

Advent Powers Patient Endurance

- ✧ from the depths of grief and sadness (vv.2-6)
- ✧ to the heights of heavenly joy (vv.7-11)

In the Name of Jesus our coming Savior, whose Advent calls for **Patient Endurance**, dear friends:

Last week we heard John the Baptist, the promised “*voice of one crying out in the wilderness, “Prepare the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight.”*” (EHV) ¹ John preached power and conviction, sparing neither the people, politicians or church leaders from God’s urgent call to “*Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.*” He wrapped up his sermon with this powerful warning about the coming Christ: “*His winnowing shovel is in his hand, and he will thoroughly clean out his threshing floor. He will gather his wheat into the barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.*” (Matthew 3:12) We all are given one life, one time of grace, to turn from our sins in repentant faith to God’s own Son. Sorrow for sin + faith in God’s forgiveness yields eternal joy in heaven, pictured as wheat in God’s barn. Refusing to repent and turn to the Lord earns eternity in “*unquenchable fire.*” John believed all this with every bone in his camel-covered, locust-eating body. So why do we find him calling today...?

- ✧ from the depths of grief and sadness (vv.2-6)

While John was in prison, he heard about the things Christ was doing. He sent two of his disciples³ to ask him, “Are you the Coming One or should we wait for someone else?”

Maybe it’s hard to imagine why John was even in prison. Amazing how many Bible characters got into trouble with the law. Joseph was falsely accused of assaulting his master’s wife and spent maybe fifteen years in prison. Elijah the prophet won the showdown with prophets of Baal but then had to run for his life from wicked Queen Jezebel. Remember David fleeing from King Saul? But later as King David trying to cover up his sin of adultery with murder. What terrible times David brought on his own family. Paul, a violent persecutor of Christians, later repented and then spent months and years in prison as Christ’s apostle. Paul was sure because of former way of life that he deserved no better. David likewise. But the others were innocent, wondering like John the Baptist, “Why me?” Worse yet for John, “If my message about Jesus Christ is true, then where is that fiery judgment God promised?”

Do you feel that way sometimes? You fear God. So you confess your sins, forsaken them and try to change your life for Him. But one setback after another makes you feel like a tiny fish in a huge vortex going down the drain. “Does God hear my prayers? Does He want to help me with His almighty power? Does God really love me as I’ve told my kids, my friends – or even preached to God’s people?”

John did the right thing He looked to Jesus. From a dungeon John sent two disciples who may have had serious doubts and questions of their own. Jesus could have answered, “Yes, I am the Christ, John. And you should know better than to doubt me.” Instead, Jesus as the true Messiah promised of old, totally lived up to God’s ancient assurance: “*A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice.*” (Isaiah 42:3 NIV84) When you feel bent over like marsh grass under heavy snow in cold winter blasts, Jesus will not break you. When your faith is barely flickering like a candle in the wind, He won’t blow you out, but will cup His gentle hands around your faith and keep your hopes alive. **From the depths of grief and sadness** Jesus grants relief.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, the Scriptures are from *Evangelical Heritage Version (EHV)* © 2016, Wartburg Project.

“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” (Isaiah 53:4 ESV) Amazing Advent! Jesus did not need to carry our burdens, our diseases and sins as He did. He did not need to come the first time in poverty to virgin Mary and stepfather Joseph. Jesus had all the joys of heaven, but He wanted us to enjoy heaven with Him. So He left His home of light to suffer with us in **the depths of grief and sadness**. Jesus did not pass a new law to end all suffering; He helped one-by-one: **“Go, report to John what you hear and see: ⁵The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the gospel is preached to the poor. ⁶Blessed is the one who does not take offense at me.”** Every promise about the coming Messiah (Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 35:1-10 700 B.C.) Jesus was doing. With a word Jesus could also free John from prison. Instead John’s head would be on a platter for cruel King Herod, a dancing teenage girl, and drunken dinner guests who could not care less.

God does not always answer “Why?” God allows suffering so that He can relieve it. **“All things work together for good to them that love God.”** (Romans 8:28) When trials rob me of answers, that’s when I really pay attention. **Advent Powers Patient Endurance – from the depths of grief and sadness...**

☆ to the heights of heavenly joy (vv.7-11)

“As these two [disciples of John] were leaving, Jesus began to talk to the crowds about John. “What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ⁸What did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? No, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ houses. ⁹So what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you! And he is much more than a prophet. ¹⁰This is the one about whom it is written, ‘Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ ¹¹Amen² I tell you: Among those born of women there has not appeared anyone greater than John the Baptist. Yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

All other prophets like David and Isaiah pointed centuries ahead to Jesus Messiah. John pointed right at Jesus: **“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** (John 1:29 ESV) So John was greater than all other prophets. He did not bend like a reed in the wind. He wore rough clothing, not the soft stuff of pomp and palace. So how could the **“least in the kingdom of heaven [be] greater”**?

God-fearing scholars have puzzled over that last sentence. Jesus would prove to be greater than John by washing away our sins with His blood and rising to conquer death. Or **“the least”** may be us, because we get to see how Jesus completed his ministry, sacrificed himself on the cross for the sins of the world, and rose again victorious on the third day. Even the lowliest Christian has advantages over John. I also wonder if Jesus was saying that the most humble Christian trusting completely in Jesus is greater than any prophet or pastor who doubts. Greatness in God’s sight is not by suffering, but by faith.

Most importantly for John and for us, **Advent Powers Patient Endurance**. When you’re feeling down in **the depths of grief and sadness**, you need to look up at Jesus. See how He is leading you **to the heights of heavenly joy**. Joseph suffered innocently, but was finally delivered marvelously. David was so thoroughly forgiven that his sins are never mentioned in the New Testament. Instead, God calls David, **“a man after my own heart.”** (Acts 13:22) Remember how Jesus met that criminal on the cross **in the depths of grief and sadness**? The thief on the cross next to Jesus confessed his guilt. Then he dared to ask, **“Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”** He appealed to God’s mercy. He saw Jesus’ **Advent** in the hope of heaven that **Powers Patient Endurance**. Jesus gladly turned the lights on **heavenly joy** by telling the criminal, **“Today you will be with me in paradise.”** (Luke 23:43)

That’s how **Advent Powers Patient Endurance**. Christ sets us free from our prison of guilt and calls us, **“Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope.”** (Zechariah 9:12 NIV84) John could cling to Jesus by faith and finally come **to the heights of heavenly joy**. You too can look forward to Jesus coming again. For now, remember Jesus is your lawyer in God’s courtroom. God’s justice is on our side. Amen.

² For Amen at the beginning of a statement FAQ #1 at www.wartburgproject.org/faqs .

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