



“Let your mind rise above earthy things”

18 For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

In our thoughts today Paul is beginning to get emotional. He talks about tears in his eyes as he considers that there are many who have decided to live as enemies of the cross. While we read this, we may feel that he is talking about those who have always been in opposition to the Jesus and the cross. But the actual phrase he uses signifies that those he is referring to are actually people who at one time would have confessed Jesus as Lord and Saviour but for whatever reason they have turned away from Him and more than that they have become an enemy of the cross. He talks about people who are only interested in satisfying themselves and their own desires. People who worship their stomach, people who live unhealthy and most likely immoral lives and yet who boast about it, as he says, to their shame. The sort of people many of us have to work with or study with who sit down on Monday morning and start going on about just how drunk they were at the weekend or who they slept with, somehow believing that you actually wanted to hear about it. People who live for the here and now and who have no notion of looking forward to the day when Christ will return.

1) The present.

Paul says, “Their minds are on earthly things...” Let’s just pause for a moment to think about this phrase. He could he talking about this day and age couldn’t he? I don’t believe there could be a better reading for us this Sunday than these final few verses from Phil 3. As you know, this is the first Sunday in Advent. But let’s take a moment to unpack what the idea of Advent really is. Basically the word Advent means "coming" or "arrival." The focus of the entire season is the celebration of the birth of Jesus the Christ in his First Advent, His first coming but also the anticipation of the return of Christ the King in his Second Advent. So, Advent is far more than simply marking a 2,010 year old event in history. It is celebrating a truth about God, the revelation of God in Christ whereby all of creation might be reconciled, brought back to God. Scripture readings for Advent should reflect this emphasis on the Second Advent, including themes of accountability for faithfulness at His coming, judgment on sin, and the hope of eternal life.

In this double focus on past and future, Advent also symbolises the spiritual journey of individuals and a congregation, as they affirm that Christ has come, that He is present in the world today, and that He will come again in power. That acknowledgment provides a basis for Kingdom ethics, for holy living arising from a profound sense that we live "between the times" and are called to be faithful stewards of what is entrusted to us as God’s people.

One commentator puts it, "So, as the church celebrates God's in-breaking into history in the Incarnation, and at the same time anticipates a future consummation to that history for which as Paul says "all creation is groaning awaiting its redemption," it also confesses its own responsibility as a people commissioned to "love the Lord your God with all your heart" and to "love your neighbour as yourself."

It is an important time of the year I believe not simply from a point of liturgy but for every disciple of Jesus Christ.

The present, this in-between time we are living in.

2) The past.

As we prepare for Christmas during Advent we look back to the first Christmas. Here is an important question: What should Christmas look like? The people at the Barna Research Group took a poll and found that only 37% of adults believe that the birth of Jesus is the most important aspect of Christmas. 44% found that family time is the most important part of the Christmas celebration. Take a look at the Christmas decorations in your neighbourhood or the lights that were turned on Friday evening.

Isn't it true that you can look at the vast majority of them without ever having the slightest clue that this season we are entering has anything to do with Jesus Christ? What should Christmas look like? Can I suggest to you - that Christmas looks like what happened in Bethlehem. And that, in our hearts, we need to go to Bethlehem to see it. We have to slip away from the High street, and step back from our multi-tasking, and unplug the TV, and suppress our own appetites long enough to go over to Bethlehem to see what Christmas looks like. Take a moment to think of the shepherds who were keeping watch over their flock by night. They were, quite literally, minding their own business, this night didn't look much different than any other. Then God broke in and spoke to them - as an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them. Their first reaction was fear but that was followed by someone has called reverent attention. What strikes me about this encounter with God's messenger angels - is that - the angels did not give the shepherds specific instructions about what they were to do. They didn't coax them, threaten them, or guarantee any material reward. They didn't have a star as the Wise Men had, nor some kind of angel to escort them. The angel simply said in V.12, "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." "You will find" implies that you will have to go looking. God revealed Himself to these shepherds and friends when God reveals Himself, we are required, each one of us, to respond with faith and action.

So, do you want to know what Christmas looks like? It looks like the scene there in Bethlehem, and it's not just the familiar stable and manger, Mary and Joseph and the Baby Jesus - no, it also includes these shepherds making major adjustments in their lives in order to join God in what He was doing. What are we prepared to do this Advent season in preparation for Christmas. What adjustments do we need to make in our lives?

Do we need to get up from where we are and make a fresh search for the Saviour who is no longer wrapped in swaddling cloths but who is buried under tinsel and wrapping paper? What does Christmas really look like? It is a picture of God coming into the world to visit and redeem, God turning things around for us, God coming through with His grace and love to give us a new beginning, new opportunities, and a new life. It's a picture where we do not have to face our problems and challenges alone.

But there is only one thing needed, we cannot be found to be living like those Paul mentions: "Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven."

Friends, this Advent, you've got to get out of the High street, and get out of your schedule, and get out of yourself, and travel to Bethlehem - to see the hope and the life that is happening there, to see God's great rescue plan for us begin to unfold.

Then thirdly, 3) The future.

As I said a few minutes ago, The focus of the entire season is the celebration of the birth of Jesus the Christ in his First Advent, His first coming, but also the anticipation of the return of Christ the King in his Second Advent.

Paul writes, *"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."* The Bible is clear that the return of Christ is certain.

John 14:3: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."

After His Resurrection, Jesus appeared to people for 40 days. After giving some final instructions, He was transported to Heaven before their very eyes. Two angels then appeared and said in Acts 1:11, *"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."*

The early Christians were convinced that Jesus was going to return. In fact, they thought it was going to happen in their lifetime. From the first century up to now, Christ followers have always believed that Jesus could return at any time.

What Difference Does It Make to believe in the Second coming?

This rock solid belief in the second coming can transform the way we're living even today in preparation for this thing called Christmas.

1. We are to encourage one another.

This topic of Jesus's second coming is not meant to make us apprehensive or terrified.

After a lengthy discussion in 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul points out the comfort that comes from knowing that Jesus is returning.

In verse 18 he challenges us to do something: "Therefore encourage each other with these words."

The message of the coming of Christ should fill us with tremendous excitement. These are great days to be alive.

Let's encourage each other to "go for it" spiritually. Let's be passionately committed, completely engaged, fully involved in kingdom living. This is no time to play it safe.

2. We need to live pure lives.

Here's a good question to ask yourself when you're involved with something that may be questionable: "Would I want to be doing this when Jesus returns?"

Wouldn't it be awful to be ashamed when Jesus comes back?

1 John 2:28: *"And now, dear children, continue in Him, so that when He appears we may be confident and unashamed before Him at His coming."*

Live as though He might come today. If you knew that Jesus was coming tonight at 8:00 p.m., what would you do differently?

What changes would you make? Here's a fact. One day He will return. Therefore, let's live in light of His coming today.

3. Ask Jesus to save you.

If you have never turned your life over to Christ and received His salvation, then I want to appeal to you with all my heart.

Be reconciled to God before it's too late!

Listen to 2 Peter 3:9-10 in the Message Translation: "God isn't late with His promise as some measure lateness. He is restraining Himself on account of you, holding back the end because He doesn't want anyone lost. He's giving everyone space and time to change. But when the day of God's judgment does come, it will be unannounced, like a thief. The sky will collapse with a thunderous bang, everything disintegrating in a huge conflagration, earth and all its works exposed to the scrutiny of Judgment."

Friends, I can't beat around the bush. The consequences are too staggering and the stakes are way too high. Let me say it as clearly as I can. If you have never made the decision to put your faith in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins, you will be in deep trouble when Jesus comes back. Your judgment will be swift, certain, and severe.

Don't be caught worshipping your stomach with your eyes on this world.

Right this moment Jesus is seeking a relationship with you, that's why He came.

Please, please, respond to Him before it's too late!