

Today is the third Sunday of Advent,
the beginning of a new Christian year.

We are endeavoring to regain the ancient
perspective of the Advent season: the
second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our most critical need is to recover
the expectation of Christ's return
and to live our lives as people
who are preparing for eternity.

It Matters How We Wait

Titus 2.11-15

Third Sunday of Advent

For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people. And we are instructed to turn from godless living and sinful pleasures. We should live in this evil world with wisdom, righteousness, and devotion to God, while we look forward with hope to that wonderful day when the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be revealed. He gave his life to free us from every kind of sin, to cleanse us, and to make us his very own people, totally committed to doing good deeds. (NLT)

- ▶ This is a profoundly Christological passage of Scripture, emphasizing the preeminence of Christ, and the exclusiveness of his person and work. It correlates with the words of the apostles in Acts that there is no other name given by which anyone can be saved from their sin and impending judgment.
- ▶ This passage succinctly and emphatically reminds us of a critical truth that is prolifically neglected by many Christians: our professed belief in Christ must be producing specific results—otherwise it is empty belief and wasted grace.

(1) Grace has appeared for the purpose of bringing salvation.

▶ Jesus Christ is the embodiment of grace—

“who gave himself for us, in order that he might redeem us”

—who through his substitutionary death has atoned for our sin so that our transgressions of the law of God can legally be expunged, and we can be acquitted of guilt and justified in our standing before the Judge of the living and the dead.

But when the kindness and love for mankind of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not by deeds of righteousness that we have done, but because of his mercy, through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we may become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3.4-7)

“grace” – unmerited favor

- ▶ the gift of favor to those who have earned absolute disfavor
- ▶ the self-originating, self-motivating, self-sacrificing, and self-expendable love that extends mercy and forgiveness to those deserving judgment and punishment

The grace of God is God’s loving response to the foolish and deceived perspective of humanity that disregards:

- (1) the revelation of God’s existence and character,
- (2) our inherent sinfulness and guilt,
- (3) our ultimate accountability and eternal judgment.

(2) Grace is received for the purpose of transformation.

▶ Jesus Christ came with a “grace agenda”—

“and purify for himself a people for his own possession”

▶ Grace addresses the guilt of sin *and* our propensity for sin. It teaches (instructing and disciplining) us to—

(1) repent of sin;

(2) renounce everything that is incompatible with the way of Christ (cf. John 14.6);

(3) live in contrast to others as ^(a) “peculiar,” ^(b) self-controlled, ^(c) upright, and ^(c) godly Christ-followers.

“a people who are his very own”

- ▶ Those whose lives reveal the mark of his ownership, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1.14);
- ▶ Those who take delight in Christ as their greatest treasure and reason for living;
- ▶ Those who give themselves to him and his purposes because he has given himself for them.

(3) Grace is reflected in *how* we wait for Christ's return.

▶ The issue of “effectual grace”—

If grace is effective in one's life, it orients everything about a person's life toward Christ—

(1) to be with Jesus,

(2) to become like Jesus,

(3) to do as Jesus did.

- ▶ If grace is truly effective, we will view and orient our lives in connection to Jesus, not any other paradigm—regardless of how “right” or worthy that connection may seem.

“worldly passions” (v. 12) – any desire that attaches itself to the temporary aspects of this life.

- ▶ When grace is effectual we will view ourselves and our lives in connection with the eternal Jesus—
 - (1) our lives are hid with Christ (Colossians 3.3);
 - (2) we live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven (Philippians 3.20);
 - (3) we are eagerly awaiting our ultimate transformation from who we now are (Philippians 3.21; 1 John 3.3-4);
 - (4) we are actively working toward our eternal performance review (2 Corinthians 5.10).

- ▶ When grace is effective, we understand the outcome of Christ's return and we live to be on the right side of his "glorious appearance" — living with anticipation, not preoccupation or what Jesus called "dissipation" — a life immersed in the opportunities and pleasures of this life.

- ▶ He is coming to reward those who are actively living toward his return as their “blessed hope” and to judge those who are, intentionally dismissive of his return, or those who unintentionally are neglectful to do his will because they are preoccupied with the details of life.

“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. 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 21.34-36)

(4) Grace is authenticated when we are “zealous for good deeds”—
or what Jesus called “much fruit” (John 15.1-8)

“This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit,
showing yourselves to be my disciples.” (John 15.8)

- ▶ Fruitfulness is a critical issue with Jesus. He declared that his Father would cut off every branch in him that does not bear fruit, while every branch that is fruitful will be pruned to bear more fruit (John 15.2).

“Zealous for good works” is distinctively Christlike; Jesus himself was characterized as one who was “zealous” for the house of God, one who “went about doing good.”

“You are the light of the world . . . let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5.14, 16)

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.
(Ephesians 2.10)

This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. (Titus 3.8)

A Christian without good works:

(1) has a dead faith (James 2.17);

(2) is a fruitless branch (John 15.2, 6);

(3) is an unfaithful servant (Matthew 25.26).

“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’”

(Matthew 25.41-43)

Jesus Christ is going to come back soon. The Jews are looking for him and praying that Messiah will come. But let us ask ourselves this question: are we really anxious for Jesus Christ to return? We in America are not so anxious to have Him come. We have good jobs, we live in luxury, we have comfortable homes, we still enjoy peace.

—Pentecostal Evangel, December 14, 1941

I believe that Jesus is coming again before long; and I am tremendously concerned with the worldliness and indifference in the churches as I go from place to place. There are not many sinners being brought into the house of the Lord.

—Pentecostal Evangel, December 14, 1941

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. (Hebrews 10.23-27)

How are you waiting for Christ's return?