

## Knowing When the End Is

Humanity has been obsessed with trying to find out when the end of the world will be. Probably ever since humanity was conscious of beginnings and endings, we have been on a quest to know when the end our world will be and how it will end. For the Jewish community, this end will culminate in the coming of the Messiah and they have been trying to determine when this coming will happen. Others in the Jewish community have cautioned not to try to determine the coming of the Messiah, such as Rabbi Zera', who whenever he came upon scholars trying to calculate when the Messiah would arrive, he would say to them, 'It has been taught that three things come when the mind is diverted: the Messiah, finding a lost article, and a scorpion. So don't postpone his coming by thinking about it!' (Jewish New Testament Commentary by Rabbi David H. Stern)

Even secular philosophy has wondered about the end of the world as evidenced by the disaster movies that portray the destruction of the world by earthquakes, volcanoes, meteors, comets, and the like. Even that part of the scientific community that studies and predicts the life of the sun and when it will go supernova and explode, destroying the planets in the solar system tries to calculate the end of the world.

Christians have been trying to figure out when the second coming will be based on the 'hidden key' that is supposedly within the Bible, that once broken will reveal when the end will happen. Today's Gospel text and other apocalyptic literature in the Bible has prompted a 'cottage industry' of books, movies and the like of trying to portray how the end of times will occur as well as determine when it will be. Like the Jewish believers who thought that they could figure out when the Messiah will come and that they could 'force' God to send the Messiah by doing

certain things, these Christians believe that they can make Jesus come again by forcing certain scenarios to happen.

Remember that all who have tried to 'force' God to do anything, or determine when God will act in this world have never been successful. Jesus reminds us of that in the Gospel reading. Before we get into the reading itself, I think we should have a bit of context here. The context for today's Gospel reading is that it is during Holy Week. Jesus had already made His triumphal entry in Jerusalem earlier that week; He had been in the temple & city preaching, teaching & healing and tensions with the religious authorities were escalating. During his teachings, Jesus even predicts that the Son of Man will be coming soon. Which leads to the natural question among the hearers of "When?" While Jesus refuses to give an exact time, or even clear clues of what to look for, the first followers of Jesus sincerely believed that His second coming would occur in their lifetimes. This is evident in many of Paul's writings as well as other New Testament writings. While the ending of the first part of the story didn't turn out the way they had hoped, they did have the hope that when Jesus comes the second time, as promised, then things will be different then. That is when Jesus will come to be the kind of king that they & others who were waiting for the Messiah to come were anticipating. The kind of king as foretold in their Scriptures, One who brings judgement. Jesus tells us not to bother to try to figure it out and the New Testament writers stress that we should be preparing for the coming.

The question that we should be asking, then, is how should we prepare for Jesus' Second Coming? Should we, just do something, anything to make it look like we are busy doing what we should be doing, or do we purposefully study what Jesus says and does and what the Scriptures tell us what we should do? We need to remember that it will not be our 'doing things' that will bring about Jesus' coming

and Jesus does not need us to 'prepare the way' for Him. In His divine glory, Jesus really does not need anything from us in order to come to earth. We have seen that time and time again in the Biblical story of God coming to people on God's time, by God's conditions, not waiting for the people to get things 'right' but most times, when people actually have it wrong; coming to set people straight, to help them get back on the right course.

To properly prepare for Jesus to come to us, we first need to change our perspective of the purpose of our preparing. The first thing we need to do is to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world. After that, we are to do those things that God wants us to do. But simply believing is not enough. Our actions must reflect that belief. So, the real purpose of preparing is to make sure that our actions are a true reflection of our hearts. It is to prepare ourselves for the invasion of Jesus into our homes, our hearts. In a way, Jesus is like a thief who comes into our homes and takes things. But what Jesus takes will be not that which we hold most dear, but those things that Jesus knows that we do not need, things that only distract us from focusing on doing what God wants us to do.

Advent, a time of preparation, is a good time to start to really prepare for Jesus coming to us. But we do need to determine the real point of our preparations. Are our preparations simply a check list of all the things that need to get done for celebrating Christmas? Are we preparing for all those Christmas parties or are we preparing for the establishment of the most important kingdom ever? Are we preparing for celebrating the birth of a baby or celebrating and preparing for the arrival of the King of kings? Do our preparations take us down the path where we are metaphorically more interested in the wrappings and boxes like a 1- or 2-year-old rather than the present that is in the box marked "from God"? Do we ignore the signs like Noah's contemporaries, who despite watching

Noah build the ark for almost one hundred years, continued to do things for themselves?

Or do we accept the different paradigm that Jesus provides - one that looks towards other first for what they need instead of what we can take from them? It isn't necessarily a choice between preparing to celebrate a baby's arrival or to prepare for the Second Coming. There is room in our hearts to do both, for without the baby in the manger, the rest isn't quite the same, though the promise of God to send a Savior to us still remains. It would be like taking a pop quiz in school. If we are properly prepared with our studies, then it does not matter when the pop quiz is given, we will be prepared for it.

May we prepare our hearts for the coming of our Savior, whenever that will be; not only for this Advent season, but also every day of our lives.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/svDG89uV-9w>

Service: <https://youtu.be/FUfcmohfIPM>