

LIFE BETWEEN THE ADVENTS

First Peter 1:3-9

Preliminary Matters

Over the past six Sundays, we have looked at the incarnation of Jesus Christ in a variety of ways. In a sense, today's sermon is focused on the *application* of the incarnation of Jesus Christ to our lives: what difference is the incarnation of Christ to make to us?

The Eternal Word, God the Son, was incarnated in His first advent. He lived a holy and righteous life, died as a substitute for sinners, rose from the dead on the third day, and ascended to heaven.

The Bible is crystal clear that Jesus will come back just as He left, through the clouds. His second advent will not be to continue His atoning work, however, but to bring final judgment to the wicked and inaugurate the eternal state for His people.

You and I are living right now between these two events. How are we supposed to live in light of our redemption in Christ's first advent and of the establishment of His Kingdom on earth in His second advent?

So then, how are we to live between the advents?

Peter tells us. We are to live by faith. Let's look at First Peter 1:3-9.

BY FAITH

First Peter 1:3-9

**3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who according to His great mercy**

has caused us to be born again to a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
4 [in order for us to] obtain an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and
unfading,
having been kept in heaven for you,
5 who are protected by the power of God THROUGH FAITH
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

God, who regenerated us according to His great mercy, has safeguarded our inheritance in heaven. That inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. It cannot be lost, stolen, or destroyed.

The same is true for us. Our lives seem to be uncertain. But the truth is that we are safeguarded by God through faith. The word *protected* implies being kept in a heavily guarded and defended military fort. No enemies can harm us. All of this happens through our faith in our Great God.

Peter goes on,

6 In this [meaning everything Peter says in 1:3-5] you greatly rejoice,
even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by
various trials,
7 so that **the proof of your faith,**
being more precious than gold
which is perishable, even though tested by fire,
may be found to result in praise and glory and honor
at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Why are we *grieved by various trials* if we are protected in God's fortress? The Scripture tells us. The trials that grieve us are not attacks of the enemy but tests of our faith. At that time, gold was shown to be pure by melting it; any impurities would separate from the gold and become visible and could be removed. Our faith, which is infinitely more precious than gold, is also tested by the fire of suffering.

How pure is your faith? Suffering both reveals the answer and allows purification. Pure gold has a proven value, and so does purified faith. The proven value of faith is the praise, glory, and honor that will be given to Christ when He returns.

Peter concludes by saying,

**8 And though you have not seen Him, you love Him,
and though you do not see Him now but believe in Him,
you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,
9 receiving as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.
(1 Peter 1:3–9, 2022 LSB)**

We must remember that “grieved by various trials” goes side by side with “joy inexpressible and full of glory.” Melting gold doesn’t harm the gold; being grieved by various trials doesn’t harm our faith. Instead, it reveals the richness of our faith, the “joy inexpressible and full of glory.” The best thing that can happen when you melt gold is that you end up with the same amount of gold. But the outcome of our faith, proven through the various trials of our lives, is the salvation of our souls.

Now, receiving the *salvation of our souls* is the same as receiving the *inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading*. We can’t separate the two, as though salvation is the key to the vault that contains the inheritance. Salvation IS the inheritance. The inheritance IS salvation. Elsewhere the Scripture speaks of the things God has prepared for those who love Him, “things which eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and which have not entered into the heart of man” (First Corinthians 2:9). These are all different descriptions and qualities of the same incredible gift.

And what do we do to receive the incorruptible, undefiled, unfading inheritance? What do we do to obtain the salvation of our souls? What do we do to receive the things we have never seen, heard of, or imagined?

We believe the Gospel. We believe in Jesus Christ. We believe God’s promise.

We believe. Our part is faith. We don't deserve these things; they are not a reward. We cannot earn them; they are of infinite value. God gives salvation to us, the inheritance, the things unseen, unheard of, and unimagined, on the basis of our faith in Him.

I hope you see the importance of your faith in Christ. With faith in Jesus Christ, everything God promises is yours. Without faith in Jesus Christ, you have nothing.

So, let's understand this clearly. Saving faith is not merely wishful thinking that one day I *might* be saved. Rather, it is a deep conviction and belief that Jesus Christ has already saved me, securing my salvation. It is the persuasion that *my* life between *His* two advents is the opportunity to live that salvation in my daily life, to "work it out," as Paul says in Philippians 2:12-13. The good works that we do are not the means by which we deserve or earn my salvation. They are the things we would naturally do if we had been born righteousness in the first place, as Jesus was.

Since everything depends on faith, let's make sure we understand it.

WHAT IS FAITH?

Hebrews 11:1 says,

I Now faith is the **assurance** of things hoped for,
the **conviction** [or *indisputable proof, evidence, persuasion*] of things not seen.
(Hebrews 11:1, 2022 LSB)

The word **assurance** means *essence, substance, or reality*.

The word **conviction** has the sense of *indisputable proof, unassailable evidence, or complete persuasion*.

So faith is not wishful thinking, daydreaming, or unrealistic optimism. The person who says, “I have faith in God, and I sure hope that He will save me,” doesn’t have biblical faith.

Faith is the assurance and substance of salvation. That is, faith is not what *leads* to salvation. Faith is the evidence that salvation has taken place.

Faith is the conviction, the indisputable proof, of salvation. Someone who trusts in Christ to save them IS saved. Yes, faith is the *means* by which the grace of God saves us (Ephesians 2:8-9). But faith is also the evidence that we have been saved and are at home in Christ.

What’s more, biblical faith is not merely the confidence that I am saved but the confidence that God has saved me. That is, biblical faith is not faith in my spiritual state but faith in God’s saving work. It is not faith in my experience but God in God’s promise and power.

What does Paul say to the Philippians?

3 I thank my God in all my remembrance of you,
4 always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all,
5 because of your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.
6 For I am confident of this very thing ...

And what does Paul say next? “I am confident of this very thing, that you will continue to believe?”

No!

6 For I am confident of this very thing,
that **He who began a good work in you**
will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 1:6, 2022 LSB)

Faith is never dependent upon itself but upon God, who not only gives us faith and the promise that faith clings to but **fulfills His promise through the very faith** that He has given us.

THREE QUESTIONS

Having saving faith means believing God, entrusting ourselves to God, and relying on God.

So let me ask you three questions.

First, do you believe God?

When He speaks in His Word, do you set aside every other consideration? Abraham was deeply grieved that he didn't have a son of his own; his heir was a slave born in his household. But Yahweh said to Abraham, "One born from your own body shall be your heir" (Genesis 15:4). Abraham **believed** God, and it was counted to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). In Romans 4 Paul says

**19 And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;
(Romans 4:19, 2022 LSB)**

The so-called "prosperity doctrine" fails at this point. Those false teachers say that a person should never focus on the negative, only on the positive. Well, what did Abraham do? He contemplated the deadness of his body and Sarah's womb. That is, he carefully considered just how useless his body was. He thought in depth about how fruitless Sarah's womb was. He focused his attention on the impossibility of them having a child.

20 yet, with respect to the promise of God,
[Abraham] did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith,
giving glory to God,
21 and being fully assured that what God had promised,
[God] was able also to do. (**Romans 4:20–21, 2022 LSB**)

Facing the truth of our circumstances does no harm to biblical faith. In fact, it strengthens our faith by making it clear that only God can do what God has promised.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that God is able to do what He has promised?

Second, do you entrust yourself to God?

Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, built a massive statue of himself and demanded that everyone in his kingdom worship it. Three Jewish men – Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah – refused. The king threatened to execute them in the furnace used to melt the bronze for the statue. They still refused. Listen to what they said.

17 “If it be so, [**Or if He desires**]
our God whom we serve
is able to save us from the furnace of blazing fire;
and He will save us out of your hand, O king.
18 But if not, [**That is, even if Yahweh DOESN’T save us**]
let it be known to you, O king,
that we are not going to serve your gods,
and we will not worship the golden image that you have set up.”
(**Daniel 3:17–18, 2022 LSB**)

What a scene that must have been! Over here is Nebuchadnezzar, standing

before this massive statue, 90 feet tall, demanding that everyone pretend that HE is just as mighty and impressive as the statue. In front of him, thousands are on their knees, pretending that he is as powerful as he pretends to be. And in their midst, three Hebrew men remain on their feet, not only standing above the groveling multitude but really standing taller than Nebuchadnezzar himself.

These men worshiped Yahweh alone and were convinced that He could do anything He liked. He could deliver them out of the furnace if He chose. But even if He didn't – even if He let them die in agony in the flames – they were not going to pretend that a mere man was worthy of worship. They lived out what Peter would write hundreds of years later: “Those who suffer according to the will of God must entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing good” (First Peter 4:19).

Do you entrust yourself to God regardless of your circumstances?

And third, do you rely on God?

Relying on God means resting the full weight of your life and circumstances on Him. Paul and his companions had been led by the Spirit of God to Europe, specifically to the city of Philippi. There was no synagogue there, but some women gathered for prayer at a local river (what we would call a creek). Paul began teaching there on a regular basis. One day as he and the others were heading to the riverside, Paul cast a demon out of a slave girl. Her owners objected, and Paul and Silas were arrested, severely beaten, and put in stocks in the local jail. We pick up the story in Acts 16:25,

25 But about midnight

Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

We don't know what they were praying, do we? But we *are* told they were “singing hymns of praise to God.” That makes me think that their prayers were not

the kind that complains, “God, how could You do this to me?”, but rather the kind that says, “Father, we trust that You are in control of everything.”

We don’t know what hymn of praise they were singing, but perhaps it was Psalm 107:13-16,

13 Then they cried out to Yahweh in their trouble;
He saved them out of their distresses.

14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death
And **broke their bands apart.**

15 Let them give thanks to Yahweh for His lovingkindness,
And for His wondrous deeds to the sons of men!

16 For He has shattered the doors of bronze
And cut through the bars of iron.

(Psalm 107:13–16, 2022 LSB)

That would certainly be appropriate since Luke goes on to say,

26 And suddenly there came a great earthquake,
so that the foundations of the jailhouse were shaken;
and immediately all the doors were opened [**He shattered the doors of bronze
and bars of iron]**

and everyone’s chains were unfastened. [**He broke their bands apart]**

(Acts 16:25–26, 2022 LSB)

Paul and Silas were utterly powerless over their circumstances. They couldn’t free themselves. They couldn’t open the door of their cell or unlock the chains that held them in the stocks. But they believed in God. They entrusted themselves to Him. And they relied on Him, putting the full weight of their circumstances on Him. Because they did so, they were able to pray with joy and sing hymns of praise to God.

BRINGING IT HOME

Faith certainly made sense before the incarnation of Jesus Christ. But how much more sense does it make since the incarnation? The old hymn says,

“I serve a risen Savior, He's in the world today
I know that He is living Whatever men may say
I see His hand of mercy I hear His voice of cheer
And just the time I need Him He's always near”

“In all the world around me I see His loving care
And though my heart grows weary I never will despair
I know that He is leading Through all the stormy blast
The day of His appearing Will come at last”

“Rejoice rejoice O Christian Lift up your voice and sing
Eternal hallelujahs To Jesus Christ the King
The Hope of all who seek Him The Help of all who find
None other is so loving So good and kind”

*“He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way!
He lives! He lives! Salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives ... the Bible tells me so!”*

Let's pray, and then we'll sing that hymn together.