

Text: Mt. 24:3-14

I. N. I.

Sermon #1805

Heavenly Father, You have taught us clearly in Your Word that this world will end, and that Your Son Jesus Christ is coming again to judge the living and the dead. Keep us strong in faith so that we are always prepared to meet Christ when He comes again, trusting in His merits and clothed in His righteousness. ... We know how easy it is for even outstanding believers and teachers to fall into error. Guide us by Your Holy Spirit into these blessed truths and keep us in them through the same, our Savior. Amen. (Luther for the Busy Man, ed. P. D. Pahl, p. 398 & 395)

As [Jesus] sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

In Christ Jesus, who clearly has revealed where He is to be found to the end of the age, so that we are not led astray following after *false-Christ*s and left unprepared for His return, dear fellow redeemed:

How easy is it for you to accept the inevitable? You start with the symptoms of a cold, you may try some concoction to thwart it's onset and then you take some over the counter medicine to mitigate its affects and finally you resign yourself to it lasting about ten days. We do this even with more serious health issues and sometimes find the prognosis given by the doctor at the beginning was not as dire as it was made out to be. But no matter how it may seem that we have evaded the inevitable, sooner or later we will all die.

But Christians are not called to a life of fatalism. We do not throw up our hands in despair and assume if we are meant to die, we will die regardless of medicines and treatments. We use the wisdom given to us

and those whose vocation it is to advise and help us in our needs, using all that is available to go on living in service to God and our neighbor as long as God grants us another breath.

Right before our text Jesus speaks of the inevitable destruction of Jerusalem within another 40 years. This caused the disciples to ask for more information about that event and when Jesus would return. Our Lord goes on to speak of the inevitability of many wars yet to come, many natural catastrophes, the falling away of many who once knew the true God. But all is not lost for as we shall see: **While Wickedness Abounds, The Good News Spreads.**

I

Every generation of Christians since Jesus first spoke these words has observed that the wickedness of the world around them has been increasing. The end must surely be right around the corner we say as we shake our heads in disgust over what man does to his fellowman. Injustice always seems to be on the rise and man's evil becomes more and more acceptable. Excuses abound, so that wrong is made into a right and right is declared evil, truth is called a lie and a lie the truth.

Jesus reports its inevitability: "lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold." Surely we are not to resign ourselves to this fact, throwing up our hands and do nothing to seek that justice is restored for victims, nor seek to encourage love and charitable deeds among our neighbors. But our Lord does not want us to be taken by surprise either, lest we fall away thinking that God has abandoned us in the ever-increasing wickedness around us.

But nevertheless this sinful and corrupt world is on its death spiral as the years, decades and centuries whirl by. If we do not heed the warning of our Lord here, we can become vulnerable to the many *false-christs* that appear deceiving many. They offer a false sense of security by turning the unsuspecting to imagine that they can make the changes internally that will save themselves. They point the sinner inwardly and not to Christ Jesus where He alone has promised to be found and received, namely in His Word, the Gospel and in the Sacraments of holy Baptism and Communion.

Review the history of the Church. Because of the evil nature of the world and its ever-increasing wickedness, what has been offered as solutions? - escaping into monasteries, convents, communes, a new world

off in the wilderness. Those being tricked like this to flee the world will develop a new code of laws by which to live and eventually seek to be justified through it. They often will dress, eat and conduct business differently than their neighbors and in general shun contact with those lost in this world as unbelievers. Then strangely there is a more current solution offered up by some Christians through trying to bring the glitz and glamor of the world into the church, using the trappings of the world to make the Church more appealing to outsiders.

Admit it, there have been times you at least flirted with the idea of following such notions of escaping the dark turmoil Jesus spoke as being inevitable. You, no doubt, have worried about the condition of the world instead of trusting in Christ the Lord of the Church who rules all things. The voices of *false-Christ*s abound more and more today with the availability of the multimedia in the privacy of our own homes. The voices imitating Jesus cry out to us from many corners saying "*Look, here is the Christ*", or "*There He is.*"

II

The wickedness of man's heart has been as evil since the first day mankind fell into sin. However the unbelieving world is on a course of ever increasing wickedness until the day Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead. We saw that develop up to the time of the flood, when God in His mercy to His Church sent the flood and destroyed all unbelief, leaving Noah and his family, the only believers left on earth. They were still sinners, but there was no unbelief in the world for a time. The only safeguard against the level of unrighteousness developing that quickly again was that God instituted human government to keep some law and order in the world. But not even governments can stem the tide of an ever-increasing wickedness. As often happens power corrupts and governments of all different types end up promoting the rise of injustice, tyranny and cruelty.

In the midst of this dark setting the Church of Christ Jesus is found. He did not want to remove His Church from the world, but that through Her many would hear the Good News of salvation, many would believe and many would be saved. Even among those who are caught up in the ever-increasing wickedness, there remains a longing on the part of many for salvation from this culture of death. Many want to know their Creator and how they can be found acceptable before Him. They may not even

know how to verbalize this, but it is an ache deep within their souls that yearns for healing and life.

By God's grace you have come to know His solution to this our shared dilemma of sin and death with all sinners. You believe that God sent His Son for you. He came to take your place, living perfectly in your place, dying your death having borne your sins, rising again to give you life. By His grace at work in you, you have become the mouthpiece of "this gospel of the kingdom" which "will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations." Through your words and actions, you bear witness to the truth that God loves us all and has reconciled the world to Himself through His Son, calling all sinners like yourself to believe and be saved.

We are called to be the salt of the earth and the light to the world, but not to be naïve thinking that we must now strive to make the world a better place. There is no path to utopia in this life. This fallen world will never become better. Yes, we are to strive to improve our lives in accordance with the holy will of God as a testimony to His truth. The holy lives He calls us to live to His glory will never save us, only Christ saves us. These lives will not necessarily improve the condition of the world. But these lives of God's people are used by our Lord to call out to a dying world that there is life, life in Christ Jesus the Savior of the world.

We may still be living in the beginning of the birth pains right now or we may be in the middle of these signs still pointing off into the distant future, or indeed the Gospel will soon have reached the ends of the earth, "and then the end will come". Jesus does not want us to guess at the timing of these things, rather always be prepared. Accept the inevitability of this world growing more and more wicked, but do not become overwhelmed by it. The Lord of the Church is in charge of all things for the benefit of His Church.

While the wickedness of the world increases, we, as His Church, have the honor and privilege to support the spreading of the good news of salvation. God still wants all people saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. As long as you are breathing, my fellow believers, your job remains secure. Meanwhile through that proclaimed Gospel of Jesus Christ you remain redeemed, restored and forgiven ready to go to your eternal home declared justified before your Creator God by the blood and righteousness of His Son alone. Glory be to the Father and to the Son and

to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning is now and shall be forevermore. Amen.