

Sermon Notes for the Third Sunday of Advent 2021
December 12, 2021

Today's "sermon" will come in several parts. My intent here is to provide the basic outline of the messages and some verses for your reflection later.

The first part of the message comes in the early moments of our worship service during the lighting of the third Advent candle, the candle I am calling *parousia* this year. *Parousia* is an ancient Greek word that in the New Testament refers to the second coming, the bodily return of Jesus Christ to establish His eternal kingdom in the new heavens and new earth.

I want to remind us that Advent is a wonderful opportunity to think rightly about Jesus and prepare for our worship of Him to be appropriate and adequate in spirit and in truth. John wrote of Jesus that "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." This is the point of Advent, to remind ourselves that the Light has come and the darkness is powerless to overcome the Light."

But, why do we need such a reminder? Why not just get on with the celebration and forego the intentional preparation? Because of the effort of evil to advance darkness where the light shines. Look at the moral and spiritual decline in the culture and world. Doesn't it feel like the darkness is winning? It does to me sometimes. But darkness, by nature, cannot overcome light. Darkness cannot force light to be less light. Darkness can only advance where there is no light. If there is light the darkness, by definition, retreats.

So how does the darkness in the world seem to be overtaking the light? It is not because the Light is lessening. It is not because the darkness is growing. It is because evil, using the primary tool of deceit, is preventing people, even people who have claimed to be followers of Jesus, from seeing the light.

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4:4 writes,

In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Evil uses deceit and lies to prevent people from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. The darkness cannot change the light or limit the light or overcome the light, so the darkness works in the world to prevent us from seeing the light, from seeing the incarnate glory of God in Jesus Christ, who is the image of God.

That's why, in this Advent season, we are talking about the glory of the Incarnate Christ. We are taking this time to see the light, to know Jesus as He is, God, in all His glory, come to us as man, truly God truly man in one Jesus.

The second part of this message, as we continue toward lighting the *parousia* candle, is to take

note of what Jesus says about Himself as God. In Revelation 1:8, God makes five significant statements about Himself. He says,

I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and was and is to come, the Almighty.

First, God says that He is the “I am.” This phrase, as it is given here in the Greek language is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew for of God’s divine name, *Yahweh*, “I am.” God tells us as He has from the first that He is self-existent, self-sustaining, eternal, infinite, boundless, timeless, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, unique, holy, without equal. He alone is God there is no other.

“I AM” then uses a merism to help us understand that all that exists draws its existence and continuance from Him. A merism uses to extremes to express inclusiveness: from A to Z and everything in between. There is nothing that exists that does not owe its existence to God.

Third, I AM declares that He is the Lord God. He is the Master. The Ruler. Numero Uno. In fact, He is the only “Numero Anything.” He has sole authority over all He has created. He is the sovereign. His rule and authority and power and will are absolute. Listen, you can fight Him, but you cannot win. He is singular, unique, worthy of worship, faith, and obedience.

Fourth, I AM speaks to the way we experience Him in our context of time that flows in a line from past through present to future. It is interesting that we usually use that order: was, is, is to come, but God uses a different order: is, was, is to come. You see no matter where you plot your coordinate on the timeline, God is fully there. No matter who encounters God at what time in history, at that moment, God is. He is not becoming. He is not passing away. He is in that moment all that He ever is, has been, or will be. For God, every moment in our time, He is present. We may perceive Him in past, present, or future, but God knows Himself and us in eternal present.

You know what that means? Nothing in our human experience ever surprises God. Nothing catches Him off guard. And therefore, He never makes a move He regrets because He never does anything without knowing His full and complete will relative to the action, including the infinite ramifications of every action of His and ours.

Finally, I AM identifies Himself as “the Almighty.” God is fully able and adequate to accomplish anything and everything He wills. No plan of His can be thwarted. No weapon formed against Him can prosper. No opposition has hope of success. No attempt of God’s ever fails. He doesn’t say, “Let there be light,” and get a fruitcake. He doesn’t choose a soul for salvation only to be rejected. God accomplishes all He wills.

This is the glory of God in words revealed for human understanding. God is the I AM, the Alpha and the Omega, the LORD God, the One Who is and Was and Is to Come, the Almighty. Now, why remind ourselves of this at Advent? Why take a month to draw attention to what God says about Himself and His glory? Because Jesus Christ, the virgin born Babe in a manger, the Son of

God and Son of Man hung on a cross and laid in a grave, and raised by the power of the Spirit of God on the third day, Himself lays to claim to be God. Look at Revelation 22:12 -13:

¹² “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

Did you hear what Jesus said? He said, “I AM the Alpha and the Omega . . .” Jesus declared Himself God. Jesus Christ is God Incarnate, the glory of God in human form. We take this time we call Advent to remind ourselves that the One Whose birth we celebrate, the One whose *parousia* we await is God Himself. Not a mere representative, not a messenger, not a lesser being created for some divine purpose, but God in all His glory come to save us from our sins and restore us to a right relationship with our Creator.

One day Jesus will return. He will come riding the white horse of royalty, the King of kings and the Lord of lords and His recompense will be with Him. The world waited for His first coming to a manger in Bethlehem. The church awaits His next coming in victory and majesty and glory. But there is another coming, another way in which God is gloriously present in the world even now.

Jesus Christ is God come in the flesh. What we expect of God in faith we ought also to expect of Christ. So, what may we expect of Jesus right now? Let me invite you to turn to Psalm 107. Here in this Psalm we encounter ourselves at various moments in our lives. We may meet ourselves in our past, our present, or our future, but in every case, God comes to those He loves.

We’re going to read the Psalm responsively. I have highlighted the parts you will read. In invite you to meet yourself and, more importantly, meet Jesus Who is God in this Psalm as He meets you.

¹ Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! ² Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble ³ and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

⁴ Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to a city to dwell in; ⁵ hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them.

⁶ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. ⁷ He led them by a straight way till they reached a city to dwell in.

⁸ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! ⁹ For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

¹⁰ Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, prisoners in affliction and in irons, ¹¹ for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High. ¹² So he bowed their hearts down with hard

labor; they fell down, with none to help.

¹³ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. ¹⁴ He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and burst their bonds apart.

¹⁵ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! ¹⁶ For he shatters the doors of bronze and cuts in two the bars of iron.

¹⁷ Some were fools through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities suffered affliction; ¹⁸ they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death.

¹⁹ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. ²⁰ He sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction.

²¹ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! ²² And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of his deeds in songs of joy!

²³ Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the great waters; ²⁴ they saw the deeds of the LORD, his wondrous works in the deep. ²⁵ For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. ²⁶ They mounted up to heaven; they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their evil plight; ²⁷ they reeled and staggered like drunken men and were at their wits' end.

²⁸ Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. ²⁹ He made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. ³⁰ Then they were glad that the waters were quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven.

³¹ Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man! ³² Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders.

³³ He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, ³⁴ a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the evil of its inhabitants. ³⁵ He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water. ³⁶ And there he lets the hungry dwell, and they establish a city to live in; ³⁷ they sow fields and plant vineyards and get a fruitful yield. ³⁸ By his blessing they multiply greatly, and he does not let their livestock diminish.

³⁹ When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, evil, and sorrow, ⁴⁰ he pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes; ⁴¹ but he raises up the needy out of affliction and makes their families like flocks. ⁴² The upright see it and are glad, and all wickedness shuts its mouth.

⁴³ Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the LORD.

The final part of today's message will focus on baptism. One of our young men will be baptized. I will share with the congregation four affirmations we make when we are baptized:

1. I affirm that I have heard the gospel.
 - a. **1 Corinthians 15:3-5 (ESV)** ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.
 - b.
2. I affirm that I believe the gospel
 - a. **Romans 8:29-30 (ESV)** ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.
 - b. Salvation is both THAT we believe AND what we believe
 - i. Salvation is the work of God's choosing
 - ii. Those whom God chooses He calls
 - iii. Those whom God calls He justifies in Christ
 - iv. Those whom God justifies He glorifies
 - v. Salvation is the work of God in which I put my faith and trust
3. I affirm that I commit to the gospel.
 - a. **Romans 6:1-4 (ESV)** ¹ What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.
 - b. Baptism is our "I do" to God's commit of grace and mercy in Christ.
 - i. No more can a baptized believer continue life in sin and selfishness than can a man or woman continue life as though single, having said "I do."
 - ii. Life after baptism is life different