

Preparedness.

Text: Mat 24:15-28

Suggested Hymns:

485, 298, 206, 840, 338

- 1) Watch and act, see and flee
- 2) Pray
- 3) Do not be deceived
- 4) Do not be surprised

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 24:15-28, ¹⁵ *“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand),* ¹⁶ *“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.*

¹⁷ *“Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. ¹⁸ “And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. ¹⁹ “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! ²⁰ “And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.*

²¹ *“For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. ²² “And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.*

²³ *“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it. ²⁴ “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.*

²⁵ *“See, I have told you beforehand. ²⁶ “Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it. ²⁷ “For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ²⁸ “For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together. (NKJV)*

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

One of the most terrifying events in history was the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. There were overwhelming attacks from the

enemy carrying everything like a tidal wave before it. Within the city there was famine and pestilence, treachery, factional strife and slaughter. Those were frightful days and terrifying nights.

Jesus, the God-man, knew what was in store for Jerusalem. Therefore on one occasion He saw the city and wept. In the words preceding our text He said to His inquiring disciples that not one stone would be left upon another in the beautiful Temple of the city.

Later, sitting on the hillside of the Mount of Olives, the disciples asked, ***“Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the world?”***¹ They considered the destruction of Jerusalem and the second coming of Jesus as simultaneous.

However, Jesus separates these two and tells them of the coming of the end of the world and then draws some lessons for the Christians of those times and of our times from the coming destruction of Jerusalem. May the Lord bless our meditation, on this, the 3rd last Sunday of the Church Year.

1. Watch And Act

Our text begins, ***“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand),***¹⁶ ***“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.***

In other words, when you *see* the abomination of desolation, then *flee*. The important words are *see* and *flee*. So the first thing Jesus tells the Christians is to watch and act.

What is this abomination of desolation for which they should watch? In Jerusalem was the Temple. This was the holy place, not only for the Jews but also for the Jewish Christians. Although they believed in Christ and knew that the Temple belonged to the shadows of things to come, nevertheless it still was a holy place. The Jews guarded it with jealous care.

Think of the commotion when they thought that Paul had brought in a Gentile. Before the destruction of Jerusalem there was a large faction known as the Zealots, the most fanatical of the defenders of Judaism and the Temple. Being fanatical, they were willing to grasp any straw that held out hope against the Romans, who were drawing closer and closer.

In their desperation they finally did an unheard-of thing, they opened the Temple to the Gentile Idumaeans, hoping that they would help them defend it. Instead, the Idumaeans in a fanatical fight turned upon the Zealots and in the Temple killed 8,500 people.

What the Jews and even in a measure the Jewish Christians considered the holy place was thus desecrated by the inroads of the Gentiles and by wholesale murder.

Jesus says, when the Christians see this, then let them flee. The Christians are to watch, and when they see the holy place desecrated, then they shall know that it is the beginning of the end, then there is no time to lose, then it is time to act.

When the Roman armies first entered Judea, not all Christians would and could get away from Jerusalem. There are often legitimate ties which cannot always be broken at a moment's notice. However, the Christians must watch. When finally the desperate situation pictured above develops, then ***“then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ “Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. ¹⁸ “And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes..*** It is immaterial what is holding them, they must leave.

All Scripture is written for our learning, so also this Scripture; especially this Scripture, when we remember that the destruction of Jerusalem is a type or illustration of the end of the world.

And who can tell how close we are to the end of the world? There will be a repetition of many of the things that happened at the destruction of Jerusalem. And so we should read and meditate and apply the solemn word of Jesus to our time.

Today we also should watch and act. Watch for the abomination of desolation in the holy place. What is that today, what is that hateful thing that makes the holy place desolate? It is paganism in the temple of God, showing itself today as Liberalism in the Church.

Watch out for any teaching that denies that the Bible is the Word of God, denies that Jesus is the very Son of God, denies that Jesus is our Saviour and Substitute, denies all specific Christian doctrines. Modernism uses Christian

phrases but is essentially rank unbelief, teaching salvation by one's own works and not by the work of Christ. This rank unbelief is in the holy place, the Church, by invitation.

So-called Christian ministers brought it into the Church, are its proponents and defenders. Modernism, Liberalism, Higher Criticism, all show unbelief and after being invited, turns on the Church to despoil it. It robs the Christians of their foundation, it robs them of their Saviour, it robs them of the hope of everlasting life.

We are not only to watch and see these things, we are to act. Flee! Liberalism in the Church is not a small matter, it creates a desperate situation. Do not fraternise, do not fellowship with, this modern killer. As you value your soul, avoid it.

In our age we find so much indifference. We hear people say that it does not make much difference to which Church you belong as long as they have the Bible. They all show the way to heaven. And so we see much fraternising. We have a World Congress, in which practically all churches are represented.

We have the so-called ecumenical movement where Christian and non-Christians are sitting side by side, trying to do the Lord's work. And we are continually invited to join hands. And our Old Adam does not like to stand alone, our Old Adam does not like to be called narrow and intolerant and behind the times.

See and note, what has unbelief has done to the churches where the doors were opened to it. Take heed and be wise and flee. Do not let any consideration of material loss or gain hold you up or slow you down, but flee.

Scripture says in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, ¹⁴ *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?* ¹⁵ *And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?* ¹⁶ *And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."*

¹⁷ Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” ¹⁸ “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.”

2. Pray

The next lesson Jesus gives us is to pray. *“But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! ²⁰ “And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath.*

²¹ “For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. ²² “And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.

The days of Jerusalem’s destruction will be times to try men’s souls. It will be particularly hard on women. When war is abroad in the land, when hatred is aroused, then also all other passions of evil come to the surface. Lewd men will not spare women but will in unnatural brutality try to satisfy their lusts and sadistic feelings. In winter the flight would be hampered by the weather.

A more recent example of this was during the Spanish Civil War when the women fled Barcelona. This occurred in the winter which was particularly cold. What misery because of the weather! They were also brutally used as human shields.

While the Christians in Jerusalem knew that the ceremonial law of the Sabbath no longer had any binding power, nevertheless quite a few of them observed the law not to travel more than about a mile on the Sabbath. And even if they did not observe it, they would meet with fanatical Jews, who would wreak vengeance upon them if they dared to ignore this law in their escape through Judea.

Therefore Jesus admonishes the Christians to pray, pray earnestly and without ceasing. What can prayer do in the midst of war, what can prayer do when the hatred of the Romans and the fanaticism of the Jews clash? Jesus says, *“And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.* The days shall be shortened, not by

the Romans, not by the Jews, but by the Lord in answer to the prayer of the Christians.

While men are making and carrying out plans for war just as though there were no God in heaven, the Christians should remember that God rules the world, that neither the Romans nor the Jews can go one step further than God in His wise providence permits. The children of God should therefore commit their ways to the Lord and in their greatest trials confidently take everything to God in prayer.

We see the evils pressing upon the Church from within and without. ⁹ *“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake.”* ¹⁰ *“And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.”*² Indifference and worldliness from within, scoffers and unbelievers from without.

Think of the Christ-less leaders in the world over the past century. And how Christians were and in many places still are persecuted. Do not think that it cannot happen here. Worse things by far can and probably will happen in the future. But, should we despair or sit listlessly by as though there were no God in heaven? Pray.

Pray, for God hears His people’s prayer. Pray, for God will shorten the days for the elect’s sake. Pray that God would give strength to the oppressed in other lands that they remain faithful and the Church again arise out of the ashes. Pray that God would give them true repentance and soon turn their affliction. Pray that it may not happen here. Pray that God give us wisdom that we be wise as serpents, yet without guile like doves. Pray that God give us courage that we stand fast and in the face of danger confess the truth.

Just how much do we pray? No doubt the conditions of the Church here and abroad would be better if we all prayed more. Brethren, let us pray.

3. Do Not Be Deceived

Another lesson to learn is, Be not deceived. ²³ *“Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There!’ do not believe it.”* ²⁴ *“For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.”*

²⁵ ***“See, I have told you beforehand. ²⁶ “Therefore if they say to you, ‘Look, He is in the desert!’ do not go out; or ‘Look, He is in the inner rooms!’ do not believe it.***

There was great danger of being deceived. Christ knew that the Christians of that time would be looking for the coming of Jesus. In their great tribulation their thoughts and their hearts would turn heavenward and it would be easy to think: Surely in these terrible times He will come.

And so there was great danger of being deceived by frauds and impostors. But Jesus tells them, Do not be deceived. I am not coming at the destruction of Jerusalem. Even if some people come and say that they are Christ and do great signs and wonders; do not be deceived, those are lying wonders of the devil. I am not coming then.

But when I come, no man will be able to say, Look here, or Look there! Before any person can speak, I will be there, ²⁷ ***“For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.*** As a flash from heaven I will be there, and then it is too late for anything else. Then comes the Judgment.

And so we today likewise should not be deceived. As then, so at the end of the world, yes, throughout the New Testament time false Christs and false prophets will arise. ⁵ ***“For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.”***³

Whenever the times are hard, for instance, economically, false economic prophets come with grandiose schemes. When the Church has tribulations and there are troubles from without and within and many Christians are not satisfied simply to hold to the Word of God and its glorious promises, then false Christs and false prophets with the promise of an easy way out will arise.

Do not be deceived. Judge every one, immaterial how glowing his promises, how holy the outward appearance of his life, how large his following, judge every one by the standard of God’s Word.

Scripture says in 2 John 10, ¹⁰ ***If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him.***

And in 2 Timothy 4:3-5, ³ *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;* ⁴ *and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.* ⁵ *But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*⁴

4. Do Not Be Surprised

Finally Jesus tells them, Do not be surprised. ²⁸ *“For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.* Where there is a carcass, there naturally are the eagles and other birds of prey. They are there for only one purpose, namely, to fatten themselves. That does not surprise us.

And so Jesus says, Do not be surprised! At what? At the false prophets. They come with glowing promises, but they really do not want to help you, they want to fatten themselves at your expense.

²⁸ *“For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.* Do not be surprised. Today, where there are spiritually dead, there are the false prophets, ready for the dead and decaying flesh.

Imagine if all who call themselves Christians were spiritually alive, really putting their trust in Christ Jesus as their only hope in life and death and holding to the Word of Truth, just how far would false prophets get with all their false doctrines?

But sadly, there are many, many spiritually dead, and so the false prophets and false Christs have a good feasting. We often hear Christians ask, *How is it possible for Christians to be deceived by such glaring false doctrines, how does it happen that some who only had pennies for the truth give dollars for the lie?* The Scriptures give several answers, but here is one of them, ²⁸ *“For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together.* Where there are spiritually dead, you must expect to find eagles and buzzards to fatten on them.

But, if so soon after Christ, there were already spiritually dead and false prophets, what a warning for us! Let us examine ourselves in these last evil days. Are we really spiritually alive? Are we Christians by conviction or from habit?

Are we thoroughly convinced that as poor, helpless sinners our only hope is in Jesus who loved us and gave Himself for us, or do we in the bottom of our heart still place our trust in our own works?

Let us pray to God to give us His Holy Spirit, that we remain steadfast, stand up for Jesus, flee from all false teachers, and joyously wait for His coming. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Matthew 24:3

² Matthew 24:9-10

³ Matthew 24:5

⁴ See also 2 Tim 3:1, 6, 1 Tim 3:1-3