

And do this, understanding the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

## WATCH HOW YOU'RE LIVING—JESUS IS COMING!

In the name of our coming Lord and Savior Jesus, dear friends,

On this first Sunday of Advent, the first of four leading up to Christmas, we begin our time of preparation. With rare exception, everyone prepares for Christmas, but Christians prepare in a whole different way. Christians prepare their hearts to hear the good news of Jesus coming into this world to save all people from their sins. In addition, it is a season when we consider how Jesus comes to us now in his Word and Sacraments. And we are reminded of how the Savior who first came as a baby in Bethlehem is returning to bring that salvation he earned for us. Advent is a time for preparing our hearts and minds for all of these ways our Savior comes to us. We do that on Sunday mornings as well as in special Wednesday services. Today our focus is on the second coming of Jesus.

How would your behavior change if you were told that Jesus was going to return on Easter 2014? That's April 20<sup>th</sup> of next spring. I suppose we'd find that date most valuable to know! We might spend money we've saved up so that we can more fully enjoy the next months. We might help others in order to improve their lives for what time they have left. Maybe our sinful nature would come to the forefront and we'd be reckless and sinful, figuring that we'd just repent somewhere around April 1<sup>st</sup> or so, you know, just to be safe! We think eventually we'd start to watch how we're living, knowing that JESUS IS COMING.

How would your behavior change if you were told that Jesus was coming *next Sunday*? Well, that changes things a bit, doesn't it?! It might very well be that this week would look a little different than normal. And for sure, church would be packed next Sunday!

My guess is most of us agree that things like this would happen. But why? Well, we have to behave if Jesus is coming! It's like being on your best behavior when mom and dad are around. It's like dressing nicely and speaking properly if you get to meet the President at the White House. It's like meeting her parents for the first time. It's like kids in these weeks leading up to Christmas—gotta be good because Santa is watching and he is coming soon! We need to be good, right? Doesn't the Apostle Paul say the same thing here?

Well, not exactly. Before we explore what he says about how we are to be living and why, let's consider the urgency Paul talks about here.

There's nothing like knowing that Christmas is 24 days away to spur you on to activity, right?! Have to nail down the travel arrangements...make all the plans for Christmas meals...buy the gifts—and figure out what I'm buying first! That only scratches the surface of what needs to be done for many of you over the next 3 and a half weeks! That timeframe presents an urgent situation.

Christmas—celebrating the arrival of our Savior Jesus into this world brings with it lots of things to do. It's helpful to know how little time we have to prepare. (Am I making you nervous the more I say that?) But the Apostle Paul, as he writes these words to us, presents an urgency that might not be as obvious to us. The Savior's arrival in this world on a Bethlehem night was planned far in advance and God's people were told to always be preparing for his coming. God has promised us that the Savior will come again and we also are to prepare. And lest we miss the urgency with which we are to prepare for his arrival, God had his apostle outline it for us in these words: **the hour has come...wake up...our salvation is nearer now...the night is nearly over; the day is almost here.** How many more ways would we have him say to us *"Get ready because Jesus is coming!"*?

Okay, so now we get it—24 days til Christmas and, although we don't know the exact time of his return, that could happen on any day, even any moment of today! So, what does that mean? What am I supposed to do? As a child of God who is even more excited about seeing Jesus than I am about celebrating Christmas, what do I do? I know that for Christmas I need to put the tree up, fight with the lights for about 9 hours and send out Christmas greetings along with all the other stuff we've mentioned, but what do I do to get ready so that I am celebrating with Jesus on the day he returns to this world? How do I prepare so that I'm not like those people we heard about in Noah's day who went on living however THEY wanted to with no regard for how God wanted them to live? They ended up surprised at God's judgment and are even now suffering in hell. I don't want that to happen to me! Like Jesus said in the Gospel for today—that kind of thing is going to happen when he returns too. People will be living however they want to live, setting their own guidelines and disregarding what God says. The same swift judgment that befell those people in Noah's day will come upon those who are not prepared for Jesus to come again. How do I prepare?

Paul says that we've got to be watching how we live right now in order to be ready. He says, **So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.**

He doesn't give an exhaustive list of sins to avoid, but he names several. Sexual sins are highlighted by a few of the terms he uses. Just like believers then, we also need that kind of warning, especially in our world today. Our culture doesn't do our sinful natures any favors when it comes to sexual sins! We're influenced by advertising, TV shows, movies, music. We're supposed to accept sex outside of marriage as totally okay. According to culture, it's not supporters of homosexuality who are off-base, it's everyone who is not willing to accept it. Many Christians have come to say that it is okay. Lust is an issue for Christians. Pornography lures Christians too. Living together is something even Christians have come to think is all right.

We may have committed these sins, but even if we don't participate in some of them, we may sin by letting it all go on around us with not so much as a prayer to God to help people, without so much as a prayer of repentance for our wrongdoing, without even a word to those caught in these sins. It is necessary for us to consider today whether we are kind of like the people of Noah's day who didn't take sin seriously and were ultimately judged by God. Do we need to repent and change our ways?

Paul also mentions drunkenness. Have we been taken in by this as well? Do we enjoy losing control? Do we drink to forget our problems? Are we kidding ourselves by thinking that we don't have a problem? Have we become tolerant of it around us?

Dissension and jealousy—relationship stuff. Do we have problems there? Are we focused on problems with others? Are we so dissatisfied with ourselves and our lives that we look at other people and either pick them apart or find ourselves wishing we had what they have? Does the family of believers suffer because we don't put the best construction on the words and actions of others and are dissatisfied with the way God has blessed us? Do we always defend others when someone speaks ill of them?

We can't even imagine how long an exhaustive list of sins would be if God were to assemble one and put it in front of us, but these several things do the job don't they? A handful of sins are enough to get the message across: we are not perfect and we have trouble living as Christians. We say we love God, but our thoughts and our words and the things we do say something different.

This is why Jesus came into the world—to live and die to pay for our sins and the sins of every person. This is why we celebrate Christmas. The baby would grow up and be the world's Redeemer. All those sins mentioned here—and all the rest—Jesus took to the cross and his death paid the penalty for them. As we put our trust in Christ, that forgiveness of sins is applied directly to us and we have the confidence that when Jesus comes again, it will be to take us to heaven with him.

But we have to do all the right things and avoid the bad stuff or else we won't go to heaven, right? If we think that, we've got things backwards. Remember that it is what JESUS did that earned us heaven, not what WE do. We can't earn our way to heaven by living a certain way. Well then why does Paul talk like this? Why would we have a theme today like WATCH HOW YOU'RE LIVING—JESUS IS COMING!?

Because Paul is reminding us that a Christian, by definition, is one who believes in and lives for Christ. Our Savior tells us that it pleases him to have us avoid sin. So a person who has faith in Jesus makes every attempt to avoid sin and please God with what they think and say and do. This is the way you and I thank Jesus for coming into the world to be our Savior; it's the way we show our faith in him.

So it's not that we "have to" live the way God says in these words, it's that we "want to" **WATCH HOW WE'RE LIVING**. Quite simply, that is faith. If we purposely ignore what God says, disregard him, and live in such a way that we do whatever we want, then Jesus' return is not something to look forward to. Again, the people of Noah's time serve as a grim warning, a warning pointed to by Jesus himself.

As Christians, we don't live **to gratify the desires of the sinful nature**, we live to please God. **WATCHING HOW WE'RE LIVING** is living our faith, the faith in Christ which saves us on the day Jesus comes again. That faith in Jesus clothes us with Christ, as Paul says. When our Savior comes again he will see us—sinners made perfect by his sacrifice and their trust in him—and he will save us.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, when it comes to faith, our preparation is not merely a seasonal one. Sure we consider these things more intensely during this Advent season, but our whole lives are lived in preparation to see Jesus come again. That is faith—and a faith we happily live for the one who came to be our Savior and who will come again to bring us salvation. Amen.