

## Introduction:

You've heard the saying, "You're unique like everyone else." Well Christians are unique **UNLIKE** everyone else (and perhaps, a bit strange). We are unique because we live between two worlds: heaven and earth (the physical and metaphysical). We have two natures: fallen and redeemed. We have two citizenships: a heavenly one and an earthly one. We live in two kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. And last, but not least, we live between two Advents: the one that occurred 2000 years ago and the one that is sure to come.

## Why Jesus Came

For the past few weeks, we have been focused on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent i.e., Christ's 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. We could go on forever on when this happens, why it happens, and what happens when it does happen but today is the last Sunday before Christmas. Therefore, let's spend some time focusing on the 1<sup>st</sup> Advent. This is the one where the eternal Word of God became a biological life form (John 1:14). In my mind, the divine decision/action for the Creator to become part of his creation, defies human logic and reason. However, the reasons for Jesus' coming are as nuanced as they are myriad. Here are just a few:

*To give us eternal life (John 10:10). To seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). To redeem humanity (Mark 10:45). To reconcile us to the Father (1 Corinthians 5:18). To establish the Kingdom of God on earth (Luke 11:20). To baptize his followers with "fire and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 3:11). To build an indestructible church (Matthew 16:18). To destroy the works of the evil one (1 John 3:8).*

Jesus' utmost motivation in all these things is found in the most beloved, most cherished, and most memorized of the 31,102 verses contained in the 66 books of the Holy Bible. That Scripture is John 3:16 :

*For God so loved the world that he gave us his only begotten Son so whosoever should believe in him would not perish but have eternal life.*

During our Christmas Eve service this Friday evening, we will re-tell the "greatest story ever told." Personally, this will be my first year of doing so as a grandfather. Therefore, I'm pretty sure sentimentality will creep into my emotions, and the message, and I'll probably cry my way through it. However, grandparenting, as many of you know, has its perks: the best is getting to spoil those little people and then ship them back home (life's great payback). Indeed, babies possess a magical ability to soften our hearts, even for the most curmudgeonly among us and no baby does this better than the Christ child. But I digress.

## The Advent Overlap

Since we are in the "Advent Overlap" how are we to live? In some ways, Christ-followers embody the old Elvis song, "Caught in a trap." Well, not really a "trap" but we are stuck between two advents and have been for two millennia now. For some reason, this question just keeps swirling through the empty corridors of my mind, lately. If we live as our dear "Creasters" and "C&Ers friends do, and

only “prepare him room” twice a year, usually in late December and early April, then our faith will be one of weak sentimentality and religious cultural tradition. On the other hand, if we only live in anticipation of the 2nd Advent, we will become so “heavenly minded but no earthly good.” How many do you know that God wants us to be BOTH heavenly-minded and earthly-good and earthly minded and heavenly good? And we can if we live into great passage called 1 Corinthians 13:13:

*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.  
But the greatest of these is love.*

Faith, hope, and love. Of the many things Paul could have listed here, why these three? Because FHL are the most important, most identifiable, and most transformative characteristics of the Christ-follower.

### **Faith**

First on this vaunted list is faith. There are probably a trillion passages about the nature and necessity of faith. Faith is how we fundamentally interface with God, please him, and experience his exceedingly great and precious promises. The greatest of which is that we are “saved by grace through faith” (Ephesians 2:8). But how does faith help us live between the Advents? The answer, ironically, is found in its direction! Faith is grounded in the past, therefore faith, forever looks back. It does so to remember God’s great acts and trustworthiness. Faith knows that since God kept his promise by coming in the 1<sup>st</sup> Advent, he can easily keep every one of his other 7487 promises as well. For instance, when people struggle to grasp God’s love, I point them to Romans 5:8

*But God proves his own love for us in this:  
While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

I do so because struggling with God’s love is not an emotional problem, but a faith problem. If God inserted the Cross into history, as a historical precedent to prove his love for us, then it doesn’t matter what my present feelings are or what my current emotional disposition is, God loves me! Faith apprehends God’s faithfulness in the past which is why Advent “tweeners” like us need to do all that we can to keep developing it. We do so, by faithfully reading his Word (Romans 10:9) and faithfully participating in a local faith community. This brings us to the second prominent characteristic of the Christ-follower.

### **HOPE**

If faith is built on God’s faithfulness in the past, then hope, is built on God’s faithfulness in the future. Hope is sometimes nicknamed, “Future Faith” and in some ways it is. Listen to Hebrews 11:1, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Faith and hope are interrelated but have different directions. If faith looks back, hope looks forward. If faith says, “God kept his promises in the past,” hope says, “He will keep his promises in the future.” Faith trusts things that have been, hope trusts things that will be. Hope has the confidence that Jesus will come again in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent. And this hope continually injects spiritual stamina, unswerving perseverance, and unassailable joy, into our souls until he gets here.

## LOVE

The 3<sup>rd</sup> characteristic of God's work in us is love. "What's love got to do with it?" Tina Turner might ask, a few octaves higher than I ever could. Love for God, others, and myself, is the evidence that I am living in faith and hope. But notice how Paul says that love is greater than faith and hope. "Who said what to who now?" There are many reasons why he says this but here is one we may not have considered. When Jesus returns in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent, our faith will be rewarded. When Jesus returns in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent, that which we had hoped for, i.e., himself, will be realized. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent becomes an historical fact, faith and hope will no longer "remain" because they will have served their purpose of keeping us going between the Advents. But love is the greater/greatest because it always remains (is always now), no matter the Advent, Age, World, Era, or Epoch. By design, faith and hope are temporary, but love remains forever because it emanates from the very heart of God. He is, after all, LOVE (I John 4:8). There will be no need for faith or hope after the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent which is partly why Paul said in Galatians 5:6,

*The only thing that matters is faith expressing itself through love.*

## CONCLUSION: MORE FHL?

If faith finds, hope floats, and love finishes, how many of us could use deep infusions of each this Advent Season, especially after the unique challenges of 2021? I do, so let's pray now.