

Be Prepared

38 years ago, when I started courting Susan, her house overlooked the village of Tarbert and so she could look down from her house to mine and see me getting ready.

My time keeping was not as good as it is now so she could see the number of attempts that I had to get ready for our date. In and out of the car several times before I finally left to go and pick her up.

It's something that she has mentioned on several occasions since but when you are getting ready for something important, you want to look your best and make a great impression – that was my excuse.

Today is the first Sunday of getting ready for the Coming of God and we have four weeks to prepare ourselves for Christmas and look our best.

Advent for Christians is a time of preparation and getting ready!

Lent is a time for preparing for Easter, Advent is a time to prepare our souls and hearts for Christmas. Yes, to be introspective and to look within ourselves and see how we can best prepare for the coming of Christ.

The Apostle Paul gives us a message of how to prepare for Advent.

He tells us to love one another, 13 v8, “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the debt to love one another...”

It begins with loving one another. Love is the fulfilment of the law. I'm sure that's what motivated me to look my best for Susan – Love.

What next... “understand the present time”. 13v11 That's a powerful thought for us as Christians to understand the present time, for the present time in our world is chaotic. The present time is one where we live under a cloud of fear and uncertainty.

Climate change is high on the agenda and so we face a great threat to our world as we know it. War is never far off the scene, and it's even closer as it enters Europe. Economic crisis and the resulting impact that this is having on many people, and so Paul's words are urgent and wise, “Believers, understand your present times”, and for those early Christians in Rome, their present time was also full of fear and uncertainty, where the Emperor was a loose cannon, and Christians were hunted for sport. When Rome burned to the ground, Nero falsely blamed Christians.

Understand the present times.

Why? Because their salvation is nearer now than when they first believed. V11. God is still in control He will return to His world to bring His salvation. So, they have to wake up and be ready!

It is good for us also to hold this spiritual truth in mind, that God is ultimately in control, and He is coming with His salvation for all who trust in his Son.

In v12, Paul uses imagery of night time and darkness and the night is darkest before the dawn appears. This sums up their present moment, in the midst of spiritual and moral darkness, *be ready*, he tells them, *for the night, is almost over...*

Paul then instructs them practically on what they should be doing to get ready and those teachings are also for us this morning.

His message is simply, put aside deeds of darkness and put on the armour of light - 13v12. It's a powerful metaphor, especially to those living in Rome, who would see the Roman soldiers fully armed and protected by their armour, and that's the image he gets them to think about.

Literally if we are to be ready for Christ coming, then his people must be ready to receive him, and it's about a radical change in their lives.

Whatever creates darkness in our lives must be laid aside and God's armour of light must be put on. Jesus spoke about this in the Sermon on the Mount, when he encouraged his disciples, to be the light of the world, to be like a city on a hill; in Nepal at night time, in the darkness high on the hills, you can look across the valley and see other small villages, and see little flickers of light, shining brightly, coming from their homes; when we were in a remote area of Uganda, in pitch blackness, the stars twinkled so brightly; that's what Paul says, we are to shine in the darkness.

The deeds of darkness are many and the Apostle highlights some... immorality, dissension, jealousy, and there are more deeds that are not on this list, greed, selfishness, pride, anger, gossip, unkindness and the list goes on...deeds of darkness.... Put them off, said Paul, and protect yourself with the armour of light.

Then clothe yourself with Christ. Here is the answer to preparing ourselves for advent and for his coming to us, that we literally must clothe ourselves with Christ.

What does this mean?

It speaks about our relationship with Jesus.

When we receive him into our lives, when we make that decision to follow him, he literally takes over, he begins a process of cleansing our lives, and driving out the deeds of darkness and slowly making us more like himself.

So, there we have it, Paul's advent message. He tells them, love each other - understand the present times, be ready for Christ coming with his salvation, as we wait, put off all the things that we know are dark and not wholesome, and clothe yourself with Jesus.

I am glad that 38 years ago I took that time to get ready for Susan, it's worth the effort, for when Jesus returns or calls us to himself, then we will be prepared to meet with him.

Amen