament verse about the Lord our righteousness. Keeping the Law was hard, but Jeremiah foretells how the Lord will Himself become righteousness for sinful man. It's not our good works but only our heartfelt response to Jesus, receiving Him as Saviour that releases us from judgment. This confronts our ideas about earned merit (and at times the Church has been muddled about this), but believing and receiving Jesus, the gate for the sheep is crystal clear through the NT.

PRAYER *Lord, help me to be clear about what You have done for me in a way that I could not have earned in any way; and clear in sharing this saving truth with others.*

Jerusalem – the holy community – will be so changed that it will be called by the same name as its Saviour, "The Lord our Righteousness (Yahweh tsidqenu)". This is one of the great covenant names of God, prophetically ascribed in Jeremiah 23:6 to the Messiah. His work is to be our righteousness. Those who have given their lives to Jesus will be counted as righteous in Him.

For further study read John 10:9, 11:26, John 14:6, John 3:16; and coupled with the warning about God's wrath, John 3:36.

"Live in safety" – this prophecy was given while the Babylonians were breaking down the walls of Jerusalem and removing people and property.

17-18 For this is what the Lord says:

"David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of Israel, nor will the Levitical priests ever fail to have a man to stand before me continually to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to present sacrifices."

"David will never fail" – meaning, the covenant with David (and other covenants), will not fail even in the judgment coming on Jerusalem.

Luke 21:25-36 – Anticipation of final redemption in end-times turmoil

Believers are to recognise the signs of the Son of Man coming again, in joy and trust

25-27 'There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

"There will be signs" – Jesus' focus is now on the end times, an allusion to Joel 2:30-31, also quoted by Luke (writer of Acts) in Acts 2:20. The prophets expected arresting celestial signs at the end of age, Isaiah 13:9-10; Jer. 4:23,28; Ezek. 32:7-8; Joel 2:10.

"They will see" – the second coming of the Son of Man will be a visible return accompanied by turmoil of the elements, and many people will be distressed, not knowing what is happening.

28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.'

"When these things... take place" – in the turmoil, believers are to look up in joy and trust, knowing that these are signs of the deliverance of Jesus' followers in the final redemption, 1 Cor. 15:53; Romans 8:23.

29-31 He told them this parable: 'Look at the fig-tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

IN PRACTICE Jesus taught about the end times, and His language conveyed a sense of urgency and expectancy, even if He also set out the kind of eternal time scale that no calendar can represent. As believers, we are to live in constant expectation of His sudden return, although the teaching gives us the kind of warning we should expect – being watchful and observant, as country people are about weather and seasons and threats to their livestock. A for Anticipation gets us thinking about where we stand with the Lord, should He return – now! The "suddenly" He speaks of will show last-minute decisions to be false decisions.

"Look at the fig-tree" – leaves appear and change appearance, heralding the seasons.

"When you see these things" – signs will show the kingdom coming fully.

32-33 'Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

"This generation" – Jesus was not setting a time for the present age to end. He continually emphasised a time scale between His being present with His disciples, and His return, Luke 21:9,12,24.

34-36 'Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. 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.'

"Will close on you suddenly" – but for those that will hear, not unannounced. For those who are not ready "that day" is judgment closing against them. The point of the discourse is to be ready and alert for Christ's return at any time.

"Suddenly... it will come on all those... on the whole earth" – the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem would follow in AD 70 but Jesus teaches that the Day of the Lord will be a crisis encounter for everyone, not just the Jews.