

THE COMING KING

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.” (Matthew 25:13, NIV)

AS MUCH AS I LOVE BIRDIES, I RARELY KNOW WHEN THEY’RE COMING. Just the other day, I had two excellent chances late in my round, but the first putt lipped out and the next died across the front of the hole. I wasn’t too upset at these lost opportunities, though, because earlier I had slammed a long-range, big-breaking putt right into the back of the cup. It was a putt I had *no* business making, but it fell in the hole for the kind of birdie you laugh about.

Much of the unexpected in life, however, is no laughing matter. We get caught off guard in ways that embarrass us or reveal a weakness. Circumstances take a disturbing turn and we’re left reeling. No one likes bad surprises.

The season of Advent, this liturgical lead-up to Christmas, is all about what’s coming, both expected and unexpected. And it asks of us the question, “Are you ready?” We’ve often ruined this question by tearing it from its biblical moorings, replacing it with the semi-competitive challenge, “Have you finished your shopping yet?” I like to answer this lesser question by telling of a friend who intentionally waits until December 24 to do any of his shopping. It is his way of spreading Christmas cheer when customers and cashiers alike need it most. But I’ve never had anyone respond by saying, “You know, that’s what I need to do next year!” Most of us would rather be ready. At least when it comes to shopping.

So why are we not as attentive to the coming of Christ? Perhaps it is because we cast the context of Christmas in history alone: “Christ has already come; we are only commemorating that day.” But following this course keeps us from examining our own level of expectation that Christ will come again—and our own readiness for his return.

Perhaps Jesus’ parable of the ten virgins, which concludes with today’s verse, should be taught every Christmas season. It is a reminder that upon his return Christ will be looking for “faith on the earth” (Luke 18:8). While the day and the hour of his coming again are unknown to us, the measure of our readiness will be fully known to him. Glossing over the need to be prepared for Christ’s second coming while giving grand attention to his first coming is widely missing the point. Let’s not only light our candles this season, but let’s “trim our lamps” and look for the coming King.

Opening questions Tell the story of the last time you laughed at a birdie. • What traits and activities are involved in being ready for the unexpected?

READING Matthew 25:1-13; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-5:11; Daniel 12:1-3

The importance of readiness (Matthew 25)

What contrast do we see between the two groups of women in this parable? How stark is that contrast at the end of the story?

Preparation and encouragement (1 Thessalonians 4-5)

What was the context for Paul’s exhortations in 5:6-8? Why might we classify readiness as a spiritual discipline? How can you use the contents of this passage to encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Wisdom and eternity (Daniel 12)

According to the prophecy of Daniel, what will the end result be for those who are wise in the ways of the Lord, ready at his return?

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