

Will We Ever Be Ready?, by Daniel H. Kuhn, Jr. A2081207
2 Peter 3:8-15 and Mark 1:1-8
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This is a favorite time of year for many people. Children rush through malls and down halls with expectant eyes. They are impatient. Ask any school teacher. You can't teach much this time of year. Behind the rambunctious behavior stands the question, "Will Christmas ever come?"

Our children are not the first to be impatient about the coming of Christ. That *is* what Christmas is about, isn't it--the coming of Christ? Early Christians asked when Jesus would return and usher in the messianic age. They had expected his return before the first of them died, but by the end of the First Century CE, he had not yet come. The author of Peter reassured those early Christians that Jesus would come again in *God's* time. He said, "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day."¹

That reminds me of the man who had a hopeful conversation with God. The man asked, "God, you are so great and so wonderful. You are the creator of all. What is time like for you?" God answered, "A thousand years for you snap by like a second for me."

"Wow!" said the man. "And what about wealth? What is that like for you?"

God answered, "A million dollars for you is like a penny to me."

"Wow!" said the man, pensively. After a moment, he hopefully asked, "God, may I have a penny?"

"Just a second," said God.

As Christians, we must put time and wealth into a different perspective. The messianic age will come in God's own time. You and I are called to be ready for it at any second- at any of *our* seconds! It will come, and so will Christmas! Meanwhile, it is up to us to get ready. Get ready for the coming of God's kingdom, and get ready for Christmas!

The Kuhn household began our Christmas decorating. Sue hums Christmas carols as she places elves on the end table. I put up the tree and Sue arranges the ornaments on it and we put the Christmas sheets on our bed! Oh, yes, Christmas bed sheets. And, we also have whole set of Christmas dishes to take the place of our every day dishes in the cabinet.

You and I do many things to get ready for Christmas, but sometimes we have so many things to do, we ask ourselves, "Will I ever be ready for Christmas?"

"Getting ready" is more of a chore than a promise for many adults in the season of advent. You can see determined and worried looks on the faces of co-workers and friends. You can tell when you try to set a date for a meeting and there is no one time when everyone is free at this time of year. There are Christmas cookies to be baked. There are Christmas plays, pageants, and parties. Men, how many of you have all of your Christmas presents ready? Do you have them for your children, your wife, your fellow workers? I don't!

Yet, with all of our rushing around, perhaps the best way of preparing for Christmas is to sit down and relax for ten minutes, contemplating why we're doing all this. Put aside the reports of job losses, stock market declines, and terrorist attacks, and open up your heart to God.

As I worked on this sermon, an old hymn from childhood kept coming into my head. It is not in our hymnal, but it's words are fitting for these days:
Take Time to be Holy, speak oft with thy Lord;

¹2 Peter 3:9

Abide in Him always, And feed on His word. Make friends of God's children;
Help those who are weak; Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek

Take time to be holy, The world rushes on; Spend much time in secret With Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, Like Him thou shalt be; Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.²

Take time to be holy. Take time to meditate. Take time for God.

The Christmas event itself is antithetical to our bustling preparations for it. Christmas is the celebration of a simple birth to a poor family in a forgotten region of the world proclaiming the profound message that God loves. Our preparation for welcoming God into our lives is linked directly to the way we live.

Hear the call to prepare the sovereign's way. Separate its voice from all those others clamoring for attention. Sometimes, that means just sitting down and relaxing. Center on God. Center on what this season is all about. Clear a pathway to your heart for God to enter.

In 2 Peter 3:11 the author asks, "what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God. . . . While you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish." Our rushing around with short tempers does more to blemish than to pacify. You will be further ahead in your Christmas preparations if you will simply take ten minutes sometime during the day to just sit, relax, and meditate.

How are you making your life holy and Godly in preparation for Christ's coming? What makes your life "worthwhile?" Nick Hood talked about the meaning of worthwhile a number of years ago when Sue and I lived in Detroit. Nick is an important and powerful figure. He is senior pastor of the two-thousand-member Plymouth UCC in Detroit. At the time, he was a member of the Detroit city council. He said he went to his son's Boy Scout meeting. The Scouts were constructing bird houses, and Nick admitted he wasn't very handy, so he was hesitant. The Scout Master came up to him and said, "Mr. Hood, why don't you do something worthwhile and help your son build this bird house."

Nick was taken aback, but remembered how important and worthwhile it is to spend time with your own children.

As you wait for Christmas, and as you wait for the coming day of God, live a life of holiness and godliness. While you are waiting, strive to be found by God at peace, without spot or blemish. Prepare for Christmas and prepare for Christ's coming by doing something worthwhile with your life.

²"Take Time to be Holy," W. D. Longstaff 1822-1894, comp. George C. Stebbins, 1846-1945