

THE WARNING—READ THE SIGNS

Signs that are disheartening -- But one sign that brings joy .

Matthew 24:1-14

TEXT: *Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains. "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

Have you ever failed to carefully read one of those yellow cautionary signs suggesting the speed you should be driving as you exit off the freeway? You're flying along at 70 mph, you see your exit coming, turn off your speed control, engage your turn signal, and slide over to the exit ramp. But then, suddenly you realize that the suggested speed for a safe exit was ignored and you must touch the brakes a little harder because you were going too fast for to make a safe exit.

According to the Lord's own Word, before Jesus' coming to judge the world on the Last Day, there are warning signs to which we should pay attention. He would not have us ignore them. Most of them are disheartening, but there is one that brings hope and joy. Let us READ THE SIGNS!

It was Tuesday of Holy Week. On Friday, Jesus would die on the cross. It was a busy and exhausting day. The religious leaders of the Jews who were plotting his death had been vicious in their efforts to get Jesus to say something that they could use as an excuse to put him to death. That's when Jesus cut loose with a verbal attack on them, exposing their hypocrisy and hatred.

As Jesus and his disciples were leaving the Temple area, they asked Jesus: ***what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?*** This curiosity has never left the hearts of man. Even though Jesus clearly tells us that no one will know or discover that moment in the near future when the Lord will return in judgment and all the world and universe will be destroyed. Yet they ask. So Jesus answers them with the warning signs of his return.

Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. Watch out for deception. Do not be among the many who will be deceived by false doctrine! Now that doesn't sound like it would be too difficult to discern. Who of us would believe someone going around claiming to be the Christ? However, Scripture warns about The Antichrist. Now pay attention to what this is. Paul writes: ***Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.*** 2 Tim 2 It was Martin Luther who recognized who this is, and in our own Lutheran Confessions declare that ***"the pope is the real Antichrist who has raised himself over and set himself against Christ, for the pope will not permit Christians to be saved except by his power power..."*** (Smalcald Articles, Part II, Article IV, The Papacy). Many are deceived and offended at the Lutheran Confessions and even refuse to read and to believe that they are a correct exposition of what Scripture teaches. So they are deceived and intoxicated by the earthly wealth and power of the Vatican.

But don't you be deceived. Be warned and be informed from by your study of God's Word!

Jesus went on: ***You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.*** You will HEAR of wars. With the technology that brings the

horror of war right into our living rooms, and with the rattling of sabers from every corner of the world, we hear of wars and the talk of wars that cause alarm. Jesus says, “don’t be alarmed. It’s going to happen from now until the end. Just head the signs that *the end is still to come*.

Disasters are a warning as Jesus says: *Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.* But once again, these warnings are in anticipation of that great day, for *All these are the beginning of birth pains.* But like the final joyous moment when the birth pains give way to a birthday, so the End of the World is very close.

Signs that are disheartening have gone on since Christ’s Ascension and still occur today in the form of Christian persecution: *Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.* What’s most disheartening is to see that many will turn away from the faith. While we aren’t being put to death yet in the United States, we see the hatred and intolerance of many aimed at those who stand firmly on God’s Word, who speak out against the sins against marriage, against homosexuality, and other forms of immorality.

And Jesus goes on: *Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.* How depressing! How frightening! Who would pick Jesus to be their political ad campaign chairman? Is this all that the church has to offer? But what if Jesus is telling the truth? What if he actually knows what he’s talking about? What if what he says the world will be like as it draws nearer to its end is indeed true? What if Jesus is God and what if he is the one who is coming again on the clouds of glory?

Read the signs and be warned. Read the signs carefully and read the one sign that offers hope and joy! That one sign is this: *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

The Gospel will be preached, in the whole world, as a testimony, or a sign, to all nations, AND THEN the end will come! Even though this is a sign that the end is now upon us, it’s also a sign of the highest comfort to know that the Lord will continue to call, gather, enlighten and sanctify the whole Christian Church even unto the end of the world!

One of the things that Jesus told his disciples that day was also very disturbing to them. The Bible says: *Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen..."* They were shocked to hear Jesus talk this way about the Temple. It had become general false teaching that the Lord’s return would be at that very location: The Temple!

There are certain groups within the pale of Christianity who still believe that the Lord is going to return to Israel and begin his world rule at Jerusalem. That’s not going to happen. Yet there is a form of that kind of thinking that causes Christians, even in the Lutheran faith, to elevate their own particular church and location to such a high level of importance that it’s difficult even for us to hear Jesus say: *"Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."* Does Jesus mean that all that we are doing for this facility we call “St. John’s” and all that beautifies it, is just going to be evaporated by the breath of Jesus’ word at his coming?

The answer is ‘YES’ and the focus is on the blessed truth that the Gospel will be preached throughout the world as a sign. But as it is preached throughout the world, this sign called the Gospel, is the power of God for the salvation of all who hear it and believe. That is the way God builds his Church. It’s not with bricks and mortar, black top and pretty symbols, but with his builder, the Holy Spirit, whose tools are the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. Wherever these tools are, there will be the building of the Temple that rises to testify to the power of God’s salvation.

There you will find the joy and hope that comes from that beautiful End-time sign: *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* The end is near! Amen