

Pay it Forward!

SERMON NOTES DECEMBER 15, 2024

The Third Sunday of Advent

Scripture: Luke 3:1-18

2 PETER 3:8-15 (THE MESSAGE)

8-9 Don't overlook the obvious here, friends. With God, one day is as good as a thousand years, a thousand years as a day. God isn't late with his promise as some measure lateness. He is restraining himself on account of you, holding back the End because he doesn't want anyone lost. He's giving everyone space and time to change.

10 But when the Day of God's Judgment does come, it will be unannounced, like a thief. The sky will collapse with a thunderous bang, everything disintegrating in a huge conflagration, earth and all its works exposed to the scrutiny of Judgment.

11-13 Since everything here today might well be gone tomorrow; do you see how essential it is to live a holy life? Daily expect the Day of God, eager for its arrival. The galaxies will burn up and the elements melt down that day—but we'll hardly notice. We'll be looking the other way, ready for the promised new heavens and the promised new earth, all landscaped with righteousness.

1 JOHN 3:11; 16-22

11 For this is the original message we heard: We should love each other. 16-17 This is how we've come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves. If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears. And you made it disappear.

18-20 My dear children, let's not just talk about love; let's practice real love. This is the only way we'll know we're living truly, living in God's reality. It's also the way to shut down debilitating self-criticism, even when there is something to it. For God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we do ourselves.

21-24 And friends, once that's taken care of and we're no longer accusing or condemning ourselves, we're bold and free before God! We're able to stretch our hands out and receive what we asked for because we're doing what he said, doing what pleases him. Again, this is God's command: to believe in his personally named Son, Jesus Christ. He told us to love each other, in line with the original command. As we keep his commands, we live deeply and surely in him, and he lives in us. And this is how we experience his deep and abiding presence in us: by the Spirit, he gave us.

MALACHI 3:8-12

Do honest people rob God? But you rob me day after day. "You ask, 'How have we robbed you?' "The tithe and the offering—that's how! And now you're under a curse—the whole lot of you—because you're robbing me. Bring your full tithe to the Temple treasury so there will be ample provisions in my Temple. Test me in this and see if I don't open up heaven itself to you and pour out blessings beyond your wildest dreams. For my part, I will defend you against marauders, protect your wheat fields and vegetable gardens against plunderers." The Message of God-of-the-Angel-Armies.

12 "You'll be voted 'Happiest Nation.' You'll experience what it's like to be a country of grace." God-of-the-Angel-Armies says so.

The "Advent" of Jesus, the impending celebration of his birth and the anticipation of his return, creates tension for us his followers. We expect his coming kingdom while still living in this world, causing us to question how we live and what we do with what we have. Is Jesus the reason for our season?

I. "PAYING" ATTENTION!

- A. The season of Advent calls us to be more alert, expectant and more "in tune" with Jesus! To pay closer attention to all that God has done, is doing, and will do! The Kingdom of God has come in Jesus and will come in all fullness!
- B. But if we're not careful and intentional, we can become pre-occupied by all the shopping, spending, giving, and getting that we forget whose birthday we are celebrating and how we "give" to Jesus!
- C. First Peter reminds us how we are to be living in this "tension" of Advent, between Christ's coming and coming again: *"Daily expecting God's Day and eager for its arrival....by living faithfully and holy...knowing that God is holding back the end because he doesn't want anyone lost!"*
- D. Advent calls us to "spend" ourselves differently! It may ask us to "spend less" money and consider how much is enough? "The challenge is to balance our desires with the needs of our communities and the rest of the world. This means that shopping will become less about entertainment and more about necessities! (The Advent Conspiracy)."
- E. First John speaks of the "Message" that we've heard from the beginning that defines who and whose we are... *"Love one another...this is how we've come to understand and experience love: Christ sacrificed his life for us. This is why we ought to live sacrificially for our fellow believers, and not just be out for ourselves."*

II. TOO CLOSE TO HOME!!

- A. The "conspiracy" of Advent causes us to feel our own "tension" with Jesus and his call on our lives. And Jesus sometimes hits too close home, too close to our pocketbooks, our credit cards, and our desires! "Christmas is a season of excess. It is difficult to walk against the crowd that seems to want nothing more than to 'eat, drink, and be merry.' Spending less requires us to plan, research, and cultivate relationships—pursuits that are more taxing than flipping through the latest catalog or bingeing at the mall (The Advent Conspiracy)."
- B. Advent calls us to be intentional about our relationship to God and God's people...our families, as well as the least, the last, and the lost! "If you see some brother or sister in need and have the means to do something about it but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love? It disappears. And you made it disappear (1 John 3:17)."

What might happen if we bought just one less gift this year and instead gave that money to help someone in need?

- C. "The best way we can break money's power is to give it away (The Advent Conspiracy)." C.S. Lewis writes, "I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I'm afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare.... there ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditures excludes them."

Perhaps we can reclaim this Advent season by giving more attention to Jesus by spending less on ourselves and giving more to care for the least, the last, and the lost!

Test me in this and see if I don't open up heaven itself to you and pour out blessings beyond your wildest dreams (Malachi 3:10)