

First Sunday in Advent

Living Advent Expectantly

Matthew 24:36-44

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Analysis by Norb E. Kabelitz

[Jesus said to the disciples,] 36“About that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, 39 and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. 41Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left. 42Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. 43But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.”

Note: “The Christian faith looks forward in hope to the coming of the Son of Man, (and Kingdom of God), not backward to a golden age (nor is it stuck in the present for mere survival in a dead end street). If hope is not at the center of faith it is neither Christian nor Biblical” (Norman Wegmeyer, Rejoice With Us, Augsburg 1972).

DIAGNOSIS: Consequences of Un-anticipation

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Un-aware*

Low awareness or no expectations of the second coming or divine intervention influence one to concentrate only on making the most out of this life, i.e, " if in this life only we have hope" (1 Cor. 15:19). Such hope is limited and expresses itself in business as usual: Eat and drink; marry, be given in marriage (v. 38). It is a life that revolves around self with no awareness of other possibilities for this life.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Un-motivated*

Even if we are made aware of a "coming," (if not of the Son of Man, then the coming of a potential natural disaster), not knowing the time—when or if—we remain unmotivated to change, to repent. We get lulled into a false security by our unbelief, our misbelief, our disbelief. Skeptical and arrogant we bleed the resources of the present for our benefit and uncaringly and irresponsibly bankrupt the future. This is an "inconvenient truth!"

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Un-done!*

Water has the potential to support us or drown us depending on whether we are "on it" or "under it" (see 1 Peter 3:21). Since, "they knew nothing until the flood came, all were swept away" (v. 39). The homesteader who was not vigilant invited a thief to plunder his house (v.43).. Like the victims of slavers or of war, one is captured and imprisoned while another escapes. (Rapture enthusiasts use this text [v. 40] to support bumper stickers that proclaim: "In case of rapture, this car will be driverless." Cynics suggest, ""In case of rapture, can I have your car?") On the other hand, if we are locked into a present without a future, "we are most to be pitied!" (1 Cor. 15:19). We

are undone! (see also Rapture Exposed by Barbara Rossing, 2004, Basic Books pp. 180-183).

PROGNOSIS: The Promise of Advent Expectancy

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (External Solution) : *Christ as Expediter*

Jesus as Son of Man expedites (ensures the movement of his goods and services), and fulfills the will of God to save and give us a future. Jesus identifies the Son of Man who “for us and for our salvation came down” (Nicene Creed) to join the human race as one of us to free us from a perilous present and ensure a godly future. We know him as Son of Man who came “to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19). We know him as Son of Man who came “to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). He was taken for us, captured, convicted, and hung. We do not need to face similar circumstances without His involvement and victory. We say it and confess it: “He shall come again to judge the living and the dead” (Apostles’ Creed). We all shall be judged by Jesus Christ, who as Son of Man came, and will come, as the one who seeks, who saves, and who gives.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Advent Excitement*

Excitement is the child of hope and hope is a consequence of faith. We are excited and aroused to faith and faithfulness by his promise. We will seek to live out his calling as “Son of Man” in our own lives. The Son of Man is coming at an unexpected, unanticipated hour (v. 44). That promise motivates us to live out the present with an eye on his future. His future brings reconciliation and righteousness; things awry made right! We count on it, we bet on it. We are bound to live out that future in our present, on earth as in heaven. We are oriented toward the fulfillment of his ministry and therefore we watch. “The great value of the doctrine of the Second Coming is that it

guarantees history is going somewhere. We cannot tell how it will happen or when [What we do believe] is that there is one divine event, far off, [or maybe not], to which the whole creation is moving; there is a consummation; there is a final triumph of God" (William Barclay). To "watch" means to "light a candle for Messiah" in the window of Advent as a sign that we are committed to be light in the darkness of the world, whether that darkness is expressed as unbelief or "unrighteousness."

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : Exemplary!

Aware of the Promise—and kept aware by the element of surprise—we are sent as disciples who witness to the Son of Man's redemptive word and work; as servants who care for the world, we become involved in many ways of feeding the hungry, the homeless, the refugee, and the widow; we even dare to visit and support the judged in prison. We are called to exercise the ministry of the Son of Man—to exemplify it. As we go about our daily work we confess it weekly, even daily, "Come, Lord Jesus!" It is, as Bob Bertram said, "a hopeful waiting for our Best Friend to return." Therefore, live expectantly; live responsibly; live compassionately! Maranatha! (1 Cor. 16:22). Our Lord, come!