

ARE WE LIVING IN THE LAST DAYS?

"What shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the age?" Matthew 24:3.

As the time of the crucifixion was drawing near, Jesus told His disciples many things which they did not understand. He predicted certain future events which were quite beyond their ability to grasp. When they were alone with Him, sitting on the Mount of Olives, they said, "Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the age?"

Jesus recognized the tremendous import of their questions and the unique solemnity of the occasion. So, He granted their request and told them what the signs would be. However, He was careful to caution them that in giving unmistakable signs of the approach of these great events, He was not setting any definite time, but only enabling us to recognize events, when they should come, which would plainly show that the end of the age and the return of the Lord were near.

No clearer presentation of the last days is given anywhere than in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew. It is Christ's own story of the days just ahead. We are not left in the dark. The future has been unveiled, and we know something of what is to come. The signs of the prophetic Word of God were given to us and are to be understood. Instead of condemning us for watching for them, Jesus encourages us to do so, and He goes so far as to enumerate them.

Sincere and honest people, both Christians and non-Christians, are asking, "Are there any real signs showing that the Lord's return is near?" If there are, is it safe or right for us to attempt to interpret them? What has the Word of God to say about the world's Saturday Night; and do present-day conditions lend any appreciable evidence that we are living in that time? We shall find that the Bible has much to say regarding the conditions on this earth preceding the "END OF THE AGE."

In recent years the world has been shaken to its very foundations. There have been stupendous changes -- governmental, economic, industrial, moral, and religious. We are living in a world of rapid and constant changes. Modes of travel, methods of communication, means of commerce, and inventions for pleasure and comfort change so frequently as to keep the whole industrial world in a stir. An automobile, a Pullman coach, a radio, or a house that was thoroughly modern yesterday is discarded today for a newer model. Man is no longer content to read by a tallow dip; he must have his Mazda reading lamp and indirect lighting. He will not ride in the pioneer stage coach; he must have an eight-cylinder automobile, a stream-lined train, or a transcontinental plane. He no longer lives in the quiet of the humble cottage immortalized by Burns in his "Cotter's Saturday Night," but on a crowded and busy street in an electrified flat. His food no longer comes from the garden, smoke-house and cellar, but from the corner grocery and delicatessen. His music comes to him by way of the radio. His children, if any, are born in a hospital, reared in a nursery, and educated in a boarding-school. We certainly live in a nervous, restless, changing and troubled world.

We are living in days of world upheaval and crisis unparalleled. Grave dangers lie ahead. The present hour is a dark one. National problems are multiplying. The international situation is becoming more complicated, entangled and critical. Whither are we bound? How soon will the terminal be reached? What lies just ahead? Such questions as these forcing themselves upon us. Men know not which way to turn. Bewilderment, apprehension, and uncertainty are evident everywhere. The leaders of the nations are like a blind-folded man in a dark closet looking for a black cat which is not there. One of their chief concerns is to perpetuate themselves in their present positions. Fear of the future is in the hearts of most thinking people.

Why are we in such a mess? For a good many years God has been left out of the affairs of this world. Men are not big enough to run the world on their own. When they refuse

God a place in their plans He will never force Himself upon them. Both Christian men and unsaved men now realize that the world can not go on as it is now going. They know that stupendous, world-convulsing world events are ahead. And there are signs everywhere for those who have eyes to see. Luke 21:24-33.

Let us take the lamp of prophecy and light up some of the signs which indicate that "the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." These signs are of varying character, some relating to general conditions, and others to specific events. I simply ask you to ponder the present conditions in the light of the many arresting prophecies of God's Word and draw your own conclusions as to their value and as to the significance of our times.

I. The Political Sign.

1. Increased lawlessness.

"Iniquity shall abound." Matthew 24:12. That this has been fulfilled is demonstrated by the daily press and current radio newscasts. Iniquity is public, open, and uncurbed by law. Vast numbers of people scoff at law, and glory in ignoring or defying every semblance of law in every walk of life. Lawlessness is evident in art, in morals, in government, and in religion.

Modern raging waves of lawlessness in our age have their roots in the homes. Lawless parents beget lawless children. Before the fathers abdicated the thrones of their homes to the children, the average age of criminals was over forty. Today it is well under twenty. Eighty-five percent of criminals today are between sixteen and twenty-five. In the last thirty-five years crime has increased over twelve hundred percent. We are universally known as the most lawless nation in the world. But, how could it be otherwise, with officialdom leading the way? Our own annual crime bill is over fifteen billion dollars, which is fifty dollars per month to every average family in our nation.

2. Conflicts between the nations.

"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." Matthew 24:7. Our world is preparing for war. Nations are building battleships, strengthening their armies, and developing their air forces. Some favoring this course will contend that preparing for war will prevent war. General Maurice said, "I went into the British Army believing that if you want peace you must prepare for war. I believe now that if you prepare for war, you will get war." Even Hitler said, "It is impossible to build up an army and give it a sense of worth if the object of its existence is not the preparation for war. Armies for the preservation of peace do not exist; they exist only for triumphant execution of war." Gilbert Murray was right when he said, "Competition in armaments means the wreck of civilization throughout the world." Bernard Shaw enjoyed a moment of sanity long enough to write, "The more I study the governments of this world, the more I feel persuaded that the other planets have turned this one into their lunatic asylum."

II. The Educational Sign.

1. Increase of knowledge.

"Many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall be increased." Daniel 12:4. A century ago there were but comparatively few schools, and only a small percentage of the people received an education. Today the country is filled with educational institutions of all kinds. Schools, colleges, and universities have been established in unprecedented numbers. At least one fourth of our population is pretending to pursue some course of study.

2. Increase of travel.

Various inventions have speeded up transportation in a marvelous way. For example, we have the automobile, train, and airplane. Didn't God's Word say, "The chariots shall

be with flaming torches in the day of His preparation . . . The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways; they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings." Nahum 2:3-4. Isaiah said, "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows?" Isaiah 60:8. To travel is no longer unusual. The modern means of transportation are bringing knowledge and understanding to our people.

III. The Economic Sign.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." II Timothy 3:1. What are some of the contributing factors?

1. A craze for pleasure.

2. A craze for gambling.

The vice of gambling is legalized in many states, and winked at in others. It is advocated by some solely on the ground that it is productive of revenue. Even some church members gamble for prizes at their bridge clubs, but I challenge the world to find one of them who has ever brought a lost person to a saving knowledge in Jesus Christ.

3. Confusion in the industrial world.

There is in our day a widespread dissatisfaction and unrest, a multiplicity of strikes, seizure of property, mob violence, etc.

4. Financial insolvency.

In all the world there is less than two hundred billion dollars in money, which is far less than the present, but ever-increasing debt of the United States.

IV. The Social Sign.

1. Disobedience to parents.

"For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy," II Timothy 3:2. In many homes parents and their children have exchanged places, and the parents now obey their children.

Many young people are now taught to accept nothing as final and absolute, to experiment and find out for themselves, to give full play to self-expression, and to do as they want to do. Not long ago, 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."

2. Degeneracy of life.

In 1893 the World's Fair was held in Chicago. The most popular place at that Fair was the Tabernacle where Moody and John McNeill preached every afternoon and evening. In 1933 by far the most people went to see the "Fan-Dance." Society has degenerated.

V. The Religious Sign.

1. False prophets.

"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many." Matthew 24:11. The world has never before had as many isms, Satan-inspired and man-made religions. Their number is legion and they continue to increase.

2. Coldness in religion.

"And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Matthew 24:12.

3. World-wide evangelism.

"And the gospel must first be preached among all nations." Matthew 13:10. Soon this prophecy will have been fulfilled, and some people in every nation will have heard the gospel.

4. A great apostasy from the faith.

"In the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons." I Timothy 4:1. "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first." II Thessalonians 2:3. Paul tells us that the time will come when "they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned into fables." II Timothy 4:4. This turning away is taking place in doctrinal standards, in church attendance, in Sabbath observance, etc. 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? Symptoms of this apostasy are evident in the present disinclination for prayer and for serious things, a disregard for Bible teachings, less serious views of sin, and an unwillingness to receive reproof for sinning.

5. An attitude of unconcern.

"As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the Son of Man." Matthew 24:37. In the days of Noah, they ate, they drank, they married, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built, etc. And you say, where is the sin in doing these things? They are not only commanded, but they are necessary. The sin was not in doing them, but in doing them UNTIL THE FLOOD CAME. That is, they did nothing else. They forgot to worship God, their Maker. Many people today are so busy in doing things, many of which are good, that they do not have any time to worship God. They are so busy building homes here that they do not have time to secure a home in heaven.

Noah preached righteousness and an approaching judgment. He met with a general indifference. Nobody cared. Jesus said it would be similar to that preceding the return of the Saviour. There is ignorance of the impending doom, engagement in worldly things, and spiritual conditions are at a far too low ebb.

This dark picture is a cloud on which the Lord casts the rainbow of His promise. Jesus 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. It is later than you may think. If you have work to do, do it now. If you have a witness to give, give it now. If you have a soul to win, win him now. If you have an obligation to discharge, discharge 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.