

Christ is Coming:
Just in Time

This is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is the season to prepare for the coming of Christ. Now, when we say that Advent is the season to prepare for the coming of Christ, we have to go on to ask, "Which coming? His first coming on Christmas Day or his second coming at the end of this age?" And the answer is, "Yes."

Christ's first coming marked the end of an age and the beginning of a new age. We mark time by counting the years since the first coming of Christ. It's been approximately 2,009 years since the birth of Christ. In a few weeks we will celebrate 2,010 years since the birth of Christ. We know that our count is off a few years. But that's not important. The important thing is that we are in the age of the first coming of Christ.

Someday this age will end. We will enter the age of the second coming of Christ. Will this really happen? Just as surely as Christ came the first time, Christ will come again. That's the message we lift up during Advent: Just as surely as Christ came the first time, Christ will come again.

Of course, this raises all kinds of questions. How will he come? Don't know. The Bible gives all kinds of descriptions of how Christ will come. People try to take all these various descriptions of the coming of Christ and blend them into one scenario. They are probably wrong.

The Old Testament prophets also gave various descriptions of the first coming of Christ. People also tried to pull together all those scenarios to describe what the coming of Christ would look like. They were as certain of what the coming of Christ would be like as the people who preach and write things like the "Left Behind" stories are. The problem is that they were all wrong. None of them expected the Messiah to come as a baby born in a stable to a carpenter and his young wife. None of them expected the Messiah to be an itinerant preacher. None of them expected the Messiah to die on a cross.

When it comes to descriptions of how Jesus will return, about the only thing we can be certain of is that those who are certain of how it will happen will be wrong.

Another question is, when will Christ return? We may not be certain of how Jesus will return, but we can be certain of when Jesus will return. He tells us that he will return just in time.

Jesus tells us that when our world is falling apart that's when he will come.

Now, we need to be careful to distinguish between the world falling apart and going through a difficult time. The world is constantly going through difficult times. Often people think that the foundations of creation are being rocked, when we are only going through another of an endless series of difficulties that are just a part of life.

Failure to make that distinction has led every generation has been sure that the world is falling apart on their watch. I remember back in 1974 we were struggling with Viet Nam. The hippie revolution had turned society upside down. There were economic problems. Many people were throwing up their hands in despair. Someone wrote a wildly popular book entitled, "74 Reasons the World will End in 1974." People were quitting their jobs. They were selling their homes and their property. They were spending all their time in prayer, getting ready of the

end of the world. Of course, it didn't end. The next year the same author came out with another book entitled, "75 Reasons the World Will End in 1975."

We are in one of those troubled times, and, sure enough, people are talking about the end of the world. The latest prediction of the end of the world is 2012. I went to see the movie "2012" on the day it was released. It was wonderfully entertaining. However, I would not advise anyone to make serious decisions about their lives based on this movie or the predictions underlying it.

Paul thought Jesus would return during his lifetime. He advised the people in his churches not to make any dramatic changes in their lives, such as getting married, because why go to all that trouble when Christ was returning at any moment.

For over 2000 years, people have been predicting the end of the world. So far they have all been wrong. They've been wrong because they have interpreted stressful times as the shaking of the foundations of the world.

There is a difference in being somewhat uncomfortable with the ways things are going and shattering the foundations of creation. Jesus didn't say that he would come when society is undergoing a change that is uncomfortable. He didn't say he would come when we are facing struggles and issues that are challenging. Those are the normal conditions of everyday life. There is never a time when society is not changing. There is never a time when we are not facing challenging issues and struggles. But Jesus said he would come when the foundations of creation are shaken and everything is falling apart.

Why does he wait until then? Because Christ only comes when we will allow him to take control. People don't want to give up control over their world. It's only when we realize that we have lost control that we are willing to invite Christ to come and take control.

Christ will come when we are willing to give him control. In fact, Christ has already come to many of us, because we were willing to let him take control of our lives. We don't have to wait until the foundations are shaken. He will come whenever we invite him to be the Lord of our lives.

And that's when things can really get good. Jesus can do a lot better job with our world and our lives than we can do. This world will be a far better place when we do things his way, rather than our way.

When the world finally realizes it has lost control and cries out for salvation, Christ will come. And Christ will come to bring a new age. In this new age, people will love God with all their hearts and souls and mind and strength. They will love their neighbors as themselves. Isaiah tells us that, "He shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isaiah 2:4)

Isaiah tells us that when the Messiah comes to rule the earth, "The wolf will lie down with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:6-9)

There are all kinds of people who make dire predictions about the end of the world. They tell everyone to be very afraid.

Not Jesus. Jesus says, when you see the heavens shaken and people fainting from fear and foreboding at what is coming, stand up, look up, give thanks and praise. Your redemption draweth nigh. Christ is on the way. And he is bringing a new age when life will be far better than it was before.

So, Jesus warns us not to get too attached to the world as it is. Someday the way we presently live and do business will come to an end. Those who love this present age too much won't be able to handle the change. But those who are looking forward to a better world will be cheering when the world as we know it comes to an end and Christ leads us into the new age.

So, get ready. Christ is coming. He will come just in time to save us and lead us into a new age.

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