

December 1, 2019

“Why We Celebrate Advent” by Pastor Ed Terry

Revelation 20:1 – 15; Colossians 3:1 – 17; Galatians 5:13 – 26; **Matthew 3: 1 – 12 (Sermon)**

We celebrate Advent for the four weeks before Christmas. Advent means the coming of Jesus Christ. One important part of Advent is to look back, thank God, and celebrate the fact that God loved us enough to send His one and only Son Jesus to save us from our sins. Another important part of Advent is to look ahead and to celebrate the fact that Jesus will come again to judge and destroy sin and evil. When Jesus returns again Jesus will establish His eternal kingdom on earth; a kingdom of love, peace, and righteousness. However, if we just focus on the past coming of Jesus or if we just focus on the future coming of Jesus we will miss the main message God intends for us today. During Advent we need to focus on the present. God’s message that John proclaimed is just as applicable to us today as it was 2000 years ago. John’s message is that God is going to do something very special and you and I need to prepare ourselves to receive it or we will miss out on the wonderful things God is about to do.

In verse 1 we see John’s message; ***“Repent For The kingdom of Heaven has come near.”*** Then in verse 11 tells us John preached a baptism of repentance? The word baptism means, *“Identification with.”* So a baptism of repentance means a person identifies with repentance. The Hebrew word *“baptizo”* first appeared in the Mosaic laws of purification where it symbolized washing or cleansing. Those people in John’s day were baptized as an outward sign to show that they had repented of their sins. So what does repent mean. Repent in the Greek is *“metanoia”* meaning, *“to change your mind”*. In repentance you make a conscious decision to turn from your sinful attitude and sinful acts and turn to Jesus. Throughout the Bible God’s people are called to repent.

Also in verse 11 we read that John’s message was a baptism of repentance and that Jesus will ***“baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”*** In John 14:15 Jesus promises The Indwelling Holy Spirit to all of His disciples who ***“love me and keep my commandments.”*** Fire in this context means the judgment that the people will receive that do not repent and accept Jesus the Christ as their savior.

Verse 7 says when John saw the Pharisees and Sadducees he said; ***“you brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?”*** John knew that these individuals were not coming for the right reasons. They came to look religious and to be identified with religious people. They were coming to be baptized because it was the thing to do. They came out of obligation and they came out of tradition. They did not come for the reason John was preaching; which was to ***“to prepare for the coming of The Lord”***. John was calling people to open up their hearts to prepare for Jesus coming to be their savior and for Jesus to be their king. This morning we all need to ask ourselves; *“why did I come here this morning?”* You see asking Jesus to be your Savior and to save you from spending eternity in hell is only the first step in your spiritual life. The next step in a person’s spiritual journey is to sincerely ask Jesus to change you, to mold you into His image, and to use you in advancing His kingdom on earth. You see Jesus wants to have a personal relationship with you and for you to be an active participant in of His kingdom on earth.

As Christians we like to think that we are righteous. But even after Jesus declares us righteous and saves us from burning in hell we still have a sinful nature and we continue to commit sinful acts. Isaiah 64:6 is clear; ***“all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away”***. But the Good News of Jesus is that; ***“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*** (1st John 1:9) Confession and repenting is not a one time exercise; confession and repentance has got to be a way of life for all Christians. The key to experiencing the peace, the joy, the love, the forgiveness, and the hope that Jesus offers begins by understanding that you are a sinner and that we all need to confess our sins, to turn away from our sins and to turn to Jesus.

John reminds us that we all need to prepare our hearts if we are to experience what God is doing and all that God wants to do in our life. Isn't it interesting that the people that display The Ten Commandments or a Bible verse about judgment in their front yard always point the sign towards the street? Their signs are never facing them. Until and unless we focus on our own sinful nature and our own sinful acts, what happened in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago is just a nice story instead of being the good news of the salvation of our souls. Until and unless we focus on our own sinful nature and our own sinful acts we will never experience the love of God in our daily life. Until and unless we focus on our own sinful nature and our sinful acts we will never experience the ***“peace that surpasses all understanding.”*** Until and unless we focus on our own sinful nature and our own sinful acts we will never experience the victorious abundant life that Jesus promised to His disciples. That is why John starts with ***“you brood of vipers.”*** First we must admit that we are rotten sinners, that God hates sin, God punishes sin, and that sin separates us from our holy God. Then John tells his listeners to repent.

Advent is a time for all of us to prepare ourselves for Jesus coming into our hearts and into our daily life. Advent is a time for self examination of our spiritual life. Advent is a time for all of us to meditate on our relationship with The Lord Jesus Christ. Advent is a time for all of us to ask God what we need to rearrange in our lives. Advent is a time for us to prepare for Jesus to change us and to mold us into His image. Advent is a time for all of us to prepare for the way for Jesus to use us and to be actively involved in advancing His kingdom on earth.

The good news is that God gives all believers His indwelling Holy Spirit to give us the power to resist temptation and sin. So Advent is also a time of rejoicing over the power that the Holy Spirit gives us. You see salvation has a past, present, and future aspect. Jesus has saved us from the **penalty** of our past sins. Jesus saves us from the **power** of sin in our present life. And in the future Jesus will free us from the **presence** of sin. Advent is a time to get serious about living like Jesus taught us to.

In Luke's account of John The Baptist's message the people ask ***“what should we do?”*** (Luke 3:10) That is the same question each one of us needs to ask ourselves this morning. What does Jesus want me to change in my life? What do I need to do to prepare my heart to receive and to enjoy all of the wonderful things God has prepared for me? John answered that question by saying; ***“produce fruit in keeping with repentance”*** (Matthew 3:8) John was not saying produce fruits to earn forgiveness. What John was saying was, produce fruit to show the world that Jesus Christ has changed you. You see we can and we should forgive other people because Jesus Christ has already forgiven us. We can and we should love our neighbor because God

first loved us. We can and we should help the person in need because God has richly provided for us. This morning we all need to ask ourselves ***“what fruit am I producing?”*** In the 5th chapter of Galatians we read that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Notice the Bible says The Fruit of The Spirit. Fruit is singular. So this morning we all need to ask ourselves *“are all nine characteristics of the fruit of The Spirit evident in my life?”* Not just one but all nine characteristics should be evident in the life of every Christian. If our life is not exhibiting all nine parts of The Fruit of The Spirit we need to repent and we need to reconnect to Jesus. Remember Jesus’ words; ***“I am the vine and you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.”*** (John 15:5)

John’s message calls each one of us to take an honest look at ourselves this morning. We all need to ask ourselves; *am I living a life pleasing to God? Am I living a fruitful life?* If not, we need to repent by turning away from our sins and turning to Jesus. We need to reconnect to Jesus. God designed our life on earth to prepare us for spending eternity with Him in heaven. So, *Have you asked Jesus to save you from spending eternity in hell? Have you made Jesus The Lord of every aspect of your life? Is there someone you need to forgive? Have you asked Jesus to use you in advancing His kingdom on earth? Do you have an unsaved friend or family member that you need to tell about Jesus? Have you been robbing God by not tithing and bringing your offerings to The Lord every week? Are you totally committed to serving The Lord in His church or have you said “not me”? What would you do this afternoon if you knew Jesus was going to call you home at 9:00 pm this evening? “Are you prepared to stand before Jesus and give an account of your life? Is 2019 just going to be another Advent or are you going to respond to John’s call to “***repent***” and to “***produce fruit in keeping with repentance***”? Are you going to truly concentrate on Jesus’ being a part of every aspect of your daily life, obeying all of Jesus’ commandments, being committed to living your life the way Jesus taught, asking Jesus to use you in advancing His Kingdom on earth, and trusting Jesus to fulfill all of His promises in your life?*

AMEN