

"The Two Advents"
Luke 2:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

INTRODUCTION

We're entering the Christmas season now and one of the words that we often hear, in church at least, is "advent." That word means "arrival." Christmas is the advent season. We call it that because it celebrates the advent or arrival of Jesus to earth.

But that advent of Jesus to earth isn't the only one. The Bible teaches that there is a second that is just as significant as the first. The first advent is the one that is past, His birth. The second is the one that is future, His Second Coming.

I'm going to do something today that I've never done. I'm going to preach about those two advents together. I'm going to make two comparisons and draw two contrasts, explaining what each one means to us as I do.

COMPARISON – PROPHESED

Let's start with the comparisons. The first is that both advents are prophesied.

The Old Testament prophesied the birth of Jesus. 700 years before it, Isaiah 7:14 predicted that a virgin would give birth to a son. 9:6-7 then predicted that this Son would be called Immanuel, meaning "God with us." Matthew 1:23 reveals that Jesus' birth fulfilled both of those predictions. Also 700 years before it, Micah 5:2 predicted that it would occur in Bethlehem. Matthew 2:6 reveals that Jesus' birth fulfilled that prediction. There's no doubt about it. The first advent was prophesied.

And so is the second. In many passages, both the Old and New Testaments predict, in some detail, that Jesus is coming again. The passage I read, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, is one of those.

The Bible **predicted** that Jesus was coming the first time and He **did**. It **predicts** that He is coming a second time and He **will**. I know that because the Bible's predictions are absolutely 100% accurate.

Because they are, we should "be on the alert." That's how Paul says

it in 1 Thessalonians 5:6. We should have a sense of urgency, in other words, about the Second Coming. The question of course is "do we?"

Suppose that I took a survey and asked you this question, "*How often do you think about the Second Coming of Jesus?*" What would you say. Is it "never" or "once in a blue moon" or "occasionally" or "frequently." To be on the alert means to think about it frequently.

When I was a boy, my church taught me to ask and answer a question before I did something that might be wrong. How would I feel if Jesus came again while I was doing it. As corny as that seems to some, it was helpful to me. It made me realize that I should actually think about the Second Coming and make it a factor in the way that I live. That's what it means to be on the alert.

COMPARISON - IN THE FLESH

The second comparison of the two advents is this. Both are "in the flesh."

God is spirit. That means that He isn't matter, isn't made up of atoms and molecules. He doesn't have a body and brain. That is true of all three persons of the Trinity - the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But 2000 years ago, the Second person, God the Son, came to earth in the flesh. He became one of us, meaning, human beings. For 33 years, He had a body and a brain and the experiences that go along with that. He burned His tongue, stubbed His toes, quenched His thirst, satisfied His appetite, and so on like we do. He became matter or stuff in other words, which we call "the incarnation."

But He isn't that now. Please understand something. Unlike us, Jesus existed before He was born. He, along with the Father and Holy Spirit, is Yahweh - the self-existent, infinite, and eternal God. He was spirit before He was born. He then became spirit again after He ascended into heaven. So, He is not now in the flesh.

But He will be again at His Second Coming. He will return in His resurrection body. He had a resurrection body for 40 days after He rose

from the dead and will have it again, temporarily, at His Second Coming.

You can see then that both of the advents are in the flesh. Jesus had an earthly body in the first and a resurrection body in the second.

If we follow Him, so will we. Philippians 3:21 tells us just that. It says that Jesus *“will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory.”* At the first advent, Jesus had an earthly body like ours. At the second advent, we will have a resurrection body like His.

The implication of that is profound. The implication is that the end of our present life is nothing to us if we're followers of Jesus. It may be something to others, for a while at least, but it's nothing to us. Dallas Willard explains why, *“The life we now have as the persons we now are will continue, and continue in the universe in which we now exist”* – except that, in our resurrection bodies, it will be infinitely clearer, richer, and deeper.

I'll tell you what I've told my wife. I won't grieve for her if she dies before me. It would be inappropriate if I did. Don't get me wrong. I would grieve greatly for me. That's appropriate. But I wouldn't grieve at all for her because the end of her present life is nothing to her. Her life will continue but in an infinitely clearer, richer and deeper way.

CONTRAST – RELATION TO HISTORY

We now come to the contrasts between the two advents. The first of those is in their relation to history.

The Bible teaches that history is going somewhere. The moment Adam and Eve sinned, it began flowing to a particular event – the first advent of Jesus. God Himself moved it to that advent. Its coming then enabled human beings to access God and His kingdom in a way that they never could before. That in turn made it the very center of history.

One of the constant reminders of that is what some historians call an “historical accident.” It's the “accident” that all the calendars of the world are arranged around the birth of Jesus. Every date that we use is

either "BC", before the first advent, or "AD", after it. The point is that everyone, even atheists, measures time by the first advent of Jesus. He is the acknowledged center of history.

But He should also be the acknowledged center of our lives. That's the call of the first advent. Make Jesus the center of our lives. Make Him the center of our conversation, battles, activities, desires, and perspective. We should eat, sleep, and drink, and breathe Jesus. We should arrange all of our affairs around Him and His words.

Now, the second advent is in sharp contrast to the first. The first is the center of history. The second is the end of it. I'm not historically astute. But I know one thing for sure – what history's very last event is going to be. It's Jesus coming again.

And that's what all of history, right now, is moving to. Remember what I said. When Adam and Eve sinned, history began flowing to a particular event - the first advent. Then, when that was over, it began flowing again to another – the second advent. And that's my point today. All of the historical events around us are flowing to that advent.

So, don't let them distress you. History is not a human affair. It's someone else's project, God's. The Muslims or communists or even the Americans aren't running it. He is and we can rest assured in that.

CONTRAST – HUMILITY AND POWER

The second contrast between the two advents is this. The first was in humility and the second will be in power.

The first advent was in humility. We see that in the place of Jesus' birth. He was born in a cold, filthy, smelly cave that stabled animals. We also see it the witnesses of His birth, the shepherds. Picture a room full of beer drinking, foul-mouthed men, making disgusting noises and you have some idea of what these shepherds were like.

What I'm trying to say is that Jesus came in complete and total humility. Philippians 2:8 says it well, "*Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself.*" He "stooped down" as one author says it.

And so should we. Paul tells us to do just that in verse 5 of that same chapter. Jesus was humble, he writes, and we should be too.

That means that we should actually value humility. Most people, including many professing Christians, don't you know. They give lip service to it but don't really value it. They value what the world does instead – dominating others and promoting themselves.

Not long ago, I spent three hours with one of our area's respected Christian leaders. I've never even seen anyone, even in the secular world, try to promote themselves like he did that day. He even admitted as we talked that humility isn't his "strong suit." He doesn't value humility. He wouldn't admit it but He doesn't. It's a vice to him.

But it isn't to God. The first advent teaches that humility is the first virtue of God's kingdom. It also calls us to value and embrace it. It's one thing not to be humble because we can't be. Spiritual formation is the answer to that. It's another thing not to be humble because we don't want to be. Repentance is the answer to that. Be humble!

Here again, the second advent is in stark contrast to the first. The first time, Jesus came in humility. The second time, He will come in power. Read Revelation 19:11-16 and you'll know exactly what I mean. As verse 15 says it, *"From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations."* Do you grasp the meaning of that? At the Second Coming, Father God will suspend the Bible's ethic of love. Jesus will no longer turn the other cheek and do good to His enemies. He will punish them instead.

So, don't be one of His enemies. He said that if we aren't for Him, then we're against Him. So, be for Him. That means something specific. We make and carry out the decision to be with Him in order to learn and do all that He says. That makes us His friends not His enemies and that's the only way that we can be ready for His second advent.

CONCLUSION

I read a poem once that expresses that vividly and well. It's titled

'Twas the Night Before Jesus Came and goes like this in closing:

*"'Twas the night before Jesus came and all through the house
Not a creature was praying, not one in the house.
Their Bibles were lain on the shelf without care
In hopes that Jesus would not come there.*

*The children were dressing to crawl into bed.
Not once ever kneeling or bowing a head.
And mom in her rocker with baby on her lap
Was watching the Late Show while I took a nap.*

*When out of the East there arose such a clatter
I sprang to my feet to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash;
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash!*

*When what to my wondering eyes should appear
But angels proclaiming that Jesus was here.
With a light like the sun sending forth a bright ray
I knew in a moment this must be the day!*

*The light of His face made me cover my head
It was Jesus, returning just like He had said.
And though I possessed worldly wisdom and wealth,
I cried when I saw Him in spite of myself.*

*In the Book of Life which He held in His hand,
Was written the name of every saved man.
He spoke not a word as He searched for my name;
When He said "It's not here," my head hung in shame.*

*The people whose names had been written with love
He gathered to take to His Father above.
With those who were ready, He rose without a sound
While all the rest were left standing around.*

*I fell to my knees, but it was too late;
I had waited too long and thus sealed my fate.
I stood and I cried as they rose out of sight;
Oh, if only I had been ready tonight.*

*In the words of this poem the meaning is clear.
The coming of Jesus is drawing near.
There's only one life and when comes the last call,
We'll find that the Bible was true after all."*

Amen!

an ironic thing isn't. Every time a communist, or Jewish person, or even an atheistThat's an incredible and even ironic thing isn't it

The place of Jesus' birth shows us that. T ways, the manger scenes we've created as part of Christmas are misleading. They idealize the birth scene of Jesus. They make it seem quaint, cozy, and even appealing. But it was anything but that. The Bethlehem Inn itself was certainly no Holiday Inn, not even a Motel 6. It was a crude series of stalls built inside an enclosure with a fire pit for cooking. It was a dismal place but as bad as it was, there wasn't any room for Mary and Joseph in it. So, they ended up in what was most likely a cave of some sort that stabled animals. It was a cold and noisy place with filthy hay and animal waste littering the floor.

Then there were the witnesses of His birth. We idealize the shepherds as much as we do the manger. We tend to view them like Hallmark does – as soft-spoken, gentle-eyed, and pastoral guys, sort of like Amish farmers. But they were anything but that. On the contrary, they were uncouth, uncultured, and rough around the edges. They were often unreliable, untrustworthy, and even a little larcenous – so much so that first century courts didn't even let them testify. Picture a room full of beer drinking, foul-mouthed men, making disgusting noises and you have some idea of what these shepherds were like.

You can see then the eternal continuum of His life. It is from spirit to terrestrial (earthly) body to celestial (resurrection) body to spirit to celestial body and finally to spirit again. That means that both advents are in the flesh – a terrestrial body the first time and a celestial body the second time.

If we're followers of Jesus, our experience will be somewhat like that. Our birth begins a continuum of life. From birth to death – terrestrial body. From death to the Second Coming – spirit. And from the Second Coming for eternity – celestial body. With regard to our celestial body, Paul says this in 3:21. Jesus ***"will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory."*** Wow, what a promise! When He comes again, He will give His followers the same kind of resurrection body He has.