

St. Peter's Parish Church,
Henbury, Bristol

The Second Advent of Christ

Sunday 29th November 2015

Steve Jones

Prayer

In 1995 I was a newly-qualified barrister who had just been called to the Bar, and I happened to hear that Queen Elizabeth II was going to be visiting Exeter University as part of the university's 40th anniversary celebrations. I was closely connected with the university as I had completed my law degree there only the year before. Not only was the Queen going to visit the university, but I learned that she was going to visit the Law Faculty to observe a moot. A moot is a mock trial and it is one of the tools used to help train law students to argue legal points on their feet. Moots at Exeter University Law Faculty are held in a large lecture hall known as the "Moot Room" that accommodates about 250 people. Needless to say I expected that many people would want to be in the room for the moot demonstration and I made sure that I got there very early and took a seat about seven rows back.

I am not ashamed to say that I am a great supporter of our Queen. I have always respected the Royal Family and I had actually met Prince Andrew during the Falklands War in 1982. I don't know how many of you have met a member of the Royal Family. I can tell you that there was a real buzz of excitement on the Exeter University campus on the day of the Queen's visit; a sense of anticipation and a desire to see the Queen and be seen by her. When the Queen is visiting somewhere and you are waiting for her you can tell how far away she is by who is coming into the room that you are waiting in. The more senior the person that comes into the room the closer she is.

When we were sat there in the Moot Room and the Head of the Law Faculty came in, we knew that he had just met her and thus she was in the precincts. When the Chancellor of the University came in, we knew that she was very close. When the Chief Constable of Devon and Cornwall came in, we knew she was seconds away. When the Lord Lieutenant of Devon came in you knew that she was right behind him.

I have to say that Queen Elizabeth II is a pretty impressive woman in person. She has an air of authority, majesty and stature about her. So Queen Elizabeth came to see an outstanding mock trial and that was exactly what was put on for her. She left after the moot seemingly impressed by what she had witnessed.

Our Gospel text for today immediately drew my mind to Elizabeth's visit to Exeter 20 years ago and provoked in me to this question, "If I were that in awe of the Queen of England, how in awe will I be of the King of Heaven and Earth when I see *Him* face to face?"

Our passage in Luke and also 1 Thessalonians pictures for us the Second Advent of Christ. Now this is the First Sunday of Advent as we prepare to celebrate the First Coming of Christ, but it is important to remember that the first Advent happens because the Second Advent is coming after it.

As the Scripture verses that prophesied a First Coming of Christ have been fulfilled, so the prophecies that teach of a Second Coming will be fulfilled.

As theologian William Barclay says in his commentary upon Luke's Gospel, history is going somewhere. It may look like chaos, but it is not. Time is being wound-up to a conclusion and at the epi-centre of that conclusion is the Lord Jesus Christ and His return to Earth.

In the age in which we are living there are some days when His return cannot come soon enough. Amen!

So this morning we are going to prepare to fully embrace the First Advent of Christ by calibrating ourselves to the Second Advent. In our Gospel passage today Jesus, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, makes three points to us.

1. He is coming again in immense power. On that day the world will shake and tremble because of His majesty and authority. I was impressed by Queen Elizabeth, but I am sorry – she will not have a patch on King Jesus. While your response and mine on that day may be to cower to the ground and prostrate ourselves before Him, verse 27 tells us that His word to His people will be “Get up – Your King comes!”

2. The lesson of the fig tree instructs you and I to know the signs of the times. We are to be exemplar students of the Word of God so that when God's prophecies are fulfilled we do not throw our hands up in terror, but instead say, “The Lord comes” - which should double our efforts to love people into the Kingdom with the Gospel of Christ.

3. Jesus also teaches that you and I are to be watchful for His return. Jesus had already described this call to watchfulness in Luke 12:35-36 where He said:

³⁵ “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; ³⁶ be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks” (NRSV).

This exhortation does not speak of a future day that is far over the hill and out of sight and mind. It speaks of imminence.

I get this sense from the New Testament that it is almost as if Christ has already set out to return. In some sense, He is already on His way! History is winding up!

Application

How then should we live in light of what we know? How should we prepare to celebrate the First Advent of Christ? If the Second Advent of Christ is just over the horizon, yet on a date that we do not know, how should we, today, prepare to meet the Lord when He comes again?

I want to quickly share with to you three questions that I believe that the Lord Jesus will ask me when I see Him face-to-face, either if I die before He comes or at the Second Coming. And I wonder whether you might conclude that the Lord would ask you the same three questions.

Question 1. Have you worshiped me only?

Luke 10:27 a lawyer asks Jesus a question to test Him. He asks Him what one must do to inherit eternal life. Jesus responds with what is known as the greatest commandment.

²⁷ He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind” (NRSV)

So if King Jesus asked you if you had loved Him with all of your heart (your emotions), your soul (your spirit), your strength (your service) and your mind (your reason and intellect) – what would you say?

Can I ask you and myself this morning – is there something of yourself that we have withheld from Christ. Is there something that you and I worship above Christ or even equal with Him?

A relationship? A position of authority? Our money or possessions? Our own opinions?

You see when Jesus asks about our worship (and He plainly told His disciples that they should worship God only) – He will be asking whether we love anyone or anything more than Him?

The sober question is - Do we?

Question 2. Have you loved those in my image?

This question flows out of what Jesus expounds to be the second greatest commandment from Luke 10 – love your neighbor as yourself.

Here is the point and it is so vital that you and I really get this. Jesus makes how we *practically* love others as a test of whether we *genuinely* love Him!

John 13:34-35

³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (NRSV)

And powerfully and radically in the account of the Good Samaritan Jesus makes clear that our neighbour may well be someone who looks nothing like us, of a different race and even of a different religion.

When we love someone in need in Jesus Name we are not simply *carrying* the Gospel – we *are* the Gospel!

But loving your neighbour goes even farther than that, because Christ has made agape love the test of discipleship. What that means is that you cannot love God, as we read in 1 John, and not love your brother or sister.

To love God who reconciles the world to Himself through Christ, is to be reconciled to your brothers and sisters in the family of God.

Can I ask you – is there someone in this family that you need to be reconciled with?

Question 3. Have you fulfilled my Commission?

When Jesus left us He gave us one missional priority – make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey all that He has commanded.

One of the things that I love about Jesus is that He makes His guidance for my life so simple that I couldn't possibly miss it.

- Make disciples in my Name
- Baptise them
- And because you understand what I have taught you, teach the same to My new disciples

As we come to the Christmas season what an opportunity to make Christ and His Church open and accessible to anyone who is far from God and this December wants to seek after God. You might say – surely there is someone else who can go out and make disciples in Jesus' Name. The stark reality is – there is no-one else – there is only us.

So as we approach our celebration of the First Advent of Christ, and as we have in mind that day that we will see Him in coming in great power, we can know that this Christmas we have three spiritual priorities.

1. Worship Him only – love other things and people – but worship Him only
2. Radically love those who are hurting and broken and in need. Be reconciled to your brothers and sisters if you need to be.
3. Embark upon a journey to make disciples of Christ, get them baptized and teach them all that you have learned about His life, His message and His Coming.

What will we do with this challenge from King Jesus to be ready when He comes? The historians of the City of Bristol will record our answer to that question.

Amen