

December 1, 2019

Rediscovering Christmas  
Be Prepared  
Luke 3:1-6

**Opening Words:** History tells us the weather was odd in Hartford, Conn. on May 19, 1780. By noon, the sky was dark. Everyone was confused. Birds sang like the day was complete and cows returned to their barns. The state legislature was meeting, and some believe Christ was about to return. They didn't want the end to come surrounded by fellow politicians, they wanted to be surrounded by their loved ones. Someone made a motion to adjourn. It never happened. The Speaker of the House, Colonel Davenport, spoke to the house with these words, "The Day of Judgment is either approaching or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I choose to be found doing my duty. Therefore, I wish that candles be brought." Rather than fearing what is to come, we are to be faithful till Christ returns. Today's message is about waiting for the Second Coming.

This is message number one in my new five-part sermon series, *Rediscovering Christmas*. In this sermon series I am going to remind you Christmas is not a secular holiday. It is a religious holiday. It is a time for the faithful remember the birth of the Savior of the world, the incarnation of God, Jesus. I begin today, the First Sunday of Advent, and will conclude on Christmas Eve. Our scripture reading for today is Luke 3:1-6. Let me call this message *Be Prepared*.

**Luke 3:1-6** 1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. 3 He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 4 As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:  
"A voice of one calling in the desert,  
'Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.  
5 Every valley shall be filled in,  
every mountain and hill made low.  
The crooked roads shall become straight,  
the rough ways smooth.  
6 And all mankind will see God's salvation.' "

The great evangelist Billy Graham (1918-2018) once said, "*The second coming of Christ will be so revolutionary that it will change every aspect of life on the planet. Man will live as it was originally intended.*" I believe, someday Jesus will return. If you believe, someday Jesus will return say, "**Amen!**"

We find ourselves in the third chapter of Luke. The main character is the son of Zachariah and Elizabeth, John the Baptist. According to the text the word of God came to him, while he was living in the desert. He began preaching a message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. His entire life revolved around that message. Matthew tells us, John wore camel's hair and ate locust, both a sign of repentance. Luke aligns John with the prophet Isaiah. He quotes Isaiah 40:35. It says:

3 A voice of one calling:

"In the desert prepare  
the way for the LORD;  
make straight in the wilderness  
a highway for our God.

4 Every valley shall be raised up,  
every mountain and hill made low;  
the rough ground shall become level,  
the rugged places a plain.

5 And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,  
and all mankind together will see it.  
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Those words sound strange to us but to John's generation the message was clear. In those days when conquering armies attacked, the land was prepared for their attack. The number of attacking soldiers was massive. The sheer numbers made it necessary to straighten the roads and level the ground. The work of the engineers was as important as the work of the soldiers. Without the engineers there would be no battle. That is what John says we must do before Jesus arrives, prepare for Jesus' attack. Let me say this clearly.

This is not the only place in the Bible where the Second Coming of Christ is mentioned. Did you know there are 1,845 references to Christ's second coming in the Old Testament, where 17 books give it prominence? Did you know there are 260 chapters in the New Testament, where there are 318 references to the second advent of Christ? Did you know twenty-three of the 27 New Testament books refer to this great event? Did you know one out of every out 30 verses in the New Testament deals with Christ's return? For every prophecy in the Bible concerning Christ's first advent, there are 8 which look forward to His second coming! It is impossible to read the Bible and ignore the Second Coming of Jesus. Yet, there is one more thing about the Second Coming you can not ignore.

The actual date of his return is a great mystery. It is one of the great mysteries in the Bible. Luke 12:40 says, "*You must always be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you least expect him.*" That fact reveals the genius of God. That means we must always be prepared. Like taking a pop quiz in school, you must always

be prepared. According to the Pew Research group, 41% of all Americans believe Christ will return before the year 2050. Do you believe Jesus will return? This is a better question. Are you prepared for the second coming of Christ? Today, I want to give you three pieces of pastoral advice, so you will be prepared for his return.

**First, make God your top priority.** In a Berlin art gallery, there is a painting by German painter Adolf Menzel (1815-1905). It is only partially finished. It was intended to show Frederick the Great speaking with some of his generals. Menzel painted the generals and the background. However, he only outlined of Frederick in charcoal. He intended to paint in Frederick later, but he died before the portrait's completion. That is the story of countless lives. How many people do you know focus in on the minor issues and characters and forget the most important thing in life, God! You must answer the next question. Does God play a major role in your life or have the minor characters in your life taken over? This is the point. First, if you want to be prepared for the Second Coming of Jesus, then you must make God your top priority. What is your top priority? If that question makes you think say, "**Amen!**" Someday Jesus will return!

**Second, purify your witness.** According to the book, *Life of Francis d' Assisi*, Francis once invited a young monk to join him on a trip to town to preach. Honored to be given the invitation, the monk readily accepted. All day long he and Francis walked through the streets, byways, and alleys, and even into the suburbs. They rubbed shoulders with hundreds of people. At day's end, the two headed back home. Not even once had Francis addressed a crowd, nor had he talked to anyone about the gospel. Greatly disappointed, his young companion said, "I thought we were going into town to preach." Francis responded, "My son, we have preached. We were preaching while we were walking. We were seen by many and our behavior was closely watched. It is of no use to walk anywhere to preach unless we preach everywhere as we walk!" What was Saint Francis trying to say? He was saying that our lives are our greatest witnesses. Second, if you want to be prepared for the Second Coming of Jesus, then you must purify your witness. What non-Christian behavior in your life do you need to eliminate? If that makes you think said, "**Amen!**" Someday Jesus will return!

**Third, perceive your Savior.** It was one of the greatest moments in my ministry. In 2008, We hosted Mill Creek Workcamp. We teamed up with a group from Loveland, Colorado and welcomed over four hundred young people from seven different states come to Youngstown to work on forty-nine homes. Every night at worship they would report on seeing God in numerous ways in our community. They call those events "God Sightings." One night, a work crew reported seeing God in the neighbor of their resident. God was well disguised. On Monday morning, when the crew arrived at their work site, the neighbor opened his door and welcomed the workers with some ugly language. (He may have mentioned our Savior's name.) However, on Thursday morning the same neighbor opened his door and told the workers that he had tools. They could use them, if they wished. The neighbor's transformation was shocking. It had to be God. Those "God Sightings" are important because they remind us that God is active in

our world. Those "God Sightings" are important because they remind us that God is active in our community. Third, if you want to be prepared for Jesus's Second Coming then you must be able to perceive our Savior. When was the last time you saw God active in your life? And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Someday Jesus will return!

William Miller (1782-1849) was a Baptist preacher in the nineteenth century. He was preoccupied with the second coming of Christ. After fourteen years of Bible study, he was convinced that Jesus would return on April 3, 1843. His followers, the Millerites, believed him. Some of his disciples went to mountaintops, hoping for a head start to heaven. Others went to graveyards, planning to ascend with their departed loved ones. It was even reported, Philadelphia society ladies clustered together outside town to avoid entering God's kingdom amid the common herd. There was great excitement as the date approached. The Millerites were disappointed. April 3 came and went, but Jesus didn't return. William Miller may have been disillusioned, but he did not give up. He went back to the Bible and recalculated his figures. He admitted the April 3 date was wrong and announced that the real date for Christ's return would be March 22, 1844. The problem was March 22, 1844 came and went without the appearance of Jesus. Once again, William Miller was disillusioned. There was more Bible study and calculations. Then, he announced a third date, October 22, 1844. That date came and went without Jesus. Do you sense a pattern?

I don't want to sound critical of William Miller. I am convinced he was sincere. However, after all that Bible study is missed Luke 12:40. The Second Coming of Christ is a mystery. Not even Jesus knew that date he would return. That means we must always be prepared and lived everyday like it is our last one. Billy Graham wasn't wrong. He once said, "*The second coming of Christ will be so revolutionary that it will change every aspect of life on the planet. Man will live as it was originally intended.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"