

Despite the expectation that he would bring peace on earth, Jesus declared that his advent (coming) would bring fiery division, even within families. Do not miss the kingdom significance of his coming. Settle your accounts with God before Judgment Day by accepting God’s offer of Jesus judged for you.

Introduction – After the Thanksgiving holiday, Christmas season races upon us. We know what to expect: music, movies, parades, shopping, wrapping, lights, decorations, cooking, travel, traffic, parties, eating, family, letter writing and receiving, concerts and plays, Christmas Eve service, stockings, getting and giving gifts, perhaps Santa Claus, hopefully snow, and finally some peace and quiet!

I. Describing the Season

A. Setting the world on fire (v. 49)

1. Why begin Christmas season with judgment—one of today’s most offensive teachings in the Bible? Why do we even need a God who is the ultimate Righteous Judge? Can’t we just love one another? (1) This is not a question that anyone who has experienced cruel and unrequited injustice ever asks. Since the beginning, the strong oppress the weak, the evil tyrannize the righteous, the majority overpower the minority. Nietzsche observed the basic human desire is a will to power. In such a world there is no true justice, no real peace. Only an iron boot maintaining control for the rulers of the present time. (2) This world’s only hope is in an ultimate Righteous Judge who will settle accounts and set the world right. The only hope for lasting peace is an all-powerful and all-righteous God to judge the earth. (3) There is no better candidate for ultimate judge than God. Disagree? Who else would you nominate?

2. If Jesus is the promise of peace on earth, why does he bring so much division? It is important to note that Jesus is not the cause for division, rather his coming is the occasion that brings out the division that already exists between those who love him and those who oppose him. Only those who prefer the status quo complain of a judge setting the world on fire. To people who are fine with their place in the world, and with God at a comfortable distance, the idea of God the judge is offensive. But to those who cry out for justice, for eternal peace, for the burning away of sin from creation, the news of God the judge sending Jesus to light the world on fire is gospel—the best news of all.

B. Not peace, but division in relationships over Jesus (vv. 51-53)

1. No peace on earth? The disciples thought when the Christ came to earth he would bring peace, harmony, shalom. This is true in a very important sense. The biblical teaching that the Christ is the man of peace is overwhelming (cf. Ps 72:3, 7; Lk 1:79; 2:14; 7:50; 8:48; Jn 14:27; 16:33; 20:19, 21; Rom 14:17; Eph 2:14; Col 1:20; Heb 6:20-7:2). But the promise of Christmas season is not what most of us hear: “peace on earth, goodwill toward men [in general].” A more accurate translation is “peace on earth among those with whom he is pleased” (Lk 2:14; cf. Rom 5:1), which also makes better sense of how various people respond to the coming of the Prince of Peace. Anyone who observes our society today can see this first advent “peace” actually brings deep division. It is a spreading peace that overtakes the prevailing powers by gospel proclamation and humble living. This spreading peace brings the existing division to the surface.

2. What kind of division? A polarizing conflict even within households. Families that are otherwise united in love and affection will sharply divide over belief in Jesus. For example, a family of five (father, mother, son, son’s wife, and daughter) will be divided over Jesus and his message: three against two, and two against three. In other words, the felt division will flow both ways: from believer to unbeliever and especially from unbeliever to believer.

II. Discerning the Season

A. What we see and understand (vv. 54-55)

In an agrarian culture dependent on rain for food and water, predicting the weather was an important skill. By watching the signs in the sky, the people became quite accurate at interpreting these data, which allowed them to maximize the land's fruitfulness.

B. What we choose to ignore (vv. 56)

1. There are two conceptually different words for "time" in the Bible. *Chronos* time is controlled by the clock, the calendar, and the schedule. People who only account for time as *chronos* tend to think of time and a commodity to be managed and spent. They tend to view life as a stream of successive moments flying by.

2. *Kairos* time has a purposeful, providential element. Not all time is *kairos* time. Only when circumstances converge by the guiding hand of God do those few and precious moments emerge that possess the ability to become momentous turning points. *Kairos* time is pregnant with meaning. The secular version of *kairos* time is expressed in the Latin saying "Carpe diem" (Seize the day!). Jesus told the crowds the present time was *kairos* time (Lk 12:56). The Bible also says today is *kairos* time (2 Cor 5:17-6:2). We can redeem the meaning of Carpe Diem. Seize the day to lay hold of Jesus. Seize the day to join in the kingdom of God. This is *kairos* time.

III. Preparing for the Season

A. Settle your accounts with God (vv. 58-59)

The prison is a debtor's prison, where people who can't or won't pay their debts are detained until the creditor gets his money. In the first century, the *accuser* was the creditor suing for payment, the *magistrate* or *official* was the judge, and the *officer* was the bailiff responsible for delivering the guilty to debtor's prison. Clearly Jesus is using this story as a parable to teach a spiritual truth.

B. Let the threat of judgment drive you to worship Christ judged for you (vv. 50, 57)

1. Jesus is the Great Divider of humanity because he is the creditor at the door, but he is also the merciful and loving Savior, who saves us from God's judgment. How? A clue to the answer is in verse 50. He was "baptized" in God's judgment for those who will follow him. He was crucified in our place. In other words, God is a judge willing to bear his own judgment in our place! God the Son willingly died on the cross to pay the sin debt of his people. The creditor forgave sin, not by erasing its penalty, but by paying it in full.

2. This should create a restored, loving, thankful, servant relationship between you and God. You can't help wanting to give your life to the creditor who has paid your debt. To follow him, work for him, love him, spend time with him, tell others about him.

Conclusion – Advent season is like a magical iron bell tolling for the faithful to come and wonder at Jesus. But only the ones who stop ignoring the *chronos* noises of Christmas season, and listen for the *kairos* "tolling of the iron bell," will find themselves on their knees in wide-eyed wonder, remembering Christ's first advent, and prepared for his second advent. Listen. Do you hear the advent bell toll? It tolls for thee.