

“What Kind of People Ought We to Be?”

When do you start listening to Christmas music? I know, for some people that isn't an important question and they listen to it whenever it pops up. Others, though, are very precise about when they start listening. For much of the year, they carefully avoid music of the holiday, right up through Thanksgiving Day. And then Friday hits, and it is all Christmas music all the time from that point forward. They have it on their personal devices, listen on the radio to the station that's playing Christmas music, and seek it out whenever they can. It's their way of getting into the spirit of the season.

Again, maybe that's not you. Maybe you prefer to wait until the last few days before Christmas and get frustrated when you see Christmas displays at stores around the time of Halloween. Or maybe, that's exactly what you're looking for, and Christmas stuff can't arrive too soon. But the thing is, no matter how you handle your preparation or your music choices, you know when Christmas is going to arrive. It's there on your calendar. And you probably know how you want to prepare: what shopping needs to be done, what parties attended, and what music to listen to.

But how would you handle it if you didn't know? What if Christmas were going to be a surprise? How would you decide when to start listening to Christmas music or baking cookies or going shopping? What would waiting for Christmas look like if you didn't know when it was coming?

Obviously, that's not a question we need to spend a lot of time or mental effort considering. Christmas won't ever be an unknown event for us as far as we can tell. But there is a significant event coming, and we don't know precisely when it will come at all. I'm talking about the Last Day. So what does the waiting look like when you don't know when it is coming? Our sermon text today asks the question a little differently. It suggests that we consider: what kind of people ought we to be?

The first answer that our text gives is that we should be repentant while the Lord is patient. People tend to think that the Lord is slow in bringing the world to an end, but these verses clarify. It is not slowness, but patience. God wants as many as possible to have the opportunity to be ready. For him, it is no more difficult to wait for a thousand years than it is for a day. In love he wants all to come to repentance rather than perish.

So that is the kind of person you should be and I should be: one who is repentant. One who recognizes God's patience and doesn't wish to abuse it or miss out on it. A call to repentance was the message that John the Baptist brought to the people. That is how people would prepare to meet Jesus when he came to earth. It is still the way that we should prepare to meet Jesus.

Well, the next question is naturally, “Of what should I repent?” Repent of our impatience. That would be a good place to start. If God is patient and doesn't want anyone to perish, how is it that we are so often impatient? How is it that we often want others to suffer for what we don't like? Impatience is a symptom of our deep-rooted selfishness. I am impatient to get what I want, what I prefer, what I think should happen. That same selfishness shows itself in a whole host of other ways, too, doesn't it? I simply want my own way, even though I know that God wants me to serve and love others, to consider them ahead of me and more important than I am. Repent. Repent constantly. Repent now, while God is patient and before the opportunity passes.

Know that when the Bible calls us to repent, that means more than just feeling bad about sin or not wanting to do it anymore. Repenting is a turning away, a turning around. Through it we turn away from our sin in attitude and action. But most importantly, we turn to Christ. We turn to the one who deals with that sin for us. We turn to the one who died for that sin for us. We turn to that one whom John the Baptist preached about as one so much greater than he was, one whose baptism was infinitely greater than the one John performed. He is the one who rescues us from our sins. He is the difference between

perishing forever and receiving his gracious gift of eternal life. He is the one who calls us to always live in repentance so that we are ready for him to return.

That is so important because we don't know when that day is going to be. Isn't it an interesting picture used here to describe our uncertainty? **"The day of the Lord will come like a thief."** Have you ever heard someone say after a burglary in their home, "Well, I kind of had a feeling that this was coming"? No! It is always a surprise. If it is not a surprise, the thief is unsuccessful. When the thief accomplishes his mischief, the victim is always surprised. That day will come like a thief. It will be a surprise. We will be able to see signs, but not a countdown, not a calendar appointment for when it will come. We simply need to be prepared. That's why we are asked the question in this context: **"Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?"** Our first answer was to be repentant while God is patient. Our second answer is to be godly as we wait eagerly.

Eagerly. We look forward to that day. Look forward to a day that comes like a thief? A day that brings fire and destruction? Have you seen the news footage of the California fires? Can you imagine looking forward to that sort of destruction over the earth and everything in it? Is that really what God says to us? Yes, it is! We can be eager for that day, we are eager for that day because it also brings a new heaven and a new earth.

Not only do we look forward to that day, we speed its coming. We pray that God would bring our salvation sooner, that he would deliver us from this life that includes so much pain and suffering. We are and get to be a part of the process of sharing the gospel with those who have yet to hear it, so that more might come to repentance and be saved. That means we are part of accomplishing what God accomplishes before that day comes. This is what it means for us to speed its coming.

Speed its coming because then we enjoy a new heaven and new earth, where righteousness dwells. Gone from the new heaven and new earth are all the negative effects of sin. Gone is all crying and suffering and pain. Gone is all shame and jealousy and rage. Gone is our selfishness and our impatience. There is only righteousness. There we will live at peace with God and with each other. All this because Jesus has taken away our sins, those sins. All this because God will have finally freed us from our sinful natures and changed us to live with him in his perfection.

So what kind of people ought we to be? The kind of people God has made us to be: living godly and holy lives, making every effort to be found blameless, spotless, at peace with our God. This goes hand-in-hand with our repentance. Our lives and our behaviors change as we have turned away from sin and turned by God's grace to Jesus as our Savior. This is how we live because in baptism God has washed away our sin. This is how we live because he feeds us and empowers us with Christ's body and blood. This is how we live because we are thankful to him who lived and died for us.

Understand and remember that we are not able to live blamelessly on our own. Our actions, even in faith, can never make up for what we have done in sin. We still need to rely in all aspects on our God and Savior for full and free forgiveness. But in response to his love for us, we serve and love him by serving and loving others.

This is better preparation than listening to Christmas music whenever we might start that. Whether we are looking forward to celebrating Christmas, which we should be, or looking forward to the last day, we are prepared by being the people we ought to be. We are prepared by being the people God has called us to be, by living in repentance now while God is patient with us and with others, and by eagerly and joyfully awaiting his heavenly kingdom. May God grant us his grace to do so.

The Text: 2 Peter 3:8–14 (NIV)

⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

¹⁴ So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.