

Sermon for Advent II – Luke 21:25-36

In the Name of the Father and of the Son ✠ and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

We are now in the midst of the Advent Season. And Advent focuses on the coming of Christ, for that's what it means. The Gospel readings for this season take on the themes of the Son of God who came into the world, is now present with us in the world, and the focus of today's Gospel is His coming again into the world to judge the living and the dead on the Last Day.

Christ's coming again to judge the living and the dead is a promise and it's a warning. It's a promise of redemption. It's a warning of judgment. The Last Day is the day of our redemption. It's all the same day. Just as surely as Christ redeemed us with His own Blood at His first coming, He will judge the living and the dead at His second coming. We who repent of our sins and trust in our Savior Jesus who has borne all our sins on the cross by washing them away with His Blood, will welcome Christ's Second Advent as the day of our final redemption. Those who continue in their sins and reject God's grace in Christ will be terrified at Christ's Second Advent. Their hearts will give out from fear.

In that day the powers of the world will be shaken. The world as we know it will be destroyed. The orderly universe that we have come to know and expect will fall into disarray. This will be no natural disaster. This will be no man-made disaster. God Himself will do it. Just as He destroyed the world through the flood, just as He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire from heaven, He will destroy the world in which we live.

Everyone who binds themselves to the cares and pleasures of this life will faint in shock and fear. They thought this world would last forever and they are fully committed to that idea. They thought that if there was ever going to be a reckoning that they must face, they would surely have time to prepare for it. But they don't account for the fact that God created them. They live as if God doesn't exist.

We can call it functional atheism. It's not actual atheism because these people won't deny with their mouths the existence of God as atheists do. They hedge their bets that much, at least. They would not deny that God exists, but they live as if He doesn't. They live to get pleasure and to avoid pain. "All the arrogant and all evildoers," summarizes them who are not concerned about God. They don't pay attention to what He says. They don't care about what really matters in life. They think that their bodily comfort, pleasure, pains, and cares of this life matter the most. They look around and see what others have that they want to get, and what others suffer that they want to avoid. They build their life around gaining comfort and fleeing from crosses. What God says is all very good and well, but it's not for real life. They adopt the religion of this culture. You know the one. It says "There's no need for genuine repentance or faith. Just look inside yourself and follow your heart. You don't need some old Bible – use your brain!" And so the one true God of the Holy Scriptures is replaced by the generic one-size-fits-all god who will accommodate himself to whatever you want to do.

Then Christ returns. And what the Scriptures have to say is true after all. Judgement Day wasn't just some scare tactic to get people to behave. Everything in the Bible that that world makes seem so distant and irrelevant is now vivid and real, staring us in the face. There's never any doubt about it – the second coming of Christ is just as certain as the first. Just as surely as Christ came into this world in humility to redeem us all last week, so surely will He return in glory to judge those whom He has redeemed. The First Advent guarantees the Second. We who receive Christ

today as He comes in humility are ready to receive Him when He comes in glory. Those who don't receive Him today, won't on the Last Day.

So this same event is terror for some and freedom for others. And what makes this so terrifying for those who reject Christ, who live only for themselves and live only for today, is that this isn't coming from the evil world which they have allowed to poison their minds—it comes from the Holy and Almighty God Himself, Whose righteousness and motives can't be questioned. Their hearts will faint when they see the universe shaken down to its foundations and the end of all things at hand. And God is doing it! They will face the Judge without a leg to stand on. They will be overcome with fear because of the truth they rejected. Their confidence in the things of this world is not only foolish, but a sin against their Creator and Judge. The destruction of the world will catch them at unawares, like a snare catching an animal in a trap without escape.

The Last Day is coming. But for us who have found our refuge in the wounds of Christ, it will be a day of joy. Week after week we come to church. Week after week we hear the Gospel. Week after week we eat and drink the body and blood of Christ. Week after week the pastor preaches to us the forgiveness of our sins. Week after week, the Holy Spirit keeps us from falling away. Week after week He upholds us by His grace and gives us confidence that this Gospel we hear is true. Week after week, God declares us to be His saints.

Still, no matter how pious we are, how sanctified, how devout—there remains in us the corruption of sin that won't go away. We are constantly inclined to the evil desires that live within us, that are ever ready to break out in thought, word, and deed.

So which is it? Are we sinners or saints? God tells us we are forgiven for He has delivered us. But sin clings to us like mud on a wheel. It permeates our thoughts. It distorts our love. It pollutes our desires so that we can't say that our hearts are perfectly pure. So the tension remains in this life—we are simultaneously sinner and saint.

Yet it will not always be so. Remember: Judgement Day is redemption day for us. It's the day of the final deliverance of us Christians from these dying bodies, our deliverance from the sin that lies within, and our full and final deliverance from every trace of sin that keeps us from being who God calls us to be. God's glory will be revealed in us. We will be free.

When the whole world is falling apart—wars here, there, and everywhere, the stock market plunging in fear, deep corruption in the government, moral bankruptcy even among the highest authorities in our land, faithlessness and apostasy even in the church, pandemic plagues changing the world, and every evil imaginable seeming to win—in these signs we look for what terrifies the world. And we see a tree budding in the spring. Just as surely as the budding tree tells you that summer is near, the falling apart of the world tells us that our redemption is near.

Those who love this world will be lost. We who love God's Word will be vindicated. For the only thing in this world that cannot be destroyed is the Word of God.

There's a lot of things that demand our time and energy and resources in this life. But when it comes to God's Word, we will compromise elsewhere. For we rest our hope in Him who came in humility to redeem us—so that when He returns as Judge we can meet Him with joy. And Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. ✠BJF✠