

**ADVENT IMPERATIVES: “BE ALERT!”**  
**Advent 1 – November 27, 2016 (s714.doc)**  
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*“Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap. For it will come upon all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”*

–Luke 21:34-36 (NIV84)

It’s just 28 days until Christmas. That’s a little hard to believe, isn’t it? Just a couple weeks ago we had temperatures in the 60s, and now we’re getting ready for Christmas. Are you ready? For most of us, there’s a lot to do in a short time before we can feel like we’re really ready:

- There is **shopping** that needs to be done...
- There are **gifts** that need to be wrapped...
- We need to put the **holiday decorations** up—inside and outside...
- **Cookies** need to be baked...and we have to **clean up the house**...and these are just some of the things we need to do if we’re going to feel like we’re ready for Christmas.

But as we try to get all these things done over the next 28 days, the one thing we **really** need to do—the most important of all—is perhaps the easiest to forget. The most important thing we can do to get ready for Christmas is to **prepare our hearts**.

And that’s precisely why we celebrate the season of Advent.

Advent is a time of **inner preparation**, of **quiet reflection**. It’s a time to take a break from the busy-ness of all the other things that need to be done, to gather here in the house of our Lord, and to listen, quietly, to him as he speaks to our hearts through his Word. It’s a time for us to let our Savior prepare us for his coming—both now and at the end of time.

Today we begin a sermon series entitled: **ADVENT IMPERATIVES**.

In each of the weeks leading up to Christmas we will be looking at an **imperative** from the Bible—a **command** or **exhortation**—that will give us some direction as we prepare to celebrate our Savior’s birth. Today we begin our series by taking a look at what Jesus says about the end of time in Luke chapter 21. Here Jesus himself urges us to: **“Be Alert!”**

And he points to the two most important things on our “to do” list:

- 1. Look for the signs of his coming.**
- 2. Be ready for him when he comes.**

As we get ready to celebrate our Savior’s first coming as a child in Bethlehem, we also need to be preparing for his second coming at the end of time.

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It’s Tuesday of Holy Week—just days before Jesus would suffer and die for the sins of the world. He’s at the temple in Jerusalem—where he’s been teaching—and his disciples are with him. They can’t help but comment on the temple’s magnificence, *“adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God”* (Luke 21:3). “But,” Jesus tells them, “the day is coming when it will all be completely destroyed.” The disciples want to know. “When will this be? How will we know that it’s about to take place?” So Jesus teaches them what to look for—the signs that will signal the destruction of the city (Jerusalem), and of the temple. But he makes it clear that all of this is just a picture of **an even greater destruction to come**—the destruction of the world at the end of time.

These are signs that have meaning for us, too. So let’s take a look at those events that will signal that the end of the world is getting closer.

- *“Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and, ‘The time is near.’ Do not follow them”* (Luke 21:8). People will claim that they are the Christ and try to predict when the end will come. We need to watch out.
- *“Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom”* (Luke 21:10). There will be wars on the earth.
- *“There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven”* (Luke 21:11). There will be natural disasters of all kinds.
- *“But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them....”* (Luke 21:12,13). The Christian church will be persecuted, but those who are faithful to God will have many opportunities to share their faith.
- *“When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near....”* (Luke 21:20). The city of Jerusalem will be surrounded by enemies and finally destroyed.

Jesus’ words are clear. The only question for us is: how many of these signs have already been fulfilled?

- Are there people today who are false Christs? Absolutely. Every generation has its list of those who claim to be the second coming of Christ. And every generation has its preachers who preach that they know the precise day when Jesus will come.
- Are there wars and natural disasters happening throughout the world? Yes. All you have to do is turn on your TV. Last year we heard about conflict in Crimea. Now the hotspots seem to be Syria and Iraq. But the truth is, there is conflict raging all over the world.
- And we hear about fires, hurricanes and tornados, earthquakes and tsunamis on a weekly basis. You can argue about whether the cause is man-made or not, but the real point is that Jesus told us they would happen...and they’re a sign that the end is drawing closer.
- Is the Christian church is being singled out for persecutions? Yes. It’s happening all over the world...but we also see it right here at home.
- Was the temple of the Lord completely destroyed? Yes it was. In the year 70 AD the residents of Jerusalem rebelled against the Romans. The Romans responded by completely destroying the city and leveling the temple.

Each of these signs has been fulfilled. The end could come at any time.

So be alert! Look for **these** signs of the end...but look also for those signs that will reveal that the end of the world is **imminent**—that the end will be **soon**. Jesus said, *“There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken”* (Luke 21:25,26). These haven’t happened yet, but just before our Lord returns in all his power, the world will be in convulsions.

- If you refuse to believe in Jesus as your Savior, it will be a day of absolute terror.
- But if you do believe in him—if put your trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins—the horrific signs in the heavens will be your cue to do just what your Savior says: *“Stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near”* (Luke 21:28).

Understand that. As children of God, you do not need to be afraid when you see the signs of the end being fulfilled. No. If you’re watchful and alert (as Jesus says), you will see these signs as the fulfillment of your Savior’s promise to come back to take you home.

He will come to deliver you from all the difficulties and hardships, all the pains and sorrows you have now. So be alert! **Look for the signs of the end** so that you will **be always prepared** for the day Jesus comes again.

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But there is another reason why you need to be alert. *“Be careful,”* Jesus said, *“or your hearts will be weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap.... Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man”* (Luke 21:34-36).

We all need to be alert because ***we need to guard our hearts***. We need to “be on guard” so that our hearts are not “*weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness and the anxieties of life...*” We don’t want to spend our time and energy chasing after pleasure, drinking, and other things that we don’t take time to do what’s really important.

If we’re not careful, our sinful nature might succeed in making us feel that we can live as we please because we’ll have plenty of time to clean up our act later. But the last thing we want to do is to lose our focus on our Savior. The illusion that we can live for ourselves now and for our Savior later can be shattered by the sudden end of our own life...or it can be shattered by the sudden return of our Lord to this earth. And then...it will be too late for us to get our spiritual house in order before we meet Jesus face to face.

So be alert. “*Be always on the watch and pray*” (Luke 21:36). Make it your goal to stay so close to Jesus ***now*** so that no matter what happens—no matter ***how your life ends*** or no matter ***when Jesus returns***—you will know “*that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man*” unafraid, unashamed, and uncondemned.

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Twenty-eight days. That’s all. Just twenty-eight days before Christmas. And it will arrive, right on schedule, with or without you. Are you ready?

It may be more to the point to ask: How many days are left until the Lord comes back? How many days do you have before the Lord closes the last page on the book of your life? We don’t know. And since we don’t know, we need to listen to our Lord and ***Be alert!***

Be alert and look for the signs that the end is getting closer. Be alert and guard your heart so that you’re ready for Jesus when he comes!

AMEN.