

PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD

Third Week in Advent (December 15-21)

Prepare the Way By Proclaiming the Good News

Devotion #1: Isaiah 35:1-10



READ THE TEXT

- ¹ The desert and the parched land will be glad;
the wilderness will rejoice and blossom.
Like the crocus, ² it will burst into bloom;
it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy.
The glory of Lebanon will be given to it,
the splendor of Carmel and Sharon;
they will see the glory of the LORD,
the splendor of our God.
- ³ Strengthen the feeble hands,
steady the knees that give way;
- ⁴ say to those with fearful hearts,
"Be strong, do not fear;
your God will come,
he will come with vengeance;
with divine retribution
he will come to save you."
- ⁵ Then will the eyes of the blind be opened
and the ears of the deaf unstopped.
- ⁶ Then will the lame leap like a deer,
and the mute tongue shout for joy.
Water will gush forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert.
- ⁷ The burning sand will become a pool,
the thirsty ground bubbling springs.
In the haunts where jackals once lay,
grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.
- ⁸ And a highway will be there;
it will be called the Way of Holiness.
The unclean will not journey on it;
it will be for those who walk in that Way;
wicked fools will not go about on it.
- ⁹ No lion will be there,
nor will any ferocious beast get up on it;
they will not be found there.
But only the redeemed will walk there,
- ¹⁰ and the ransomed of the LORD will return.
They will enter Zion with singing;
everlasting joy will crown their heads.
Gladness and joy will overtake them,
and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

READ THE DEVOTION

The world just isn't right, is it? Everywhere you look there is trouble and pain. There are places in the world where children go to bed hungry almost every night. There are places where if you get sick, chances are you will die, because there is no access to medical care.

The world just isn't right. You see it sometimes when babies are born. The child is born blind or deaf or perhaps missing a hand or a limb.

The world just isn't right. You see that in the fact that much of the world is completely unlivable. Try living in the scorching heat of the desert. Try living in the brutal cold of Antarctica. It can be done, but it's miserable.

The world just isn't right. You can probably see it in your own life too, can't you? What is it? Is it a child at school who picks on you and won't stop? Is it a job that seems to be going nowhere? Is it the people who laugh at you for your Christian beliefs? (If it hasn't happened to you yet, it will. Many people in the world think Christians are backwards and not very smart.)

The world just isn't right. And sometimes that makes us sad. Sometimes it makes us afraid. Sometimes it makes us feel weak.

But then, through his Word, God speaks to us. "Be strong! Do *not* fear! Your God will come!" This lesson is talking about Jesus. It says that when Jesus comes, he will make everything that is wrong with this world right again. God will make the blind see. Those who can't walk, Jesus will make walk. Jesus will change the unlivable places — deserts and frozen wastelands — into beautiful gardens full of fruit and flowers. And if anyone has hurt you and has not repented for that sin... Jesus will avenge you.

That almost sounds too good to be true? How can we believe that Jesus is going to come to our world and make everything right? Christmas.

Christmas proved that God keeps his promises. God promised that he would send Jesus into the world to take care of the *cause* of all the world's problems — sin. Jesus did that. We are going to celebrate that in not too long.

But in the lesson we just read, God promised that Jesus is going to come a second time and eliminate the *results* of sin too. The fact that God kept his promise to send Jesus the first time makes us certain he'll keep this promise too.

Do you know someone who is hurting or frightened? You have some good news to tell them! Jesus is coming. He is coming to save us. He is coming to make everything right.

TALK ABOUT THE LESSON

The following are questions you can ask your children to try and drive home the point of this lesson. They are geared towards different ages. You can use as many or as few as needed.

- For the very young: Show them this picture. Ask, "*What is something that happened in the past week that made you sad, something that you would like Jesus to take away?*"

Answer: There are an infinite number of answers. Perhaps your child was sick or was sad that someone else got sick. The point is simply to demonstrate to your child that there *are* things in this world that make us sad. But Jesus *will* fix them! We just need to be patient.

- For slightly older children: Ask, "*The lesson told us: Say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong. Do not be afraid. Your God will come to save you.'* The lesson was asking you to tell others about Jesus. *Why is that important, and what are some times you might be able to do that?*"

Answer: Jesus doesn't want *anyone* to live afraid or sad. But people will be *both* of those things unless they know the good news about Jesus.

There are lots of ways children could share this news. Tell them that whenever a friend of theirs is sad or afraid, that is a time for your child to remind that friend that we have a Savior who loves us perfectly and who is going to give us a perfect, eternal home where there will be no problems.

Witnessing isn't just something your children can do with unbelieving children. Christians often forget the promises of God, and therefore grow sad and afraid. What a blessing it is to have other Christians (including Christian children) to remind us of God's promises!

- For older children/teens: Ask, "*The devotion mentioned babies being born with birth defects. Does that seem fair to you? How can a baby do something so bad that they deserve to be blind?*"

Answer: Part of this answer lies in the fact that children are born of sinful parents. They inherit the sin of their parents, and sin always has consequences. However, the entire premise of the question is false. It paints a picture where the comfort or trouble in our life is directly proportional to how much or how little we sin. It doesn't work that way. Sin has simply broken the world so that it doesn't function the way God designed it too. Therefore, people suffer even when they *haven't* done anything wrong. That is why Jesus is so excited to come again, destroy this world, and create a new and perfect world in its place.

END WITH PRAYER

Come, Jesus! Come and save us! The world is so broken. We know you can come and fix everything that is wrong. We are ready for you to do that. We want you to do that. Come, Lord Jesus! If we have to wait much longer, then please send us your Holy Spirit to give us patience and strength and courage. Give us the courage to share the Good News of your salvation with others. Amen.

PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD

Third Week in Advent (December 15-21)

Prepare the Way By Proclaiming the Good News

Devotion #2: James 5:7-11



READ THE TEXT

⁷Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. ⁸You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. ⁹Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

¹⁰Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

READ THE DEVOTION

Imagine if you were a farmer. You plow the field, breaking up the soil so that you can plant it. Then you go through that field and plant seeds in the ground. Then before you go to bed, you water that field. Would you be angry the next morning if you woke up and that field wasn't full of corn? How silly! Even if you aren't a farmer, you probably understand that crops don't grow instantaneously. It takes time! And so, if you are a farmer, you need to be patient.

It is no different for Christians. Sometimes, we have this silly idea that when we became Christian, everything in our life should have instantly turned hunky-dory. You might see this in your prayer life. You are having some sort of trouble. So you pray about it. Then you are confused and upset when that trouble doesn't disappear in the next 10 minutes. Silly! That's just as silly as a farmer wanting his crop to grow up overnight.

We need to be patient. Parts of your life are perfect already. For example, the way God looks at you is perfect. In your baptism, Jesus perfection was wrapped around you like a robe. When God looks at you he sees perfection, because he sees Jesus.

So parts of your life *are* perfect already. And eventually, all of it will be made perfect. But you need to be patient. Our lesson tells us to consider the example of believers who went before us: prophets like Moses or Elijah, heroes of faith like Job. Those fellow believers were great men of faith. They served the Lord well. Yet, their lives were far from perfect. But they were patient. And now, they live in heaven. Things for them are so perfect, they can't even remember any of the hardship they had here on earth. So it will be for you too! Just be patient!

A big part of Advent is learning to wait... learning to be patient. And so for four weeks we think about Christmas without really celebrating it! We are learning to wait.

It's a lesson we desperately need today. We have fast food, high-speed internet, instant text messages. We are used to getting what we want quickly. But the greatest blessings, the ones that provide lasting happiness, are ones for which we must wait.

For what it is worth, Jesus has to wait too. There is nothing he wants more than for you to be in his home right now, enjoying a perfect existence. He wants that so badly, he was willing to die to make it happen. But he has to wait for you. Jesus knows that for now, you have work to do — sharing the Good News! And so both Jesus and we wait patiently for the perfect life that, soon enough, *will* be ours.

TALK ABOUT THE LESSON

The following are questions you can ask your children to try and drive home the point of this lesson. They are geared towards different ages. You can use as many or as few as needed.

- For the very young: Ask, *“Can you give me some examples of times when it is hard to be patient and just wait?”*

Answer: There are many possible examples. One of them could likely be waiting to open the presents under the tree! Explain to your child that all these times in our life when we have to wait train us to be patient, which is a Christian virtue. There are many times in our life when giving God glory will require patience. So it is a good thing when we learn to wait.

- For slightly older children: Ask, *“When you have to wait for something, what are some things you can do to keep you from getting bored while you wait? What are some things we can do while we wait to go to heaven?”*

Answer: The point of this question is simply to illustrate that waiting for something is easier if we can keep ourselves occupied. For example, a child reads a book while on a long car trip. He is waiting to get to the destination, but he is passing the time productively. Likewise, one of the ways we wait to go to heaven is by keeping ourselves occupied with the good and noble work God has placed before us. There are countless opportunities for us to serve God.

- For older children/teens: Ask, *“Sometimes, people are not impatient when it comes to heaven. Sometimes people don’t even think about going to heaven. When do you think it is that people don’t think about heaven — during really good times of life or really bad times of life?”*

Answer: When life is going really well, we tend not to think about heaven. We are comfortable enough. Human beings set the bar for happiness way too low! A comfortable life is considered good enough to make us forget about a perfect, vibrant existence in heaven. The follow up

question to this is: *Does this help you understand why God sometimes allows our life to be hard?* God wants more for us than we want for ourselves! And so he makes it impossible to fall completely in love with this world. He allows us to experience pain and sorrow so that we long for our true home, the place where those things do not exist.

END WITH PRAYER

Holy Spirit, we humbly ask you to give us the gift of patience. You have already provided us with so many blessings. You have given us faith. You have given us peace in Christ. You have given us the power to live a meaningful life. But since we are impatient, we want the perfection of heaven now. So please, give us patience. As we wait for heaven, help us to pass the time by doing things that help others, including telling them the good news of Jesus. Amen.

PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD

Third Week in Advent (December 15-21)

Prepare the Way By Proclaiming the Good News

Devotion #3: Matthew 11:2-11



READ THE TEXT

²When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples ³to ask him, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"

⁴Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. ⁶Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of me."

⁷As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? ⁸If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. ⁹Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written:

" 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

¹¹I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he."

READ THE DEVOTION

John the Baptist was a very important man. In fact in our lesson Jesus himself says that John was one of the greatest men who ever lived. John the Baptist served God well. He helped prepare people to meet their Savior.

But then John the Baptist was thrown in prison. Some of the things John taught angered King Herod, who had John locked up. Therefore, in

our lesson, some of John the Baptist's followers went to Jesus and asked a question. They asked, "Are you *really* the Savior? Are you *really* the Son of God?"

We understand why John and his followers might be wondering that. They were thinking, "If Jesus is really the Son of God and really loves us, then why would he let John the Baptist go to prison when John didn't do anything wrong?"

Look at how Jesus answers. He doesn't get angry and say, "Of course I'm the Son of God! How dare you question that!" Nor does Jesus explain exactly why John is in prison. Instead, Jesus points to the loving and powerful things he is doing. The fact that he *can* make the blind see proves that Jesus is powerful. The fact that he *wants to* make the blind see proves that he is loving. By reminding John the Baptist and his followers that he is both powerful and loving, Jesus assured them that he really is our Savior. And that is all they needed to know to be comforted.

What a wonderful lesson! Because there are times in our lives when we might have questions too. Something in our life isn't going the way we think it should. And so we have doubts. "Is Jesus paying attention to me? Does he care about me? Does he really have the power to help me?" When that happens, we learn from this lesson where we should go. Go straight to Jesus!

Go to Jesus in prayer with your concerns. Then go to his Word so he can speak to you. What will Jesus tell you when you read his Word? He will tell you that he came to earth on that first Christmas, just for you. He will tell you he loved you so much he was happy to die for you to pay for your sins. He will tell you that he is so powerful, he was able to rise from the dead. He will tell you that he will raise you from the dead too and take you to live forever with him in

heaven. That is all you need to know to be comforted.

If you ever have questions about Jesus... ever question whether he cares for you... go straight to Jesus with those questions. Go to his Word. He will completely comfort you with very good news. He is your loving Savior.

TALK ABOUT THE LESSON

The following are questions you can ask your children to try and drive home the point of this lesson. They are geared towards different ages. You can use as many or as few as needed.

- For the very young: Ask, *“Tell me some things that Jesus did to prove that he is both very loving and very powerful?”*

Answer: Any of Jesus’ healing miracles would illustrate these things. Ultimately, Jesus did miracles to prove that he was true God. That means when he died on the cross, that was a very special sacrifice! It is a sacrifice great enough to pay for the sins of the entire world.

- For slightly older children: Ask, *“If you ever have doubts about some of the things that God tells you in the Bible, does that mean you are an unbeliever?”*

Answer: No. Every believer will, from time to time, have doubt creep into his heart. It is sinful to doubt what God says, but it doesn’t make you an unbeliever. Like all sins, we take the sin of doubt to Jesus and we ask him to forgive us. More than that, we ask him to send us the Spirit through the Word to take our doubts away. The goal here is to assure your children that if they ever begin to have doubts about Scripture, it doesn’t mean they are unbelievers! But they do need to deal with their doubt by taking it to Jesus, just like John the Baptist did in our lesson.

- For older children/teens: Ask, *“When we have questions about life, why is it important that we go to Jesus? Why not just listen to our peers and friends?”*

Answer: Because they are sinful human beings, they don’t always have good or

correct answers! For example, imagine if John the Baptist’s followers had gone to the Pharisees and asked, “Do you think Jesus really is the promised Savior?” The Pharisees would have given the wrong answer! Likewise, if your high-school aged child has doubts about how the universe came into existence, he probably shouldn’t take that doubt to his non-Christian physics teacher. If your teenage girl has doubts about what is appropriate/inappropriate to do with a boyfriend, it is silly for her to seek the counsel of her BFF, who thinks premarital sex is just fine so long as it is “safe”. When we have questions about life, we go to Jesus. He tells us what we need to know. And his answers flow from a heart that is pure love and only wants our eternal happiness.

END WITH PRAYER

Dearest Jesus, please forgive us for any time that we doubt your love for us or doubt the things you tell us in the Bible. You proved your love for us beyond all doubt when you died for our sins. You proved your power beyond all doubt when you rose from the dead. Help us to just trust you. Help us to trust that no matter how our life may be going, you are acting in love. In your name we pray. Amen.