

## IT'S COMING!

### Luke 3:14

It's coming! And we're not going to stop it. I could be talking about it getting colder this winter or the coming of Christmas or the end of the semester or the end of the year. These things will happen despite our best efforts to ignore or work around them.

John the Baptist told people that the Messiah, the promised one of the Old Testament was coming. The prophet Malachi said that God's messenger would come to prepare for the coming of the LORD. The promise came true with John, who prepared the way for Jesus to come. John's message to the people was, "You better be ready for Him to come."

That message continues today. St. Paul in our second lesson from Philippians speaks of the "Day of our Lord." That is the day when Jesus will come again. He is coming. We can't stop it. What are we going to do about it?

We could try to hold our ground and not let Him change us. We work hard, keep our noses clean, and live as good citizens. We go to church, bring our offerings, and live moral lives. John the Baptist said, "Repent, turn your lives around," but what is there to turn around? We are just doing our best.

But when Jesus comes, will we be able to stand? As Malachi said, "Who can abide the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears?" It is like trying to stand in the way of a Cy-Ride bus or an 18-wheeler. We're going to lose.

We could also look to what so many in our modern world hope in—technology. Technology is the answer to our diminishing energy supply, disease, poverty, violence, war. If we can keep in contact all over the world with a little pad we hold in our hands, if we can put a spaceship not only on the moon, but on a moon of Saturn, if we can produce hybrids of corn that did well even with the drought this summer, can't we solve the problems in our lives as well with the latest creations of technology?

But what good is all of that against the force of God? All our technology cannot stop hurricanes or thunderstorms. And if we have no electric power, most of that is useless. We can try to outflank God with our knowledge and science, but that would be like trying to run a football sweep in an indoor field that's only ten feet wide against the Iowa State defense.

Most of all we can just try to ignore John's warning. "So He's coming. It has been almost 2,000 years since Jesus left and nothing has happened. Life goes on. We have Christmas to get ready for, finals to take, travel plans to make, and end of the year reports on our platters. Why get ready for something that won't probably happen in our lifetimes?"

But He's coming. It's not just the event itself, but how it impacts our lives. Even if we don't think we will be around when the world ends, we will. Those who have died will be raised. So whether Jesus comes back in our lifetimes or not, we still need to be ready.

As an offshoot to ignoring Jesus we can put it off. To function we often have to prioritize things. We put off the things that are lower on our lists. It is not that we totally ignore that Jesus will come again, but we have other things to take care of before that. So we figure that we can wait until later when we are older and closer to death. Right now other things are occupying our minds.

Yet, delaying makes us like the hare in the story of the hare and the tortoise. The hare and the tortoise have a race. The hare starts so far ahead that he decides to take a nap. But when he wakes up, it's too late. The tortoise is crossing the finish line. Whether we die an hour from now in a traffic accident or as a 100-year-old in bed, if we put it off, when it comes we will be run over.

So what do we do? We can't stop Jesus from coming. We can't delay Him. We can't get around Him. But we can let Him carry us.

Sermon delivered by Pastor Mark T. Heilman  
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Ames, Iowa 50014

During World War II the Allies carried on an extensive bombing of Nazi Germany. Though the Allied leaders knew many civilians would be killed, what motivated them was trying to end the war more quickly and without a costly ground invasion to save lives. They hoped to crush the will of the German people. It didn't work because the Germans were under the Nazi powers. The people knew they could not resist the Nazis, so just went on as best as they could with their everyday lives despite losing their homes and families to the bombing. They were trapped under Hitler's rule.

So it is with our lives. We can go on living our lives under the terror of suffering and death. But we are trapped under the power of sin. There is no escape from death, so we just have to accept and live that way.

But Jesus won't let it remain that way. He came to this world to shake things up so we don't have to stay bound by sin. We can put our lives in His hands as He rescues us from sin and delivers us from the terror of death.

Instead of holding our ground, trying to get around Jesus, trying to ignore or put Him off, we can repent. We can let Him turn around our lives. John the Baptist spoke of what that specifically meant for people in Jesus' time. He told those who had to share with those who did not have. He told tax collectors to stop cheating. He told soldiers to stop using their authority to extort people. Repent means to let Jesus take the driver's seat and live with Him, not as if He didn't exist. Think of what it can mean for you and me—No more cheating on tests or income tax. No more living our lives for things rather than the people God has put into our lives. Giving generously because we know all we have is God's already.

Christmas is coming. Finals are coming. The end of the year is coming. But what really matters is that Jesus is coming. Christmas becomes not so much a time when I get what I want or when I spoil those in my life, but when we let His love direct us to give what people really need and to give it to all people, not just those people we like and who like us.