

Don't Miss the Bus

1 John 2:28-3:3

In this last Sunday of December we are going to take some time to think about Jesus' second coming. The celebration of Advent is about both the first and second coming of Christ. Leading up to yesterday we were preparing to celebrate the first coming and now we turn our focus to preparing for the second.

A lot of people are talking about the second coming of Christ because of things happening in the world. The pandemic and political scene seem apocalyptic. And depending on who you listen to and how you interpret the book of Revelation and other end times prophecies in the Bible, you might think that those prophecies are unfolding right now. Are we living in the "End Times"? We might be, but I think we need to use caution before jumping on any bandwagon because Jesus warned that there would be false alarms and people have been trying to fit current events into biblical prophecy ever since the time of Christ. This isn't new.

So we need to use caution, but we also need to be watchful and aware because there is a day coming when Jesus will return, and there will be signs that precede his coming. I can't say for certain that's what we're seeing right now based on what I see in the Bible, but I do believe the things happening in our world should at least remind and warn us that the day of his return is getting closer and could happen soon.

Jesus told his disciples, *"For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains."* So I think we're definitely seeing birth pains in our world, and if these are the birth pains, then when is the "birth" going to happen? In the same way birth pains remind an expecting mother that the birth is going to happen, the things going on in our world right now need to remind us that the return of Christ is coming and we need to be ready.

When I was a kid we would ride the bus to school and we had a quarter mile driveway to walk, and I remember the urgency to get ready – "The bus is coming! Get ready and get to the end of the driveway or you're going to miss the bus!" I don't want to miss the bus when Jesus returns. I don't want to be caught unprepared. He said it will be like a flash flood or a thief in the night to point out

that he is coming at an hour we do not expect. No one knows that hour so we must be ready. And this morning I want to look at how we can do that.

When you're getting ready for a vacation you usually have some kind of packing list and some kind of chore list that you need to get done before you leave – water the garden, stop the mail, drop off the dog... There isn't a packing or chore list to follow to get ready for Christ's return. It doesn't work that way. But there is another way to get ready and the apostle John talks about it in the letter we've been studying this month. Both he and the people he was writing to were in a similar situation to ours. They saw the things going on in their world that seemed to match up with some of the things Jesus' talked about and they were looking for his return. They didn't know when it would happen, but they wanted to be ready. And John tells his readers how to do that in his letter.

Read 1 John 2:28-29.

²⁸ And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. ²⁹ If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him.

John points out two ways that people will respond when Jesus returns. They will either have confidence and be ready and excited to see him, or they will shrink from him in shame, fearful of what's going to happen. How do you want to respond? I want to have confidence and I'm sure you do to. And how can you have confidence? John says, "abide in him." Abide in him... what does that mean? Jesus taught about that very thing and John wrote about it in his gospel account.

Read John 15:4-11.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my

love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Jesus uses the metaphor of a vine and branches to explain what it means to abide in him. To abide is to remain, to stay, to be connected, to linger... If you think of that from the perspective of a disciple it would mean trusting Jesus, following Jesus, spending time with Jesus, obeying Jesus. It's a spiritual and relational connection through which the power of Christ flows in and through you and produces fruit in your life. In verse 10 he says it includes keeping his commandments and that's similar to what John wrote back in 1 John 2:29: *"If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been born of him."*

So for us to have confidence on the day of Christ's return and not shrink back in shame it means that we need to pursue a lifestyle of abiding in Christ – seeking him, learning from him, connecting with him, spending time with him. It means walking in obedience to his commands and living the kind of life he taught us how to live. That's one of the ways we get ready for his return. It isn't a packing list or chore list to get ready just before he comes back; it's a lifestyle to live from here on out so whenever he returns we'll be ready.

Are you abiding in him? As we turn toward a new year, what changes do you need to make in your life to abide in Christ? It's a good time for a reset. Maybe you need to make time in your morning for devotional reading, journaling, and prayer to connect with Christ. Maybe you need to get plugged into a small group for fellowship and encouragement. The author of Hebrews writes: *"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near"* (Heb. 10:24-25). A lot of us have gotten into the habit of not gathering together and we need to turn that around.

Abide in Christ – that's one way to get ready. John gives another way at the beginning of chapter 3.

Read 1 John 3:1-3.

¹See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

So John begins by glorying in the amazing reality that God has adopted us as his children and that's something we experience right now. We should be different than the world and people who don't know Christ shouldn't really understand why we do what we do. It's because we're children of God who are trying to become like our Father. They don't know us because they don't know him. And that's what's happening now.

But something else is going to happen that's even more incredible when Jesus returns. John says, "*what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.*" When Jesus comes back, something incredible is going to happen to us. These bodies that are weak and frail and susceptible to illness, injury, and eventually death, will be drastically changed and we will become like Christ. Paul writes about it in 1 Corinthians 15.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 50-53.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. ⁴⁴It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body...

⁵⁰I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵²in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

That's going to be awesome. We don't know exactly what it's going to be like, but it's going to be awesome – it's going to be glorious and unlike anything we've ever experienced. We'll feel more alive than we've ever felt and have a far greater joy

than we've ever known. This body of sin and death will be no more and we will be fitted with a resurrection body for all eternity.

The older I get and the more I see that this body is going in one direction, the more I look forward to the fact that Christ has promised us glorified bodies, fit for heaven and eternity with him. So after Paul wrote about these bodies, he wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:58: *"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."* There's a very bright future for those who are abiding in Christ and one of the ways we get ready for his return is to set our hope on that future. That's what John says back in 1 John 3, *"we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."* ³ *And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.* Getting ready includes longing for Christ's return when all these things will happen. It's that hope that helps motivate us to purify ourselves as he is pure, which is the same as abiding in Christ.

The end is coming, and if we want to be ready, we don't have to worry about the exact timing or finishing up a chore list so we don't miss the bus. You'll never miss the bus if you are abiding in Christ and longing for his return. What do you need to do to make those things happen? Now is a good time to make some changes.