

## The Epiphany of Grace

Titus 2:11-14

Advent 2017

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**W**E live in such a consumer culture. At one point back in *September* at a store I saw the boxes full of Christmas décor already sitting by and waiting to be displayed. For old guys like me “Black Friday” was always the day retailers would go into the black for the year and begin making a profit. But I read an article that said “it’s the end of the word as we know it” because Black Friday as we know it will be no more with the advent of online purchasing. Was it just me or did you get “Cyber Monday” emails like weeks in advance? I’m still getting them!

This is the culture we live in, but also participate in! The “spirit of the age” wants to take the place of the Spirit of God within you! One of the ways we’ve sought to provide a refuge from this spirit of the age and to find the strength of the Spirit of God is by utilizing the Christ-centered church calendar’s season of Advent – the four Lord’s Days prior to Christmas. These Sundays are no more holy than any other, but because we can be swept up into the consumerism of the age they are helpful for

us a way to “redeem the time” (Eph. 5:16; KJV), pausing and mediating on *God’s* greatest gift – the advent of the eternal Son of God who humbled himself by taking our humanity to himself and who will come again in great glory at the real “end of the world as we know it” to judge our consumer culture. We need to hear this! It’s not just so that we can “put Christ back in Christmas” or know “the reason for the season.” It’s so that as we are humbled that God would stoop so low into the cesspool of our sins to save us we might sing, “O come let us adore him;” it’s so that as we are humbled that he’s coming again in judgment we might repent of our consumerism, which is idolatry, and that we might re-orient our lives to eternity and not the trappings of time.

For Advent, then, we will focus our hearts and minds on several key texts “the advent of our God.” We turn first to Titus 2 and *The Epiphany of Grace*.

**P**AUL proclaims *the grace of the first advent*. And you can see how in the previous context Paul is moving from the various Christian duties of men, women, young people, and servants now in our text to the doctrinal reason why. Christians of all kinds are to respond in

obedient lives **for** (v. 11) a particular reason. Again, as I've already said, this reminds us that Advent is not the same as our cultural Christmas season. Advent says because of what God has done for us in Christ's first advent we are to serve others; our culture says serve yourself or at best, serve others with a gift to impress them enough to repay you in kind.

What's surprising here is the reason Paul gives: **for the grace of God has appeared** (v. 11). In verse 13 he uses the adjective to speak of **the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ**. But here he says *grace...has appeared*. He's speaking of Jesus, but he calls Jesus **grace**. Amazing! Grace is not a principle but a person.

But this brings us an interesting question. When he says **the grace of God has appeared** is he saying there was no grace before in the Old Testament as our forefathers awaited the first Advent? We know from the story of Scripture that God did appear in grace to our first parents after their sin. We know he appeared in grace to Noah and his family. We know he appeared in grace to Abram, to Joseph, to Moses, to Israel, to the judges, to the kings, and the list goes on. So why does Paul speak this way? The grace of the first advent is a *climactic grace*. There's something

this appearance of grace that makes it unique and unlike anything before. This word **appeared** comes into English as “epiphany.” It’s used in ancient literature of the sun. You see its glow appear first. Then you see its rays. Finally, you see it in all its glory. The grace of God that appeared like the glow and rays of the sun in the animal skins to Adam and Eve, I the ark to Noah and his family, in calling Abram out of an idolatrous family, in saving Joseph from the wrath of Pharaoh, in redeeming the firstborn of Israel by the Passover lamb, in the crossing of the Red Sea, has now come in the flesh! Grace has appeared in person – the person of the eternal Son. Look back at 1 Timothy 1 for a moment. Here he speaks of “God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and *grace*, which [*grace*] he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which [*grace*] now has been manifested through the appearing [*epiphany*] of our Savior Christ Jesus” (vv. 8, 9, 10).

The grace of the first advent is also a *universal grace*. **The grace of God that has appeared** in the person of the Son of God in human flesh **bring[s] salvation for all people** (v. 11). In the context he’s speaking to

men, women, young people, and slaves, in other words, all kinds and classes of human beings. Free and slave, male and female, Jews and Gentiles. There is no human being out of reach of the rays of the sun of righteousness that has appeared (Isa. 60). It's fascinating how Paul speaks in the same breath of **all people** and that Jesus **gave himself *for us*** to redeem *us* from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for **his own possession** (v. 14)

This amazing grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ is also a *sanctifying grace*. This brings us back, again, to the context of the reason why Paul says **for**. Note how grace is personified as **training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age** (v. 12). He is doing the training because he is the one who is doing the **redeem[ing] from all lawlessness** and the **purify[ing]**. And this work in us make us **zealous for good works** (v. 14). The Advent of God's grace in Christ makes us grateful for grace, but more than that, zealous to do good works as outward acts of gratitude.

**P**AUL also proclaims here *the glory of the second advent*. Our Lord who has come a first time in grace will come again in glory: **waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ** (v. 13). Children, if you've ever gone to the airport you'll see big boards with all kinds of information: departures and arrivals. When you travel on a plane you're always look back from where you departed and forward to where you will arrive. Here we are in living between Jesus' two advents. We look back to his coming in grace but also forward to his coming in glory.

And this is such a contrast, isn't it? Grace and glory, I mean. Jesus came to be judged for our sins but when he comes again it will be to judge sinners. He came as a lamb then but in the future as a lion. He came in humility the first time but will come in honor the second. The first time hidden away in a lowly manger, but again for every eye to see upon the clouds of God's manifest glory!

And it's for this glory that we are called in this age between the two advents to wait. Notice that: as we look back to the first advent we are to be **renounce[ing] ungodliness, renounce[ing] worldly passions, liv[ing]**

**self-controlled, upright, and godly lives** (v. 12), and being **zealous for good works** (v. 14). That's acting! But as we look and long of his coming again it's **waiting**. But it's more than interesting linguistic or theological tidbits that we've come together. I have to ask you: are you **waiting**? I know your life is busy. Are you **waiting**? I know "it's the most wonderful time of the year." Are you **waiting**? You see, **waiting** actually takes action, doesn't it? You have to intentionally focus your heart, when it is being enticed with sales, to wait for Jesus.

While feeling consumed by the age, brothers and sisters, be consumed with faith in what Jesus has already done for your in his first advent; be consumed with hope as you long for the age to come when he appears a second time to take you and all his people in the eternal joys of his kingdom!