REGULAR LESSON · ABOUT 50 MINUTES

Waiting Well: The Church Between the Comings

BIG IDEA	The whole Christian life is an Advent. We live between Christ's first and second comings, kept by God's faithfulness and called to watchful, working faith.
READINGS	1 Corinthians 1:3–9 and Mark 13:24–37
MEMORY VERSE	1 Corinthians 1:9
YOU WILL NEED	Bibles, the student handout (one per person)
BACKGROUND TO READ	Corinth: the city behind the letter; How the readings tie together

1 Open 5 min

Ask: "What is the hardest kind of waiting you have done: for a diagnosis, a child to come home, a job offer?" Then: "What helped you wait well, and what made you wait badly?" Don't press anyone to share something painful; offer your own example first.

2 Paul's thanksgiving 15 min

1 Corinthians 1:4–9 I always thank my God concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus; that in everything you were enriched in him, in all speech and all knowledge; even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that you come behind in no gift; waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ; who will also confirm you until the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, through whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

1. **This is the most troubled church in the New Testament: factions, scandal, lawsuits, chaos in worship. Why does Paul start with thanks?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE

   He sees them first as God sees them in Christ: enriched, gifted, called. Calvin noted that Paul praises what is God's work in them before he rebukes what is theirs. It is a model for church conflict and for marriages: start with what God has done.

2. **Who is the subject of the main verbs in verses 8–9?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE

   God: he will confirm you; God is faithful; he called you. Our perseverance rests on him, not on our grip. Lutherans and Reformed both stress this, though they explain perseverance a little differently.

3. **Paul calls them people "waiting for the revelation of our Lord." How does waiting for Christ correct a divided church?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE

   Everyone will stand before the same Lord; party loyalties ("I am of Paul, I of Apollos," 1:12) shrink in that light. The Last Day relativizes our quarrels.

3 The doorkeeper 15 min

Mark 13:32–37 But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Watch, keep alert, and pray; for you don't know when the time is. "It is like a man, traveling to another country, having left his house, and given authority to his servants, and to each one his work, and also commanded the doorkeeper to keep watch. Watch therefore, for you don't know when the lord of the house is coming, whether at evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he might find you sleeping. What I tell you, I tell all: Watch."

1. **What did the master give before leaving? What does that mean for the church today?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE

   Authority and work. The church is not an empty house while the Lord is away; each servant has a task, and the doorkeeper watches for all.

2. **The doorkeeper's job is to watch. What does spiritual "sleep" look like for adults?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE

   Distraction, routine faith, comfort, cynicism, busyness, despair. Let the group name it honestly. J. C. Ryle's comment on this passage is worth reading aloud: "We are to watch. We are to pray. We are to work." (Good Books)

3. **Jesus ends, "What I tell you, I tell all." Why add that?**

   TEACHER'S NOTE

   He was speaking privately to four disciples (13:3), but the command is for the whole church in every age, including us.

4 Two catechisms, one hope 10 min

"The kingdom of God comes indeed of itself, without our prayer; but we pray in this petition that it may come unto us also."

Luther's Small Catechism, Second Petition (1529) · Read it in the Reading Room

> “That in all my sorrows and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the very same person, who before offered himself for my sake, to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as judge from heaven.”
>
> Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 52 (1563) · Read it in the Reading Room

1. **Which phrase in these two answers do you most need this week?**

   TEACHER’S NOTE
   Let several people answer. Point out that Lutheran and Reformed Christians speak with one voice here: both ground our hope in *who* is coming, the same Christ who was judged for us.

Keep the balance. Christ’s coming is good news because he comes to save sinners, not to reward the good. But “watch” is a real command. Grace that makes no one watchful is not the grace of the New Testament. God forgives us in order to make us like his Son (1 John 3:2–3).

5 Pray 5 min

Pray the collect for the First Sunday of Advent from Prayers for the week, and close with “Maranatha.”

> “Stir up thy power, O Lord, and come.” … Maranatha: Come, Lord Jesus.

Scripture: World English Bible (public domain). Free to print and copy.