

church fellowship and its gifts, not as his but as the Lord's. Compare Romans 1:8

5 For in Him you have been enriched in every way – with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge –

"All kinds of speech" — Corinth prized oratorical skill and Corinthians exalted spiritual gifts of speech and revelation.

6 God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.

"Confirming" — used in legal documents in the sense of guaranteeing. Paul and companions had preached the gospel to Corinth, they had accepted it and their changed lives and growing in spiritual gifts (v.5, v.7) confirmed it.

b Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

SUMMARY The church in Corinth is keenly waiting for the Lord Jesus to be revealed, in His visible return. Meanwhile they were celebrating their changed lives with a growing experience of the gifts of the Spirit. Together this was creating an experience of the Lord's presence and a sense of anticipation which was attracting others.

APPLICATION Corinth had a high level of expectation, both of the Lord's presence among them and His return. That is a challenge to many of our present-day church congregations with their desire that this week's service will be the same as the last. Spiritual gifts and participation were part of 'Corinth's expectation culture' — and should be part of ours, so that the Lord will find us 'growing and going' — not managing a decline.

QUESTION *To what extent is today's church 'enriched' and 'not lacking in any spiritual gift'? How can we encourage the discovery and use of speaking and revelatory gifts mentioned here?*

PRAYER Lord Jesus, You have told us to watch for signs of Your return and to be spiritually active and engaged in our waiting.

We recognise our poverty of spiritual riches.

We are sorry for our low expectation of seeing You at work among us in each others' spiritual gifts.

Stir us up to a higher expectation of encountering You, and to humble ourselves and pray for a new turning to You before You come. Amen.

"As you eagerly wait..." — active, expectant waiting. "To be revealed" — similar language is used in 1 Thess. 1:7

8 He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Keep you firm" is the same word as "confirm" in v.6. "The day" is the Day of the Lord, "the end" is the soon-anticipated end of the age.

9 God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

"God is faithful" — and can be trusted to do what He has said He will do, including "keep you firm to the end", v.8 above. Waiting with anticipation is an exercise in developing faith.

• *For further study on God's faithfulness, 1 Cor.10:13; Deut. 7:9; 1 Thess. 5:24.*

The Living Word

Bible readings for Sunday, November 29, 2020, with explanatory notes

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Bible study on the RCL passages for **Advent Sunday, November 29**
Prepare by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on the pulpit teaching

Theme: Raising our expectation of the Lord's presence as we wait

Isaiah 64:1-9 – An appeal by those who gladly do right

Mark 13:24-37 – Keep watch for Christ's return at any time

1 Corinthians 1:3-9 – Equipped by the Lord to wait expectantly

Also read: Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19

Isaiah 64:1-9 – An appeal by those who gladly do right

Followers of God's ways are compliant, like clay shaped by the potter

1 Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before You!

"Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down" — Isaiah sees the heavens like a curtain to be torn apart and appeals to Yahweh to reveal Himself in dramatic action to challenge the attitudes of His people.

• *For further study see Exodus 19:16-18; Isaiah 51:6; Psalm 18:9, Psalm 144:5.*

2 As when fire sets twigs ablaze and causes water to boil, come down to make Your name known to your enemies and cause the nations to quake before You!

"Make Your name known" — God's name stands for His nature in Hebrew thought.

3 For when You did awesome things that we did not expect, You came down, and the mountains trembled before You.

4 Since ancient times no one has heard, no ear has perceived, no eye has seen any God besides You, who acts on behalf of those who wait for Him.

"No eye has seen" — a version of this verse is quoted by Paul in 1 Cor. 2:9.

"Those who wait for Him" — this waiting for God is active, attentive and expectant, not passive. Compare Isaiah 30:18.

5 You come to the help of those who gladly do right, who remember Your

ways. But when we continued to sin against them, You were angry. How then can we be saved?

"Come to the help" — when Israel and Judah continued to forget God's ways and abandon the framework of the covenant, first the northern kingdom of Israel would fall to Assyria, followed by the fall of Judah and Jerusalem and further exile and dispersion.

6 All of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

"Righteous acts like filthy rags" — sin and guilt have left Israel carrying out a parody of their rituals in their soiled and disgusting state.

"Like a leaf ... [in] the wind" — a picture of how sin leaves us as easily blown away as chaff, Isaiah 17:13, 40:24, Psalm 1:4

7 No one calls on Your name or strives to lay hold of You for You have hidden Your face from us and have given us over to our sins.

"No one calls on Your name" — calling on His name is calling on His compassionate and gracious character, Exodus 34:5-7. The response to difficulty the Lord looks for is fervent repentant prayer, 2 Chronicles 7:14.

8 Yet You, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, You are the potter; we are all the work of Your hand.

"We are the clay" — recalls Isaiah 29:16. The clay is not to attempt to define the pot that is made by the potter, Isaiah 29:16, Isaiah 45:9; Jeremiah 18:6.

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9 Do not be angry beyond measure, Lord; do not remember our sins forever. Oh, look on us, we pray, for we are all Your people.

"Look on us, we pray" — recalling the promise

SUMMARY Isaiah appeals to Yahweh to become a dramatic and visible presence as He did before calling Moses up the mountain at Sinai, Exodus 19. He pleads with God to come to the help of those who keep His ways and do what is right, while recognising the way the nation has lapsed into sin. It is faithlessness and lack of prayer which has invoked the Lord's anger. The appeal is based on a pledge of submission, like clay in the potter's hand.

- They have failed to keep alive the memories of what the Lord has done among them;
- They have continued to sin against His ways, even while seeing the Lord come to the help of righteous people;
- Their prayer life, and their whole relationship with the Lord, has collapsed.

APPLICATION In our secular and largely unbelieving culture, appealing to "make Your name known" is a good basis for a biblical prayer for God to make known again His love, His justice – and His holiness. These are common failings, for us now as well as then. They are all causes of faith malaise – and without faith we cannot please the Lord, Hebrews 11:6.

QUESTION *From this passage, what is Advent about?* See verses 2 and 4 and 7.

Mark 13:24-37 – Keep watch for Christ's return at any time

Faith is needed, not speculation, and noticing the signs of the spiritual season

24-25 "But in those days, following that distress, 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

"In those days" — an OT expression of the Messianic age.

"The sun will be darkened" — the prophecy Jesus quotes was initially against Babylon but clearly looks ahead more generally, "I will punish the world for its evil", Isaiah 13:10-11. The "day of the Lord" was God's day of reckoning which often combined short-term consequences with the prospect of the end-time judgment to come.

26-27 "At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And He will send His angels and gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

that the Lord will turn from His anger, Isaiah 54:7-8. The appeal to the Lord to "act on behalf of those who wait for Him" and "come to the help of those who...do right, who remember Your ways" is the theme of hope, the confident expectation based on the Lord's covenant mercy.

28 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near.

"The Son of Man coming in clouds" — visibly fulfilling Daniel's prophecy, Daniel 7:13-14.

"Lesson from the fig tree" — which reveals the different seasons; the changing spiritual 'seasons' also show signs.

29-30 "Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

"This generation... until all these things have happened" — the siege and destruction of Jerusalem occurred less than 40 years later – within a generation. The Early Church saw this as more far-reaching, and exhorted members to live with an expectation of the imminent return of the Lord. Elsewhere, "this evil generation" is all those remaining until Christ returns to establish His kingdom, Matt. 12:45; Luke 11:29.

31 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.

"Never pass away" — 1 Peter 1:23-25.

32 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

"Only the Father" — on earth Jesus lived by faith, and warns us to do likewise and not speculate.

33 "Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.

• *For further study* see 1 Peter 4:7; 1 John 2:18; James 5:8-9 (also Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 7:29; Phil. 4:5; Heb. 10:25; Rev. 22:20).

34-35 "It's like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep

watch. Therefore keep watch because you do not know when the owner of the house will come back – whether in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or at dawn.

"Like a man going away" — a parable only in Mark.

"The one at the door" — the doorkeeper was to remain alert at all times for any sign of the master returning. Living in the expectation that the return of Jesus (*parousia*) is at hand is difficult in a science-aware age which values what is evidence-based. But this was not a mistake on the part of Jesus, or a misunderstanding by the Early Church. Ever since Jesus was born in Bethlehem, we have been living in the Last Days.

36-37 "If he comes suddenly, do not let him find you sleeping. What I say to you, I say to everyone: 'Watch!' "

SUMMARY Jesus reminds us that His words will always endure, but everything else is to be regarded as temporary. He will return and it will be a shaking encounter as never before. We are to live in daily expectation of it, even nearly 2,000 years later. Here is clear teaching to remember Jesus as if He has only just gone, and to live in the urgency of His coming again at any time despite history demanding a more reasoned explanation.

APPLICATION While we have been waiting for the end time visitation, there have been frequent encounters and renewals by the Lord through history. There's the Reformation that brought biblical literacy, the First Great Awakening of the 1700s that brought to prominence Whitefield and Wesley and Charles Simeon, and a century later the Second Great Awakening, the time when pastors and revivalists gathered thousands, and a move of church attendance and church building in both affluent areas and slums. Then the Welsh Revival of 1904-5 and the Pentecostal Revival following in 1907, the Hebrides Revival of the early 1950s and the widespread transformation of mainstream churches in charismatic renewal that started in the 1960s – and many more local revivals, like Cwm Bran in Wales recently, where God has come in response to the prayer and praise of His faithful people. These are the lessons of the fig tree and the preparation of all who will hear His call.

QUESTION *What does keeping watch involve, for us personally? What does it mean for us as a group or congregation?*

1 Corinthians 1:3-9 – Equipped by the Lord to wait expectantly

We need to be using all our spiritual enabling to pursue the Lord's mission

3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Grace and peace" — not just a traditional greeting but a calling-down of God's goodness:

the undeserved blessing from the kindness of God that is His grace; and the well-being and contentedness that the Holy Spirit gives on our response to the Good News.

4 I always thank my God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus.

"Thank my God for you" — Paul honours the