

Signs in the World

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As a boy I recall that from time to time my pastors: H. Hoeksema and C. Hanko would preach on the last things. They would preach about the signs of Christ's coming and about the Antichrist and the persecution during the great tribulation. And I was frightened by it all. Rev. Hoeksema used to say from the pulpit that he hoped he would still be living in those days but I fervently hoped I would not! I dare say you share some of those same fears. That's why I'm glad for the opportunity to speak on this subject. Jesus knows our fears. That's why He said: "See that ye be not troubled." We have nothing to fear and every reason to rejoice.

The occasion for these words of Jesus is found in verses 1-3 of Matthew 24. Jesus and the disciples are near the temple when Jesus predicts the destruction of the temple. Then they went to the Mount of Olives. The disciples ask: "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming?" The rest of the passage is Jesus' answer to their question. Jesus explains that the destruction of the temple is a picture of the end of the world. What we have then in this chapter are the signs of Christ's coming and of the end of the world. We shall consider the beginning of those signs, those which occur in the world. They are wars and rumor of war, earthquakes, famine, pestilence and abounding lawlessness. The Lord speaks of these in verses 6-8 and 12.

Let us consider first what these signs are. Jesus tells us they are wars and rumors of war. It was a time of peace when Jesus spoke these words. It was a peace enforced by Rome's military might, but peace nonetheless. Jesus said that's going to change. The disciples were on the verge of hearing of wars and rumors of wars. In the very near future they would hear of these. How true these words of Jesus are. There have been thousands of wars since that time. In Europe there have been three hundred wars in the past three hundred years. The world of the twentieth century witnessed two terrible world wars in which millions were slaughtered. Six million Jews died in the second world war alone. Then there were the Korean and Vietnam wars. And we hear of wars and rumors of war today. Ireland is wracked by conflict, Russia invaded Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq are at war. There is revolution in Poland. The Arab-Israeli world is a virtual time bomb which could explode at any moment and at the slightest provocation. The world is simply an armed camp. The world is armed to the teeth with all kinds of sophisticated weaponry, to say nothing of the utterly fearful nuclear weapon. The world has the capability of destroying itself with the push of a button in a matter of moments.

But there's more. Wars will continue and increase. Nations shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. War has characterized the entire history of the world. That will continue and increase. Jesus said so. And our Lord told us these are a sign of His coming and of the end of the world.

But there are more signs in the world. There shall be famines. Thousands die from starvation. Children with bloated bellies go to sleep hungry every night. A recent newspaper reported that ten thousand people, most of them children die of hunger per day. There shall be pestilences. Think of the destruction of crops by insects. There are diseases of every sort. Heart disease and cancer kill thousands every day. There are earthquakes in diverse places. How true! They cause untold damage to property and loss

of life and injuries. Scientists predict many more and worry about the severity of them. Jesus spoke too of abounding iniquity. Iniquity is literally lawlessness. The word refers to contempt for the law, wilful violation of the law. That abounds and increases. This too is perfectly obvious in today's world. Prisons are filled to overflowing and they can't build new ones fast enough. In Michigan the problem is so severe that the state wants to release prisoners early. Crime in spite of men's best efforts increases. When we lived in South Holland the Chicago police called the Cabrini-Green housing project, "the war zone." Many streets in our cities are unsafe at any hour of the day or night. But there's still more! How many thousands of babies are murdered in cold blood before they see the light of day!? Think of the pornography, prostitution, gambling, and homosexuality in our world. It's enough to make the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah blush. Drug addiction and drunkenness are problems of huge proportions.

How are all these to be explained? Not as natural occurrences. They don't just happen. They are not to be explained in terms of Political Science or the principles of Sociology. There is no natural explanation which accounts for them.

That's what sinful man thinks. He thinks that man is in control. He measures the force of earthquakes with his seismograph. He forecasts volcanoes like Mt. St. Helens. He spins his theories of world economics to prevent famine and has all kinds of measures to prevent pestilence. With his diplomacy man attempts to end the wars and tensions among the nations. None of this is the answer. At bottom it's utterly futile. Wars, famines, pestilences, earthquakes and lawlessness continue and abound.

But Jesus has the answer! "All these things *must* come to pass." Literally Jesus says: it is necessary that these things become. That's a divine necessity. No matter what man thinks or does these things *must* happen. Nothing will stop them or even cause them to slow down. It is necessary that these things become. God said it is necessary. This is divine necessity. God brings these things. God has determined that His kingdom will come in the way of all these things. That's His eternal counsel in Christ Jesus.

What must be our attitude towards all these things? Jesus tells us, and He uses very strong language. "See!" He says. Take note of this! Know this! Our Lord means to emphasize this very, very strongly. One commentator put it nicely when he wrote: "Look out for wars but do not be scared out of your wits by them." This is what Jesus is saying to us. "See, that ye be not troubled." To be troubled is to be alarmed, to be paralyzed with fear and to cry out in terror. The Lord says: "See that ye be not terrified by these things."

Make no mistake these things are terrifying! Think of the terrors of war. Who knows the terror of many millions of war victims and soldiers since these words were spoken? Who can measure the screams as troops and tanks and guns roar through village and countryside or as the bombers devastate cities and towns. Think of the screams of a mother who has just seen her child burned to a crisp or blown to bits! That's war. Go to the hospital and hear the moans and cries of the sick. Witness the fears of the dying. The examples could be multiplied. There is no way one can calculate the terror caused by earthquake and storm. The suffering caused by all these things is simply beyond comprehension. In the face of all these things Jesus says: "See that ye be not troubled."

Why not? The answer is all these things must come to pass but the end is not yet. These are signs of the end of the world. But there's more that has to happen before the end comes. God has determined these things as signs of the final revelation of His glory in Jesus Christ. We must know that. We must be sober and watch and pray. When we see

these things we must realize our God is at work bringing the coming of Christ and the end of the world.

All these are the beginning of sorrows. Literally Jesus says these are the beginning of birth pangs. The end is not yet but these signs tells us that the beginning of the end is at hand. Other signs must follow until finally Antichrist comes. And when the gospel shall have been preached to the ends of the world then shall the end come. But these signs: war, earthquake, famine and the rest are the beginning of birth pangs. Just as birth pangs tell us that the birth of the child is very near so these signs tell us that the end of the world and the birth of the new world are very near.

Therefore, do not be terrified! Rejoice and be very glad! Christ is coming in great power and glory. We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

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