

SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS

"And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and 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, Christ told His disciples many things which they did not understand. He predicted certain future events which were quite beyond their ability to grasp. When the disciples 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?"

Our Lord 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 very careful to caution them that in giving unmistakable signs of the approach of these great events, He was not setting any definite time. He was merely permitting His own to recognize events, when they did come, which would show plainly that the return of the Lord was near.

No clearer presentation of the last days is given anywhere than in the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew. It is Christ's own description and portrayal of the days just ahead. We are not left in the dark. The future has been unveiled, and we can know various things about what is to be. The signs of the prophetic Scriptures were given to us and are to be understood by us. Instead of condemning us for watching for them, Christ encourages us to do so, and He has even enumerated them for us.

In view of the fact that the Bible has many things to say regarding the conditions on this earth preceding the "end of the age," sincere and honest 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? Do present-day conditions lend any appreciable evidence that we are living in that era?

In recent years this 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 rapidly and frequently as to keep the whole industrial world in a stir. Things that were thoroughly modern yesterday are discarded for a newer model. Man will not ride in a pioneer stagecoach; he must have an eight-cylinder car, a stream-lined train, or a transcontinental plane. He no longer lives in the quietude of the humble cottage immortalized by Burns in his "Cotter's Saturday Night," but on a crowded and busy street in an electrified apartment. His food no longer comes from the garden, smoke-house and cellar, but from the corner grocery, delicatessen, or super-market. Grandfather had a farm, father had a garden, but son has only a can opener. His music comes to him by way of the television, radio or juke-box. His children, if any, are born in a hospital, are reared by a baby-sitter and in a nursery or kindergarten and taught very little by anybody as to how to live, act and do. We certainly live in a restless, nervous, fast, changing and troubled world.

We are living in days of world upheaval and crisis. Grave dangers lie ahead. National problems are multiplying in every country. The international situation is becoming more complicated, entangled and critical. What lies just ahead? Whither are we bound? Such questions as these are forcing themselves upon us. Men know not which way to turn, nor just what to do. Bewilderment, apprehension and uncertainty are evident everywhere. Fear of the future is in the hearts of many.

Nations today are in distress hitherto unprecedented, perplexity heretofore unknown, animosities erstwhile unparalleled, and fear aforesaid unsurpassed. Demonized men never before possessed instruments of torment, destruction, devastation and death as they do today. Prominent men freely prophesy that another great war will mean the destruction

of civilization; yet they go right on preparing the ways and the means for the suicide. Mankind seems to realize that it has lost its way, but it does not understand that it has lost its way because it has lost THE WAY. Men have tried to have peace and prosperity, but they have not succeeded because they have left out God. The problems of humanity are getting far beyond the wisdom and ability of a generation that has politely bowed the living God and His blessed Son out of its council chambers.

Present conditions remind us of what Gibbon wrote in 1787, when he listed the causes of the fall of the Roman Empire as follows:

1. The decline of home life.
2. Higher and higher taxes, with more and more people living from the taxes paid by others.
3. A craze for pleasure and sports.
4. The building of a gigantic army, without thinking of the decadence of the people.
5. The decay of religion.

A nation is no greater than its home life. Many of us are grateful for our forefathers who knew God and loved and served Him. They studied His Word, believed it and obeyed it. They prayed unto God. They observed the Lord's Day by going to church and worshipping Him. But what are their descendants doing today? Many of them are forgetting God and ignoring His Word. They have Bibles in their homes, but they never read them. They never pray unto the Lord unless they are sick or in trouble. Many of them do not have any interest in church. Multitudes of both parents and children are seeking pleasure, indulging in profanity, participating in gambling, drinking and immorality. When and as the home goes, everything goes.

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. Among the signs which our Lord Jesus Christ mentions in this passage of Scripture are the following:

I. Increase Of Deception.

Christ taught that the last days of this age will be a time of deception. It is said that a new cult or sect springs up at least once a month in the United States. No matter how fantastic or fanatical its teachings may be, or how wild its claims, there are always those who are willing to be deceived. How timely, therefore, is the warning of our Lord, "Take heed that no man deceive you" (Matthew 24:4).

It is tragic, but true, that false cults are thriving. They thrive on those in the churches who lack a spiritual experience, spiritual perception or proper teaching. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons" (I Timothy 4:1).

II. False Christs.

Christ warned that the end of this age would be characterized by false christs. He said, "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:5). It is said that during the last century there have been over eleven hundred people in various parts of the world who have claimed to be the Christ, and they have deluded millions. In case you think this statement is absurd, what about the Alabama Negro, "Father Divine"?

III. Wars And Rumors Of Wars.

Christ said, "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (Matthew 24:6-7). In my brief lifetime and memory, there have been two world wars and scores of lesser wars. Today, our world is facing and preparing for an atomic war. Bloodier conflicts are to come than this world has yet witnessed. Competition in armaments means the wreck of civilization.

IV. Famines And Pestilences.

These always follow in the wake of war. This generation has seen famines in greater intensity than previous ones. Though some nations are at a loss as to what to do with their surplus food, millions are starving in various countries. Pestilences are ever the scavengers of famine. They are never far away when destitution is abroad. Where there is a lack of nutritious food, physical resistance to germs is weakened. Then it is that grievous pestilences come in for the kill.

V. Simultaneous Earthquakes.

Scientists tell us that earthquakes have never been as numerous as in recent years. The number of earthquakes is rapidly on the increase. As many as three major ones have occurred on three widely separated continents at the same time.

VI. Racial Intolerance And Persecution.

This racial hatred about which Christ speaks has particular application to the Jews. He said, "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" (Matthew 24:9). Many people blame most of the misfortunes of the world on the Jews and propagate the hellish doctrine that the hope of the world lies in the annihilation of the Jews. It is the same old story with a new satanic vengeance.

VII. Undependability Of Man.

"And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another" (Matthew 24:10). Such a procedure and attitude are well known to each of us.

VIII. False Prophets.

Christ said, "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many" (Matthew 24:11). These false prophets claim to speak for God, but they are mouthpieces for Satan. Posing as messengers of light, they preach that which is not the gospel of Christ. They deny the virgin birth and vicarious death of Christ. They try to humanize Christ and to deify man. In their teaching they try to make Christ far less than He is, and to make man far more than he is. Preaching and teaching a so-called gospel of works, these false prophets would have men save themselves by their own efforts, thus despising the sacrifice of God in the person of His Son on the cross of Calvary. They hold out a hope of salvation as a result of keeping the commandments, obeying the Golden Rule and practicing the Sermon on the Mount. The preaching of their pretty words and high-sounding shibboleths has led and is leading multitudes astray.

IX. Religious Indifference.

"And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matthew 24:12). Truly, the love of many Christians has waxed cold. Never before has there been so much religious indifference as there is today. From earnest preachers and close observers in many quarters there comes the cry that lukewarmness and indifference are creeping over church members. Preaching does not seem to influence them in the least, in so many cases because they never hear it. Leaves of profession are in abundance, but fruit, which is satisfying to Christ, is woefully lacking.

X. World-wide Evangelism.

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14). By means of the radio at least some people in every nation will soon hear the gospel. All of these signs are present simultaneously. This has never happened before.