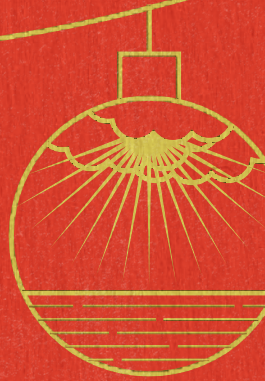




*“WE LIVE  
TODAY  
SUSPENDED  
BETWEEN TWO  
ADVENTS.”*



# TWO ADVENTS:

LIVING SUSPENDED WITH HOPE SECURED

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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## **SECTION 1** – Advent Shows God Is Sovereign Over Time

- DAY 1
- DAY 2
- DAY 3
- DAY 4
- DAY 5
- DAY 6

## **SECTION 2** – Advent Shows God Is Sovereign Over Leaders

- DAY 7
- DAY 8
- DAY 9
- DAY 10
- DAY 11
- DAY 12

## **SECTION 3** – Advent Brings Good News

- DAY 13
- DAY 14
- DAY 15
- DAY 16
- DAY 17
- DAY 18

## **SECTION 4** – Advent Shows God Is A Promise Maker and Promise Keeper

- DAY 19
- DAY 20
- DAY 21
- DAY 22
- DAY 23
- DAY 24

## **SECTION 5** – Advent Shows The World Who Jesus Is

- DAY 25
- DAY 26
- DAY 27
- DAY 28
- DAY 29
- DAY 30

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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To Discover Church – Thank you for allowing me to be your Pastor! I’m not sure if anyone other than my mom will ever read this (I’m definitely going to send her the link to this!). But this was written with you on my heart. It’s my joy and honor to be your Pastor...to journey with you...to wrestle through life and faith with you...to charge the gates of Hell with a water pistol with you...all so we might see our city changed by Jesus, one life at a time! I love you! And I’ll never stop praying for you!

To Kevin Phillips & Mallory Skinner – Thank you for editing and correcting my many, many mistakes in this writing project! I felt really bad when I wrote you and asked you to proof-read a 17,000-word project that needed to be finished in about a week. But you didn’t flinch! I’m beyond grateful for the impact you have in our church. I am especially grateful for my newfound understanding of your gift and enjoyment of being a “grammar hammer” (Mallory’s words, not mine!). Thank you for making this better!

To my bride, Jessica – The truth is, this isn’t MY project, this is OUR project. What began as a seed of an idea was planted and took root during a Spring 2022 trip to Austin, TX. We discussed, we argued, we brought our ideas forward. I may have brain-dumped a year’s worth of thoughts onto paper. This project would not be what it is without your creative and writing genius to interpret my rather barbaric prose into something that is intelligible and, hopefully, enjoyable for the person who picks this up! You are the one who re-framed and re-positioned my thoughts to help me say it better. Thank you for being my better half and making me better in every way.

# INTRODUCTION

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Let me start by saying, congratulations for reading this introduction! I personally never read book introductions, but being on this side of the writing process, I understand why people write introductions.

I somehow made it through 35 years of living and 15 years of being a Pastor without ever really knowing the meaning or purpose of Advent. I threw Advent into a general category of Catholic traditions and thought of it as a Christmas version of Lent. No offense to Catholics, but I have never made it a practice to observe either Lent or Advent.

Advent is actually just a word that means “arrival”. To speak of the advent of something is to speak of its arrival. It can be used to describe a whole host of things such as, the advent of the television, the advent of the internet, and, in this case, the advent of Jesus. Generally speaking, Advent is observed 4 weeks leading up to Christmas by many Christian denominations as a way to set their focus and prepare their heart for the celebration of Jesus’ birth.

Jesus as an eight-pound, newborn baby didn’t really compel me in my faith. Sure, Jesus is the reason for the season and His birth was a miracle, but let’s talk about what happened 30 years later when he crushed sin and death and claimed victory over sin and hell forever! Amen! Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! That charges my faith and gives me hope for my here and now!

Because so many get swept up in the celebration of Christmas and Jesus’ birth, many often miss out on the secondary focus of Advent that speaks not of the arrival of Jesus as a baby in a manger, but His arrival as a King over His Kingdom.

During one of our December services in 2021, our service host, Erika Opperman, made a comment that really struck me. She said, “We live as a people suspended between two Advents.”

This idea of being “suspended between two advents” struck a chord in me. I spent much of the next several weeks contemplating and studying what this meant. Here’s the reality I came to recognize: Jesus came once, and when He left, He promised to come again. And right there, at the birth of this promised Savior/God/Immanuel, the great divide between man and

God was bridged. His first Advent is a pillar of our faith that we hold to as Believers, but there is another pillar: the second Advent. The second Advent is His promise to return, to rule and to reign as King. The remembrance of both of these pillars is important to navigating life as a follower of Jesus. If we don’t look back to the first Advent, we forget His goodness and faithfulness. If we don’t look forward to the second Advent, we lose sight of His kingdom, purpose and promise. So, it is here we clip onto the sturdy line that connects these two pillars. We are suspended. We are secured.

Many of you are familiar with the story of Jesus’ birth. The Advent tradition has been a great way to reconnect with our precious Savior. It is certainly what God’s people had waited on and placed their hope in all of their lives, but I wonder how familiar you are with the details of Jesus’ return? I wonder if you might be missing out on the hope found in the promise of what we are to wait on and place our hope in: His second coming?

This is not an end times prophecy devotion. But this devotion IS designed to use what we know about the first coming of Jesus as a catalyst for deeper hope in the promise of His second coming.

Here is my hope for you: in celebrating the events that have already happened, you will learn to anticipate an event that is promised to come.

It is not a coincidence that we typically observe Advent leading up to Christmas, and Christmas is just before the New Year. As you wind down this year with this devotional, I pray you will be reminded of who our God is, how He’s delivered on past promises and how He will make good on promises yet to be fulfilled. And as you see this in a new light, you will walk into a New Year with a fresh reminder that this world is not your home!

May this celebration of Jesus’ birth create in you an anticipation of Jesus’ return!

Happy travels!

Jernigan Schwent

## SECTION 1 || Advent Shows God is Sovereign Over Time

In this first section of our advent journey, we are going to take a look at how God is sovereign over time.

Sovereign is a word we don't really use any more. That is, unless we are talking about the British "Sovereign," the King or Queen of England. But in theological terms, it essentially means that God is in total control over "it". In this case, the "it" we are talking about is time.

For us, time is linear and always forward-marching. Despite the great effort of Doc Brown and Marty McFly, we can't go Back to the Future. We, as humans, are bound by the dimension of time in the same way we are bound by the gravitational pull of the Earth. We've learned to measure it, but we've not learned to manipulate it.

God is bound by no such rules of science. God is the creator and originator of these concepts. He does not live in time; He lives beyond and above time. Consider this mind-bending truth recorded in the Bible:

☪☪ | *"But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."*

– 1 PETER 3:8

In other words, God's view of time is extremely different from our view of time. What seems like a day to us is like 1,000 years to God, and what seems like a day to God sometimes seems like 1,000 years to us.

Let me take it one step further. There are passages of scripture that explain things we are experiencing in our current dimension of time as having already happened, past tense, in God's dimension of eternity (insert twilight zone theme song).

Go back and read that again.

Even as I write this, I can't even begin to wrap my mind around it as a reality. Such is the nature of God and man.

As we consider what it means for us to be suspended between two advents, we must see how all things relating to time are completely under God's control. We are now two millennia removed from the birth of Jesus. If we allowed the space of time to discourage us or dissuade us from believing in God, we could lose hope. But as we journey back and forth between two advents in the coming days, you'll see how perfect God's timing always is.

Let's dive in.

# DAY 1

BUT WHEN THE FULLNESS OF THE TIME HAD COME, GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON,  
BORN OF A WOMAN...

GALATIANS 4:4

How do you wake up in the morning? Maybe you're the kind of person who rises with the sun. Or maybe you're the kind of person who wakes up 5 minutes before your alarm goes off (I hate it when that happens). Or maybe you're like me and you are dependent on the alarm clock—and then you hit the snooze button five or six times before finally getting out of bed.

I'm famously a hard sleeper. As a kid, I slept through my alarm often. I would be awakened by my mom yanking the chain on the light to the ceiling fan, ripping off the covers and in that shrill tone, yelling, "You have to get up or you're going to miss the bus!" Thanks for that, Mom!

Things haven't changed much as I've gotten older. As an adult, I've slept through all the crying babies, sirens and storms. I've even woken up to find downed tree branches and our trampoline tangled up in bushes and deck stairs. As I stared at the shrapnel, I wondered, "How'd that happen?"

So, for years now, my iPhone alarm has been set to the "alarm" tone. It is as awful as it sounds. It is the sound one might expect to hear if a nuclear strike was imminent. I hate it, but it is just as effective as my mom's methods when I was a kid.

Each morning, when my alarm goes off, it is essentially saying to me, "The fullness of time for you to sleep has come. There is no more time for slumber. You must now get your lazy bum out of bed and get on with your day!"

Essentially, the sound of the alarm means the clock has struck :00. Time is up.

That is what happened 2,000 years ago at the first Advent: the birth of Jesus. The fullness of time had come for God to initiate the next step in His great plan to rescue people from sin's penalty and punishment.

No more would He allow humanity to continue without a means to have hope in their life.

No longer would humanity live without a visible and tangible expression of God's goodness and love.

For thousands of years, God promised a Savior to come into the world who would be fully God and fully man. Throughout the pages of the Old Testament, there are over 300 prophecies that speak to the promises God was making to His people, and in each one, God was laying a bread crumb trail that would lead to Jesus.

Today, let's look back and celebrate the goodness of our God who needed no alarm to remind Him of His plan or His promise. He decided when the fullness of time had come and He Himself came through as he always does and always will.

*The fullness of time had come for God to initiate the next step in His great plan to rescue people from sin's penalty and punishment.*

# DAY 2

THE LORD IS NOT SLACK CONCERNING HIS PROMISE...BUT IS LONGSUFFERING TOWARD US.  
NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH BUT THAT ALL SHOULD COME TO  
REPENTANCE...AND CONSIDER THAT THE LONGSUFFERING OF OUR LORD IS SALVATION

..... 2 PETER 3:9, 15a

Yesterday, we reflected upon the first Advent and the goodness of our God to send a Savior to the world at the perfect time. Today, we climb up on the truth that our God is good. He is sovereign. He is always on time. We use what we've learned from the Christmas story as a step stool to try to get a better view, so we can try to understand Him as we await His second Advent.

Several times in the Scriptures we are told that nobody knows the day or the hour when Jesus is going to come back. Not even Jesus Himself knows when the time will be. In Matthew 24:42-44, Jesus says His return to Earth will be like a thief that comes into your home in the night.

I've never encountered a thief in my home, but some of my friends have described it as quite an unexpected experience (insert sarcasm). I guess it's not good business for a thief to give advanced warning for when they are planning to show up and invade your home.

You may be asking, "Why can't we know?" Some of us may cry out "even so, come quickly Lord Jesus" in hopes for a day when we will live with Him for eternity. So, why must we be in the dark about when He will return? What is He waiting for?

Our answer is in today's passage: "the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." In other words, God is waiting patiently for as many people as possible to come to salvation in Christ before the clock hits :00. And when the clock does hit :00, the fullness of time will be yet again. Until that time, we have been given our instructions by Jesus to go into all the world and tell the world about Him. Then, we are to teach them about Jesus so they can go and teach others about Jesus. God is, in some ways, waiting on us to get busy telling the world about Him. So, as we wait expectantly for Jesus' return, let's also get to work!

“God is waiting patiently for as many people as possible to come to salvation in Christ before the clock hits :00.”

# DAY 3

AND IT CAME TO PASS IN THOSE DAYS...

LUKE 2:1

It's easy sometimes when we read the Bible or think of our favorite characters from the Bible to put them in a vacuum of time and space and not consider the social and political events that were happening in the time they lived.

It's important we understand "those days" of the first Advent.

The Christmas story takes place in Israel, in the Roman empire, ruled by a man called Caesar Augustus. His position was viewed by most in Rome as almost god-like. Under Caesar Augustus, Rome began to experience a 200-year time of peace that would later be known as Pax Romana, but this peace was only possible because the Emperor ruled with an iron fist. As he conquered new lands, his brutal military ensured that no one challenged the Emperor's rules.

Israel has a long history of being ruled by really powerful, foreign governments who thought very little of them. This time was different though. In past times, Israel was accustomed to having a prophet who would speak on God's behalf to the people and offer instruction and hope, but at the time of Jesus' birth, they had no prophet to encourage them. In fact, the people hadn't heard from God in 400 years.

So, the Jews clung to the promise God had left with them: a Messiah who would reign on David's throne forever to RESCUE and REDEEM them. Israel waited and hoped that their RESCUER & KING would soon come onto the scene and set them free. Their hope was that they would no longer be under the subjection of evil kings in far-away places. They hoped God would be their King and would fight for them, protect them, lead them and care for them.

He had not yet come. The people of Israel were weary and worn out. They were desperate for this King to arrive. Into the cold night of desperation, God came through. He chose to come as a poor Jewish baby to a province controlled by a globally dominant geo-political force, the likes of which the world had never seen. He chose to come at a time when Caesar had acquired so much power that many worshiped him as a god. Jesus was born right on time to show up and show off as the King of kings. What a reminder that God is not slack concerning His promises. He does nothing by accident. Just as He knew what He was doing in those days, He knows what He is doing now.

*Their hope was that they would no longer be under the subjection of evil kings in far-away places.*

# DAY 4

BUT AS THE DAYS OF NOAH WERE, SO ALSO WILL THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN BE.

MATTHEW 24:37

“Are we there yet?” They are four of the most exhausting words any parent can hear on a road trip. Every time Jessica and I take the family on a road trip – shoot, sometimes it happens on a trip across town! – our kids ask this question. The answer is always the same: “No, we aren’t there yet.” My kids started getting clever and switched it up to ask: “How much longer until we get there?” Again, another sweet, innocent question. But after the tenth time hearing it, it starts to grate on the nerves and patience dissipates.

Jesus’ disciples had heard Jesus teach about His return. They had heard that when He returns, He will bring a new, beautiful, peaceful order with Him. Anticipating the inevitable, “How long until we get there” question, Jesus gets ahead of it by saying that no one but the Father knows when He will return. But He does give us a clue regarding things to look for. Jesus said: “For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matthew 24:38-39).

Oftentimes, we hear these verses and focus on the part of the eating, drinking and marrying and think this is the point. This isn’t the point of Jesus’ teaching. There’s nothing inherently wrong or sinful about any of this. The point of this teaching is that the time of the Son of Man returning will be like it was in the days of Noah (Genesis 6) when people thought so little of God they were completely indifferent towards Him.

In the days of Noah, they were worried about their lives and their pleasure. They were either unaware or unconcerned about the warnings Noah gave to the people about the coming judgment.

It’s impossible to know when Jesus is going to return. If Jesus didn’t venture a guess as to when it would be, then we shouldn’t either. It’s clear the world is becoming more and more indifferent towards God. That’s not really the shocking part though. People far from God have never pretended to be godly. The shocking part is what is happening in the Church. More and more “Christians” are growing more and more indifferent towards God. As the church, we have to ask ourselves, “Are we more concerned with God’s blessings on our lives or are we more concerned with living our life for God?”

Here’s the point: It’s not about knowing when He’s coming back. Jesus wanted them (and us) to live ready for His return.

*In the days of Noah, they were worried about their lives and their pleasure.*

# DAY 5

AND BEHOLD, THERE WAS A MAN IN JERUSALEM WHOSE NAME WAS SIMEON, AND THIS MAN WAS JUST AND DEVOUT, WAITING FOR THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS UPON HIM.

..... LUKE 2:25

There are 300 Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament that pointed Israel to Jesus as the promised Messiah. Many of these prophecies were completely beyond His control. It could be argued Jesus read some of the prophecies and then oriented His life to fulfill them (although that's highly improbable), but there are many prophecies that spoke of the conditions and events that would transpire leading up to and including when He was born to Mary and Joseph in a manger in Bethlehem:

- ◆ Genesis 12:3 says He would come from Abraham's family tree—and He was.
- ◆ Genesis 17:9 says He would come from the lineage of Isaac—and He did.
- ◆ Genesis 28:14 says He would come from Jacob's offspring—and He did.
- ◆ 2 Samuel 7:12-13 says He would be a son of David—and He was.
- ◆ Isaiah 7:14 says He would be born of a virgin—and He was.

Simeon was an astute Jew. He had known of these prophecies. He also had an encounter with the Holy Spirit that informed Simeon that "he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ" (Luke 2:26). And so, Simeon waited. He didn't know when. He didn't know how. But he knew of the prophecies and He trusted in the Spirit.

Verse 27 tells us that Simeon was led by the Spirit into the temple on a specific day. And it was there, on this day, that Simeon saw Joseph and Mary and sweet little, baby Jesus, and in an instant, He knew this baby was no ordinary baby. This was the Christ! The Messiah! The promised Rescuer come to save Israel and lead her to prominence. He held the baby. He blessed Jesus and Mary and Joseph and happily declared, "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace..." (Luke 2:29).

There's no way to know just how long Simeon waited for that moment, but God knew exactly when the moment would be. And God led Simeon to that place, at that time, so he could have an encounter with the promised Messiah!

It should be of great comfort to us all that the same God who is sovereign over all of time and space cares enough about Simeon to guide him to the place where he could experience and appreciate the first Advent! If we will wait faithfully on the Lord and follow closely after the Spirit, God will also guide us as we await the second Advent.

“There’s no way to know just how long Simeon waited for that moment, but God knew exactly when the moment would be.”

# DAY 6

BE ALWAYS ON THE WATCH. AND PRAY THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO ESCAPE ALL THAT IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN. AND THAT YOU MAY BE ABLE TO STAND BEFORE THE SON OF MAN.

..... LUKE 21:36

Every year at Christmas, my Grandma Sandy's boss would give his employees one of those giant boxes of Russell Stover chocolates. With all due respect to Russell Stover, there's no sicker joke of a candy than the coconut filled chocolate. I've yet to meet a single person who says "I like every single one of those chocolates!" Why do we give these as gifts?

Anyway, my Grandma would bring the box home and folks would pick it over. One year, as a kid, I remember noticing that some of the chocolates had a small, finger-sized hole on the bottom of them. As it turns out, my Grandma was equal parts genius and Jedi. She would poke a hole at the bottom to find the ones with caramel. If it had caramel, she ate it. If not, she put it back! My grandma trained me well and for the last 30 years, I've adopted the same methodology. I will not be tricked by the coconut chocolate!

Because Jesus' second Advent will come so unexpectedly, there are going to be many people who are unprepared. Jesus devoted many of his teachings to help people avoid this.

In Matthew 25, Jesus gives the Parable of the ten virgins. In this teaching, he likens the second Advent to a traditional Jewish wedding that had three distinct parts: engagement, betrothal (a time where the couple were legally bound to one another while the bride-groom went back to his father's house to prepare living quarters for him and his bride), and the ceremony. Nobody in the bride's village knew how long the betrothal period would last, so the wedding party (the virgins in the parable) would await the bridegroom's return. In the event the bridegroom returned, the female attendants all had torches prepared (long sticks with fabric wrapped tightly around the end to burn).

In the parable, all ten virgins outwardly seem the same. They are all friends with the bride, they are all waiting and they all have torches. But only half of them were ready with oil to dip their torch in so it would burn and not be consumed. Those without oil leave to go purchase more oil for their torches. In their absence, the bridegroom comes. Those without oil miss the event. When they come back, they try to enter the wedding feast, but it's too late. The doors are closed.

Here's the point: there are many people who have the outward appearance of faith. They do the do's and don't do the don'ts. But on the inside, they've not truly been born again (Romans 8:9). Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Just as some of these virgins are without oil, there are some "Christians" who are without the Holy Spirit that is given to people at the moment of their salvation (1 Corinthians 3:16). When the second Advent comes, only those who are truly saved will enter into God's Kingdom.

This is why Jesus tells us in Luke 21:34-36 to be ready. Hear the urgency in Jesus' voice! We don't have to be caught off guard by the second advent. Be ready!

*Because Jesus' second Advent will come so unexpectedly, there are going to be many people who are unprepared.*

## SECTION 2 || Advent Shows God Is Sovereign Over Leaders

God is not just sovereign over time. He is also sovereign over kings and kingdoms. It can be difficult for us to remember this when we look out across the world. Regardless of the political lens through which you see the world, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that stuff in our world is jacked up. And with every new election cycle, we are bombarded with messages of how one party is the problem, why one person can't be trusted or how this new person is going to usher in change to make the world a better place.

This really leaves us with one big question: After all of the money and time spent on campaigns and the "work" elected officials go off to their government office to do, is the world a better place? The answer is pretty ambiguous. I mean, for those of us that live in the USA, ours is still the freest country on the Earth that provides the greatest amount of opportunity to everyone who lives here, regardless of the circumstances into which they were born. We see and hear overwhelming success stories happening all across our nation. Yet, at the same time, in 2022, things seem irreversibly divided and any real progress seems stalled out because we can't get a majority of people to agree on what progress looks like.

We've grown accustomed to electing people to come up with answers and solve problems. And when they don't do this well, then we feel the entire spectrum of emotions from frustration to fear.

It's important that we are reminded that we serve a God who is sovereign over all of these leaders...not just the leaders of our nation, but over every king and over every kingdom in the world. There is no leader who rises to power without God's approval. As we live suspended between two Advents, we need to take the perspective of Joseph. The same Joseph whose brothers hated him so much that they beat him. Then they buried him in a pit while they plotted to kill him. Just before they killed him, they saw a group of traders going by and decided to sell him instead. Joseph was taken to Egypt and sold as a slave to a man named Potiphar. He worked hard and did well. That is, until Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him. When he refused her advances, she accused him of rape. He was tried and convicted, then held as a prisoner.

Years went by before he was led by God to interpret Pharaoh's dreams. Pharaoh elevated Joseph to second in command. Several more years passed, then a famine caused Joseph's brothers to come to Egypt in search of food. Joseph was all dressed up in royal Egyptian garb and not recognized by his brothers. Finally, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. He forgave them, saying, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" (Genesis 50:20).

Friends, all things are happening according to God's plan. Regardless of the evil and twisted motives of others, God means it all for good to save many people. In these next days, we will see how He is in control of all leaders!

# DAY 7

AND IT CAME TO PASS IN THOSE DAYS THAT A DECREE WENT OUT FROM CAESAR AUGUSTUS THAT ALL THE WORLD SHOULD BE REGISTERED.

..... LUKE 2:1

Here we see Caesar Augustus doing his emperor thing (you know, figure out how to collect more taxes!). His decree that all should be registered was a way to finance His power schemes. The Romans would take a census for two purposes:

- ◆ To keep track of the population of their ever-expanding empire
- ◆ To establish a tax for all citizens

Mary and Joseph were required to obey this decree. They saddled up on a donkey and made the nearly 80 mile trek to Bethlehem.

Can you imagine being very pregnant and having to spend four days riding on the back of a donkey? Or how about having to walk for four days holding the reins of a donkey that is carrying your very pregnant fiancée? Or how about being a donkey having to carry a very pregnant woman for four days? Probably not the plan Mary and Joseph had for their baby moon.

But we can take comfort in this part of the first Advent story because as Caesar was wielding his “god-like” power and prestige to bring about his purposes, the one true God, in His sovereignty, was using Caesar for His own purposes.

That random decree to make everyone go to his own ancestral town to register placed Mary and Joseph in the town of David, perfectly fulfilling a thousand-year old prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

We can see in the historical record and artistic renderings that Caesar thought of himself as a god. But, in fact, we know that he, like all rulers of this world, was under the sovereign hand of our all-powerful God. This one sentence of the Biblical record establishes the truth that God has power over all Kings.

“...as Caesar was wielding his “god-like” power and prestige to bring about his purposes, the one true God, in His sovereignty, was using Caesar for His own purposes.

# DAY 8

LET EVERY SOUL BE SUBJECT TO THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES. FOR THERE IS NO AUTHORITY EXCEPT FROM GOD. AND THE AUTHORITIES THAT EXIST ARE APPOINTED BY GOD.

..... ROMANS 13:1

Trying to wrap our minds around the sovereignty of God is like trying to fit the sun into a mason jar. It's impossible. But the fact is, God IS in control of everything. And to believe God is in control of everything will, at times, cause us to question the nature and character of God. Let's be honest, if you've never wrestled with God over some evil on Earth, can you really say you believe He is in control over everything?

The book of Romans is teaching us a few things here.

First, the government is one of three institutions ordained, or established, by God. (The family and the Church are the other two). This means that it was God's idea to establish governing bodies and positions to be filled by broken, imperfect people to exercise leadership, direction and authority over nations, kingdoms and people.

Second, every single person who has ever stepped into a position of authority has been allowed to do so by God. Some of those leaders are good and godly. Some of those leaders are evil and wicked. All of those leaders, regardless of how insignificant or powerful they may be in their nation, lead beneath the governing authority of all-mighty God.

I don't know how you feel about your elected officials. Whether you voted for them or not, God has allowed them into their position of power. And in the exact same way that God used Augustus' position and power to bring about His will, He is using the position and power of today's elected officials to bring about the second Advent. This will happen exactly according to God's perfect plan and timing.

*Let's be honest, if you've never wrestled with God over some evil on Earth, can you really say you believe He is in control over everything?*

# DAY 9

NOW WHEN THEY HAD DEPARTED, BEHOLD, AN ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED TO JOSEPH IN A DREAM, SAYING, "ARISE, TAKE THE YOUNG CHILD AND HIS MOTHER, FLEE TO EGYPT, AND STAY THERE UNTIL I BRING YOU WORD; FOR HEROD WILL SEEK THE YOUNG CHILD TO DESTROY HIM.

..... MATTHEW 2:13

"We three Kings of orient are...bearing gifts we traverse afar..." Oh, these majestic kings in their ornate garb, holding royally-wrapped birthday presents! Each year we tuck them into the backgrounds of our nativity scenes in order to keep the true servants in the foreground (in order of importance: Jesus, Mary and Joseph, little shepherd boy, livestock, wisemen). No room for rich snitches inside this stable. Over by the peaceful cow and donkey they go. But have you ever wondered about this part of the Christmas story? You can read it fully in Matthew 2.

Who are these three kings? As it turns out, the Bible doesn't tell us how many there were. Nor does the Bible tell us they were kings. At minimum, these Magi were highly influential pagans from Eastern nations who would have been both well-versed in astronomy and astrology and familiar with the teachings of the Jewish prophets.

By the time they got to Jerusalem, Jesus was probably a toddler. Much to their surprise, no one seems to know about this Child who was born King of the Jews. Word gets around to Herod, who assumes these Magi are there to speak with him. After he learns why the Magi search for the newborn King, Herod is furious. In an insecure rage, he wants to make sure that no one will challenge his crown or position. So, Herod orders for all the male children, two-years old and younger, to be murdered (Matthew 2:16). It's grizzly and horrific.

Before Herod's order is executed, the wise men find Mary and Joseph. They meet Jesus and worship Him. They also present gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. (It's assumed there were three kings because there were three gifts). Immediately after the Magi leave, we read that an angel warns Mary and Joseph about Herod's plot and urges them to immediately go to Egypt (Matthew 2:13).

Here's where it gets crazy. Nearly 800 years before the first Advent, the prophet Hosea predicted Jesus would come out of Egypt. "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son" (Hosea 11:1).

There is absolutely no logical reason why God would call His Son out of Egypt. Unless something so terrible happened that His Son would have to leave Israel to go to Egypt.

This is a hard truth to stomach considering the horrendous acts Herod performed, but here is the hope: evil never gets the last word. As the King of all kings, God will righteously bring all things to justice. We can trust there is no scheme of Hell or power of man that can pluck us from His hand or His plan.

“As the King of all kings,  
God will righteously bring  
all things to justice.”

# DAY 10

AND WE KNOW THAT ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THOSE WHO LOVE GOD. TO THOSE WHO ARE THE CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE

..... ROMANS 8:28

There is no doubt that yesterday's passage was hard to process. There is both a troubling and comforting reality to that part of the Christmas story.

It's troubling to realize that for some reason God allows bad things to happen. And He will often use bad things to bring about His will. That is a difficult pill to swallow. It is the reason many doubt, or deconstruct, their faith.

On the other hand, it is comforting to know that God is so powerful that even the most wicked leaders will not have the final say. God is so good that He can redeem even the most wicked intents of the heart and use them for His glory and our good.

We see in the Old Testament a vicious cycle. God warns the children of Israel of the consequences that will befall them if they do not repent from their lazy, wicked and idolatrous ways. When they don't repent, God allows the rise of evil nations (e.g. Assyria and Babylon) to take them into captivity. Finally, when Israel does repent, God brings righteous judgment upon the evil nations and frees His people from captivity (this is what much of the book of Judges is about).

In our lifetime, we will watch many leaders rise to prominence and power. They will bring about things that make us feel scared and insecure about our future, but we can, and should, take heart that the King we serve is not just a good King. He is a powerful King. The day will come when He will judge all evil in the court of His perfect justice and all will be made right.

This, too, is both a troubling and comforting reality.

It's troubling when we realize we are sinful, wicked people. Every lie, every theft, every wrong thought is all worthy of being sentenced under the gavel of God's righteous judgment.

It is overwhelmingly comforting to realize that, for all of those who have trusted in Jesus, His death paid the penalty of our sin and His blood stamps on us His seal of protection. This means when the time comes for justice to be served on our wickedness, we will walk away innocent.

From now until the time of the second Advent, when Jesus finally demolishes all evil and wickedness forever, we cling to this truth from Romans. God can work through even the most wicked intentions in the darkest of nights for the good of those who love Christ and are called according to HIS purpose. In Christ, our story is His story. And His story ends with the great hope of a day when Jesus returns and evil and sin are no more!

*It is overwhelmingly comforting to realize that, for all of those who have trusted in Jesus, His death paid the penalty of our sin and His blood stamps on us His seal of protection.*

# DAY 11

BUT YOU SHALL RECEIVE POWER WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT HAS COME UPON YOU; AND YOU SHALL BE WITNESSES TO ME IN JERUSALEM, AND IN ALL JUDEA AND SAMARIA, AND TO THE END OF THE EARTH.

..... ACTS 1:8

The particular time in history when the first Advent took place is no accident. Jesus was born into an era where the Roman empire was becoming the dominant world super-power. Caesar Augustus was at the peak of his greatness and power. The glad tidings of good news was about to break out across the whole world.

As the empire conquered nations and expanded its reach, it absorbed a variety of cultures, languages and currencies. In order to effectively rule such a vast, increasingly diverse territory, Rome put systems in place to unite the empire.

- ◆ They adopted and implemented Latin as the primary language in order to connect and engage in commerce together.
- ◆ They established a currency that could be the standard for any and all commerce.
- ◆ They developed a remarkable and expansive system of roads and bridges, so soldiers could quickly and easily traverse from one part of the empire to another, furthering their military success and dominance.

It's all pretty amazing how Rome was able to so quickly implement these things. There is no question the Caesars and the Senate led remarkably well for the purpose of expanding the Roman kingdom. However, what they could not have expected was how this would serve the radical expansion of the Kingdom of God.

While man used all of these impressive advancements to expand his own kingdom, God used them to make it easier for His people to rapidly spread the good news of Jesus! All of it happened under the control and supervision of God!

Jesus' arrival at the first Advent ushered in hope for all of humanity. And all of the wisdom Rome used to make itself more famous and more dominant only served to make Jesus famous across the known world!

How good is our God?

“While man used all of these impressive advancements to expand his own kingdom, God used them to make it easier for His people to rapidly spread the good news of Jesus!”

# DAY 12

AND THIS GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM WILL BE PREACHED IN ALL THE WORLD AS A WITNESS TO ALL THE NATIONS. AND THEN THE END WILL COME.

..... MATTHEW 24:14

October 29, 1969 - a date that changed the world. The first message was communicated from a computer at UCLA to a computer at Stanford University.

It was a groundbreaking development in technology, but it would take a while for any real momentum to happen, as computers were still sending and receiving data through a host of networks.

All of that changed on January 1, 1983, when the internet was officially born. A new communication protocol was introduced that allowed all computers connected to the network the ability to speak with one another.

From 1983 to 1995, the internet was primarily used by government officials. However, in 1995, the internet was offered and sold to the average consumer. And the rest is history!

I can still remember going to K-Mart and getting an AOL disc. We took it home and loaded it on the Hewlett Packard desktop computer. After about 15 minutes of loading and dialing and some strange noise that sounded like a robot on its deathbed, voila, I was connected to the internet.

Of the hundreds of thousands of years of human history, it's only been in the last 30 years that we have had the internet. Now, we walk around carrying the information superhighway in our pockets. We are living in a marvel of human achievement.

In Matthew 24, Jesus' disciples ask Him to tell them when the second Advent will take place. They are looking for insider information. Can you blame them? I have wondered the same thing.

In what theologians call the Olivet Discourse, Jesus shares with His disciples a fairly lengthy answer that provides all sorts of clues to things that will happen around the time of the second Advent. Jesus offers this clue in Matthew 24:14. We now, through the internet, have more ability to "preach this Gospel to all the nations" than we ever have before. According to Illuminations, there are still 3,600 languages that still do not have any part of the Bible in their language.

I don't know what this means when it comes to the exact timing of the second Advent. But, just like God used the advancement of Rome to make the news of the first Advent spread, God is using the advancement of technology today to prepare the way for the second Advent.

“According to Illuminations, there are still 3,600 languages that still do not have any part of the Bible in their language.”

## SECTION 3 || Advent Shows the World Good News

Do you know what is so good about getting good news? It is that good feeling we have as it fills us with joy and hope. Unfortunately, we don't get much good news in the 24-hour, corporate media cycle. Someone at some point realized that good news doesn't make money. That is why every time you turn on the news you see "BREAKING NEWS" followed by some horrible thing that has happened or some nasty thing someone said or did to someone else.

In the peak of the COVID quarantine in 2020, actor John Krasinski began a little campaign on his Instagram and YouTube account called Some Good News. It detailed one story after another of something good that was happening in the lives of people across the world. He told stories of real people who were being blessed and encouraged by the acts of kindness of others.

As we will see over the next few days, both Advents bring really good news to the world, but the good news each Advent brings is very different.

Our God is a good news God! He wants good for people. When Jesus was on the Earth, He contrasted the desires of the Devil with His. "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus is literally saying, "I've come so you can have a better life— a real life."

In church circles, it is easy to get too linearly focused on the idea of saving people from the Hell they are going to, that we can, at times, be unaware of the Hell people are going through in their day-to-day lives. But God makes no such mistakes. He is very aware of every single person's difficulty and hardship (Psalm 56:8). This is why Jesus came—to give people a better life. And not just on Earth, but in eternity with Him.

Bad news may make money, but good news lifts spirits, and this Good News can change people's lives, situations and the entire family tree!

# DAY 13

THEN THE ANGEL SAID TO THEM, "DO NOT BE AFRAID, FOR BEHOLD, I BRING YOU GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY WHICH WILL BE TO ALL PEOPLE.

..... LUKE 2:10

The news of Jesus being born first came to shepherds who were tending their sheep outside of Jerusalem. The Mosaic law required that once a year people would bring one year-old sheep without spot or blemish to be sacrificed as Passover lambs as a memorial of what God had done for them in Egypt (Exodus 12). These shepherds were tending to those sheep.

The shepherds' job that night was to stand watch over their sheep. Why? Because sheep have no ability to defend themselves from predators like lions and bears. Because their livelihood required the sheep to be protected and returned safely, they would have been doing their best to be alert and attentive to what was going on around them throughout the night.

I cannot imagine how freaked out they would have been to see a cosmic being show up and reveal itself to them. I have no idea what an angel looks like. But apparently, they are pretty intimidating because the first thing angels always say is: "do not be afraid". I wonder how effective that was? Probably about as effective as one spouse telling another spouse, "do not worry!"

The angel shows up and says he has good news. And this good news is available, accessible and applicable to all people. What is this good news? The good news was the first Advent had finally happened. The Savior had been born! The promises had finally been fulfilled. They no longer needed to long for the day the promised Messiah would arrive. He was finally here!

What I love about this is how the angel phrases this good news: "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord" (emphasis mine). Jesus was born for the people. And not just for the wealthy or important people, but He was also born to the lowly, overlooked, smelly shepherds.

Growing up, I went to a small school with two factions: the cool kids and everyone else. The cool kids made the sports teams and those who didn't were relegated to "everyone else" status. As the shortest, fattest and slowest kid on the basketball team, I barely made it into the cool kids group (though some may disagree with that!). I would do anything for a laugh. I craved attention and affirmation. I wanted to be noticed. I wanted the feeling that comes with being an accepted part of the crowd. I believe I have a pretty good understanding of what the shepherds might have felt in that pasture when they heard that THE Savior was born to them.

Good News is for everyone! Salvation is for everyone!

The first Advent introduced the best news to the world. That news would continue to bring joy to anyone who had the opportunity to hear it for centuries to come!

*“Jesus was born for the people. And not just for the wealthy or important people, but He was also born to the lowly, overlooked, smelly shepherds.”*

# DAY 14

AND IF I GO AND PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU, I WILL COME AGAIN AND RECEIVE YOU TO MYSELF; THAT WHERE I AM, THERE YOU MAY BE ALSO.

JOHN 14:3

When Jesus spoke of the second Advent, He spoke of incredibly good news that was available to all who would believe in Him.

In John 14, Jesus references the Jewish marriage tradition, which His disciples would have known well. Jesus promised there would be a time when He would leave them and leave the world, but He wasn't going to leave them for no reason. Just as the bridegroom would leave to prepare a permanent place for himself and his bride to dwell together, Jesus was leaving to prepare a place for His Bride, the Church, to be together with Him forever.

I'm sure this was confusing to the disciples. In fact, Thomas spoke up and revealed their confusion: "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" (John 14:5). They wanted to follow Him, to be with Him, to not be away from Him. They were asking for clues as to how they could get to where He is going.

Jesus responds: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

In other words, He's saying to Thomas, the disciples in the audience and to us, "Follow me! I'll lead you to that place!"

The prophet Isaiah speaks to some of the things we can expect when we get to where Jesus has prepared for us.



*"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den."*

—ISAIAH 11:6-8

This place Jesus is preparing for us is a place where all things are right, where there is no danger, fear, sin or guilt. It's a perfect place. It is more than the best of anything we have ever seen, known or experienced in this life. It is absent of all the things that bring strife and hurt. It will be a place of beauty and wonder. And it will be a place where we will no longer require faith in Jesus because we will have instant and immediate access to Him at all times!

When the second Advent happens, Jesus will take all who are His disciples to this beautiful place! What a future to look forward to!

*Just as the bridegroom would leave to prepare a permanent place for himself and his bride to dwell together, Jesus was leaving to prepare a place for His Bride, the Church, to be together with Him forever.*

# DAY 15

"BEHOLD. THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD. AND BEAR A SON. AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL." WHICH IS TRANSLATED. "GOD WITH US."

MATTHEW 1:23

When Jessica and I were in the early phases of our dating relationship, I was smitten. Absolutely gobsmacked by her beauty, sense of humor and love for Jesus. To steal a word from the Disney classic Bambi, I was twitterpated!

I loved being around her. I was most happy when I was with her. I laughed more when I was with her. Colors had more vibrancy when I was with her. And when I wasn't with her, when I was in class or at work, I was thinking about her and dreaming of when I could be near her again.

I can remember being at work thinking that it was going to be a shorter than expected day. I would start texting her that I would be off early. This meant that we would be able to get together and hang out sooner than expected. Then, when my boss would show me the additional work that needed to be done before we could call it a day, I was so disappointed!

I'm happy to say that after 15 years of marriage, I still feel this way about her.

When I think back to those days, it is amazing to me how much 30 minutes more or less with Jessica would make me feel. I could not wait to be with her.

Before the angel appeared to Mary and Joseph, God almost exclusively connected and communicated with the Jews through Prophets and Judges. On occasion, He would perform signs and wonders to show His presence and His power, but there was only a select few who ever got to experience the presence of God.

What's more is, it had been well over 400 years since God had spoken to any of the Jews in any way. Four-hundred years of silence! No prophet. No messengers. No revelation. No signs or wonders.

The Jewish people longed for the first Advent because their promised "Immanuel," which means "God with us," would soon be with them. No longer would God be "God near us," or "God over there doing something really cool." After thousands of years of human history, the pinnacle of every person's experience with God is about to be radically and wonderfully outdone with the birth of Jesus—the God-Man (Colossians 2:9). Everything was about to change because God was coming to them. What glorious and incredible news!

“No longer would God be “God near us,” or “God over there doing something really cool.”

# DAY 16

AND I HEARD A LOUD VOICE FROM HEAVEN SAYING, "BEHOLD, THE TABERNACLE OF GOD IS WITH MEN, AND HE WILL DWELL WITH THEM, AND THEY SHALL BE HIS PEOPLE. GOD HIMSELF WILL BE WITH THEM AND BE THEIR GOD."

..... REVELATION 21:3

The second Advent is going to be a remarkable thing to behold. It is really hard to put into words what it is going to mean for the whole world, but I will try.

Imagine a scenario where in an instant, every wrong is made right. Every innocent person wrongly accused will be vindicated and every guilty person who got off on a technicality will be brought to justice.

Imagine a scenario where words like hatred, bigotry and racism are no longer required in the human vocabulary. Where cancer and death no longer pass through our lips. And where poverty and homelessness are distant memories.

Imagine being reunited with your loved ones who have passed away, whose faith carried them to Heaven. Imagine the struggle to keep the faith being a bygone reality because you now have perfect sight and knowledge.

Imagine no longer having emotions like fear, sadness or sorrow. Instead, imagine only being able to experience joy, gladness and contentment.

Can you even fathom what it would be like to no longer worry about people's motives or what they are saying about you behind your back? How freeing will it be to never have to wonder if "I have what it takes"? Consider how awesome it will be when everything you do will be exactly as it was supposed to be and it always turns out right!

These things are just a morsel of the truths that will be our reality at the second Advent when Jesus finally returns to reign on Earth forever!

The first Advent made it possible for God to be with us, but it was always only going to be temporary. When Jesus ascended back to Heaven, the Holy Spirit came to take residence inside of God's children, but at the second Advent, God is going to move into the neighborhood. This time He will not be renting. He will be putting down roots. And when He comes to put down roots, He will change the entire landscape of what we know and see.

As the new Heaven and the new Earth come down, they will bear a resemblance to all that we have come to know. Except, it will be altogether different and new, and better in every possible way. In fact, it will be perfect.

The good news of the second Advent is that when Jesus returns, we will return to the reality for which God created humanity. Life will be Paradise in perfect union and fellowship with Him!

*The first Advent made it possible for God to be with us, but it was always only going to be temporary.*

# DAY 17

AND THE GOD OF PEACE WILL CRUSH SATAN UNDER YOUR FEET SHORTLY. THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST BE WITH YOU. AMEN.

..... ROMANS 16:20

One of the most prevalent descriptions or images the Bible provides for Satan is that of a serpent. Add this to the list of reasons why I am not a fan of snakes.

Satan first shows up in the Bible in Genesis 3 when he slithered up to Eve and convinced her that God was holding out on her and intentionally withholding something really good. Instead of obediently doing what God had told her (not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil), she succumbed to his fork-tongued logic. She ate of the fruit, then turned and handed it to Adam so he could participate as well (Genesis 3).

It seemed like such an innocent thing, but this one decision by the first man and the first woman sent Creation into chaos. Sin entered the human story. And now, for the first time, the human race experienced blame, shame and a sense of nakedness. For the first time, sickness, pain and death became part of the human experience.

When God shows up for His daily stroll with Adam and Eve, we overhear a tragic dialogue between God and Adam. God is simultaneously broken-hearted and angry. Adam and Eve did not trust Him. They trusted in their own logic. Now, humanity was going to experience something very different from what God wanted for them.

God issued a curse to Adam and Eve for the act of defiance. But to the serpent (Satan), God issued this promise:

“*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.*”

—GENESIS 3:15

From this very first failure of man and trickery of Satan, God had a plan for redemption. This is the first Messianic prophecy. And with it is a promise that the impact of the serpent’s beguiling ways will not always be a blight on the human race.

In the first Advent, Jesus does not just show up as a baby to be celebrated, or as a servant to be crucified. Jesus shows up as a snake killer. At the crucifixion, Satan bruised Jesus’ heel, but at the resurrection, Jesus crushed Satan’s head. And because of this, every person who has a relationship with Jesus is no longer required to only experience the fallen reality of the curse of sin. Rather they can now also experience the victory that comes through a relationship with the snake stomper!

“*At the crucifixion, Satan bruised Jesus’ heel, but at the resurrection, Jesus crushed Satan’s head.*”

# DAY 18

THE DEVIL, WHO DECEIVED THEM, WAS CAST INTO THE LAKE OF FIRE AND BRIMSTONE WHERE THE BEAST AND THE FALSE PROPHET ARE. AND THEY WILL BE TORMENTED DAY AND NIGHT FOREVER AND EVER.

..... REVELATION 22:10

The first movie I can ever remember going to see in the theater was The Lion King. It was also the first movie I ever cried in. The scene when Mufasa died was just a lot for me to handle as a six-year-old.

It is an epic story of loss, shame, betrayal, moving on from the past, accepting responsibility and becoming a man. The final fight scene between Simba and Scar was emotionally exhausting for me. I will never forget sitting at the edge of my seat, gripped by the suspense. Scar tosses coals into Simba's face. I watched, as in slow-motion, each gained then lost the upper hand in the fight. Scar smacks Simba across a flaming gulf onto a rock. Scar jumps over the flame, trapping Simba and we are brought back to the traumatizing death of Mufasa. Is Simba about to lose? Is evil Scar going to win? Will good be defeated again?

But that is not what happens. Simba tosses Scar off the ledge into the fire below where, in perfect righteous rectification, Scar's own hyenas eat him for lunch.

And finally, there is victory for Simba and the rest of the pride. The dark clouds recede. The sun shines. New life and vegetation springs forth. And now, finally, good reigns and all is made right in the Pride Lands once again.

In many ways, this is a beautiful image of what is going to happen at the second Advent. When we read Revelation, we get a glimpse of how the story is going to end. There are a lot of difficult things about this book to understand, but this much is very clear: when Jesus comes back, He will win the final battle with Satan and his demons! The end result is detailed for us in today's passage. Verse 14 gives more detail:

“Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.”

—REVELATION 22:14

Here is the great news of the second Advent: Good will win. Jesus will defeat evil and death once and for all. He will finally rule and reign. On this day, all things will be as God always wanted them to be in His Kingdom!

Where will the children of God be? We will be basking in the glory of a fresh new Heaven and new Earth. Wickedness is forever defeated and righteousness reigns for all of eternity!

“Jesus will defeat evil and death once and for all. He will finally rule and reign.”

## SECTION 4 || Advent Shows God Is A Promise Maker and Promise Keeper.

Have you ever heard someone say that God is faithful? Have you ever struggled to fully understand what this means? In essence, it means that every time God makes a promise, He keeps it.

There has never been a promise God has made to someone that He did not keep. He has a perfect record. This is unheard of in our world. Nobody on this planet can say they have kept every promise they've ever made. It's not possible for us to do that.

This is why it hurts so much when someone lets us down. We think if that person really loved me and cared for me, then they wouldn't have let me down the way they did. While I'm sure there are some people who intentionally let you down with the intent of causing you harm, the vast majority of people won't let you down on purpose. Most of us love others and want to be loved in return. The reason people let us down is often not their poor intentions but their limitations. We are all, every single one of us, fallible, imperfect people.

Someone you love dearly is going to let you down. And, if it hasn't happened yet, you are going to let someone down whom you dearly love. Even with the best intentions, some promises are not possible for us to keep because we are not sovereign and in control of all aspects of life. God is bound by no such limitation. He is perfect and holy and has never made a mistake. He has never made a promise He couldn't keep. And any promise He's made that has not yet been fulfilled is simply waiting on His perfect timing.

Watch and see how God is a promise maker and a promise keeper.

# DAY 19

THEREFORE THE LORD HIMSELF WILL GIVE YOU A SIGN: BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL CONCEIVE AND BEAR A SON, AND SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL.

..... ISAIAH 7:14

I am not sure how one can rank the legal binding of a promise made by kids. However, there does seem to be a hierarchy of oaths in the childhood justice system. First, you have the “cross my heart, hope to die, stick a thousand needles in my eye” promise. It carries pretty serious implications. So tragic, all the children who died of a thousand needles to the eyeball!

The second promise is much simpler. It is the “pinky promise”. It, too, is very serious. I mean, have you ever thought about how a “pinky promise” goes down? This promise is a tiny handshake of the most vulnerable of the five fingers. In essence, it is signifying a submission of will, or an exposing of weakness, as a vow. We do not really know what happens if a “pinky promise” is broken. Do we really want to find out?

When it comes to God and how He interacts with us, we never see Him use such measures to make promises. His promises are sometimes referred to as covenants or prophecies.

A covenant is a binding agreement God strikes where the fulfillment of the promise is upon His shoulders and not on the shoulders of the person with whom He struck the deal (see Genesis 12:1-3 and 2 Samuel 7:8-29 for examples).

A prophecy is like a promise made with clues, so that when God makes good on the promise, it is very obvious that He has done so.

This remarkable prophecy in Isaiah was given to the nation of Israel as a sign that He was about to make good on the promises He made with Abraham and David regarding the Messiah.

Though it took 700 years for this prophecy to be fulfilled, God did in fact make good on this promise. God kept this promise when the virgin Mary became pregnant with Jesus. Luke tells us about this moment:



*Then the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.*

—LUKE 1:30-33

Read how Mary, a Jewish girl, responds to the fulfillment of the sign from Isaiah 7:14:



*He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.*

—LUKE 1:54-55

He will always do just as He promised!

# DAY 20

FOR THE SON OF MAN WILL COME IN THE GLORY OF HIS FATHER WITH HIS ANGELS. AND THEN HE WILL REWARD EACH ACCORDING TO HIS WORKS.

MATTHEW 16:27

We get the incredible benefit of being able to look back at promises God has made and see how He has faithfully kept many of those promises. But, if I'm being honest, there are times when I look back at the Patriarchs of the Bible and wonder how they could have wrestled with the faithfulness of God. Hindsight being 20/20, it is easy to see how God was working on their behalf, but when you are living suspended between promise and fulfillment, it's difficult to trust that God is working.

Today, we are very much living in a similar reality to what the folks in the Bible lived. They reported bold declarations of promises God made to His people, without any clue as to how God was going to make those promises come to pass.

In this verse in Matthew, Jesus is promising that when He returns, He will return "in the glory of His Father and His angels." What does this mean and what does this look like?

I believe the Gospels give us a glimpse. It's an occasion theologians refer to as the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-8). What Peter, James and John see is difficult for them to describe, but in essence, they become the first people to see God's unveiled glory. Jesus is revealed as no longer being bound by human flesh. And not only do they see Jesus, they also see Moses and Elijah!

For these three disciples, Moses and Elijah are the ancient equivalent of our sports Greatest Of All Time (GOAT). They are getting a chance to see their heroes alive and well in front of them, even though they've been "dead" for 1300 and 800 years, respectively. keep!

Just as it happened on the mountain that day, there is coming a time when Jesus will return in all of his unveiled glory, unconfined to the limitations of the human form. And when He does, He will reward us according to our works. That means, for all of those times when we did what was right and no one knew, for all the times we served out of joy and no one knew, for all the times we went into our closet to pray and no one knew, for all the times we lived generously and sacrificially and no one knew, for all the times we shared our faith, disciplined someone or prayed for someone and almost no one knew—Jesus knew! And He will reward us for those steps of faith.

This is why God tells us to "not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season you shall reap if you faint not" (Galatians 6:9).

Friend, this is a promise God has made. And it is a promise He will keep!

*Just as it happened on the mountain that day, there is coming a time when Jesus will return in all of his unveiled glory, unconfined to the limitations of the human form.*

# DAY 21

"I WILL SET UP YOUR SEED AFTER YOU, WHO WILL COME FROM YOUR BODY, AND I WILL ESTABLISH HIS KINGDOM...I WILL ESTABLISH THE THRONE OF HIS KINGDOM FOREVER."

1 SAMUEL 7:12-13

This promise was given to David and is a part of what theologians call the "Davidic Covenant". It's a covenant God establishes with David and guarantees that David's lineage and reign will continue for all eternity.

As an American, it's hard to wrap my brain around the concept of "royal bloodlines." There are no "royals" in the U.S.A. There might be people who think they are royals, but we cannot truly understand the importance of how being born into the right family impacted a person in the times of the Iron Age in which David lived. During David's day, kingdoms were won, established and expanded based on basic Darwinian evolution, "survival of the fittest". When a King or Queen died, their eldest off-spring, typically the eldest son, assumed the throne, and during his time on the throne, he would inevitably have many who might seek to overthrow him. That certainly happened in David's life.

I cannot imagine how David must have felt when he heard God establish a covenant with him that guaranteed that his sons would have their throne and kingdom established forever. For him, it would have felt like a guarantee that his lineage would be protected and blessed by God Himself. This meant, when it came time for David to die, he could do so with great confidence that his legacy would be protected and preserved.

However, God's promise turned out different from what David probably imagined. For generations the throne of Israel bounced from one person to another. Until fourteen generations after David died, Israel was exiled under Babylonian captivity. How would God fulfill His promise to David when Israel was no longer even a nation?

In the opening verses of the New Testament, some 1,000 years later, God finally shows us how He always intended to keep the promise He made to David.



*"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham...So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations." (emphasis mine)"*

—MATTHEW 1:1,17

Promise made. Promise kept!



*For generations the throne of Israel bounced from one person to another.*

# DAY 22

"BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, WHO ACCORDING TO HIS ABUNDANT MERCY HAS BEGOTTEN US AGAIN TO A LIVING HOPE THROUGH THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST FROM THE DEAD, TO AN INHERITANCE INCORRUPTIBLE AND UNDEFILED AND THAT DOES NOT FADE AWAY, RESERVED IN HEAVEN FOR YOU."

..... 1 PETER 1:3-4

Once I turned 30, I began to develop a growing curiosity in investing. I have found resources and developed friendships to talk about investing to help me learn. So far, I have learned it does not matter if there is a bear market or a bull market, there are all kinds of people who have a knack of getting a return on the investment of their money. I have also learned I am no such master.

Over the last few years, I have invested money into different investment opportunities. Nothing huge, but enough to try and make a little return so I could use it towards something that fits in the financial goals that Jessica and I have set.

Some of those investments have turned out really great! Other investments did not turn out so well. In fact, they lost quite a bit of money.

This is not an investment brochure, but when I think about this promise found in 1 Peter, I am struck by the phrase "inheritance incorruptible and undefiled that does not fade away." Think about it. God is promising to all of His children that He is storing up an inheritance.

What will this inheritance be?

For starters, when Jesus returns at the second Advent, He will usher in victory! He will also establish a New Heaven and New Earth where streets will be paved with gold (Revelation 21:21)! We will have perfect bodies that are healthy and void of any ailments or maladies that will be able to do things that our current bodies are simply unable to do (Philippians 3:21). There will be no more death, sorrow, sadness, tears or pain (Revelation 21:4). Think about how awesome it will be to live in such a place!

Truth is, it is impossible to adequately detail all that God has in store for us when we get to Heaven. What God has prepared for us is so great that it is beyond description. Consider this truth about our inheritance:



*"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

— 1 CORINTHIANS 2:9

This inheritance is stored up for us in Heaven with God. And where God is, there is nothing that can be corrupted or defiled. There will be no losses in Heaven. You won't have to worry about negative returns on your account statement.

God is promising that everything we choose to store up in Heaven will be protected and preserved and exponentially increased beyond our wildest imagination! Just like He always does, He will keep this promise!



*What God has prepared for us is so great that it is beyond description.*

# DAY 23

"BUT YOU, BETHLEHEM EPHRATHAH. THOUGH YOU ARE LITTLE AMONG THE THOUSANDS OF JUDAH. YET OUT OF YOU SHALL COME FORTH TO ME THE ONE TO BE RULER IN ISRAEL. WHOSE GOINGS FORTH ARE FROM OF OLD. FROM EVERLASTING.

..... MICAH 5:2

I moved around a lot growing up. I went to three different elementary schools, three different high schools and three different universities in four different states. So, it is a little odd when I talk about "back home." But mostly, when I think of "back home" I think of where I grew up in Arkansas. Before we moved to the "big city" (Jonesboro, AR—a town of roughly 75,000 people) we lived in the small town of Imboden, AR. I can promise you that whatever image comes into your mind when you think of "small town," my town is smaller than what is in your mind. I'm talking about a town with no stop-lights and only a few stop signs. A town that, for as long as I can remember, has a town sign with the population listed at less than 500 people.

Any time I tell people I grew up in Northeast Arkansas, very few of them have ever heard of Jonesboro. I can count on one hand how many people I have met who have heard of Imboden, AR. For most people whom I tell about Imboden, it is clear that, despite how I feel about it, Imboden is another one of those small towns in the middle of nowhere that nobody ever goes to or really ever comes from. At best, they might go through there and not even realize it if they blinked while they were driving.

This is very similar to what Bethlehem was. It was a small town a few miles outside of Jerusalem. According to many historians, there were only a few hundred people that lived there when the first Advent took place.

Bethlehem was primarily notable in Micah's time as being the birthplace of King David. The original audience of Micah's prophecy would have remembered this. So, when they heard Micah's prophecy, they could understand the symmetry connected to the Davidic Covenant, but for us, it might seem a bit odd to have such an obscure place be the birthplace of the most famous person to ever be born.

But, lo and behold, 700 years before the first Advent, God made a promise that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. And, just as God promised, it happened.



*"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king..."*

—MATTHEW 2:1

Promise made. Promise kept!

700 years before the first Advent, God made a promise that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.

# DAY 24

AND REBUKE MANY PEOPLE; THEY SHALL BEAT THEIR SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES,  
AND THEIR SPEARS INTO PRUNING HOOKS; NATION SHALL NOT LIFT UP SWORD  
AGAINST NATION, NEITHER SHALL THEY LEARN WAR ANYMORE

..... ISAIAH 2:4

The 1960's was an interesting decade for a lot of reasons in the U.S.A. The Beatles exploded onto the scene. The first Super Bowl took place. JFK was assassinated. MLK played a critical role influencing the passing of the Civil Rights Act. The Vietnam war raged. And there was significant unrest amongst the American population.

Cultural revolution was underway as the American youth rebelled against traditional values and passionately protested the Vietnam war with signs and shouts of "Make love not war!". This was certainly an overly idealistic slogan, Especially considering this phrase rose to prominence simultaneously with the "free love" ideals that rejected traditional marriage.

World peace is a remarkable thing to aspire to. In our non-stop, 24/7 media culture that is accelerated by social media and constantly puts bad news in our faces, it is not hard to understand why the average person would hope for a time when there could be peace on the Earth, when one nation is not antagonizing or protecting itself from another nation, where tribes and people groups have no need to fight each other.

Is the idea of world peace reserved only for overly-idealistic fools? Until the second Advent happens, yes. Yes it is.

But, when Jesus returns, world peace will become the norm. Jesus is going to rule with such righteousness and overwhelming goodness that war will be a thing of the past. In Isaiah, God is making a promise that people will one day realize they have no need for weapons, not because some tyrannical government or ruler has stripped weapons from the people making them unable to defend themselves, but because there will be no conflict. No animosity. No jealousy. No "crimes of passion." No overly ambitious, ego-maniacal leaders looking to expand their influence.

There are two incredible outcomes of Jesus' reign.

First, there will finally and forever be world peace. There will be no "breaking news" about how one country invaded another country or about a new terrorist attack. There will be no geo-political saber rattling. We will never again hear phrases like "boots on the ground" or "Seal team operators".

Second, and much closer to home, there will be no divisions or arguing amongst family members. No decades-old baggage that makes family gatherings awkward. No slamming of doors, shouting matches or "domestic disturbances".

All people will live with love and honor for others. We will be able to engage in free-flowing discussion without having to fear walking on egg-shells or being "triggered". It will not just be global peace. It will be total peace.

A promise made. A promise that will be kept!

*Jesus is going to rule with such righteousness and overwhelming goodness that war will be a thing of the past.*

## SECTION 5 || Advent Shows The World Who Jesus Is

Growing up, my first love was basketball. I grew up in the heyday of Michael Jordan and the Chicago Bulls in the 1990's! No one will ever be able to convince me that MJ is not the greatest basketball player of all-time. To all the Boomers and Gen-X'ers, I'm sorry. Your arguments for Bill, Dr. J, Kobe and Lebron fall deaf on my ears.

As a kid, I would play basketball, either by myself or with my neighbor, for hours and hours. One of our favorite things was to lower the goal to its lowest setting and try to throw alley-oops to one another. (A note to all the non-sports/basketball players reading this. So glad you are here! An alley-oop is when someone passes the ball towards the hoop and another person catches it in mid-air and dunks it through the hoop. It is one of the most epic plays that can happen on a basketball court!). For my friend and me, the scenarios of a game-winning alley-oop were endless. Those are fond memories.

The alley-oop always required two people. One person to set it up with a pass and another to finish it with the slam dunk!

As we take the final turn in our Advent journey, it seems only appropriate we spend time looking at the part Jesus played in the first Advent and the part He will play in the second Advent.

The first and second Advent are like the two parts of an alley-oop. The first Advent was the pass. The second Advent will be the emphatic slam dunk that will finally secure victory for God and His people! In this case, Jesus set Himself up to win!

I am going to venture a guess that you are familiar with the parts Jesus played in the first Advent. He came as a lamb, a kid, and a bridegroom. The Bible tells of the part Jesus will play at the second Advent, as well. Jesus will come as a lion, a king and a husband! But did you know that the roles Jesus played in the first Advent perfectly set up His roles for the second Advent? I pray your eyes are opened and your soul is both blessed and encouraged to know that in the huge story God is writing, He has given Jesus these leading parts. And for anyone who is discouraged living suspended between these two Advents, do not fret. The story isn't finished yet!

# DAY 25

BEHOLD! THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD!

JOHN 1:29

At the first Advent, Jesus came as a lamb. Not literally, of course. In this verse, John the Baptist is proclaiming to every Jew who will listen who Jesus is.

What would this have meant to the Jewish people?

In the Old Testament, God gave the Jews a system of worship that involved a number of sacrifices that were to be made at the temple, rich in purpose and meaning. One of these is called Passover.

The Passover originated when Israel was liberated out of slavery in Egypt. (If you're not familiar with this epic story, read it yourself in Exodus 13-14). In the last of a series of plagues, God sent a death angel to kill the first-born male of every family in order to show His power to Pharaoh.

To spare the Israelites and make known His favor on Israel, God gave Moses specific instructions to kill, cook and eat a spotless lamb. God also told them to collect some of the blood from the lamb and paint it on the doorposts of their home. When the death angel came, it would PASS OVER any home that had the blood of a lamb on its doorposts.

The Jews did as God commanded. That night the death angel came. The quiet morning hours were interrupted by the cries of thousands of weeping mothers and fathers, but every Jewish home with the blood of the lamb across the doorposts was completely untouched.

The Passover was a celebration of this moment. At Passover, each Jewish family would bring to the temple a one-year-old, perfectly white and completely spotless lamb to be sacrificed to God in order to make atonement (or to make right a wrong) with God because of their sins.

Innocent blood had to be shed in order for there to be forgiveness for sin. It started that way all the way back with Adam and Eve, and it is still true today. This atonement sacrifice allowed there to be "at-one-ment" between God and the Jews.

The Passover not only reminded the Jews of their sin, but it also reminded them of their need for blood to be shed to cover their sin.

At the first Advent, the Lamb of God had arrived to take away the sins of the world once and for all. The writer of Hebrews would one day provide more clarity on this significance (Hebrews 10:1, 9-10).

Not just any lamb could adequately pay for the sins of humanity. Jesus, the Spotless Lamb, was born as a man to willingly lay his life down and finally satisfy the requirement for us to be "at-one" with our Father, God.

Behold the Lamb!

*Innocent blood had to be shed in order for there to be forgiveness for sin.*

# DAY 26

BEHOLD. THE LION OF THE TRIBE OF JUDAH. THE ROOT OF DAVID. HAS PRE-VAILED TO OPEN THE SCROLL AND TO LOOSE ITS SEVEN SEALS.

..... REVELATION 5:5

Most expected the first Advent would bring a Messiah who would come as a mighty warrior who would lead Israel to power, prominence and prosperity. But as we have seen, that was never the plan for the first Advent. That would wait for the second Advent, where Scripture tells us Jesus will come back. The second time He will not be a lamb to be slain. Rather, He will be as a Lion to ravage and reign!

In C.S. Lewis' epic fantasy novel *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch & the Wardrobe*, we see a tale of victory and an unexpected turn of events. In the story, four siblings are accidentally transported to the fantasy land of Narnia. They are dropped into a waging war between the rebel natives of Narnia and the evil White Witch who has caused an endless winter in the land.

In their journey, the siblings come to learn of a previous king, a lion named Aslan. There is a prophecy that Aslan will one day arrive to defeat the witch. And it is believed by some of the Narnians that the prophecy is coming to fruition soon. One of the siblings, Susan, has this conversation with Mr. Beaver:

*Mr. Beaver: "Aslan is a lion—the Lion, the great Lion."  
"Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."  
"Safe?" said Mr. Beaver ... "Who said anything about safe?  
'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."*

As the story unfolds, the lion does come and willingly sacrifices his own life to save his people. At his death, the witch thinks she has won and plans one final war with the Narnians. Then, when things seem beyond all hope, Aslan miraculously returns! The return of Aslan creates a major problem for the witch and her plans. Aslan delivers a quick victory and re-establishes his authority over Narnia.

In many ways, this story is less of a fantasy and more of an allegory of what it will be like at the second Advent. Like Aslan, Jesus saved His people by dying for them. But like Aslan, He will one day return as a ferocious lion who will unleash all the magnitude of His power and might to fight back and defeat all of the forces of Hell.

When Jesus comes back, He will be the opposite of a docile, innocent lamb awaiting the proper time to be slain. The world will see a very different side of Jesus: the fury and justice we only get a small glimpse of when He is tossing tables in the temple (Matthew 21:12-13).

At the second Advent, the world will see Jesus as a Lion.

He will not be safe, but He will be good.

*“When Jesus comes back,  
He will be the opposite of  
a docile, innocent lamb  
awaiting the proper time  
to be slain.”*

# DAY 27

AND SHE BROUGHT FORTH HER FIRSTBORN SON. AND WRAPPED HIM IN SWADDLING CLOTHS. AND LAID HIM IN A MANGER. BECAUSE THERE WAS NO ROOM FOR THEM IN THE INN.

..... LUKE 2:7

When my first child was being born, Jessica and I experienced all the emotions (fear to wonder)! Towards the end of labor, I remember Jessica saying, "I think I need to push!" And the nurse saying, "No sweetheart. It's not time for that yet. You'll know when it's time to do that."

I thought, "Uh, excuse me! How do you know what she's feeling? If she says it's time to go, you better put your catcher's gear on and get ready to catch!"

Of course, the nurse was right. About thirty minutes passed when the nurse said: "Okay, sweetheart, you're doing great! You need to hold on a minute until the doctor can get here."

At this point, it was clear to me that my daughter wasn't going to wait on the doctor. I said, "uh, listen, I don't know much, but it's definitely time!" Right then, the doctor walked in and delivered our little angel. They did their thing to clean her up, cut the umbilical cord and then handed her to me.

There she was! A seven-pound bundle of absolute perfection. She let out her first cries. Then, I brought her over to Jessica and laid her on Jessica's chest. What happened next marked the first time in my life I have ever been truly speechless.

With a huge smile, bright eyes and small trails of painful tears that had come and gone, Jessica said, "Hi Micah! It's so good to finally meet you!"

In that exact moment, Micah stopped crying. She looked straight at Jessica, with eyes opened wide, she reached her perfect little hand toward Jessica's mouth and brushed Jessica's lips with her fingers. (Yes, I started crying.

I had practiced something really cool to say in the moment we held our daughter for the first time, but I couldn't breathe, much less speak.

What was it like on that night Jesus was born? Mary and Joseph finally met their baby! The prophets and angels may have called Him Immanuel, the Messiah, the Redeemer, the King of Israel or Jesus, but at that moment, He was just their firstborn son.

What was baby Jesus like? He cried. He cuddled. He snorted. He looked sweet and innocent and cute. He nursed. He pooped. His mother could not resist His chubby, unblemished, fuzzy cheek. His father counted His tiny toes and fingers.

We do not have all the details of this Holy night but we can know Mary and Joseph did pretty much what every parent has done for centuries. They wrapped Him up in soft, warm cloths to protect Him from the cold world. They did all of this while being fully aware of what the angel had told them. He would be God with us. He would be the Savior of the world.

*They wrapped Him up in soft, warm cloths to protect Him from the cold world.*

# DAY 28

AND HE HAS ON HIS ROBE AND ON HIS THIGH A NAME WRITTEN: KING OF KINGS  
AND LORD OF LORDS.

..... REVELATION 19:16

At the second Advent, Jesus will not need to be coddled or cradled. He will not need to make Himself a servant or take on the humble role of being a man. He will arrive fully and finally revealing His authority and preeminence over all kings and lords and rulers. When He returns, those who will not bow will understand the meaning of the words of the famous 21st century philosopher, Ricky Bobby, "if you ain't first, you're last."

In Revelation, the prophet John paints an amazing image, that God reveals to Him, of the final epic battle between Good and evil.

☪ *Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS*

AND LORD OF LORDS. "

—REVELATION 19:11-16

After the first Advent, Jesus extended an invitation for all to hear His words and believe in Him. He invited them to willingly choose to bow and worship Him. All who do this will be accepted and adopted into His family. They will be forgiven of their sins and invited to join Him to rule and reign with Him in eternity.

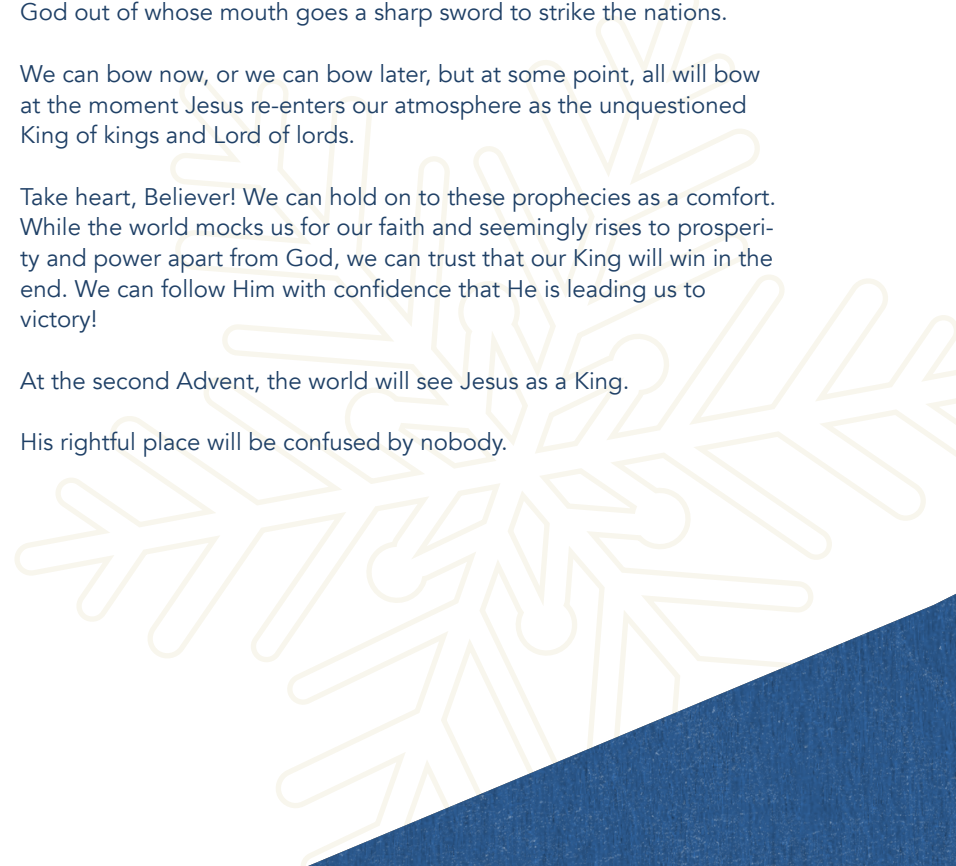
At the second Advent, all those who refused to hear and believe Jesus' invitation will have missed the opportunity to follow the gentle, lowly servant Jesus. They will now be ruled with a rod of iron by the Word of God out of whose mouth goes a sharp sword to strike the nations.

We can bow now, or we can bow later, but at some point, all will bow at the moment Jesus re-enters our atmosphere as the unquestioned King of kings and Lord of lords.

Take heart, Believer! We can hold on to these prophecies as a comfort. While the world mocks us for our faith and seemingly rises to prosperity and power apart from God, we can trust that our King will win in the end. We can follow Him with confidence that He is leading us to victory!

At the second Advent, the world will see Jesus as a King.

His rightful place will be confused by nobody.



# DAY 29

AND JESUS SAID TO THEM. "CAN THE FRIENDS OF THE BRIDEGROOM MOURN AS LONG AS THE BRIDEGROOM IS WITH THEM? BUT THE DAYS WILL COME WHEN THE BRIDEGROOM WILL BE TAKEN AWAY FROM THEM, AND THEN THEY WILL FAST.

..... MATTHEW 9:15

Jesus gives this answer in response to a question He receives from the disciples of a different rabbi. They asked: "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?" (Matthew 9:14).

Fasting reminded the Jews that they were not to live too attached to the world. These disciples cannot understand why Jesus' disciples are not fasting. To answer, Jesus gives another marriage metaphor. To understand this, let us again take a moment to consider the marriage practices of ancient Israel.

When a man wanted to marry a woman, he would have a conversation with the woman's father and a bride price (price the man was able to pay to secure his worthiness as a suitor) would be established. The price the man was willing to pay said a lot to the woman's family about his intentions for their daughter and their life together (see the story of Jacob and Rachel, Gen. 29).

Once the price was paid, there was a period of waiting before the two could be officially joined as one. While the bridegroom was away, he prepared the home and the bride prepared herself for marriage. The bride would have been filled with joy to be with the bridegroom and would miss her suitor.

In this passage, Jesus refers to Himself as the bridegroom. He tells His disciples He would be leaving them. There would be a period of time when the bride (the Church) would fast. Her hunger would be her way of saying she missed her bridegroom.

This is the way Jesus came at the first Advent. He came to buy His bride and seal her for the day when they can truly be together as one.

And now, we wait for true union with Him. In this interim time between the first and second Advents, we live awaiting the marriage, a time when Jesus will come back and welcome us into the type of loving and intimate relationship He's always desired to have with us. This isn't physical intimacy. Rather, it is a relational and spiritual intimacy.

During this time of waiting, Jesus is sanctifying us (the church) so He might present us in splendor, without spot or wrinkle (Eph 5:25-27).

After He ascended into Heaven, Jesus was taken from us. But not forever. He will come back for us. Until He does, Jesus invites us to fast. Through the discipline of fasting, we can be reminded that this world is not our home. We are just passing through (Hebrews 13:14-16). Believer, let us keep our eyes fixed on Heavenly things as opposed to Earthly things (Colossians 3:2).

At the first Advent, the world saw Jesus as a Bridegroom preparing to marry His true love!

“Through the discipline of fasting, we can be reminded that this world is not our home.”

# DAY 30

LET US BE GLAD AND REJOICE AND GIVE HIM GLORY, FOR THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB HAS COME, AND HIS WIFE HAS MADE HERSELF READY..

..... REVELATION 19:7

There are many images and pictures the Bible uses to help us understand the type of relationship God wants to have with us. Many of them, I can completely understand and get down with. Some of them are difficult for me to understand. Then, there are examples given that I understand, but have a hard-time appropriating. This is one of those.

As a man, I “get” what it means to be united with my bride physically, spiritually and emotionally. As a man, I have a hard time “getting” what it will mean to be united with Christ physically, spiritually and emotionally. Perhaps, you are like me and wonder what all of this means. Let us revisit the Jewish marriage customs one last time.

After the engagement and betrothal, the wedding ceremony could finally happen. This ceremony would often be a multiple day affair that would be referred to as a “wedding supper.” It was an elaborate celebration of the couple finally coming together. When it was over, the couple would leave together with all of the rights and privileges of a husband and wife.

In this case, the marriage will be between Jesus and His Church. The Bridegroom finally becoming a Husband to the Bride. It is difficult to know exactly what this moment is going to look like, but we do know that all of the Church (which includes all people who have placed their faith in Christ for salvation) will be purified and made clean by the blood of Jesus and the ongoing sanctification of His bride. We will be ready and presented to Jesus.

☞ *And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’ ”*

– REVELATION 19:8-9

When the marriage supper is over, the Church (that’s you and me), will have all the rights and privileges of being wed to the King of kings and Lord of lords.

What does this mean?

When a British Royal marries someone, they bestow upon their married spouse a great deal of rights, privileges and responsibilities. These include, among other things, a title and wealth. Along with this comes certain expectations of behavior and duties as a Royal. In the same way, you and I will have rights, privileges and responsibilities bestowed upon us.

It will be in this moment we will finally realize what it means for us when God promised those who have placed faith in Him would rule and reign with Christ.

At the first Advent, the world saw Jesus as a bridegroom. At the second Advent, the world will experience Jesus as a husband. He will finally provide the perfect rest that every human heart has always longed for!

“We will be ready and presented to Jesus.”

# AFTERWORD

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I hope this has been as enlightening for you as it has been for me. I have a whole new appreciation for the role Advent can play in building my faith and reminding me where my hope is truly found!

In the introduction, I shared this hope I had for you in this devotion: by celebrating the events that have already happened you would learn to anticipate an event that is promised to come. I also shared that I wanted you to see Advent in a new light so you would walk into a New Year with a fresh reminder that this world is not your home.

I pray this has blessed you and helped you grow in your understanding of who God is and how He wants a closer relationship with you. But I did not feel compelled to write this so you might think “this was a cool/new way of thinking about Advent. Good for him for writing this!” I felt compelled to write this to help you reclaim the meaning of the Advent season and use it to refresh your hope in the return of Jesus.

If I may, I want to leave you with this truth: information alone has never changed anyone. We can have the most earth-shattering revelation full of potential to propel us into new heights; but until we take steps to apply it to our lives, it remains on a shelf collecting dust.

So, if this has blessed you in anyway...if this has opened your eyes to something fresh and new about God and His plans...if you've grown closer to Jesus in anyway, the greatest way you could show gratitude would be to put this formula into action:

## **INFORMATION + APPLICATION = TRANSFORMATION**

As you consider these things, may you walk boldly, expectantly and passionately into this New Year with a new appreciation of the God you serve!

What are the key differences between the first Advent and the second Advent?

In your experience, what benefit does observing Advent in the Christmas season have on the life of a Christian?

In your experience, why is it hard to live with a Heavenly, or eternal, perspective?

Why do you think it is important that we not only take time to celebrate the first Advent, but the second Advent as well?

Think about what you knew about Advent before going through this devotion. What new things have you learned about either the first or second Advent from this devotion?

After working through this devotion, in what ways does the first Advent set the stage for the second Advent?

What are some real-life examples you've experienced where having greater clarity for the second Advent might have provided more certain hope for you in trying times?

*(continued)*

## AFTERWORD

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Imagine a believer you know is struggling in an area of their life. What truth from this devotion could you share to offer both comfort and encouragement to them?

How would you explain the concept of being suspended between two Advents to someone who is completely unfamiliar with Advent?

What will you start/stop/continue as you head into the New Year as a result of what God taught you through this devotion?