

“Knowing What’s Coming”

Jeremiah 33:14–16

Do you want to know what’s coming? When you start a book, do you skip to the ending right away to see who did it, or which characters are going to survive? Or are you one who works to avoid spoilers at all costs? Do you mute certain words on news sites or social media so you don’t know what happens?

One of the biggest challenges of the pandemic was not knowing what was coming. The constant changes, having to adjust plans weekly, daily, hourly. That’s been the hard part of this year, as well. Things opened up and looked to be getting back to normal, and then the delta variant hit. Watching and waiting for the kids version of the vaccine to finally be approved. Waiting for businesses to open up, and watching them deal with fewer workers and uncertainty created by that.

Why is it that uncertainty is such a certain part of life? It seems like it’s always difficult, maybe even impossible, for us to know what’s coming, even if whatever it is might be right around the corner. Something unexpected could happen. The future is always just out of our reach. Uncertainty remains.

Of course, we usually don’t know what’s coming. Some people thrive on that kind of unpredictability. Others feel swamped by constant changes.

Sometimes though we know what’s coming. We can watch an Iowa State football game and know that something bad will happen, even if we don’t know what exactly it will be. We can watch a loved one grow weaker and weaker even if we don’t know for sure if the treatment will work. We can spend time at work just waiting for the next shoe to drop.

Jeremiah has known what’s coming for a while now for the people of Judah, and what’s coming isn’t good. There’s a reason he’s often known as the weeping prophet. It’s because of how difficult his ministry was. He’d spent most of his ministry warning people of God’s judgment that was to come, of how they’d be taken into exile if they didn’t return to following God and his covenant. Jeremiah spent his whole ministry preaching for the people of God to turn back to God, but they didn’t listen. He faced ridicule and scorn and persecution from almost everyone he talked to. Instead of listening to Jeremiah’s true prophecies from God, they listened to false prophets who told them to trust in their own military might and the alliances they had made.

Jeremiah got thrown in jail for warning the people of Israel that Babylon would conquer them, and when he was proven right, the people rewarded him by throwing him into an open well. Jeremiah grieved not only for the people who would undergo such oppression and exile, but also for himself, because no one would listen to what he could see so clearly. In fact, a whole genre of literature, known as the jeremiad, developed, where the author bitterly laments the state of society and its morals and always contains a prophecy of society's imminent downfall.

God fulfills his promises of what would happen if his people broke the covenant they’d made with him. But God made not only promises of judgment and wrath. God made promises of hope and restoration as well.

Jeremiah isn’t all doom and gloom. He also wrote messages of hope, looking ahead to when God would fulfill his promises of restoration.

He looked ahead to where God would rescue his people, and bring them back to their land where they would be able to live in peace and safety. Even though the people of Israel had broken their promises to God, God wouldn't break his promises to them.

As Christians, we read "those days" Jeremiah is talking about not just as a promise for the people to be restored from exile. We read "those days" as the days of the coming of Christ, not just His birth but also His coming today in the Word and His coming in final, once and for all judgment. In Jesus, God's promises of a savior were fulfilled. The words of forgiveness and comfort we hear today fulfill God's promises as well. And as we prepare to celebrate Christmas and the first coming of Jesus, we keep an eye on being prepared for His Second Coming, as well.

We need a God who is with us no matter what the future may hold. In Jesus, that's what we have. He comes to us in Holy Communion to give us both food and forgiveness. He comes to us through His Word to encourage and empower us.

In this first week of Advent, there is so much energy and excitement pointed to the immediate future. We find our minds full of holiday travel plans or sharing the travels we just made. Our minds are full of shopping lists, menus and recipes, address lists for cards, and visions of the perfect décor for our homes. In these days full of busyness and excitement, it can be hard to slow down and look around.

As Jesus talks with his disciples in the upper room on Maundy Thursday, the night he was betrayed, they're all under pressure. Jesus knows what's coming. He tells them they will have trouble in the world, tribulation in the

world. When Jesus finishes this last discourse to his disciples, they'll go to the Garden of Gethsemane. His disciples will collapse under the pressure and be unable to keep watch with him. They'll abandon Jesus when he's arrested. Jesus will be beaten and bloodied, mocked mercilessly. He'll be tried and crucified. On the cross, he'll be crushed under the pressure of all the sin the world has ever known and will ever know.

Jesus didn't just tell his disciples that the world was full of trials and tribulations and troubles, pressure and problems. No, Jesus told them that they had peace. They had peace because Jesus had overcome the world.

Jesus knew that trouble was coming, but it was trouble he was ready for. It was trouble he was born to face. It was trouble he was born to bear and to overcome.

Jesus gives the gift—the gift of righteousness. It is ours because the Messiah laid aside his glory and became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). Now we are free from striving to be self-righteousness. Instead, we can rest in the Messiah's gift of declared righteousness.

There are times when we are afraid, when we don't know what the future will hold. As we look ahead to the time of transition as we wait to see what the new school year will bring, we don't know all of the answers. We don't know what the future holds. But we do know who holds the future. We know who holds us. What a wonderful promise.

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