

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: I WILL COME AGAIN

Scripture: Matthew 24:1-4

And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. 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 world? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.

And now I have told you before it come to pass,
that when it is come to pass, ye might believe.

The second coming of Christ in glory to judge both men and nations, to destroy all the evil dominion of Satan, and to establish his own kingdom of righteousness, has been the hope of men for many ages. Old Testament prophets looked forward to and saw the day when a King should reign in righteousness. Job testified that his Redeemer should stand on the earth in the latter day, and that men long since dead but resurrected should see him in the flesh. According to one student of the subject, 20 out of the 27 books of the New Testament teach the second coming of Christ. It is mentioned 318 times in 260 chapters. Jesus himself promised, "I go to prepare a place for you. But if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." By many parables Jesus taught his disciples that they must always be as servants who wait for the return of their Lord who will demand an accounting of the resources left in their keeping.

Seemingly it is God's invariable policy to give some foreknowledge of impending events to those who are alert to see, to hear, and to understand. The Lord God doeth nothing save he reveal it to his servants, the prophets. Never does he bring judgment and destruction upon a city, a nation, a people, an empire, an era, a civilization, without first giving some warning which the watchful man may see and heed, and so save himself by repentance. God warned of the

destruction of the world by flood. He warned of the destruction of Sodom. He warned of the destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, and the scattering of Israel into all the nations. He warned of the later destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem by the Romans under Titus, and of the fearful judgments which at that time should make an end of Israel's dominion as a nation. Jesus has in the same way left us certain signs by which we may be warned of the imminence of his coming in judgment and glory, so that men may be left without excuse if they refuse to repent. These signs or warnings are to be found principally in three chapters of the Bible, the 24th chapter of Matthew, the 13th chapter of Mark, and the 21st chapter of Luke.

At the close of the 23rd chapter of Matthew, Jesus laments over the city of Jerusalem, and closes with this judgment, "Your house is left unto you desolate." The first verse of the next chapter tells how Jesus left the temple for the last time. As he left, his disciples came to him, puzzled and incredulous. His words had hinted at a destruction of the temple. They pointed out the huge stones -- some of them sixty feet long -- of which the temple walls were builded, as proof that it could never be destroyed. But Jesus prophesied that not one stone should remain upon another. Then the little party went privately to the mount of Olives, overlooking the temple and the city, where Jesus continued his prophetic discourse.

In this conversation, the disciples asked him three things: (1) When shall these things be? (i.e. the destruction of the temple) (2) What shall be the sign of thy coming? and (3) What shall be the sign of the end of the world? Because the early writers believed that all three things would happen simultaneously, they made no particular effort to separate and classify the several signs. They are all grouped together. We know from history that certain signs preceded the downfall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the destruction of the temple by the Roman general, Titus. Therefore, one method of determining which are the signs of Jesus' second coming would be by the process of elimination -- subtracting from the list all that were fulfilled in 70 A.D., and accepting all that remained as signs of the end of the world and God's judgment at Christ's coming in glory.

The problem is not quite that simple, however. There are many signs which are common to all apocalyptic scripture, to all warnings of impending judgment. When a city, a nation, a civilization, an empire, a social or an economic system begins to deteriorate and die, or to move towards judgment which shall eventually destroy it and replace it with a better, there are certain signs which seem to be common to all such occasions. False and presumptive leaders arise to propose panaceas for every public or private ill. Injustice, oppression, inequity, and rivalries between men and races and nations bring wars, battles, insurrections, rebellions, anarchy, commotions, persecutions, rumors of wars, doubts, fears. Unsettled social and economic conditions usually bring famine, and oftentimes pestilence. Under the pressure and pessimism of such times, men decide to "eat, drink, and be merry" while they may, for life is short and uncertain; therefore iniquity abounds. Men forget God; and love of many waxes cold. That which once was regarded as holy is ridiculed; the abomination of desolation stands in the holy place. Those who attempt to maintain righteous standards are persecuted. And in the midst of it all both men and nations stand helpless and perplexed, wondering how to find a way out.

All of these signs preceded the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. There had been both general and specific warnings of this event in Jesus' prophecies. Some who paid heed to those warnings fled Jerusalem and escaped when the Roman armies first laid siege to the city. Others ridiculed the idea that Jerusalem could fall, and when the Roman army suddenly gave up the siege and marched away, there was even greater assurance that Je-

rusalem would never be taken. But the army came back two years later with a new general, and Jerusalem fell with the loss of 1,300,000 slain, and 97,000 more sold into slavery -- because when the siege was clamped on, the city was crammed with pilgrims come up to the Passover feast.

Between Jesus' warning and the downfall of Jerusalem, other signs had been fulfilled. False Christs arose. In several places the Jews arose in rebellion, and were massacred. A great famine troubled the earth for several years. Within the walls of Jerusalem there was civil war between two, and later three fanatical parties, even while the Romans stormed the walls outside. There were threats of war from every side. Strange portents appeared in the heavens. In their despair, men abandoned themselves to iniquity. They betrayed and persecuted each other. Antiochus Epiphanes set up an altar within the temple and sacrificed swine's flesh upon it. The Zealots or assassins, one of the revolutionary and most fanatical of the warring parties, turned the sacred temple into an armed fortress, and in open combat defiled the altar with the blood of their brethren, instead of uniting with them to beat off the Roman besiegers.

Many of the signs of Christ's coming in glory and in judgment at the end of the age, or the end of the world, closely parallel these signs of Jerusalem's destruction. Nation shall rise against nation. There will be wars and rumors of wars, fears, perplexities, famines, pestilences, earthquakes, persecutions, betrayals, false prophets, presumptuous leaders, false Messiahs. There will be a general apostasy; iniquity shall abound and the love of many wax cold. Holy places and sacred things will be desecrated.

There are two philosophies of history. One says that men are gradually evolving, getting better and better, and that by their own efforts they will some day reach perfection. The other philosophy says that God's kingdom will come only when Christ returns to end the blundering of man-made history and man's unrighteous dominion, and to make the kingdoms of this world the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. We believe in the second of these two philosophies. We cannot save ourselves. We need Christ to come again and save us. In the next sermon of this series, we shall further point out some of the signs which we believe herald his imminent return -- the return of him who said: "I will come again."