

The End of the World

Matthew 24:15-28, Trinity Sunday XXV

November 25, 2007

Beloved of the Lord.....It is out of infinite mercy that the Lord warns us that this world we live in is going to end. 2 Peter 3:10 says, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." All the vain works of man, all his earthly glory will come to ruin. And all will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. With a blare of the trumpets of angels, God will announce His presence, and then divide the sheep and the goats from one another. All the secrets sins of men will be judged by the one and only Almighty God.

Of course God tells us that this world will end, for our own benefit. He does not want that day to take us by surprise, but He desires that we be prepared by repenting of our sins, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that Jesus warned His disciples of two great destructions yet to come. The first destruction which Jesus prophesied, was the destruction of Jerusalem, in 70 AD, by the Roman army. But the second destruction, the end of the world, stands behind the literal language of the first. "Wherever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together."

I. The destruction of the Jewish kingdom. Our Lord begins by warning His disciples of the abomination of desolation, "spoken of by Daniel the prophet." What is this? Roughly forty years after Pontius Pilate and the Jews crucified the Lord Jesus, the city of Jerusalem was overthrown, burned, and utterly destroyed by the Roman army. This was God's punishment upon the Jews, because they crucified the Lord of glory (I Cor. 2). Luther held that the "abomination of desolation" was when a statue of the Roman Emperor, Caius Caligula, was placed in the Temple to be worshipped. Such idolatry was indeed an abomination to the Lord, as all idolatry is. In a similar way, Kretzmann held that the "abomination of desolation" was the Roman army's ensigns, its eagles and idols, which defiled Jerusalem and the Temple. This fits the words of Jesus who earlier warned the believers "when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh." (Lk. 21) When the Roman army first surrounded Jerusalem, the believers who remembered Jesus' words, fled the city quickly, going to the mountains leaving everything behind. During the two year siege of Jerusalem, the Jews within were starving, and they practiced great cruelty upon one another. Luther writes, "Yea, the famine was so great that they ate the strings of cross-bows and even their own children. It

was so shameful and abominable that like pity and distress shall never be heard again."

When we hear such things we feel sorry for them, or we might wonder, where is the mercy of God here? But God's mercy had been with them for forty long years AFTER they crucified the Lord Jesus. Moreover God sent the Jews prophets and apostles like Peter, James, and the great apostle Paul. But one by one they murdered the apostles, though the apostles brought them the message of Jesus and God's grace. They had their chance to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Indeed Jesus had already died and paid for their sins on the cross. Yet they still would not repent. They still would not believe.

That sounds like our world today doesn't it? Surely we're on the verge of Judgment Day, and people continue to live in sin, children rebel against their parents, workers rebel against their employers, citizens rebel against their state, and in short everyone acts and behaves as if God is sleeping, or unconcerned with the cruelty mankind exercises upon itself. And perhaps we wonder, why hasn't He come yet? Why hasn't He returned?

But the answer to this question brings comfort. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." 2 Pet. 3:9 And so it is not that God has forgotten about mankind, nor is it that He will never come, rather He has not come yet because He is very patient, longsuffering. He doesn't want people to go and perish in hell, but He is still working through the preaching of the Gospel to call men and women throughout the world, to repentance, to faith: that they might see and understand that the Lord Jesus died on the cross for their sins also. And truly our world is in great need of that Gospel message, for I know many people right now are living without repentance, without faith, and if God came now, if He returned today, these people I know would be sentenced and judged to hell. For their sinful way of life is against God's commandments, and they do not confess the Lord Jesus to be their Savior from sin. Except they repent, they shall perish.

And so on the one hand, it is God's great mercy which keeps and prevents Him from coming, but on the other hand He has already chosen the Last Day. So for our benefit, for our sake, He tells us the truth, that He can come at any time, when we least expect it, like a thief in the night. And then it's all over. For just as quick as the lightning strikes and flashes through the sky from the east to the west, turning the night into day, "so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." And then if you have not repented, it is too late. The end of this world is similar to the destruction of Jerusalem.

II. That which precedes the destruction and end of the world. But now let us turn more perfectly to the spiritual

side of this picture, the "abomination of desolation." For Jesus here speaks not only of the destruction of the Jewish kingdom, in 70 AD. Jesus also speaks of great tribulation, a shortening of days for the elect's sake. And He connects all of this to His final return, so we know He is also speaking of the end of the world. What is all of this about? What comes before the destruction of this world?

To begin with, the "abomination of desolation.....stands in the holy place." Hence it is within the visible church, and not outside of. People within the visible church follow this abomination religiously, being deceived and led away from the free grace of Christ Jesus. "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect." And mark this point well, dear Christian. For you yourself will be deceived, if you put your faith in any man, due to an outward show of holiness, outward miraculous signs, lying signs, lying wonders. For when the end of the world is near, the powers of deception will be so great and powerful, so convincing, that even the elect would be deceived, if that were possible! The elect are those Christians who believe, and persevere in the true faith until death. God desires that your faith be built upon the Word of God, Christ crucified, who justified and declared you innocent, by His holy, precious blood, and by His innocent suffering and death. If only you believe in Him, certainly you shall be saved!

But perhaps the best way to understand this "abomination of desolation", which God pairs up with the end of the world, is to turn to Second Thessalonians chapter two, the chapter of the antichrist. For the Bible teaches the antichrist is a man (or a series of men) who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped. The antichrist sits as God in the temple of God, "showing himself that he is God." And there is no figure, no man who better fits this picture in all of history than the papacy, or the Pope. For the Pope teaches that he is the universal bishop whom God has placed on the earth to speak for God! All men are to kiss his ring and bow to his authority. The Pope teaches that when he speaks from his official chair, *ex cathedra*, or the shrine of his heart, he cannot err. Even worse, the Pope teaches that if any man believes he is justified by faith alone in Christ Jesus, "let him be anathema!!" This means the Pope teaches all true Lutherans are going to hell, for they believe they are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ.

Truly, God has elected and ordained no other man to sit in the Temple of God, other than our glorious God-Man, Christ Jesus the LORD! Jesus is the Man, the Prophet, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who rises above all other men in this world, NOT THE POPE! And what poor and broken and downtrodden sinner, who

by the law feels the weight and burden of their own sins and fears hell, what dear soul will find comfort in the teaching of the Papacy, that they must do many good works to earn their place into heaven? Where is the comfort for those who follow the Pope in the knowledge that when they die they will go to purgatory, and there be tormented by fire for their sin, until they are pure enough to receive heaven? And under the papacy, what kind of Savior is Christ really, if He did not pay for the sins of all men? And how will you know if your good works are enough? if they are pure, if they are holy, if they are acceptable before the Righteous and Holy God? Is the Pope right if he teaches that we must do good works to earn heaven, and contrary to this the Bible says, "By the deeds of the law shall no man be justified"? The Bible says, "by grace ye ARE saved." When Jesus hung and suffered there on the cross, to the thief He said, "TODAY, shalt thou be with ME in PARADISE!" "As soon as you die, dear sinner, you will be with me in heaven!" That is what Jesus said! Truly these are words of comfort, these are words of hope. With Jesus there is always hope, the hope of everlasting life.

Truly, dear Christian, "by grace ye are saved!" Your salvation is secure, your salvation is certain, because it is built upon the merits of Christ Jesus. And notice, the Bible doesn't say, "by grace you will be saved", it here says, "by grace you ARE saved." Even now, by God's grace, you have and own heaven. The Lord says, "It is my free gift to you, so that when you die, you will not fall into condemnation, but instead you will receive life everlasting." All this God says to you in the Gospel. And just think again of that thief on the cross. Who was that man? Who was that thief? Isn't it you? dear sinner? For the Gospel says to you, the same thing that Christ Jesus, the Living Gospel said to that thief, "TODAY shalt thou be with me in Paradise".

Yes, I know, this world we live in is filled with trials and tribulations. There is suffering and even pain for God's children. And there can be no doubt, that the closer we get to the end of the world, the worse things will get. "Behold I have told you", Jesus said. But if only our faith is built upon the solid Rock of Jesus Christ, then even the end of the world, or Judgment Day, or death is not to be feared. For Christ, for our sake, has already tasted death for us. He conquered it and rose again! For the believer, death is our entrance into heaven. One by one our gracious God calls His saints home. Let us then be prepared for the Lord to return today, or tomorrow, or any day at any time. For those who are prepared in faith, are well prepared for their heavenly home. Amen.