

## **Mid-week Advent 1**

### **1 Thessalonians 5:12-24**

12 But we appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you, and have charge of you in the Lord and admonish you; 13 esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves. 14 And we urge you, beloved, to admonish the idlers, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. 15 See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all. 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise the words of prophets, 21 but test everything; hold fast to what is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil. 23 May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.

### **December 5, 2018**

The season of Advent is a time of preparation for the coming of our Lord. And in our focus on Christ coming to us, we get all kinds of images.

Not surprisingly, one group of images includes that of pathways, roads, and highways. A most familiar cry we hear in this season comes from the prophet Isaiah, one we will hear again this coming Sunday, that is that we are to “Prepare the way of the Lord, and make His paths straight.” We even have an Advent hymn titled, Prepare the Royal Highway.

So, for our mid-week worship services this year, we are going to use these images of preparing the royal highway, of making his paths straight, this idea of pathways and roads, as we get ready for Christ to come to us once again.

This idea of preparing the royal highway and making his paths straight, clues us into the fact that this time of waiting, this season of Advent, is not about us sitting around on our hands and doing nothing while we wait. There are indeed things for us to do. We have a highway, a road, to prepare. We have a path to make straight.

And most likely, your to-do list is already full of tasks for you to take care of, I mean, you were already going to be on the move, not sitting on your hands, so this idea of adding one more thing to our to-do list, and no small thing at that, preparing a road – well, it may seem like too much.

But there really is an order to all of this. We really do need to pay attention to keeping first things first. That is true in our life always, and never more than during the season of Advent. I think what God’s word makes clear, here through these words of the apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians, is that nothing else on your to-do list will matter if you haven’t prepared the way

of the Lord, if you haven't made his paths straight.

In some ways, this may seem strange. Because, the fact of the matter is, Jesus is coming whether we are prepared or not. You see, the straight path, the clear road, the smooth highway, is not for Jesus, but it is for us. The fact is, that Jesus is coming but we shouldn't want to have him delayed and we don't want to miss him. We want to be able to see him from a great distance as he is on his way to us.

This plays on a couple of levels. First, for us personally. What is it in your life that is cluttering or blocking the highway that Jesus is using to get to your heart? What are the obstacles that are making the pathway anything but straight as Jesus comes to you?

Perhaps it is things like resentments and jealousy. Perhaps there are things like painful losses and deep hurt by others. Perhaps it is selfishness or guilt. You are not alone. We all have work to do to prepare the royal highway, to make his paths straight.

But this also plays on another level. Christ's coming isn't just for us. It is for everyone. So, we also need to be mindful that we should not be creating road blocks and confusing pathways for others because we should want them to be able to see Jesus coming as well.

For those who are not regular church attenders, the religious road we follow can seem confusing to say the least. We need to be ever mindful that we are not creating unnecessary roadblocks and obstacles. We can mitigate some of this by offering to be fellow travelers with them this Advent season.

The question that remains is just exactly how do we go about preparing this royal highway and making his paths straight. That is where our reading from 1 Thessalonians comes in. In some ways, it can serve as a construction blueprint of sorts.

Here is what the apostle Paul tells us in the way of instructions – the key to preparing the road so that we can cause no delays in Jesus' coming, so that we can see him from far off as he comes to us once again.

Ready? Here is what Paul says, "We appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respect those who labor among you" in making the Lord's path straight. Simply put, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, and hold fast to what is good.

Hope is coming. Jesus is coming; to you, for all. We make his path straight to our hearts when we rejoice, pray, give thanks, and hold fast to what is good.

May we put these things at the very top of our to-do list this Advent season.

Amen.