

On How to Have an Apocalyptic Christmas

Lectionary: Luke 21:25-36

Focus: We prepare for Jesus' Advent the same way we prepare for His Second Coming.

FUNCTION: Encourage preparedness.

Prayer for Illumination

Luke 21:25-36

Sermon

There's been an awful lot of hype over the end of the world happening at 2012.

If you're lucky enough to have missed it:

There is a notion that the world is going to end in the year 2012.

This belief is based on the fact that several ancient calendars (particularly that of native Central and South Americans) all serendipitously run out at the year 2012.

They've made **movies** about it.

People are all excited about it,

Not unlike Y2K, or the dozens of other "**end-times**" **preachers** who have sought the exact date.

After all, **we've been given the signs**, haven't we?

What's funny to me is that people act like getting ready for the end of the world is a new thing!

We Christians have been getting ready for the end of the world for close to 2000 years!

Jesus has shared openly about the end on numerous occasions.

We have an entire picture of the end painted for us in Revelation.

Friends, we've known the end is coming for a long, long time.

What gets everyone worked up is knowing “when” it’s going to happen.

That’s the anxious question.

“If only we knew ‘when’, then we could take time to be ready!”

You don’t pack for your July beach trip in December, right?

Knowing “when” means we’ll have time to prepare ourselves.

Or at least we’ll know when we can quit work and go do all the things we want to do before it’s all over!

Jesus gives us some clues about the “when” too:

“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

It sounds fairly grim.

There’s lots of room for interpretation here which adds to the unease of it all:

What’s going to happen to the sun, moon and stars?

Haven’t we seen some of the greatest anguish of human history in the last 100 years?

Of course the greatest unease is that at the end of the world, everything ends!

This is an entire shift of the way we exist!

This is no small transition.

We’re not just talking about moving to a different state and having to learn our way around a new grocery

Or a different country and having to learn a new language.

Everything we know and are familiar with will pass away.

In other words, it will all die. It will all be destroyed.

This is what makes it so scary: losing the things we’ve grown attached to.

Is it really any wonder that people are frantic to know “when” this is supposed to take place?

He told them this parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees. When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened.

We know “generation” is obviously **not a literal “generation”**

The Greek word can mean either the literal or be more like a season or era.

So we are living in this epoch of signs, anxiousness and perplexity.

Nothing really new there.

But the thing is, the end of the world is not the end.

According to Jesus, when the world ends, **a new one begins.**

Remember,

At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.

Redemption! Newness! Revelation = a new heaven and earth

You know, it is rather like having a baby.

When a baby comes, **the world as you knew it comes to an end.**

Nothing is ever the same again.

Old ways of living have to die and fall away in order to make room for another way of life; or even, another life!:

Instead of going out with the guys to watch the game or with the ladies to go shopping, there are new responsibilities, new demands on your time; a rearrangement of commitments.

But not only that, it takes serious time and energy to get ready for a baby to arrive.

You have to **paint** walls and **rearrange** furniture.

You have to go to **appointments** and take **vitamins**.

You have to get a whole new **wardrobe**.

You have to **pack a bag** for the hospital and be ready to go at a moment's notice, **not knowing "when"** it will be.

A **woman's body** goes through all kinds of gradual changes in order to get ready for labor and delivery and afterward, nursing.

Labor and delivery itself is a moment of great anguish and pain.

But much more than that, it changes you.

It demands you **quash your selfishness and become more loving.**

You learn **new depths of patience** you never had.

Your apprehend a **deeper sense of beauty** and **joy** that was never possible before.

Indeed, **some things need to die** and fall away make room in our souls for these things.

This is no small transition:

An old way of life ends and is gone forever.

A new one takes its place.

If the end of the world is like having a baby, then it is no wonder that this passage is an Advent reading.

For **when Jesus appears on the scene**, things die and are raised to new life.

The world as we know it ends.

And new love, life and beauty takes its place.

And like making room in your house for a baby to come to the hospital,

the key is making room in our lives for Jesus to arrive.

The difficulty with preparing our hearts for Jesus arrival (whether it be celebrating the nativity or it be His imminent Second Coming) are the distractions.

Everyone who gets all hyped up about predicting the exact date of Jesus' Second Coming or the end of the world is that they miss the point.

They are distracted by "when" and fail to prepare for what we need to do and be.

The Christmas holiday gets so hectic and crazy that we are distracted from the central purpose and person of the season.

Sometimes we even get so distracted by the **sweetness of a baby Jesus, or the sweetness of our own children** that we deprive them and ourselves from the true hope of that Jesus' birth brings.

How sad a picture parents paint for their children when they watch them wrestling over a stuffed toy.

Is that what Christmas is about?

Making sure they have all the toys their hearts desire or to invite them to see the world and their neighbor has Jesus see it?

The real issue is whether or not we are making ourselves ready.

Like awaiting the baby's birth,
there are signs and indications about what conditions will be in place when the baby *might* come.

you get yourself and your house ready just in case it happens in the next minute!

This season (both the holiday and this generation awaiting the end of the world) **is full of distractions** that prevent us from getting our hearts ready.

Jesus' lays out plainly what we're supposed to be about:

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, 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."

Don't be distracted.

Be on the watch for distractions.

Don't get sluggish or let fear weigh you down.

Talk to God a lot.

A marathon runner's training does not consist of doing a short jog the night before.

Every day, they are running and running and running, so they'll be ready for the big day.

We have to be training our hearts too.

All this to make our hearts and homes ready for Christ's imminent arrival.

How do we get ready for Christ's arrival (first and second)?

We start by asking ourselves what has to die.

What distractions need to die and fall away?

What parts of us are getting away with lazy faith and not being attentive?

What sin or selfishness? What grudge or fear?

What misperception or pain?

What do we need to do to make room for Jesus' coming into our lives?

Are we going to be ready when Jesus comes onto the scene or is it going to catch us off our guard, despite all the signs that it's coming?

There's a song that has come out several months ago, not by a Christian group, that actually gets it right. The chorus says:

If today was your last day and tomorrow was too late

Could you say goodbye to yesterday?

Would you live each moment like your last

Leave old pictures in the past?

Donate every dime you had, if today was your last day?

And would you call those friends you never see?

Reminisce old memories?

Would you forgive your enemies?

Friends, it is not about "when" but about "what":

Whether Jesus returns in 2012 or by the end of this worship service.

What we're called to do and be as we await Jesus' arrival into our world and into our souls.