



WESTMINSTER  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

December 3, 2017

# When Jesus Comes

Dr. Jim Gilchrist

# **When Jesus Comes**

Dr. Jim Gilchrist

© 2017 by Dr. Jim Gilchrist and Westminster Presbyterian Church.

All rights reserved.

No part of this sermon may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the author.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: December 9, 2017

*But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come (Mark 13:32-33).*

Advent marks the beginning of the Christian year in worship. It reminds us that the whole point of the Christian life is to look forward to the coming of Christ, and be ready for him when he comes—which is to say, we need to live in such a way that when Jesus comes he will say to each of us, “Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your master.”

Advent has nothing to do with Black Friday and everything to do with Good Friday. It’s not about looking forward to getting things, or giving things. It’s about Jesus, and all that he gives to us, and what he expects from us in return. And that’s the most important question in the world, isn’t it? Because if Jesus really is King of kings and Lord of lords, as Handel’s *Messiah* says, quoting scripture itself, then we owe our whole lives to him; and he will ask one day what we have done with this life and all the other gifts God has entrusted to us as stewards.

Living for Jesus means coming down out of the cloud of comfortable platitudes and being faithful in the nitty-gritty details of everyday life, individually and as fellow inhabitants of the world around us.

A dozen or so of us worked this year on re-envisioning a strategic direction for Westminster—a set of themes to guide our church’s efforts in the days ahead.

Among those themes is striving to be a community of confession, reconciliation, and redemption, acknowledging the ways we all fall short of God's will for our lives, especially in our relationships with other people, and playing our part in God's redeeming, reconciling work in the world. That means helping to heal the pervasive angst and fear in our society, connecting with people whose faith has been shaken by bad experiences with the church, reaching beyond our relatively comfortable suburban environment to work for justice and fellowship among all races, and strengthening our relationships with people of other faiths.

In our seminars today and next Sunday we're focusing especially on race relations, because that's an area sorely in need of redemption. I was glad to see, in the survey we conducted on October 1, that 375 people—85% of those who responded to the question and 74% of everyone who participated in the survey, said that racism is an issue the church should address.

Our congregation is far more homogeneous than many of us would like, reflecting the demographics of the community we live in, but a fair number of our members are actively engaged in sharing with brothers and sisters in Christ who are people of color. That's true locally—in Homewood and the Hill District of Pittsburgh, and in Washington, PA, for example—and internationally, especially in Haiti. In the process, we learn from one another, and walls of suspicion and stereotypes come down, and real friendships grow up in their place. We get to know one another as human beings who are precious in God's eyes and, pretty soon, precious in one another's eyes as well. We move beyond all those labels and generalizations

people use to lump others together in ways that lead to so much division and hostility in our society.

We want to be on the side of redemption at Westminster, because redemption is God's work, and we want to be instruments of God's peace. "I know that my Redeemer lives," the biblical character Job says, and we know it too. We know because we look forward to Christ's coming in Advent, and celebrate his coming at Christmas—not just 2000 years ago, or in some vague and distant future, but right here, right now, in each of our lives. Whenever Jesus comes into any of our hearts, and the Holy Spirit dwells richly in us, there is a partial answer to our Lord's Prayer: God's kingdom does come, and God's will is done, on earth as it is in heaven.

To belong to the kingdom of heaven is to live as God wants us to live, tearing down walls that divide, and building instead bridges of friendship that reflect here and now what life will be like for all eternity in God's peaceable kingdom.

We don't know when Christ will come to redeem the whole world at once. We do know that, in the meantime, Jesus comes to redeem individual lives and the relationships we share. And sooner or later, one way or another, every one of us will come to him. None of us knows that day or hour, but in the grand scheme of things, it will not be long.

So be ready then, Jesus says. Keep awake. I'm coming to meet you. And when I do, I hope to find you taking part in God's great reconciling work in the world. If you really are doing that, then your joy, and mine, will surely be complete.



**WESTMINSTER**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2040 Washington Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15241  
412-835-6630

[www.westminster-church.org](http://www.westminster-church.org)