

## Surprise! He's Coming!

A sermon based on 2 Peter 3:8-14

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It was one of those blustery, snowy days when everyone was glad to be gathered around the dinner table together, out of the elements. Thankfully, Mom had planned for the weather and had whipped up a huge pot of her famous chicken and dumpling soup, a family winter favorite.

They had finished their meal prayers and Dad was starting to dish out the soup when suddenly the doorbell rang. Little Susie was the first up to go and grab the door, curious who would be out in this weather. A few moments later, loud squeals echoed throughout the house. The other kids went sprinting towards the front door. Mom and Dad simply grinned at each other. They knew who it was. Grandma and Grandpa were here for the holidays, having made the long trek through the surprise blizzard. They knew. The kids didn't, but that made the surprise all the better!

Surprise! He's coming! Maybe that's not so much of a surprise to you. Maybe you have Dec. 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> circled on your calendars. Maybe the Advent calendars are already up on the fridge or the bookshelf and a few doors have already been opened. Jesus is coming at Christmas, the child born in Bethlehem, and we're all going to be ready. Christmas Day is not going to creep up on any of us; it's not going to surprise us. We know it's right around the corner.

Surprise! He's coming! Again, that's not so much of a surprise to you and me. We know Jesus is coming again, on the Last Day. While we don't have Advent calendars up on the fridge, where we can count down the days til he returns, like we can for Christmas, nevertheless, we know he's coming back. He tells us so in his Word.

Will you be ready, though? And, will you be surprised when he comes?

How many of you like surprises? Depends on the surprise, right? Obviously, there are good surprises and there are not so good surprises. Grandma and Grandpa visiting at Christmastime...an awesome surprise. Walking into the classroom the day before Christmas break, barely sitting down in your seat, and the teacher says, "Put away your books, grab a pencil, we're having a pop quiz," and you didn't study...you're not even quite sure what the quiz will be on...not a good surprise. You had a bad day at work, and your hubby brings home flowers, gets a babysitter for the night, and treats you to dinner out...a great surprise. You get back home after a relaxing vacation as a vicar, chat with your supervising pastor, who casually mentions, "Sorry (not sorry) for the late notice, but I'd like you to come up with a 4-week Bible class on this specific topic and be ready to teach lesson one by Thursday evening (maybe had that happen to me)!" Not a great surprise.

"The day of the Lord will come like a thief," Peter writes here. Meaning, it's going to be a surprise! When Jesus returns, he's not going to give us any notice ahead of time, much like a robber wouldn't call you up at 9 o'clock at night, before you go to bed, and say, "Hey, I'm planning on coming over tonight to rob your house, so if you could leave the front door unlocked, maybe shut off the alarm so as not to wake the kids, definitely keep your valuables out in the open so I don't have make a lot of noise looking for them and be quick in, quick out, that would be awesome." Obviously, if you knew, you'd do the

opposite of all those things, maybe have the gun loaded and close by, definitely alert the cops to the thief's plans.

Jesus will return. We don't know when. For all the reports you hear from time to time of those who've figured it out, they don't know when. God's Word doesn't tell us when. But he's coming, and to all of us, when he does, it will be sudden and unexpected.

And the question isn't whether you'll be surprised or not. The real question is, will his return be a good surprise for you or not?

Maybe you've seen the videos or heard the stories before...the person whose birthday it is, coming home, walking through the front door with a friend or their significant other, lamenting how it really wasn't that great of a birthday. Their friends/family stink for not even calling to wish a happy birthday, or their co-workers, who they don't even really like, didn't bother to get them a cake, though they do that for everyone else. They turn on the lights...and now there's a less than enthused crowd (friends, family, co-workers) murmuring "Surprise!"

Sometimes, one thing we don't particularly like about surprises is, well, the surprise. Right? In that situation, if I would have known you were going to have a party for me, I would have made sure my makeup or my hair was ok...I wouldn't have said those nasty things as I was walking through the door...I wouldn't have been such an emotional wreck and embarrassed myself.

Would you have regrets if Jesus returned right now? "I thought I had more time. If I had known ahead of time he's coming, I would have done this, I would have gone here, I would have said this to that person," as if your life's bucket list is somehow more important than the fact Jesus is returning.

That's not as scary, though, as people who think, "I'm going to do whatever I want. I can commit all these sins, and then later, right before Jesus returns, I'll repent and we'll be good," taking a huge risk...gambling their eternal future to satisfy the sinful pleasures of the present. There are those. Is that you? Is there a sin you're caught in right now, that is a part of your life, that you haven't confessed and repented of yet? What would happen if Jesus returned right now and you were living in that impenitence? Hebrews says, ***"If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God."*** Not a good surprise.

Friends, I'm going to be candid with you. Where we are right now is one of the easiest times for you to take your focus off Jesus and his return. And you might be thinking, how can that be? This season is all about Jesus!

And I hope for you it is. But you know, as well as I do, how this is a season, where even for us believers, Jesus has to contend with greed, commercialism, Santa, family traditions, maybe even an extra emphasis on volunteerism and charity...which, those aren't necessarily bad things...until they take the focus off Jesus and being ready for Jesus.

Oh, we know how to get ready for Christmas. I know for Mara, her dresses are already picked out. She has the white tights and matching bow. She'll get a bath, and Becky'll fuss to make sure her curls are just right. Parents, you'll probably do the same with your children as well. All of you will make sure you're at your best for Christmas...for Jesus.

And outside of that, we make sure presents are all wrapped and under the tree, the house is clean, the ham is all prepared, just needs to go into the oven, Grandma's rolls are rising.

Are you that ready for Christ's second coming? As Peter writes here, are you (continually) living "holy and godly lives"? Do you "look forward to the day of God"? When Jesus returns, will you be at your best? Will you be found "spotless, blameless, and at peace with him"?

Or, will you be unpleasantly surprised?

You know what would be ideal? If Jesus' return could be like how it was with John the Baptist, where John proclaimed his coming, prepared the way and Jesus followed right on his footsteps.

It would be great if we could proclaim Jesus is coming back soon (which he tells us in his Word he is), and then we get all ready, get our lives and our hearts in order, and then bam, Jesus keeps his promise, returns and takes us to our heavenly home...enough of this waiting, which to us seems like such a long time, like an eternity.

But it's not, at least not to God it's not. Listen to our verses here, ***"With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."***

You see, God looks at our lives, at the entire passage of time from a different perspective. We only see time as it comes. God sees all of it, from eternity to eternity. So, his "soon Jesus will return" might seem like a thousand years to us, but it's soon to him.

But in the meantime, God's not being slow in keeping his promises. He's being patient with you...and that's a surprise. That for us, who can't, who haven't waited properly for God, God is waiting for us to come to him in repentance...God is patient with us.

And that doesn't mean he's sitting around, twiddling his thumbs, tapping his feet, waiting for us to get our lives in order. In his patience, he stepped in.

I'm sure for the Old Testament Israelites, it seemed to be taking God forever to keep his promise to send a Savior from sin. But in his perfect timing, God sent his own Son, Jesus...in a surprising way. That baby wrapped in clothes, lying in a manger, because there was no room in the inn in the little town of Bethlehem, though it was small and insignificant among the clans of Judah. The child born to a virgin mother and a carpenter father, from the town of Nazareth (what good could come from there?!?). A man who did everything he could to avoid letting the people crown him king and put him on an earthly throne...and then they turned on him and crucified him as a common criminal. That...is your Savior.

Surprised? Yes and no. We know Jesus and what he's done for us...no surprise. That he would come and live and die in such a humble way to completely pay for our sins...for us who don't deserve it...will always be the best surprise.

That's God's patience. He saw we wouldn't come to him in repentance on our own, so he brought us to himself, making us spotless, blameless, and at peace with God through Jesus, who lived, died, and rose for us.

And he's coming back. That's no surprise. Peter here assures us that the promise of his final coming also will be kept, just as surely as the promise of his first coming was kept. And until he comes? Don't lose heart in the midst of all the distractions that the world offers to make us forget our chief business of being and getting ready for his coming. Those lost in the distractions will meet him with dismay. But thanks to God's patience, that won't be us. Instead, let's keep craning our necks and standing on tiptoe, busy with obedience to his Word, with living holy and godly lives, and with cherishing each proclamation of the message that helps us to prepare.

Then, when Jesus comes, yes, it'll still be a surprise, but we won't be caught unprepared...in sin. Instead, as verses 12 & 14 allude to, we look forward to that day. And here's a surprise...we can actually help speed along its coming. Since God is waiting for all who will come to repentance, the sooner we believers can bring our Savior to others, the sooner, that day will dawn. How cool is that?!?! How awesome of a goal is that?!?!

Friends, again, when Jesus comes, it'll be a surprise...a great surprise. But when he does, we won't be surprised...at least as to where we're going. And we're ready. And better than Grandma and Grandpa's surprise visit at the holidays, when Jesus comes, the surprise for us will be the new heavens and the new earth. The surprise will be the glories he has in store for us in our eternal home. And there, he's not going to leave. Neither will we. Amen!