

A PROPHETIC WARNING

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A SERMON

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“And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”

Matthew 24:12

CHRIST had spoken to his disciples of earthquakes in divers places, famines, and pestilences, but these were only the beginning of sorrows. Such things as these need not trouble Christians, for though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, yet may the believer be confident, and his heart may abide at rest. Even when the Master told His disciples that they should be hated of all men for His name's sake, that needed not afflict them. He had taught them before, “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

They were thus braced up to meet the fiery trial. Earthquake, and pestilence, and war, and persecution fail to disturb the serenity of believers in Christ, but the evil spoken of in our text—this is the wound, this is the sorrow! Here is something to tremble at, “Because iniquity shall abound,”—that is worse than pestilence, “the love of many shall wax cold,”—that is worse than persecution. As all the water outside a vessel can do it no hurt until it enters the vessel itself, so outward persecutions cannot really injure the church of God, but when the mischief oozes into the church, and the love of God's people waxes cold—ah, then the barque is in sore distress. I fear that we are much in this condition at the present hour. May the Holy Spirit bless the alarming prophecy now before us to our arousing!

I. Notice, first, THE CAUSE OF THAT GRIEVOUS CHILL OF HEART which is here spoken of, “Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”

When love grows cold, it is a serious sign. Then the heart is affected—affected with a chill! Is not this the forerunner of death? What is the cause of it? According to our text, it is the abounding of iniquity.

Sin does its best to destroy grace. So much sin, so much the less of holiness, so much the less of every Christian grace. Sin is like a poisonous atmosphere, if a man has to live in it, he has good need to pray that he may not be overcome by it. You and I, seeing that we are in this world, and cannot go altogether out of it, must come into contact with evil. In our daily avocations however careful we are, we must encounter this infection. We cannot but feel that the evil around us is a hindrance to our holiness, and a detriment to our growth in grace. When the society around the Christian becomes flagrantly wicked, corrupt, and offensive, it is hard for him to maintain the purity of his life, and the strength of his spiritual character.

At this time, we live in an atmosphere which hinders our growth, yet in the early days of Christianity the Lord's people had, as a rule, to live in worse society than that which surrounds us today. I will not say this without an exception. There are quarters of London, I am told, as vicious as ever existed in Corinth, or in old Rome, and I am afraid that some of the grossest vices, which we dare not even mention, abound in this city. We have a fringe of respectability which barely conceals the licentiousness and abomination which abound. I have been reading today some details as to the number of illegitimate births, and I am perfectly astounded at the awful wickedness of this land. We call ourselves a Christian country. Forbear to speak so falsely. This is growing to be a heathen land, part of it bowing before images, another part howling out, “There is no God,” and a third secretly reveling in unutterable filthiness.

Still, the most of us do not come into contact with vice to the same degree as the first Christians did. Society in the Roman Empire was utterly rotten. It is a wonder that God permitted the world to exist in that loathsome age. It tended greatly to the depression of Christian principle for infamous crimes to be tolerated in the society which surrounded the faithful. Look at those first churches which some think so much of! They were not half as good as the churches of today, bad as these are.

Take the church at Corinth, for instance. Did you ever hear of a church in our day which allowed drunkenness at the Lord's supper? Have we personally met with a church which would knowingly allow a person living in incest to remain in its membership? I hope not. But gross offenses had become so common in general society in Paul's day that it did not strike even Christian people that some of these things were wrong. Iniquity abounded, and it was greatly detrimental to grace.

Again, *iniquity is especially injurious to the growth of love*. Because iniquity abounded, therefore the love of many waxed cold. Men inside the Christian church found themselves betrayed by other members of the church. Frequently, the heads of the brethren were sold to the executioner by hypocrites like Judas. That would greatly tend to injure Christian love. Men began to suspect one another. You did not know that the man, who sat next you at the Lord's table would not tomorrow inform against you, and get blood money for you, therefore suspicion entered with its wintry breath.

It was natural that it should be so, albeit that there was sin in it, yet you and I would have probably fallen into the same. All around, men were so loathsome that Christian love, which teaches us to pity the most degraded, and to do good to the most unworthy, found it a hard struggle to live. Godly men endeavored to win the ungodly from their lusts, but they found themselves persecuted in consequence, the more they sought to do good, the more they were hated, and this put their love to a severe test.

I think that you can see why our Savior has given us a warning in this particular form.

Iniquity is naturally opposed to grace, but it is most of all injurious to the grace of love. If sin abounds in a church, it is little wonder if the love of many should wax cold. Young members introduced into the church after a short time find that those whom they looked upon as being examples, are walking disorderly, and using lightness of speech and of behavior. Those young people cannot be very warm in love, they are stumbled and scandalized.

Older saints who have for years held on their way in integrity, and by grace have kept their garments unspotted from the world, see those around them who have come into the church who seem to be of quite another race, who can drink of the cup of Belial and of the cup of the Lord, who seem to follow Christ and the devil too, seeing this evil, these godly men gather up their garments in holy indignation, and find it hard to feel the love of purer days.

Oh, friends, if the frost of sin rules in a church, every tender flower is injured, and nothing flourishes! Love is a sensitive plant, and if it be touched by the finger of sin, it will show it. The lilies of Love's Paradise cannot bloom amid the smoke and dust of unholiness.

Because iniquity abounds even in the professing church, the love of many is waxing cold today. What a sermon one might preach upon this!—but I shall not do anything of the kind. I am not so desirous to deplore the evils of others as to watch against evils within myself. I am not so anxious to make you discover transgression in the church as to make you watch against it in your hearts, for rest sure of this, if you give sin any license in your heart, your love will wax cold. You cannot walk in love to Christ and yet live in the love of sin. If you today have indulged in unholy temper, if you have given way to covetousness, if you have in any way transgressed against the Lord, you will not feel that warmth of love towards Jesus Christ which you felt yesterday. Your life will have lost much of its beauty and its sweetness. Cry to God that He would give it back to you. Do not rest satisfied until it is perfectly restored.

II. Now let us consider THE SERIOUS CHARACTER OF THIS EVIL.

“The love of many shall wax cold.” It is a very dreadful thing that love in any man's heart should wax cold. Observe the bearings of Christian love, and you will see the sin of it under various aspects.

Our love is, first, *a love to the great Father*, our Father who chose us before ever the earth was, by whom we have been begotten again, and received into His family. If our love to Him grows cold, what mischief that must bring! Coldness towards the father in a family—do you know any household afflicted in that way? I should be very sorry to be a member of it. Coldness of love to the father? Why, that household is scarcely a family! It has lost the bond which holds it together and constitutes it a family. May the good Lord save us from this ruin of all holy unity!

Next, our love is *love to Jesus Christ*, “who loved us, and gave Himself for us.” If love to Jesus should grow cold, the result would be grievous. Is there any spiritual grace within you that can be in a healthy condition when your love to Christ is declining? Are you right anywhere if your heart is wrong towards your Lord? Can you do anything earnestly when love to Jesus is chilled? Can you sing aright? Can you pray aright? Can you live aright? Do not let us dream of bearing fruit if we are severed from the Vine. It is vitally important that we should love Jesus with all our heart, and soul, and strength.

Christian love also embraces *the truth*. They that love God and His divine Son, love the truth which He has committed to them. The church is the trustee of the Gospel, she is “the pillar and ground of the truth.” And when men begin to play with the truth and think that one set of doctrines is as good as another, and that nothing is of any particular importance, evil must come. In former days, our fathers counted it a small thing to go to prison for a doctrine, or to be burnt to death for a testimony. Look at the multitudes in Holland who were drowned, or who were tied to ladders and roasted to death, for nothing but their conviction that believers should be baptized.

Nowadays, people consider Scriptural views of baptism to be a mere trifle. I question whether our present Broad Churchmen think that there is any doctrine worth a person’s losing the first joint of his little finger for, as to burning to death for a truth, that must seem a great absurdity to these liberal theologians. Now that things have reached this pass, need we wonder that heresies and all manner of errors rush in torrents down our streets? When she can afford to trifle with truth, what is the church worth?

Our love is also *love to our fellow Christians*. This is a vital principle. “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.” But when members of churches have no love to one another, when a professor does not care at all what becomes of his brethren, has the church any Christianity left then? No, it has a name to live, and is dead. Christianity is gone when the heart is cold, its very life is mutual affection.

Then, again, we are to *love the ungodly and the unconverted*. It is by love that we are to win them to Christ. But if the church has no love to the dying sons of men, what is she worth? Where will be her missionary operations? What will be the use of her ministry? Think of her Sunday schools without love to the children. Think of people pretending to win souls who have no love for them, and do not care whether they are lost or saved. Can the church sustain a worse loss than the losing of her fervent love to perishing men? And yet, if iniquity abounds, this is the great risk we run, compassionate love will cease to minister to man’s miseries.

Beloved, when we love best, how little is our love compared with what it ought to be for Him who left the royalties of heaven for the shame and sorrow of our nature! If we glowed with seraphic fire night and day, through a life as long as that of Methuselah, our love could not repay the love of Christ. If that love, poor as it is, grows colder, what will it come to? Oh, eyes that are to look upon the Well-beloved for ever and ever, if you cease to see beauty in Him now, what has blinded you?

Oh, hearts that are to glow forever with delight in the presence of the Reigning One, who once was crucified, what ail ye, if ye grow chill when most ye need His love, and are receiving most from Him? I cannot bear it—that we should love Jesus little. It seems to me horrible. Not to have your heart all on fire for Christ—this is execrable! Let us love Him to the utmost. Let us ask Him to give us larger hearts, and to fire them with the flame that is in His own, that we may love Him to the utmost possibilities of affection.

Ah! then, beloved, think again. Suppose our love waxes cold, do you not see how it paralyzes the entire system? If the reservoir is empty, you cannot expect to get much water from the pipes. If the heart grows cold, everything will be coldly done. When love declines, what cold preaching we have! All moonlight—light without heat, polished like marble, and as chill. What cold singing we get—pretty music, made by pipes and wind, but oh, how little soul-song!—how little singing in the Holy Ghost, making melody in the heart unto God! And what poor praying! Do you call it praying? What little giving! When the heart is cold, the hands can find nothing in the purse, and Christ's church, and Christ's poor, and the heathen may perish, for we must needs hoard up for ourselves, and live to grow rich.

Is there anything that goes on as it ought to go when love waxes cold? I should like to act throughout life as I have acted when my soul has been stirred to its inmost depths with affection for my Lord. I would continually act as if I had just seen *Him* and had put my fingers into the print of the nails. I would live as if I had been just sitting at His feet with Mary, ay, and were sitting there still. I would speak for Him, and work for Him, and give for Him as if I had freshly lifted my head from John's place upon His bosom.

III. Thirdly, THE SOLEMN DANGER of the spread of this mischief.

I will read you the text translated accurately, "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of *the* many shall wax cold." That is a more saddening expression than "the love of many." It is "the love of *the* many," that is, of the major part of the church—the bulk of it. This supposes a dreadful state of things, because, when *the many* have become cold, *they keep one another in countenance*.

One cold brother says to the other, "What is your temperature?" "I think I am far below zero." "So am I," says the first one, "and we are about right." If the majority are warm, then the cold ones are thawed, but if they are all below zero, then they freeze into a wretched compactness. It is the most sober, respectable church you ever knew, they have no quarreling, everything is so comfortable, and orderly. Alas! they are frozen together, and their peace is that of death. The love of the many has waxed cold, and they are full of mutual admiration for their quietness.

They have nobody to rebuke them. If the many have waxed cold, then the few among them, instead of being able to rebuke with authority, are themselves snubbed. "He is a terribly fanatical young man! That zealous fellow never leaves anyone alone!" "He will grow out of that," says one, "by the time that he gets to my age he will be as prudent as I am." Yonder good woman feels areas anxiety for the conversion of souls, and she is making a stir. A lady of repute declares that she is too forward or has got a bee in her bonnet. Active people are looked upon as rather troublesome when the love of the many waxes cold. The few have a hard time of it, and if they do venture upon a rebuke, they are soon snuffed out, this confirms the evil.

And then *the tendency is to grow colder still.* They go on freezing. There is no telling how cold people can be. I have been burnt with cold, and I suppose you have been. I have preached in places whose spiritual temperature was that of an ice house, and preach as hard as I could, nothing could possibly come of it, for my words fell to the ground like lumps of ice. Colder and colder churches become, till at last the great God, who breaks up icebergs in due season, destroys a church, and its place knows it no more.

IV. In the presence of the danger, which is seriously threatening many churches, there is A CALL FOR SERIOUS ACTION ON OUR PART. What is that serious action?

Why, it is, first, that we should remember that, if the love of the many may wax cold, then *our love may wax cold*. What are we that we should think ourselves secure where others are in danger? If other men, as good as we are, have gradually cooled down, may not we? Let us be watchful and careful, and let us go to God for more grace.

Let us notice, next, that if the love of the many waxes cold, it is not much use our complaining about it, but *the few must get together, and pray*. The real vitality of a church seldom lies in the many, but generally in the few. Inside the election there is another election. Do you remember that out of Christ's disciples there were twelve, out of the twelve there were three, out of the three there was one? And so

election has rings within rings. Inside the nominal church—(we cannot say whether they are all God’s people or not)—the many may grow cold, but there ought to be a remnant who abide in life and love. God grant that we may belong to it! We must at once grow warmer. We must live nearer to Christ. We must be more enthusiastic.

Oh, for a band of choice spirits—men fit to walk with Christ in white, for they are worthy—men who will be prepared to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth! The Spirit said, “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments,” and so in every church there are some that have not grown idle or heretical. Let them get together and help each other. I thank God for those whom the Lord keeps very near to Him, may their number be daily increased! May each one of us be filled with the Spirit!

When I hear of one minister after another giving up the old-fashioned Gospel, do you know what I say to myself? I resolve that I will stick the closer to it. If the many cannot bear Calvinistic doctrine, I will be more Calvinistic than ever. The more men do not like the truth, the more they shall have it. Let this be our line of action. If men become more worldly, we will become more Puritanical. If professing Christians do not exhibit the spirit of Christ, we will ask our Lord to give us sevenfold of His spirit, that we may maintain the truth.

Suppose you expected a famine in London as there was in Paris during the siege. Everybody who could do so would get in a hundred-fold supply of provisions. Every good housewife would lay out every penny that she could get and fill her cellars full of food. There is going to be a spiritual famine, therefore buy the truth, and sell it not. Go to your Lord and get larger supplies from Him. Do not go to one another for it. That will be like saying, “Give us of your oil,” and your companions will wisely reply, “Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you.” Go you to your Master and ask Him to fan the fire within you to a great heat, that, if there should be cold everywhere else, there may be warmth in your bosoms. The Lord help you to do this, dear friends, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

MATTHEW 24:1-28

Verse 1-2. *And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciple 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.*

The King, having finished his first discourse in the temple, left it, never to return, “Jesus went out, and departed from the temple.” His ministry there was ended. As His disciples moved away with Him towards the mount of Olives, they called His attention to the great stones of which the temple was constructed, and the costly adornments of the beautiful building. To them the appearance was glorious, but to their Lord it was a sad sight. His Father’s house, which ought to have been a house of prayer for all nations, had become a den of thieves, and soon would be utterly destroyed, 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.”

Josephus tells us that Titus at first tried to save the temple, even after it was set on fire, but his efforts were of no avail, and at last he gave orders that the whole city and temple should be leveled, except a small portion reserved for the garrison. This was so thoroughly done that the historian says that there was but nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited.

We sometimes delight in the temporal prosperity of the church as if it were something that must certainly endure, but all that is external will pass away or be destroyed. Let us only reckon that to be substantial which comes from God and is God’s work. The things which are seen are temporal.

3. *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?*

The little procession continued ascending the mount of Olives until Jesus reached a resting place from which He could see the temple (Mar 13:3). There He sat down, and 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?"

These are the questions that have been asked in every age since our Savior's day. There are here two distinct questions, perhaps three. The disciples inquired first about the time of the destruction of the temple, and then about the sign of Christ's coming, and of "the consummation of the age" (R.V. margin).

The answers of Jesus contained much that was mysterious, and that could only be fully understood as that which He foretold actually occurred. He told His disciples some things which related to the siege of Jerusalem, some which concerned His Second Advent, and some which would immediately precede "the end of the world." When we have clearer light, we may possibly perceive that all our Savior's predictions on this memorable occasion had some connection with all three of these great events.

4-6. *And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.*

Jesus was always practical. The most important thing for His disciples was not that they might know when "these things" would be, but that they might be preserved from the peculiar evils of the time. Therefore, Jesus answered and said unto them, "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." They were to beware lest any of the pretended Messiahs should lead them astray, as they would pervert many others.

A large number of impostors came forward before the destruction of Jerusalem, giving out that they were the anointed of God, almost every page of history is blotted with the names of such deceivers, and in our own day we have seen some come in Christ's name, saying that they are Christ's. Such men seduce many, but they who heed their Lord's warning will not be deluded by them.

Our Savior's words, "Ye shall hear of wars, and rumors of wars," might be applied to almost any period of the world's history. Earth has seldom had a long spell of quiet, there have almost always been both the realities of war, and the rumors of war. There were many such ere Jerusalem was overthrown, there have been many such ever since, and there will be many such until that glorious period when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

"See that ye be not troubled" is a timely message for the disciples of Christ in every age. "For all these things must come to pass," therefore let us not be surprised or alarmed at them, "but the end is not yet." The destruction of Jerusalem was the beginning of the end, the great type and anticipation of all that will take place when Christ shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. It was *an* end, but not *the* end, "the end is not yet."

7-8. *For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.*

One would think that there was sorrow enough in "famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places," but our Lord said that "all these" were only "the beginning of sorrows," the first birth-pangs of the travail that must precede His coming, either to Jerusalem, or to the whole world. If famines, pestilences, and earthquakes are only "the beginning of sorrows," what may we not expect the end to be? This prophecy ought both to warn the disciples of Christ what they may expect and wean them from the world where all these and greater sorrows are to be experienced.

9. *Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.*

Our Lord not only foretold the general trial that would come upon the Jews, and upon the world, but also the special persecution which would be the portion of His chosen followers, "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake." The New Testament gives abundant proof of the fulfillment of these words. Even in Paul's day,

“this sect” was “everywhere spoken against.” Since then, has there been any land unstained by the blood of the martyrs? Wherever Christ’s Gospel has been preached, men have risen up in arms against the messengers of mercy, and afflicted and killed them wherever they could.

10. *And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.*

This would be a bitter trial for the followers of Christ, yet this they have always had to endure. Persecution would reveal the traitors within the church as well as the enemies without. In the midst of the chosen ones there would be found successors of Judas, who would be willing to betray the disciples as he betrayed his Lord. Saddest of all is the betrayal of good men by their own relatives, but even this they have many of them had to bear for Christ’s sake.

11-12. *And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*

What could not be accomplished by persecutors outside the church, and traitors inside, would be attempted by teachers of heresy, “Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.” They have risen in all ages, in these modern times they have risen in clouds, till the air is thick with them, as with an army of devouring locusts. These are the men who invent new doctrines, and who seem to think that the religion of Jesus Christ is something that a man may twist into any form and shape that he pleases. Alas, that such teachers should have *any* disciples! It is doubly sad that they should be able to lead astray “many.” Yet, when it so happens, let us remember that the King said that it would be so.

Is it any wonder that, where such “iniquity abounds” and such lawlessness is multiplied, “the love of many shall wax cold”? If the teachers deceive the people and give them “another gospel which is not another,” it is no marvel that there is a lack of love and zeal. The wonder is that there is any love and zeal left after they have been subjected to such a chilling and killing process as that adopted by the advocates of the modern “destructive criticism.” Verily, it is rightly named “destructive,” for it destroys almost everything that is worth preserving.

13. *But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall he saved.*

Again, our Savior reminded His disciples of the personal responsibility of each one of them in such a time of trial and testing as they were about to pass through. He would have them remember that it is not the man who starts in the race, but the one who runs to the goal, who wins the prize, “He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.”

If this doctrine were not supplemented by another, there would be but little good tidings for poor, tempted, tried and struggling saints in such words as these. Who among us would persevere in running the heavenly race if God did not preserve us from falling, and give us persevering grace? But blessed be His name, “the righteous shall hold on his way.” “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”

14. *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*

The world is to the church like a scaffold to a building. When the church is built, the scaffold will be taken down, the world must remain until the last elect one is saved, “Then shall the end come.” Before Jerusalem was destroyed, “this gospel of the kingdom” was probably “preached in all the world” so far as it was then known, but there is to be a fuller proclamation of it “for a witness unto all nations” before the great consummation of all things, “then shall the end come,” and the King shall sit upon the throne of His glory, and decide the eternal destiny of the whole human race.

15-18. *When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whose readeth, let him understand;) then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes.*

This portion of our Savior’s words appears to relate solely to the destruction of Jerusalem. As soon as Christ’s disciples saw “the abomination of desolation,” that is, the Roman ensigns, with their idolatrous emblems, “stand in the holy place,” they knew that the time for them to escape had arrived,

and they did “flee into the mountains.” The Christians in Jerusalem and the surrounding towns and villages, “in Judaea,” availed themselves of the first opportunity for eluding the Roman armies, and fled to the mountain city of Pella, in Perea, where they were preserved from the general destruction which overthrew the Jews. There was no time to spare before the final investment of the guilty city, the man “on the house-top” could “not come down to take anything out of his house,” and the man “in the field” could not “return back to take his clothes.” They must flee to the mountains in the greatest haste the moment that they saw “Jerusalem compassed with armies” (Luk 21:20).

19-21. *And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: for then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

It must have been a peculiarly trying time for the women who had to flee from their homes just when they needed quiet and rest. How thoughtful and tender was our pitiful Savior in thus sympathizing with suffering mothers in their hour of need! “Flight...in the winter” or “on the sabbath day” would have been attended with special difficulties, so the disciples were exhorted to “pray” that come other time might be available. The Lord knew exactly when they would be able to escape, yet He bade them pray that their flight might not be in the winter, nor on the Sabbath day. The wise men of the present day would have said that prayer was useless under such conditions, not so the great Teacher and Example of His praying people, He taught that such a season was the very time for special supplication.

The reason for this injunction was thus stated by the Savior, “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.” Read the record written by Josephus of the destruction of Jerusalem and see how truly our Lord’s words were fulfilled. The Jews impiously said, concerning the death of Christ, “His blood be on us, and on our children.” Never did any other people invoke such an awful curse upon themselves, and upon no other nation did such a judgment ever fall.

We read of Jews crucified till there was no more wood for making crosses, of thousands of the people slaying one another in their fierce faction fights within the city, of so many of them being sold for slaves that they became a drug in the market, and all but valueless, and of the fearful carnage when the Romans at length entered the doomed capital, and the blood-curdling story exactly bears out the Savior's statement uttered nearly forty years before the terrible events occurred.

22. *And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.*

These were the words of the King as well as of the Prophet, and as such, they were both authentic and authoritative. Jesus spoke of what “should be,” not only as the Seer who was able to gaze into the future, but as the Sovereign Disposer of all events. He knew what a fiery trial awaited the unbelieving nation, and that “except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved.” If the horrors of the siege were to continue long, the whole race of the Jews would be destroyed. The King had the power to cut short the evil days, and He explained His reason for using that power, “For the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.”

Those who had been hated and persecuted by their own countrymen became the means of preserving them from absolute annihilation. Thus has it often been since those days, and for the sake of His elect the Lord has withheld many judgements, and shortened others. The ungodly owe to the godly more than they know or would care to own.

23-26. *Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. 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. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not.*

It is a grand thing to have such faith in Christ that you have none to spare for imposters. It is important not to distribute your faith too widely. Those who believe a little of everything will, in the end, believe nothing of anything. If you exercise full faith in that which is sure and steadfast, “false

Christs and false prophets” will not be able to make you their dupes. In one respect, the modern teachers of heresy are more successful than their Judaeian prototypes, for they do actually “deceive the very elect,” even though they cannot “shew great signs and wonders.”

One of the saddest signs of the times in which we live is the ease with which “the very elect” are deceived by the smooth-tongued “false Christs and false prophets” who abound in our midst. Yet our Savior expressly forewarned His followers against them, “Behold, I have told you before.” Forewarned is forearmed. Let it be so in our case. Our Savior’s expressive command may be fitly applied to the whole system of “modern thought” which is contrary to the inspired Word of God, “Believe it not.”

27. *For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*

When HE comes, we shall know who He is, and why He has come. There will be no longer any mystery or secret about “the coming of the Son of man.” There will be no need to ask any questions then, no one will make a mistake about His appearing when it actually takes place. “Every eye shall see him.” Christ’s coming will be sudden, startling, universally visible, and terrifying to the ungodly, “as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west.” His first coming to judgment at the destruction of Jerusalem had terrors about it that till then had never been realized on the earth, His last coming will be more dreadful still.

28. *For wherever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.*

Judaism had become a “carcase,” dead and corrupt, fit prey for the vultures or carrion-kites of Rome. By and by, there will arrive another day, when there will be a dead church in a dead world, and “the eagles” of divine judgment “will be gathered together” to tear in pieces those whom there shall be none to deliver. The birds of prey gather wherever dead bodies are to be found, and the judgments of Christ will be poured out when the body politic or religious becomes unbearably corrupt.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.