

## Everything That Matters Requires Preparation – Denny Wayman

Isaiah 2:1-5; Psalm 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44

Today is the first day of the new Christian year, the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is the four weeks of preparation needed in order to fully recognize and celebrate the birth of “Jesus the Christ” on Christmas. And Christmas requires 12 days to celebrate, leading up to Epiphany on January 6<sup>th</sup>.

Along with Lent preparing us for Easter, Advent and Christmas demonstrate this vital truth that “everything that matters requires preparation.” We can see that in the simplest of things, from the Thanksgiving dinners we just celebrated which required hours of preparation, to the graduation that is coming which requires years of preparation. We see it in weddings and birthdays, in building a home or establishing a career, or even having a friend or creating church community. “Everything that matters requires preparation.”

But if we are honest, we often want the joy of the celebration without the work of the preparation.

A few weeks ago I attended some of the Science and Faith events at the University. They were amazing. I was both informed and encouraged. But I would have to say that it was obvious when a person did not prepare (at least not as much). Now I don’t know why a person would do that—but the result was that we did not get to enjoy the “fullness of the moment” because the preparation was missing. “Everything that matters requires preparation.”

It would not be an understatement to say that the most important events in human history are the birth of Jesus, when God became flesh, and the resurrection of this in-fleshed One, when his life was taken. Both “matter” in virtually every way—and both required “preparation.”

When I was young and came to understand that Adam and Eve brought such immeasurable suffering into their lives and ours, my first thought was, “Why didn’t God just fix it? Why didn’t he send his Son to the Garden and help Adam and Eve confess their sin, end their rebellion, find forgiveness and be healed of their brokenness?”

But then I realized, would they have been ready? Were they prepared to understand what they had done and why “God himself—and no Other” had to come and suffer?

You see, in our Old Testament text the prophet Isaiah is writing 700 years after Moses and the Exodus and 700 years before Jesus comes. So in our text the preparation is now seven centuries along, or about halfway through. By this time God had established the truth that understanding comes from “God himself” provided in His house—Yahweh’s house—the *Lord’s house*.

If you will look again at your Old Testament reading, Isaiah 2, in verse 2, Isaiah says that *in days to come* (which is not as helpful as the King James, which more accurately translates the Hebrew word “Akh-ar-eeth” *in the last days*—meaning “in the days of the Messiah,” or “when the Messiah comes”) *the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established as the highest of the mountains—not physically but spiritually—and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations*

*shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

At the time of Isaiah’s writing the First Temple, the Temple of Solomon, was 300 years old, and would be destroyed within two centuries. The Passover had been celebrated for 700 years by now. The sacrificial lamb and the atonement for sin had now been established for hundreds of years. The weight of sin and its forgiveness was increasingly understood.

But it was not yet “the fullness of time.” The preparation was only half-done—or we could even say half-baked. For, as is often true of preparation, we can become confused and think the preparation, the setting in which the lesson is taught, is the purpose—that it is in Jerusalem itself—that this is all about a city, a place. A city that then we fight over for centuries.

The same thing is true in our lives now. We can become confused and think that becoming a better person, a more compassionate and kind person, is the purpose of life—that we are to become mind-ful—rather than Spirit-filled.

Look again at the poet’s words in the psalm. Psalm 122 was written by David around 1000 years before Christ’s incarnate birth and looks forward to the day the Temple will be built. But let’s start with verse 2. David writes:

*Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem,  
Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together.  
To it the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. For there the thrones for judgment were set up, the thrones of the house of David.  
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: “May they prosper who love you.  
Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers.”*

There is no doubt that God was using this city of God’s peace, Jerusalem, and the Temple that was built by David’s son, as the place of preparation. And it is true that we all have a special connection to this place and we join the “stream” of people who go there. But it is not on this mountain or any physical mountain that we worship the One who can only be worshipped in Spirit and in truth. The preparation is not complete.

So that leads us a thousand years later to the Epistle to the Romans. Look once more. We should read the whole text but let’s focus just on verse 11, where Paul explains that we are now in the time of the Messiah, the moment we need to wake from our preparation. Starting in verse 11, Paul writes: *Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light ... put on the Lord Jesus Christ...* The same is true for us!

In our time, when we live approximately 2019 years after Jesus was born, the time now is to wake up, put on the Lord Jesus Christ and live in His transforming presence. Unlike Adam and

Eve who could not have understood, we can fully understand the power of sin and death and the necessity of a Savior, a Messiah whose Holy Spirit is with us like an armor made of light. We can be with God because we were prepared to be with Him—Immanuel.

But that leaves us with one last reality. We are still in preparation. Preparation for the Second Coming and ultimate “fullness of time” – the completion of time itself perhaps, when all things will become complete, from creation itself to each individual who has ever lived. That is the preparation Jesus gives us in his words. Look at verse 42. Jesus says: *Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But 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. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.*

The great suffering that began with the first sin of Adam and Eve has been dealt with only in part by the coming of God in Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is saying that you and I are still in preparation for the ultimate coming, the Ultimate Advent when all things will become new.

The question we now ask ourselves is, “How do you prepare for that?”

How do you prepare for the completion of life itself, let alone your own life?

What does it look like to no longer live in the darkness but to live in the light? As we move toward Christmas, with the increasing light symbolized by the Advent Wreath, may we be ready to light the Christ Candle now in 2019 and in eternity.

“Everything that matters requires preparation.”