

Well, it is Advent time. and is upon us. It's here. It's the first Sunday of Advent. And it is a time of preparation more than it is a time of celebration. We prepare during this time. We prepare our hearts and we prepare our mind for the celebration of the anniversary of Jesus's birth. And even more importantly, we prepare for the completion of God's plan as we wait for Jesus to return again.

But we often skip to the good part and worry more about the travel plans and the gifts and the presents in the meals and the decorations than we do the preparation. But what if we just skipped Christmas? Not. Not the presents and the decorations. Kind of like that movie with Tim Allen and Jamie Lee Curtis. Christmas with the Kranks.

It's a movie where this couple, they're like, they're fed up with all of the shenanigans of Christmas presents and decorations and all of that. So they decide they're going to skip Christmas and just leave town for vacation. Of course, that doesn't work out as they had planned. But I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about what if we actually skipped the preparation part.

Now, in our Advent series sermons degrees. We will focus on kind of three things. First of all, what it meant for waiting for the Savior, like long, long before Jesus was around. Like what? What did it mean for them to wait for a savior? Then we're will think about OC in the in the in the months in the days and the moments before Jesus's birth, what did it mean for them then and then?

What does it mean for us now? As in Who needs Christmas today and why do we have to keep waiting patiently for peace and hope and love and joy if the Savior already came? So here we are. We're waiting for the Savior and we're waiting patiently now. Patiently is waiting. Patiently is not my greatest strength that I have.

I don't really do patience. Well, Tom, my husband and I, we joined a life group and it's really increase credible and remarkable how quickly we got comfortable with one another. So I think part of the reason is we did that personality assessment, the temperament study, the one I said this, you heard that we did that as our very first study when we started meeting back in September.

And I think that really accelerated our comfort level with one another because you have to kind of be pretty honest when you fill out those forms. So last Monday, our my group met and it was amazing how quickly my group agreed when I mentioned that I was not a patient person. Now, they didn't even hesitate to throw shade my way.

Of course they did it all in love. Now, the staff. The staff got me this mug that says, Be careful or you will end up in my sermon. And it's true. But I've realized this this week that I think the mug is actually meant for me because more often I am the one that needs to hear this message, because more often I am the one thing that I do.

My flaws, my examples are the ones that I end up in my message. Now, here's a time when I when I needed to remember that message on my mug. Because when preparing for this message, as I often do, I asked my husband, Tom, I said, Tom, tell me about a time when I was impatient, like a good spouse.

He didn't answer me until about 30 minutes later, and we were working in the basement. We're working on this project. And I said, Hey, Tom, can you move this for me? And he didn't do it right away. So I did it. And he looked at me and he says mockingly, Tell me about a time that I was impatient.

Right? His point was made. Yes. I realize impatient comes out pretty often in me. I am thankful for my life group. I'm thankful for my husband, Tom. I'm thankful for others in life who hold me accountable for my actions. Because when we make mistakes, we might end up in sermons. But when we do something good in life, there's a chance that you'll end up in the hall of Fame.

Now, there's all sorts of different Hall of Fame's in our country, different museums and places to go, where you can see different famous people, Hall of Fame's for sports and history and all kinds of things. But in Chapter 11, in Hebrews there it is known as the Hall of Fame of Faith Heroes. Now, here I'm going to list just some of the heroes listed in Hebrews.

Chapter 11 is the Hall of Fame of Faith Heroes and what they did by faith. So here I'm kind of jumping around in Chapter 11 by faith, Abel offered a better sacrifice to God than Cain. By faith, Enoch was taken up so that he didn't see death. By Faith? No. What responded that with godly fear when he was warned about events he hadn't seen yet by faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was going to receive an inheritance by faith.

Even Sarah received the ability to have a child, though she herself was barren and passed the age for having children by faith. Moses was hidden by his parents for three months when he was born because. Because they saw that that the child was beautiful and they weren't afraid of the king's orders. Now it's known as the faith chapter, because it also answers the question, What is faith?

And then it offers this brief history of God's faithful people. Now, we don't know the author of Hebrews, but we know that it was written after Jesus came and died and was resurrected and went up to heaven. But we know that the author intends to encourage those who are struggling and waiting patiently for God to fulfill God's promises.

And the author does this by looking back. So to give hope for the future now, faith and hope go together in Hebrews explanation of faith. Now, the very first verse in chapter 11, we find the definition of faith. It says, Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don't see. Now, the letter recipients were Jewish converts.

They were Jewish Christians, and they were familiar with the Old Testament scriptures. But they were struggling, they were impatient. And as the naive study Bible puts it, they were tempted to, Judy, use the gospel message. But there was this new covenant that had been established by Jesus in the old covenant that God established with Abraham and God's people.

We know that that included laws and regulations, means things that will allow them to to experience God to be closer to God. And there are a total of 613 laws in the Old Testament. There is a law about almost every aspect of human behavior in the Old Testament, circumcision in Sabbath, Sabbath rules, hygiene, diet, sex, clothing. What to do if your ox injures your neighbor.

Right. As you can imagine, trying to keep these 613 laws was impossible. So for hundreds of years to address people breaking God's rules, God established animal sacrifices to atone for sins. Now, the Book of Hebrews is a reminder for us that Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice and now we can live more easily under God's grace, because Jesus is the mediator, theologian Martin Luther called this contrast between the two covenants law verses gospel or the good news.

Now both testaments, the old and the New Testament are about the same God and his love for creation, and both the old and the new Testament Scriptures are essential for us to study and understand this the love story of God. But we have to be careful not to slip into the idea of rigid religion because Jesus taught over and over again that that was not the point.

Now, in Jim Collins popular book, Good to Great, you've probably you may have read it or heard about it. There is an example and it's an example of a mindset that is important for individuals and for businesses to succeed, to be successful. And it became known as the Stockdale Paradox, named after Jim Stockdale. Now, Jim was a prisoner of war in Vietnam, and Collins, the author of the book, he interviewed Jim and he asked him, like, how did you survive if when most everyone around you did not survive this horrible experience?

And Jim said that he observed something, that he observed that the prisoners who were extreme optimists or extreme pessimists had the most trouble surviving. But those who kind of lived in the middle in the reality survived at a higher rate. So, Jim, the author puts it this way. He says, you must maintain unwavering faith that you can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties and at the same time have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.

Now, the Jewish Christians after Jesus, they were suffering, they were being persecuted, they were struggling with some pretty serious issues. Now, some of us can say the same thing in our lives. Some of us are suffering with illness or pain or hurt or loss or anger or whatever it may be. And we might be asking, okay, and how much longer do we have to wait for Jesus to return?

So when we think about this question, I think what's helpful for me is to turn to the Bible project. Quick side note If you don't know about the Bible project, check them out. They have all sorts of videos on the Internet. Just Google the Bible projects and you will find videos that recap every book of the Bible which are amazing.

They have these great animations, but you will also find different subjects like one on salvation and sin and the Holy Spirit and the Trinity and everything you can imagine. So if you Google the Bible project, Heaven and Earth video, it's you'll pull up a video and it talks about how heaven and earth were completely overlapping at one time.

Like, think about the Garden of Eden image right there. That's what this that's what the Garden of Eden is portraying. This beautiful were world where heaven and earth are completely overlapping. And then sin came into the world and separated the two into two realms. Right? Sin separates us from God. So here we're separate. And then and then it's separate.

Then God sent Jesus to Earth and heaven and earth once again overlapped just a little bit. We think about what Jesus said when He was here in the Scriptures. Jesus said, The Kingdom of Heaven is near. Jesus said, The Kingdom of Heaven is here. Jesus said, The Kingdom of Heaven is among you. So it is always been God's plan to restore for the two realms, to completely have them over overlap again back to the Garden State.

So when Jesus came in, it kind of overlapped, right? You see that overlapping and Jesus came and then and then he ascended into heaven. But then the church received the Spirit and the Holy Spirit. And now

we have these little pockets of heaven on earth. When we, when we do what Jesus asks us to do, that's pretty amazing to think about.

So if we think about back to this Stockdale paradox, when we are thinking about what we what we should do, when we wait for God's kingdom to be here on Earth, to be fully here on Earth, we can just change one word in this quote To bring a new perspective, you must maintain unwavering faith that God can and will prevail in the end, regardless of the difficulties and at the same moment have the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be.

So we use this in real life examples. Maybe your example is My family is struggling, but God will prevail. And because of my faith in Jesus, I am called to to bring love into my family, regardless of the difficulties and outcomes. Another example People are walking into places and killing because of hate. But God will prevail and because of my faith in Jesus.

I do as He did, and will provide a safe place for all people now to think about your own life and maybe your example is okay. So here, here is my struggle, but God will prevail. And because I believe in Jesus, here is what I am going to do about it. God will prevail in the end when Jesus returns to Earth.

But what does that mean for us today? It means that we need Christmas and Advent. We need the reminder that faithful people went before us, because sometimes we have faith and other times we don't have faith. And it doesn't matter how much faith we have, it's the assurance of the things that we can't see. Because sometimes the things that we can see, the evil in this world, sometimes that moves us away.

So we need a Christmas because we see a hope in the world. We get to feel the holy Spirit moving in the world by these little pockets of heaven when we do what Jesus asks us to do. But like Abraham, Abraham never reached the promised land. And in fact, none of the prophets that that listed in Hebrews 11, none of these prophets saw the Savior while they were living.

So it seems like it's impossible. It's impossible sometimes to see what we hope for, to have that faith in things that we can't see. But that's why we celebrate the faith of those who who've gone before, the prophets who were faithful to God's call. Now, this week, on Tuesday, it is giving Tuesday and giving Tuesday is a nationwide day that was started in 2012.

And it's simply a day to give to nonprofits. And we'll invite you on Tuesday to consider giving to Horizons. But for Tuesday, on giving Tuesday, all funds that are collected will go to the Miracle Fund. Now, here's what's amazing about the miracle fun. Part of the miracle is that you don't always get to see what the funds are used for.

Now we're pretty transparent with the finances here. And some of these funds go to our partnership with Zeeman Elementary and some go to our backpack program and others to support missionaries, to support the blanket and backpack Bible ministries. But some of these funds go to people who are in need, some of them in our church family that are struggling with medical bills and other things, and some of it go to family out in the community that we don't even know.

And the steering chair here at Horizons, he reminded me something a few weeks ago, and he reminded me of how powerful it is to give money and know that it blesses someone knowing that you may never even know how or who or where or how much of a blessing it will be. So as we prepare to celebrate the

anniversary of the birth of our Savior and prepare to for the return of Jesus, we remember the story and Luke, it begins.

The gospel story begins with Jesus's mother's cousin, Elizabeth, and her husband, Zachariah. So we read in Luke chapter one, it says, The angel said, Do not be afraid, Zachariah. Your prayers have been heard. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give birth to your son, and you must name him John. He will later be known as John. The Baptist says he will be a joy and a delight to you.

And many people will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the Lord's eyes. He will make ready a people prepared for the Lord preparing for the Savior is a beautiful place to be. So who needs Christmas? Those who are faithful to God now and those who were faithful before. Those who are blind and cannot see any hope for the future.

Faith and patience go hand in hand. And if you're like me, who struggles with patience. We need this time of Advent to prepare our hearts and minds. A person with a strong faith must have, must be one with great patience, too, as well. So we must be willing to wait for God because God will prevail. Yet, because of our faith in Jesus and because of the faith of those who've gone before us, we face the reality of the world around us today.

And we move to show God's love in this world. Little pockets of heaven. Now we have Christmas now because of the faith of those before us. Before us. And we need Christmas to continue to because of the next generation. Would you join me in prayer? Holy in loving God. Thank you so much for giving us this time of preparation and give us the courage to commit or recommit to you as we live in both the realm of knowing that you will prevail.

Yet living in our reality, that's hard and difficult. So move us in action with love. God, we know that this time of year can be difficult for some. We pray that your peace will wash over all. It's not always easy to see God what you have in store. And we know that your plan is greater than anything we can ever experience.

But yet you don't call us to just sit and wait. You call us to be your people in this world. Help us to do that as we prepare for Jesus. We say this in Jesus name. Amen.