

IT IS LATER THAN YOU THINK!

"And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." Luke 21:28.

Fortunetelling is experiencing a record boom. But it is not necessary to be gypped when we can be guided. The Word of God tells us where we came from, where we are, and where we are going. Unfortunately, there are self-appointed prophets who predict the date of the end of the world and even presume to name the Antichrist. There are always some gullible people who would never think of entering a church door to hear the truth from God's Word, but would fight through a blizzard to hear some self-styled prophet attempt to explain the unexplainable and, as the colored man said, "unscrew the inscrutable." Then, there are others who say they believe in the second coming of Christ, but who keep silent about it. They really do not believe it. One cannot believe anything that important and not talk about it. There is no excuse for this sinful silence in the fact that others go to extremes on the subject.

On those grounds we would never take a stand on any doctrine of the faith, for every one of them has been carried to extremes at one time or another. Nobody has a right to take a lofty and condescending air toward prophecy as though it were beneath one's dignity to discuss it. Anything that takes up as much space in the Word of God as this matter is not to be dismissed as though it were a jigsaw puzzle for prospective lunatics.

Peter dealt with these two extremes in reverse order. He wrote about the scoffers who made light of the signs of the times and showed us that those who ridicule such signs are signs themselves. Then he calmed the excitable crowd on the other extreme by reminding them that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day.

Instead of belittling the matter, our Lord asked, "How is it that ye cannot discern the signs of the times?" When His disciples asked plainly, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:3). In answer to their question, He gave them a whole chapter of signs.

God's Word gives us unmistakable guideposts by which we may know when the end draweth nigh. If they mean anything, it is later than we think. What are some things which indicate that it is later than you think?

I. Anarchy.

By anarchy I mean absence of regulating power. Anarchy is rampant for "the mystery of lawlessness doth already work" (II Thessalonians 2:7). Our day is characterized by a general disregard for law. Vast numbers of people scoff at law. They glory in ignoring or defying every semblance of law in every walk of life. Lawlessness is evident in many places. These raging waves of lawlessness in our age have their roots in the homes. Lawless parents beget and support lawless children. Before the fathers abdicated the thrones of their homes and turned them over to their children, the average age of the criminals was over forty. Today that age is well under twenty. Eighty-five percent of the criminals today are between sixteen and twenty-four. We are universally known as the most lawless nation in the world. Our annual crime bill is considerably more than sixteen billion dollars.

We are a generation of rebels against authority. When we are rebels against God in our hearts, it shows up in our homes, in the breaking of the marriage vows, in disobedience to parents, and in juvenile delinquency. Oh, how much parental delinquency there is! What else, but juvenile delinquency, can you expect of a generation brought up to blame its sins on society, fed on pictures from the gutter, listening to music of which even decent apes would be ashamed, and a code of morals that would disgrace Sodom and Gomorrah? Why blame the young generation alone for a world which adults set up for them?

When people make void the law of God, they become a law to themselves and that is anarchy. People are not capable of governing themselves, and that fact soon becomes evident in hearts, homes and governments. It blares forth from jukeboxes, radios and television sets. It shouts from newsstands and magazine racks. It shows up in daily habits. It manifests itself in crime waves. This lawless generation which has heard people talk about the love of God needs some scriptural preaching on the laws of God.

Many young people are now taught to accept nothing as final and absolute, but to experiment for themselves, to give full play to self-expression, and to do as they want to do. Not long since, in another city, the President of a State Teacher's College spoke to the incoming freshmen in part as follows: "Accept absolutely nothing until you have proved it to your own satisfaction. Take nothing on your parents' say-so, or your minister's. The maxims, moral and otherwise, of the alleged 'wise men' of old have no meaning for the present age. Times have changed. What was true yesterday is not true today; what was right yesterday is not right today. Have a modern outlook and a modern mind. Don't let your mind be a storehouse, and your life an outworking, of antique ideas. Don't live by moral standards which are out-of-date; they may have been good once, they aren't now."

II. Apostasy.

By apostasy I mean an abandonment of what one has voluntarily professed. In writing to the Thessalonians Paul said that before our Lord returns there will be a defection in the sphere of the Christian profession, that is, a desertion of beliefs once confessed and an abandonment of standards once acknowledged.

Various scriptures teach clearly that the end of this age is to be characterized by a falling away of a pronounced character. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (I Timothy 4:1-2). "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition" (II Thessalonians 2:3). "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Timothy 4:3-4). "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (II Peter 3:3-4).

Bible prophecy has been given to us by the Holy Spirit in order that we may know in advance some things that are going to take place, and not be taken by surprise. God's Word tells us that the time will come when leaders and teachers will abandon positions formerly held. Not only will they turn from the truth, but they will seek to turn the truth into fables. It is amazing how readily people today will accept myths instead of the Word of God. Some teachers and preachers declare that the Old Testament consists largely of "allegories," that the Ten Commandments are out-of-date, that the statement in I John 1:7, to the effect that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin," is the teaching of a slaughter-house religion, and contrary to human understanding; and that it should be expunged from the Bible. All such teaching is as false as can be, and came from the devil, no matter by whom it is propagated. A woman recently remarked, "I have been to church to hear the preacher dispense with the gospel." There are people with very mediocre intelligence, who are self-inflicted with a superiority complex, who think that because of their statements they have succeeded in taking the inspiration out of the scriptures, the deity out of Christ, the blood out of the atonement, the truth out of the miracles, the fire out of hell and the bliss out of heaven.

This turning away is taking place in doctrinal matters, in church attendance, and in the scriptural observance of the Lord's Day. The present disinclination for prayer, the widespread disregard for Bible teachings, the less serious views of sin, and the present unwillingness to receive reproof for sinning are evidences of apostasy. Today, in many quarters, if one clings to foundational truths, he is scorned as being old-fashioned, antiquated, behind the times, unenlightened or ignorant.

Our Lord asked the question, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Faith, He will find! Plenty of it, in this cult and in the other. But the faith will be a precious commodity. What is in mind here is not personal faith so much as belief in the whole body of revealed truth; not "faith," but "the faith." In many churches, where the message of God's grace was formerly heard, there is now a proclamation of humanism, liberalism, psychological fads and book reviews. In some churches there is much talk about social problems, race relations and world peace, because the speakers do not have any gospel to preach and have to talk about something. What influence does such apostasy have upon the unbelieving world other than to confirm it in its doubt, its indifference, and its open antagonism to the gospel of Jesus Christ?

III. Apathy.

By apathy I mean listlessness, or indifference to what prompts to action. Living in the last days was never meant to be a lullaby to put people to sleep but a reveille to awaken them. Paul did not say, "It is high time to go to sleep." Churches do not need bedtime storytellers but awakeners.

In the last days it will be as it was in the days of Noah and Lot. Christ said, "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:37-39).

In the days of Noah men began to depend upon their own resources and were carried away in arrogance over their own achievements. So it is today, and the multitudes settle down to the comforts, conveniences and indulgences of this luxurious age. As the people destroyed by the flood were self-contained and occupied with their own intellectual pursuits, ignoring the claims of the God Whom they lived and died without, so men today are animated by the same spirit. The Bible warns us that amid all the discoveries of our age, amazing though they be, the tempest of God's fury is to break, causing the loftiness of man to be brought to naught.

A characteristic feature of Noah's day was the persistent rejection of the preacher's message. First of all, there was the powerful appeal of Enoch as he called a declining age to repentance. His threatenings of judgment were spurned. As day followed day and no sign of predicted doom appeared, men lost all fear and became incapable of response to the Spirit's appeal through Enoch.

God in His goodness, however, sent another witness. Noah succeeded Enoch and for one hundred and twenty years preached divine righteousness. But his testimony and holy living, like that of his predecessor, were rejected. The far-off and terrible flood was real to Noah, more real than the life around him. When he began to build the ark, Noah was the object of laughter and ridicule. As he toiled away at his gigantic barge they scoffed at him, but he was indifferent to all the gibes, believing that God's wrath would be manifested against his corrupt age. As Noah kept on predicting the flood and building his ark in the face of the arrogant contempt, the people came to look upon him as a weak-minded fanatic, a preacher void of intellect and therefore unworthy of notice. But Noah went on with his preaching and building, even though none apart from his own immediate family circle heeded his warnings. Even

though they paid no attention to him, once the door of the ark was shut, and the floods began to rise, affrighted crowds fought for admission, but it was too late. The separation had been made and the day of vengeance had commenced.

Our Lord said, "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). People are not especially hostile to the churches; they are simply ignoring them. In other words, the attitude is not antipathy, but apathy, not feeling against but rather the lack of any feeling about them. No church ever suffers as much from antipathy without as it does from apathy within, that is, from carelessness and indifference. Satan has cocained and chloroformed the spirit of the age until even many of God's people have sunk into a lethargy, almost like a coma. Seemingly many of them have lost the capacity for being aroused. They have reached the point of stagnation.

This dark picture is a cloud on which the Lord casts the rainbow of His promise. Christ said, "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). Truly, it is later than you think.

If you have work to do, do it now.
If you have a testimony to give, give it now.
If you have an obligation to discharge, discharge it now.
If you have a wrong to right, right it now.
If you have a confession to make, make it now.
If you have a preparation to make, make it now.
If you have children to train, train them now.
Time is passing and you are passing out of time.
It is later than you think!