

Waiting With Hope and Fervency 2021  
 Jeremiah 33:14-16 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13

### Jeremiah 33:14-16 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>{14}</sup>The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. <sup>{15}</sup> In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. <sup>{16}</sup> In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

### 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 (New Revised Standard Version)

<sup>{9}</sup>How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? <sup>{10}</sup> Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. <sup>{11}</sup> Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. <sup>{12}</sup> And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. <sup>{13}</sup> And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

When I taught Old Testament at a community college back in NC,  
 there was a young Marine in my class with no church background,  
 but who had a tremendous desire to learn and to understand.  
 He asked wonderful and fascinating questions about the material.

As an instructor it was pure joy, delight & incredibly satisfying  
 as he explored his own beliefs and his understanding deepened ...  
 ... and I think that's how the Apostle Paul was feeling  
 when he wrote this passage we read from 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians.

According to Acts 17,  
 Paul and Silas had proclaimed the Gospel among the Thessalonians.  
 But there had been fierce opposition, a major riot ensued,  
 & after just 3 weeks they were forced to flee for their lives.

During that brief stay, some folks had committed to following Christ,  
 but Paul hadn't had much time to instruct and teach them,  
 or to help them develop more fully and deepen their faith.

Paul was very concerned about this fledging new church community,  
 so he sent Timothy back to check on their progress,  
 who then returned with a very encouraging and glowing report...

... that despite heavy adversity and harsh persecution,  
 and the very short time that Paul had been with them  
 they were doing very well, growing and living faithfully.

The seeds of faith that Paul planted that seemed so vulnerable  
 had germinated, taken root, grown deeper and were spreading,  
 but, Paul's hasty and forced exodus  
 had left some holes in their theological understanding.

Delighted with reports of their progress, he writes to encourage them  
 as Paul looks forward to coming back, spending more time with them,

and helping them deepen and grow in their faith. vs. 9-10.

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

The book, this letter of 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians is probably the earliest New Testament document in our Bible.

Most scholars believe that it may have been written as early as perhaps 15-20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This was long before there was any formal organization or institutional church...  
... early believers simply gathered to share Jesus stories & teachings and they fully expected Jesus to return within their own lifetime.

This empowered them with a strong sense of immediacy and fervency that gave a freshness and urgency to their waiting, which after having waited centuries, today, we Christians may have lost.

I believe that one of our significant tasks and goals during Advent is to rekindle & reignite that flame of expectant hope & fervency that so energized the early Christian Church to do mission, **and that we may be lacking in our spiritual lives.**

The word, "Advent" comes from a Latin phrase that described how a village or community would prepare for a king's arrival by getting everything cleaned up, set and repaired, all ready to receive, and not disappoint the king.

The Apostle Paul wants the Thessalonian Christians to stay on track, and continue to grow deeper and ever more faithful, so that they are ready for the coming of the Lord...

... which is also an appropriate Advent message for us, vs. 12-13

And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Today we begin once again a journey that we've taken together before, our season of looking backward and forward to prepare and to wait.

Advent is the season when we celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ.

The hope & promise that was fulfilled by the incarnation of Christ, and we are waiting and we are preparing for his promised return.

**Like crossing a busy street, it's important that we look both ways so we don't miss out on any of the sights and wonders along the way.**

**The season of Advent is far more than just arriving at a destination, because done properly, Advent includes eager anticipation as we savor the sights and experiences along the way.**

When I traveled in the Middle East during seminary, a good friend and I knew it was a once in a lifetime opportunity, and so we were determined to absorb every bit of it we could.

In contrast, some of our fellow students and travelers, started playing hearts or spades at every opportunity...  
... while riding on the bus between the sites, waiting in hotels,

or in the evenings after dinner when we were free to wander.  
Today, I doubt that any can remember who won or lost those card games.

But my friend & I have rich memories of wonderful & unexpected sights,  
and remarkable things we saw outside the bus windows as we traveled,  
great conversations we had with other travelers while waiting,  
and though tired, all that we noticed & experienced  
while free to walk and wander on our own at night.

**We didn't just go from one destination to the next destination,  
but intentionally, we savored, explored and drank deeply,  
and experienced every bit of the journey all along the way.**

I want to live out, explore & experience my season of Advent like that  
for I want much more than just letting the season pass me by,  
or to arrive at Christmas without having received  
the full measure of blessings that God intends for me.

**So how do we do Advent well this year so to receive its full benefit,  
and let the full blessing of Advent truly enrich our Christmas?**

Our Advent-task is to create space in our lives where God can act,  
against cultural obstacles and distractions that can hinder  
our having a more blessed & meaningful Advent and Christmas.

Consider how easily the events and circumstances of our lives  
can deflect and derail our faith into despair or fearful worry  
in a world of conflict, violence, evil, Covid & other disasters,  
which can leave us feeling overwhelmed, lost and discouraged  
with fear & doubt, questioning **what is God up to in all this?**

Through the prophet Jeremiah we're given a different perspective.

When the passage we read from the prophet Jeremiah was written,  
the situation in Judah was desperate with disaster approaching,  
as Jerusalem was already under siege from the Babylonian army.  
It was just a matter of time until the city would be lost  
and the defeated & starving people taken into captivity...  
**... and yet this passage is a message of promise and hope!**

Exile wouldn't be the end of the story, for God was still in charge,  
and wonderful things were still going to happen... vs. 14~16

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of  
Judah ... In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute  
justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved ...

The promise was not that God would prevent their defeat and exile,  
but, that God would bring them through it to return and rebuild,  
and that the Messiah would come as promised, vs. 15  
and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

The hope & assurance Jeremiah described was rooted in the certainty  
of God's love and faithfulness, that never abandons his people.

**Beyond the ashes of defeat, devastation and disappointment,  
God's promised future was certain in the truth and hope  
of the Lord's ongoing purpose and activity in our world.**

One facet of Advent waiting, especially these last couple of years,  
is about tenacious hope and trust even amid struggle and strife,  
and that whatever else is going on in our lives or in the world  
our God still reigns, and the Lord remains in control...  
**... for the fear and brokenness of this world do not have the last word.**

**We need to hear that truth and promise from God, especial today,**  
because for many, Advent and Christmas are not all about joy,  
but can be a very hard reminder of loved ones that are gone,  
or of pleasures and wonderful memories, we now miss...  
... but wherever there is pain and suffering, confusion and difficulty,  
there we will also find **our God bringing healing-grace and hope.**

This Advent may our lives be renewed by the Power & Presence of Christ,  
by focusing on our God of hope rather than the stuff of this world  
and knowing and trusting that truly & without question,  
God does have something awesome and wonderful for us.

Yes, our disasters, disappointments and tragic losses are very real,  
**but our hope and assurance is that God's grace & good will prevail.**

Another danger & distraction to our Advent preparations and waiting  
can be getting caught up in the hectic and stress of the season...  
... so many demands, so much we desire, and so much we feel we need to do.

**How foolishly destructive, if we**  
overload our calendars and our lives with endless holiday activity.  
**How foolishly destructive, if we**  
compulsively overdo in elaborate preparations and expectations.  
**How foolishly destructive,**  
if we make Christmas something we accomplish, rather than God.

So as we travel along this journey through culture toward Christmas,  
it's important to focus and remember, to believe and trust,  
that it has everything to do with our hope in Jesus Christ...

**... and if we choose to see it, there is plenty of God's good present,  
and the free flow of God's blessings to receive and celebrate.**

This year, I am trying to notice where I can see that God is at work,  
**and I intend to practice**  
**unrestrained gratitude and intentional joy,**  
**- by keeping my focus on God-sightings...**  
**... and at the end of each day during Advent I am going to ask,**  
**where have I seen and recognized God's gracious love today?**

The truth is, whatever our current situation or context in life,  
**it is exactly where God intends for Advent to happen in our life—**  
- perhaps a wonderful-mystical-meaningful moment of blessing  
- perhaps a hard and difficult look at our own character  
and how we affect and influence those who are around us  
- perhaps discovering or reawakening a special gift or passion  
in a way that we can bless the world or the people we know.  
I want the full Advent blessing that God intends for me to happen.  
So I intend to reread the Christmas story in both Matt. & Luke,  
and through prayer, compassion and Advent readings, etc.,  
I want to connect closer and deeper, **to get more real with Jesus.**

A young naval officer was given opportunity to do an important task

when he was allowed to command the ship from port and out to sea.  
With great skill and efficiency  
he established a new record for getting the ship underway.

But then a sailor handed him a message from the captain:

"My personal congratulations upon completing your underway preparation exercises according to the book and with amazing speed. In your haste however, you overlooked one of the fundamental rules, -- always make sure the captain is on board before you leave."

**Let's don't leave the port of Advent without our captain on board!**

So in our holiday rush, preparations and busyness,  
in our striving toward accomplishing Christmas success,  
don't lose our focus or compromise our Advent and Christmas  
by failing to take time for spiritual preparations ...

... by going out of our way to share the good news with others,  
and speaking of hope in a world filled with fear and uncertainty,  
**while trying to see whatever it is that God is up to this year!**

To put it simply, **I intend to be a Christmas card this year,**  
a sparkling scene of Christmas joy and peace on the outside,  
with a bold message of God's grace and love on the inside...

... and perhaps even include Paul's message to the Thessalonians, vs. 9  
How can I thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that I feel before our God because of you?

Surely God does has something special and awesome for each of us  
**but we'll have wait in eager and faithful anticipation  
to receive the true blessings that the Lord our God intends.**

**Today, along with Christians from around the world,  
we light the first candle of our four-week journey of Advent...  
... not hunkered down in fear, doubt, dread or terror, but  
but standing together in faith, trusting in God's grace.**

As the psalmist instructs, Psalm 37:7, 46:10

Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him... Be still, and know that I am God!