

## Advent

How do you/we prepare for Christmas? Gifts, decorations, Christmas tree, Christmas parties and food? Nothing wrong with this, but I wonder sometimes if this preparation is why so many people find Christmas as one of the most stressful and most difficult times of the year. We prepare the outward things but forget our hearts.

**Advent: the coming of something long awaited or the arrival of something special.**

Special things take special preparation (when president of the US comes to a country). But again that is outward preparation.

God foretold of making preparations for His son's arrival (Isa. 40:3-5). But God's preparations for this "advent", this important person was very different than how we prepare for "important people". Read Isa. 40:3-5

Preparing a road means upheaval, disruption, change, turmoil, drastic change...in order for the glory of the Lord to appear.

**But this was not going to be the removal of literal mountains or valleys, this is speaking of people's hearts. We can not often see, understand, comprehend the incredible beauty, glory, light of Christ's birth because too much stuff is in the way. God needs to open our eyes by bulldozing our hearts! Repentance is how this was understood with John the baptist.**

Advent is not disconnected from real life, not some nice stories in a book that does not connect to our lives. Advent happened to real people in real life situations. Advent happened once in history but in another way the preparation to "see" to "understand" the first advent, the coming of the special one, needs to continuously happen in our lives.

So how did God prepare for this advent? And how does He continue to prepare us for advent? What are the mountains, high places in our hearts that need to be brought down. What are the valleys, the low places in our hearts that need to be raised up?

### **1.) Luke 1:5-25: Zechariah and Elizabeth, the preparation of unfulfilled desires and faith**

V6-7: Godly people, people who have spent their entire lives doing what is right and...they are childless (last week's sermon; like Haana, only Zechariah does not have 2 wives.). Difficult. We do all the right things and look around at other people, unrighteous people and they have the very thing we are longing for. Easy to become resigned to not hoping, to not wanting to get our expectations up. We quietly get on with being good, but faith, expectation in God to do the impossible, well that is for other people, or books about other people.

V8-18: After years of unfulfilled desires, a God surprise, you're going to have a son even though you both are "very old"!

**The challenge; the faith to embrace (believe, trust) God's promises in spite of our circumstances, to hope again! The valley of disappointment being raised up.**

This is challenging for religious people's faith, especially when hope, or something hoped for has been long delayed. Easy to just accept this is just how it's going to be, if i don't expect, hope, at least i will not be let down. Faith becomes compartmentalized in our lives. What i mean by that, is there is church and being good, my religious stuff, then there is life, work, family and somehow i stop believing, expecting God to work, to show up outside of church, real life and God are not connected. Faith is in one compartment, or room and the rest of life is in another room. But advent, the preparation for His coming forces itself, bulldozes right into the hopeless areas of our lives and challenges us to believe for miracles right here in the real world! **What appears to be the end may only be a new beginning**

Ex. The project  
My life and singleness

For us, like Zechariah, I think repentance here means turning from unbelief and daring to risk disappointment, daring to hope, daring to expect God to do the things He has promised.

V19-20: But God's promises, can seem so crazy, wild, that unbelief is right there, even with an angel delivering a message! The angel's answer is almost humorous for its obviousness. Unbelief is shut up and the gift is given in spite of it! We are so afraid to doubt, and faith is very important, **but God's grace is greater than our unbelief! Luke 1:23-25**

Where is God challenging you to faith, to be expectant again, to embrace His promises? To believe that His grace is even greater, His promises faithful even if you cannot muster up the faith to believe? **My prayer at one point in my life; "God help me to trust that you can bring me to a place of trusting you!"**

2.) **Luke 1:26-38: Mary, the preparation of unexpected disruption of our life plan**

**V26-33: the disruption of grace and favor!** We have this idea that if i am under God's grace, favor, then, life is going to be rosy and our plans, God's plans will all work seamlessly, easily.

**God favors those He wants to use to do meaningful things!**

**But an easy life and a meaningful life do not go together. You can either look for an easy life, or God in His grace and mercy can call you, choose you to do something meaningful. Favor, grace in no way, ever means easy.**

V34-37: All of Mary's plans and dreams were being disrupted, broken, shattered. A virgin promised to her love is now going to be pregnant by an act of God! Her life, her plans, her dreams will forever be broken, disrupted by this one moment of preparation for advent.

What do we do when God calls, shows up in His wild disruptive grace and calls us to follow Him, to follow down a road that will cost us in one sense all of our plans and dreams? This is the preparation for advent? Something so special is coming, so valuable, that it demands a change in our plans, dreams, comfort levels.

V38: Mary saw the privilege of grace. **To let go of our plans and to embrace God's, we must see by faith that this call, is an incredible privilege.**

## **The challenge; the faith to let go of my plans and follow.**

Ex. My life and starting this ministry, staying in Mongolia, letting go of my dreams.

Preparation to "see" the advent means to repent of trying to hold on to our lives, plans and control life. **What appears to be the end may only be a new beginning**

### **3.) The preparation of disappointment in relationships Matt.1:18-24**

**V18:** Joseph had to have been very disappointed! His bride to be, his joy, comes to him with a story that an angel appeared to her and now she is pregnant with a child birthed by God!

What do you do with that?

V19: Joseph was going to divorce her quietly. Is this not the "righteous" response we so often make? No big public display of anger or trying to embarrass those who have hurt us or disappoint us, just a quiet divorce from the relationship and then we get on with life. Is this not what we often do in the church, quiet divorces from hurtful relationships or disappointing people and then feeling good about ourselves because we did not make a scene. But is this the righteousness of God, or our way of protecting ourselves from further hurt and disappointment?

V20-21: Joseph goes to sleep and God speaks to him in a dream. This child is from God!

Would I believe that dream? How about, will I believe God's word about reconciliation, about forgiveness, about each person being apart of Christ's body and therefore my body?! Will I do what God's word says and take these disappointing people as my bride?

Matthew 5:23-24: "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

Colossians 3:12-14: Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

This is where the rubber meets the road, this is real life and maybe the most difficult part of real life, the disappointment we experience in our relationships with others!

## **The challenge; faith to trust people who have let us down. Faith to see God's redemption in the midst of the failures or apparent failures of people.**

Ex. One inner city ministry, YWAM team

Is there anyone that you need to be reconciled to? To by faith trust again, trusting that God is acting redemptively in the midst of the disappointment?

Preparation for "seeing" the advent means to repent and be willing to trust God's redemptive purposes by trusting others in the midst of them disappointing us.

## **What appears to be the end may only be a new beginning**

Great, just what i did not want to hear!

Two important things about Advent, about preparation for advent:

**1.) The privilege of advent. Being prepared to see the Christ is a privilege! Mary, Luke 1:38**

**2.) The privilege of "seeing" the glory of the Lord in Jesus.**

Sometimes we get so focused on the pain of the preparation, the pain of the road making, that we lose sight of the goal. But there is a goal...the glory of the Lord, the beauty of God as seen in Christ. If we truly see it, well the road work is nothing in comparison to the reality of knowing the Savior, Jesus, the light, the beauty, the glory God. Luke 1:28, Matthew 13:16-17, John 1:4, 16-18.

Faith to embrace God's promises, faith to let go and follow, faith to trust disappointing people...this is God's preparation for the Advent, the preparation for the coming of His son.

How is God preparing the road of your heart this advent season?