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Between Advents

I. Introduction

Have you ever noticed how different Christmas feels when you're a child versus when you're an adult?

When I was a kid, Christmas Eve was almost unbearable. I'd lie in bed, wide awake, straining to hear sleigh bells or reindeer hooves on the roof. Every creak of the house made my heart race. I knew—with absolute certainty—that morning was coming, that gifts were waiting, that everything wonderful was just hours away. The waiting was agony precisely because the promise was so sure.

But somewhere along the way to adulthood, many of us lose that sense of expectant waiting. We still celebrate Christmas, but it's become more about remembering what happened than anticipating what's coming. We've turned Christmas into nostalgia instead of prophecy.

And I wonder if that's happened with our faith too. We're pretty good at looking back at the first coming of Christ—the baby in the manger, the cross, the empty tomb. We celebrate what Jesus did. But when's the last time you lay awake at night, unable to sleep, because you were so excited about Jesus coming back?

The early church had a prayer they prayed constantly. It's actually one of the oldest Christian prayers we have record of—so old that Paul doesn't even translate it. He just writes it in Aramaic: *Maranatha*. It means "Our Lord, come!" ([1 Corinthians 16:22](#)).

That was their heartbeat. *Come, Lord Jesus. Come soon.*

But if we're honest, most of us don't pray that prayer very often. And when we do, it doesn't carry the same weight. We've settled into the in-between. We're living between two Advents—between Christ's first coming and His second—but we've forgotten we're waiting for anything at all.

Here's what I want us to explore together tonight: What if the way we celebrate Advent—the way we wait for Christmas—is actually meant to train us for how we should be living every single day? What if the whole point of remembering that the Light came once is to keep us ready for when the Light comes again?

We're going to look at what Scripture says about Christ's return, why we can be absolutely certain it's coming, and how that future hope should transform the way we live right now. Because the Christian life isn't just about looking back at what happened in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago. It's about looking forward to what's going to happen when heaven and earth become one, when every tear is wiped away, when death dies, and when we see our King face to face.

II. The Promise of His Return: He's Coming Back the Same Way He Left

Let's start where the story picks up after the resurrection. Jesus has appeared to His disciples multiple times over forty days, teaching them about the kingdom of God. And then comes this remarkable scene

Acts 1:9–11 ESV

⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

The eyewitnesses who watched Him leave

Picture this scene. The disciples are standing on the Mount of Olives, and Jesus is speaking His final words to them. Then, right before their eyes, He begins to rise. Not metaphorically. Not spiritually. Physically. His body lifts off the ground and ascends until a cloud receives Him out of their sight.

They're standing there, necks craned, mouths probably hanging open, staring at the spot where He disappeared. And that's when two angels appear and essentially say, "What are you doing? Stop staring at the sky. He's gone. But here's what you need to know: He's coming back exactly the same way."

The Greek word for "in the same way" is *hon tropon*—"in which manner." This isn't vague. The angels are saying: Just as you saw Him go—bodily, visibly, physically, in the clouds—that's exactly how He's coming back.

This matters because there are all kinds of theories about what Christ's "return" means. Some say it's just spiritual—that Jesus comes back into your heart when you're saved. Others say it happened in AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed. Still others say it's metaphorical for the advance of the gospel in the world.

But the angels leave no room for reinterpretation. The same Jesus—not a principle, not an idea, not a movement—will return in the same manner—physical, visible, bodily, in the clouds.

The certainty rooted in His first coming

Now here's why this promise matters so much for us during Advent. The reason we can be absolutely certain that Jesus is coming back is because He already came once.

Think about it. For thousands of years, God's people waited for the Messiah based solely on prophecy. They had promises written by Isaiah, Micah, Malachi, Daniel—but they'd never seen those promises fulfilled. They were waiting for something that had never happened before.

We're in a completely different position. We're waiting for the second coming of someone who already came once. We're anticipating the return of a King who has already proven He keeps His promises.

Every Christmas, we celebrate the fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies. The virgin birth ([Isaiah 7:14](#)). Born in Bethlehem ([Micah 5:2](#)). From the line of David ([2 Samuel 7:12-13](#)). Called out of Egypt ([Hosea 11:1](#)). Preceded by a messenger ([Malachi 3:1](#)). The list goes on and on.

God didn't miss a single detail. Everything He promised about the first advent came true exactly as He said it would. So when that same God promises a second advent, we don't have to wonder if He'll follow through.

The manner of His coming: impossible to miss

Jesus Himself described what His return would be like. Look at [Matthew 24:27, 30](#):

"For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man... Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes

of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

Notice the imagery: lightning flashing across the entire sky. Every tribe seeing Him. Coming on clouds with power and glory.

This is not a secret event. This is not something you'll need to check the news to find out if it happened. When Christ returns, there will be zero ambiguity. Revelation 1:7 puts it this way: "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him."

Every eye. Believers and unbelievers. Those who loved Him and those who crucified Him. From every nation, tribe, and tongue. Everyone will see. Everyone will know. There will be no need for anyone to announce it because it will be self-evident to every person on earth.

The contrast with His first coming

Here's where the two advents create such a striking contrast. When Jesus came the first time, He came in obscurity. Born in a stable to a peasant girl in a backwater town. Announced to shepherds—the lowest social class in Jewish society. Recognized by a handful of faithful remnant—Simeon, Anna, the magi.

Most people missed it entirely. Herod tried to kill Him. The religious establishment rejected Him. Even His own family thought He was out of His mind at one point (Mark 3:21).

But when He comes the second time? Philippians 2:9-11 tells us the result:

"Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

First coming: knees bowed in mockery before the cross.

Second coming: every knee bows in acknowledgment of His lordship.

First coming: crowned with thorns.

Second coming: crowned with many crowns (Revelation 19:12).

First coming: rejected by men.

Second coming: recognized by all.

III. Children of Light Living in Darkness: Our Position While We Wait

This brings us to a crucial question: If Jesus is coming back, and we know He's coming back, how are we supposed to live in the meantime? Paul addresses this directly in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. Let's walk through it carefully.

The day and the night (vv. 1-3)

"Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'There is peace and security,' then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."

Paul starts by acknowledging something the Thessalonians already knew: God hasn't given us the exact date and time. The phrase "times and seasons" (*chronoi kai kairoi*) refers to both general periods and specific moments. Paul's saying, "You don't need me to give you a detailed timeline."

Why? Because Jesus already made it clear: "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (Matthew 24:36).

But notice what Paul does say: it will come "like a thief in the night." Now, this doesn't mean Jesus is a thief—it means His coming will be unexpected to those who aren't watching. A thief doesn't send a notification. He doesn't schedule an appointment. He comes when the homeowner is unprepared.

And who's unprepared? Those who are saying "peace and security." The Greek word for "peace" is *eirēnē*—a sense of calm, safety, everything under control. The word for "security" is *asphaleia*—firmness, certainty, freedom from danger.

In other words, the people who will be caught off guard are those who have settled into this world as if it's permanent. They've made themselves comfortable. They've built their lives on the assumption that things will just keep going as they are. And then—sudden destruction.

The image of labor pains is brilliant. If you've ever been around a woman in labor (or experienced it yourself), you know: there's a point of no return. Once labor truly begins, that baby is coming. There's no stopping it. No negotiating.

That's how it will be when Christ returns. For those who aren't ready, there will be no second chance, no time to get their affairs in order, no opportunity to change their minds.

Our identity as light-dwellers (vv. 4-8)

But then Paul makes a crucial shift:

"But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation."

Here's the stunning truth: we are not in darkness. Present tense. Not "we will be children of light someday" but "we are children of light right now."

This is positional reality. Because we're in Christ, we've already been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light ([Colossians 1:13](#)). We're not waiting to see if we'll make it into the light—we're already there.

The day of the Lord won't surprise us like a thief because we're already living in that day. We belong to the age to come even while we're still physically present in this age.

But—and this is critical—positional reality creates practical responsibility. *Because* we're children of light, Paul says, "let us not sleep." Let us stay alert. Let us be sober-minded.

The word "sober" (*nēphō*) means to be free from intoxication, but metaphorically it means to be self-controlled, clear-headed, not distracted or dulled by the things of this world.

And then Paul gives us the armor: "the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation."

Notice what protects us: faith (trust in God's promises), love (for God and others), and hope (confident expectation of salvation's completion). These aren't things we conjure up through willpower. They're the natural result of understanding who we are in Christ.

Our destiny (vv. 9-11)

Paul concludes with the ultimate assurance:

"For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."

The word "destined" (*tithēmi*) means "appointed" or "set in place." God has not appointed believers for wrath. That's not our destiny. Our destiny is salvation—full, complete, final salvation.

And here's the beautiful part: "whether we are awake or asleep." Paul's not talking about being spiritually alert or drowsy here. He's talking about whether we're physically alive or dead when Jesus returns. It doesn't matter! Either way, we'll live with Him.

This is the Christian's comfort. We're not trying to time the market, hoping we're spiritually awake at the exact moment of Christ's return. No—our salvation is secure because it rests on what Christ has already done, not on our ability to maintain perfect vigilance until the end.

Living between the advents

So here's where we are. We live in this strange in-between time. The kingdom has been inaugurated but not yet consummated. The King has come but hasn't yet returned. We've been transferred into the light, but we're still physically present in a dark world.

Theologians call this the "already but not yet." We already have eternal life ([John 5:24](#)), but we're not yet experiencing it in its fullness. We're already seated with Christ in heavenly places ([Ephesians 2:6](#)), but we're not yet physically there. Sin and death have already been defeated ([1 Corinthians 15:54-57](#)), but they haven't yet been eliminated.

And this in-between time isn't purposeless. God hasn't forgotten about us or lost track of His timeline. [Second Peter 3:9](#) tells us exactly why there's been a delay:

"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

Every day that passes between the first and second advent is another day of grace. Another opportunity for people to hear the gospel and be saved. Another chance for rebels to become children. The "delay" isn't forgetfulness—it's patience.

But make no mistake: patience has a limit. The door will close. The day will come. And those who belong to the light will be vindicated, while those who chose darkness will face the reality they've been denying.

IV. The Eternal Light: When Darkness Ends Forever

Now I want to take you to the end of the story. Revelation 21:23-25 and 22:5. This is the apostle John describing the new creation, the eternal city of God:

"And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there... And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever."

No more sun, no more night

Think about what John is describing. In the new creation, there will be no sun. No moon. No lamps. No light fixtures. No flashlights. No candles.

Why? Because the glory of God will be the light source.

This is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 60:19-20:

"The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended."

Throughout Scripture, light and darkness have represented opposing kingdoms. Genesis 1 begins with darkness covering the face of the deep, and God's first creative act is to speak light into existence: "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3).

But notice something interesting: God creates light on Day One, but He doesn't create the sun, moon, and stars until Day Four. How can there be light without the sun?

The answer is that God Himself was the light source. The sun is just a created intermediary—a reflector of the true light. And in the new creation, we won't need intermediaries anymore. We'll have direct access to the Source.

The Lamb as the lamp

John tells us that "the Lamb" is the lamp of the city. Not just God in general—specifically Jesus, the Lamb who was slain.

This is profound. The scars that Jesus bears from the cross will be eternally visible. When we see Him in glory, we won't see an untouched deity who observed suffering from a distance. We'll see the One who entered into our darkness, who bore our sin, who died our death.

And those scars will radiate light. The wounds that purchased our redemption will be the source of our eternal illumination.

In John 1:4-5, John wrote about Jesus' first coming: "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."

When Jesus came the first time, He entered a dark world and the darkness tried to extinguish Him. They arrested Him, tried Him, mocked Him, beat Him, nailed Him to a cross, and buried Him in a tomb.

And the darkness thought it had won.

But on the third day, light burst from that tomb. Death couldn't hold Him. The grave couldn't keep Him. Darkness couldn't overcome the Light.

And when He comes again, there will be no more contest. Revelation 21:4 tells us the result: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

No more night

"There will be no night there." Five words that undo Genesis 3.

When sin entered the world, darkness entered with it. Not just physical darkness, but spiritual, moral, emotional darkness. The darkness of shame, hiding, fear, death, suffering, decay.

Every night since the Fall has been a reminder that we live in a broken world. We sleep because our bodies are weak. We lock our doors because evil prowls in the darkness. We fear the night because that's when predators hunt and enemies attack.

But in the new creation? No more night. Ever.

No more sleep, because we'll have resurrection bodies that never grow tired. No more fear, because there will be no evil. No more darkness, because the source of all light will dwell among us.

This isn't just about improved lighting. This is about the complete, final, irreversible defeat of everything darkness represents. Sin, death, sorrow, pain, decay—all of it gone. Forever.

Learning from Advent

And here's why this matters for how we celebrate Advent: Christmas is a preview of this eternal reality.

When Jesus was born, the angels appeared to shepherds and "the glory of the Lord shone around them" ([Luke 2:9](#)). Light breaking into darkness. Heaven invading earth. Glory shining in the night.

The star that led the magi wasn't just astronomical coincidence—it was a sign that the true Light had entered the world.

When we put up Christmas lights, we're not just decorating. We're proclaiming something: light has come, and light will come again. The darkness is temporary. The night will end.

And one day—maybe soon—the Light will come in such fullness that darkness will be nothing but a distant memory. A sad chapter in a story that ends with unimaginable joy.

V. Keep Watch: The Parable of the Ten Virgins

Jesus knew that His followers would have to wait a long time for His return. So He told them stories—parables—to help them understand what faithful waiting looks like. One of the most sobering is found in [Matthew 25:1-13](#). Listen to what Jesus says:

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

The context: a wedding feast

To understand this parable, we need to know a bit about first-century Jewish wedding customs. When a couple got engaged, the groom would go back to his father's house to prepare a place for his bride. He might be gone for months or even a year. When everything was ready, he would return—often at night—to claim his bride and bring her to the wedding feast.

The bride and her attendants had to be ready because they never knew exactly when the groom would arrive. They would keep their lamps burning and oil ready so that when the cry went up—"The bridegroom is coming!"—they could immediately join the procession.

Jesus is using this familiar image to describe His relationship with the church. He's the bridegroom who has gone to prepare a place ([John 14:2-3](#)). We're the bride, waiting for His return. And when He comes, there will be a wedding feast—the marriage supper of the Lamb ([Revelation 19:6-9](#)).

All waiting, not all ready

Notice something crucial: all ten virgins were waiting for the bridegroom. All ten had lamps. All ten fell asleep during the delay. This isn't a story about Christians versus non-Christians. This is a story about two kinds of people who both claim to be waiting for Christ.

The difference isn't in their intentions or their knowledge that the bridegroom is coming. The difference is in their preparation. Five brought extra oil; five didn't.

When the cry comes at midnight—"Here's the bridegroom!"—all ten wake up. All ten want to join the feast. But only five have lamps that will stay lit.

The foolish virgins ask the wise ones to share their oil, but the wise refuse. This sounds harsh until you understand what's at stake. If the wise virgins share their oil, all ten lamps will go out. Nobody will have enough light to join the procession. The wise virgins aren't being selfish—they're being realistic. Some things can't be borrowed or transferred. You can't live off someone else's faith.

The tragedy of "too late"

Here's the most heartbreaking part of the parable. While the foolish virgins are scrambling to buy oil, the bridegroom arrives. Those who are ready go into the wedding feast, "and the door was shut."

That door is a tragic image. It's not locked because God is cruel. It's shut because the time for preparation has ended. The wedding has begun.

When the foolish virgins finally show up and cry out, "Lord, lord, open to us," the bridegroom's response is devastating: "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you."

He doesn't say, "You're too late." He doesn't say, "You should have been more prepared." He says, "I don't know you."

What the oil represents

So what does the oil represent? Commentators debate this, but I think the best answer is: genuine spiritual life. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. Real faith, not just external religiosity.

You can go to church every Sunday and not have it. You can know Bible verses and not have it. You can serve in ministry and not have it. The foolish virgins looked exactly like the wise virgins from the outside. Same lamps, same place, same activity. But when the moment of testing came, the difference became obvious.

In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus gives a similar warning:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"

Notice: they call Him "Lord." They did religious activities in His name. They even performed miracles. But Jesus says, "I never knew you."

The oil is the difference between religion and relationship. Between going through the motions and actually knowing Jesus. Between claiming to wait for the bridegroom and actually being ready when He comes.

Watch therefore

Jesus concludes the parable with a simple command: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

The word "watch" (*grēgoreō*) means to stay awake, be alert, keep vigilant. It's a military term—like a guard on duty who knows the enemy could attack at any moment.

But notice: even the wise virgins fell asleep during the delay. So "watching" can't just mean staying physically awake 24/7. It means living in a state of readiness. Keeping your lamp filled. Maintaining relationship with Christ. Not presuming that you have unlimited time to get serious about your faith.

This parable is meant to create urgency. Not panic, but holy urgency. Because here's the truth: none of us knows when the door will shut for us personally. We don't know if we have fifty years or fifty minutes. And we certainly don't know when Christ will return.

So the time to get ready is now. Not later. Not after you've achieved your career goals or raised your kids or retired or gotten your life together. Now.

Because when the cry goes up—"Behold, the bridegroom!"—it will be too late to start looking for oil.

VI. How Then Shall We Live? Practical Holiness While We Wait

This brings us to the most practical question: If Christ could return at any moment, how should that affect the way we live today? Peter addresses this directly in 2 Peter 3:8-14. Let's look at it carefully.

Understanding divine timing (vv. 8-9)

"But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

Peter is writing to believers who are starting to wonder: It's been decades since Jesus left. Where is He? Did He forget? Was He wrong?

And Peter says: You're thinking about time the wrong way. God doesn't experience time like we do. A thousand years pass like a single day to Him. What seems like a delay to us is purposeful patience to Him.

The Greek word for "slow" (*bradynō*) means to delay or hesitate. Some people were accusing God of being slow—of not keeping His promise. But Peter says the opposite is true: God is being patient.

And why? "Not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

This is staggering. Every day that Christ delays His return is another day of grace. Another opportunity for sinners to be saved. Another chance for rebels to come home.

If Jesus had returned in AD 100, you and I wouldn't exist. If He'd come back in 1950, many of us wouldn't have been born. Every generation that passes is another harvest of souls brought into the kingdom.

But patience has a limit.

Certainty of the Day (vv. 10-13)

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

The day *will* come. Not might come. Not probably will come. *Will* come. And when it does, the entire present order will be dissolved.

The word "dissolved" (*lyō*) means to loose, unbind, break apart. It's the same word used for breaking chains or untying knots. God is going to unbind the present creation the way you'd untie a package.

Everything we think of as permanent—mountains, oceans, stars, planets—will melt in the fire of God's presence. Not because creation is evil, but because it's been corrupted by sin and needs to be remade.

And here's Peter's application: "Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be?"

In other words: If everything you can see is temporary, how should that change your priorities?

If your house is going to burn, do you spend your energy redecorating it? If your job is going to be dissolved, do you make it your identity? If your reputation is going to melt, do you build your life around protecting it?

Peter's answer: Live lives of holiness and godliness.

The word "holiness" means to be set apart, different, consecrated to God. The word "godliness" means reverent worship, living in the fear and awareness of God.

This isn't about joyless rule-following. It's about living in light of reality. The reality that this world is passing away and a new one is coming. The reality that we're not home yet.

Practical response (v. 14)

"Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace."

The word "diligent" means to make every effort, to be zealous, to give it your all. Peter isn't saying, "Casually hope you're ready." He's saying, "Work hard at this."

Work hard at what? At being "without spot or blemish."

Now, this doesn't mean sinless perfection—we won't achieve that until glorification. It means living in repentance, dealing seriously with sin, not tolerating known rebellion in your life.

And notice the last phrase: "and at peace." Not anxious. Not terrified. Not frantically trying to earn salvation at the last minute. At peace—because your confidence is in Christ's finished work, not your own performance.

What this looks like practically

So let me get specific. How does the return of Christ change the way we live today?

First: It changes our relationship with possessions.

If everything material is temporary, we hold our stuff loosely. We're generous because we can't take it with us. We use money for kingdom purposes because we're investing in the only thing that lasts: people.

Jesus said it plainly in [Matthew 6:19-21](#): "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Second: It changes our relationship with people.

If Jesus could return today, we don't have time for petty grudges. We don't have time to put off reconciliation. We don't have time to assume we'll share the gospel with that family member "someday."

Ephesians 5:15-16 says: "Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil."

The Greek phrase "making the best use of time" is literally "buying up the opportunity" (*exagorazō ton kairon*). Every conversation is an opportunity. Every relationship is a chance to reflect Christ. We don't waste time because we don't know how much time we have.

Third: It changes our relationship with suffering.

When you know the story ends with resurrection, new creation, and eternal glory, present suffering becomes bearable. Not meaningless—bearable.

Paul puts it this way in Romans 8:18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

He's not minimizing pain. He's putting it in perspective. Seventy or eighty years of struggle versus endless ages of joy? It's not even close.

Fourth: It changes our relationship with sin.

If you really believed Jesus could return today, would you click on that website? Would you nurse that grudge? Would you lie on that tax form? Would you indulge that lustful thought?

First John 3:2-3 says: "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."

Hope in Christ's return produces holiness. Not legalism. Not fearfulness. But a genuine desire to be like the One we're going to see face to face.

VII. Be the Light: Our Mission Between the Advents

Now we come to the heart of our calling. What are we supposed to be doing while we wait? Jesus answered this in Matthew 5:14-16:

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way,

let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Our identity: "You ARE the light"

Notice Jesus doesn't say, "You should try to be light" or "I hope you'll become light someday." He says, "You ARE the light of the world."

This is present-tense identity. Because we're in Christ—the true Light—we reflect His light into the darkness around us.

But here's the key: we're not the source of light. We're reflectors. The moon doesn't generate light; it reflects the sun's light. And we don't generate spiritual light; we reflect the light of Christ.

This takes all the pressure off. We're not responsible to manufacture righteousness, wisdom, or holiness out of our own resources. We're simply called to remain connected to the Source and let His light shine through us.

Our visibility: Cannot be hidden

"A city set on a hill cannot be hidden."

In the ancient world, cities were built on elevated ground for defense. At night, their lights would be visible for miles around. Travelers could navigate toward the light. Lost people could find their way home.

Jesus is saying: When you live as a child of light in a dark world, you will be noticed. You can't help it. Light in darkness is always conspicuous.

This means we shouldn't try to blend in. We shouldn't camouflage our faith or hide our allegiance to Christ. Not in an obnoxious, self-righteous way—but in a genuine, authentic way.

When your coworkers are gossiping and you don't participate, they notice. When you choose integrity over profit, people notice. When you forgive instead of seeking revenge, the world takes note.

Our purpose: Good works that glorify God

"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

The purpose of our light isn't to draw attention to ourselves. It's to point people to God.

This is the difference between showing off and shining forth. Showing off says, "Look how great I am." Shining forth says, "Look how great God is."

And notice: it's our good works that cause people to glorify God. Not just our words. Not just our theology. Our actions.

James 2:17 says, "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." Real faith—faith connected to the Source of light—will inevitably produce visible good works.

What kind of works? Jesus gives us the model throughout the Gospels:

- Feeding the hungry
- Caring for the sick
- Welcoming the outcast
- Speaking truth with grace
- Pursuing justice for the oppressed
- Showing mercy to the guilty
- Loving enemies
- Blessing those who curse you

These aren't optional activities for super-spiritual Christians. These are the normal overflow of a life connected to Christ.

The lighthouse illustration

Let me give you a picture. Imagine a lighthouse keeper in the 1800s. His job is simple: keep the light burning every single night. Why? Because ships are out there in the darkness, navigating treacherous waters, trying to avoid rocks that could destroy them.

The lighthouse keeper doesn't build the lighthouse. He doesn't generate the light. He doesn't control the weather or the waves. His job is simply to keep the lamp full of oil and the lens clean so the light can shine as far as possible.

Some nights are clear, and the light is visible for miles. Other nights are stormy, and the light barely penetrates the fog. But the keeper's job doesn't change. He keeps the light burning regardless of circumstances.

And here's the thing: he may never meet most of the sailors he saves. He won't get thank-you notes from ship captains. He won't see headlines about the disasters he prevented. He just faithfully tends the light, night after night, trusting that it matters.

That's us. We're lighthouse keepers in a dark world. Our job is to keep the light of Christ burning in our lives—through our words, our actions, our love, our integrity. We may never know the full impact. We may not see immediate results. But we keep the light burning because lives depend on it.

And one day—maybe soon—the Harbor Master will return. The ships will dock safely in the eternal harbor. The storm will be over. And there will be no more need for lighthouses because the Lord Himself will be the light.

But until that day, we keep the light burning.

Our urgency: Time is short

Here's why this matters with particular urgency: we don't know how much time is left.

Second Corinthians 6:2 says, "Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation."

Every person you encounter might be meeting their last chance to hear the gospel. Every conversation might be the one that determines someone's eternity. We don't have the luxury of assuming we'll have another opportunity.

This doesn't mean we should be anxious or pushy. It means we should be intentional. Prayerful. Alert to the opportunities God brings.

Who in your life needs to see the light of Christ today? Not someday. Today. Who needs to hear that there's hope beyond this broken world? Who needs to know that the Light has come and is coming again?

VIII. Conclusion: Living Advent Lives

So let me bring this full circle. We started by asking: What if the way we celebrate Advent is meant to train us for how we should live every day?

Here's what I mean. During Advent, we do several things:

We remember what God has already done. We celebrate the incarnation—that God became flesh and dwelt among us. We marvel at the first coming of Christ.

We anticipate what God will do. We look forward to Christmas morning. We live in expectant hope. We mark the days, knowing the celebration is coming.

We let the future hope shape present behavior. We're more generous during Advent. We reach out to family. We sing songs about peace and joy even when circumstances are hard. We light candles in the darkness.

Now here's the revolutionary idea: What if that's exactly how we're supposed to live all year long?

Remember what He has done

The Christian life begins with looking back at the cross and empty tomb. We remember that Jesus has already accomplished our salvation. The work is finished. The victory is won. We've been rescued from darkness and transferred into light.

This isn't ancient history. This is the foundation of everything. When you're discouraged, remember what He's done. When you're anxious, remember what He's done. When you're tempted to earn God's approval, remember what He's done.

Anticipate what He will do

But we don't just look back. We look forward. We live with confident expectation that Jesus is coming back. That death will be swallowed up. That every tear will be wiped away. That the darkness will end forever.

This isn't wishful thinking. This is certainty based on the character of God and the pattern of His faithfulness. He kept every promise about the first advent. He'll keep every promise about the second.

And this hope changes everything. When you know how the story ends, you can endure the hard chapters. When you know resurrection is coming, you can face death. When you know light will reign forever, you can bear the darkness a little longer.

Let hope shape holiness

And because we remember what He's done and anticipate what He will do, we live differently today.

We're generous because we're investing in eternity. We're patient because we know God's timeline is perfect. We're bold in witness because time is short. We're pure because we're going to see Him face to face.

We put up lights—not just at Christmas, but every day—declaring that darkness doesn't have the last word.

We sing songs of hope—not just in December, but in June and September and February—reminding ourselves and others that joy is coming.

We gather together—not just for holiday services, but week after week—encouraging one another as we see the Day drawing near ([Hebrews 10:25](#)).

The final invitation

So here's my question for you: Are you ready?

Not "Have you been perfect?" You haven't. None of us have.

Not "Do you have your life together?" You don't. None of us do.

But: Are you ready? Do you know Jesus? Not just know about Him—know Him. Is your lamp filled with oil? Are you connected to the Source of light?

Or have you been going through the motions? Showing up at church, saying the right words, but your heart is far from God?

The foolish virgins looked exactly like the wise virgins from the outside. Same lamps. Same place. Same activity. But when the moment of testing came, the difference was obvious.

Don't wait until the door shuts to find out which kind you are.

If you've never truly surrendered your life to Christ, today is the day. Not tomorrow. Not after you get your act together. Today. Right now. Call out to Him. Confess your need. Trust in His finished work on the cross. Ask Him to fill your lamp with His Spirit.

And if you're already a believer but you've been coasting? Wake up. Trim your lamp. Refill your oil. Get serious about your walk with God. Because whether Christ returns in your lifetime or you go to meet Him through death, the day of reckoning is coming.

But don't let that terrify you. Let it energize you. Let it fill you with holy urgency and joyful expectation.

Because here's the truth: we're not waiting for a disaster. We're waiting for a wedding. We're not dreading judgment; we're anticipating reunion. We're not hoping we'll barely escape; we're confident we'll be welcomed home.

The prayer of the early church

Let me close with where we began. The early church prayed constantly: *Maranatha*—"Our Lord, come!"

That wasn't a prayer of fear. It was a prayer of longing. Of love. Of desire to see the One who had captured their hearts.

And that should be our prayer too. Not just during Advent. Every day.

Come, Lord Jesus. Come soon.

Not because we hate this life, but because we love You more.

Not because we're trying to escape, but because we're homesick for a home we've never seen.

Not because we're afraid, but because we're in love.

The Light came once, born in a stable, bringing hope to a dark world.

The Light dwells in us now, shining through cracked and broken vessels, pointing others toward home.

And the Light will come again—in power, in glory, in fullness—and darkness will be no more.

So keep watch. Keep working. Keep hoping. Keep loving. Keep your lamps burning.

Because the Bridegroom is coming. And when that cry goes up—"Behold, the Bridegroom!"—those who are ready will enter the feast.

Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.