

Second Sunday in Advent,

Luke 21:25-36

Christ's Second Coming: “Or the Signs of the Day of Judgment; and the Comforts Christians Have From Them.”

I. THE SIGNS OF THE DAY OF JUDGMENT.

1. The first thing for us to understand is that although the signs preceding the judgment day are many and great, they will all be fulfilled, even though none or very few men take note of or esteem them as such. For two things must take place according to the Word and prophecy of Christ and the apostles: first, that many and great signs will be made manifest; and secondly, that the last day will come unawares, the world not expecting it, even though that day be at the door. Though men see these signs, yea, be told that they are signs of the last day, still they will not believe, but in their security mockingly say: *"Thou fool, hast thou fear that the heavens will fall and that we shall live to see that day?"*

2. Some, indeed, must see it, and it will be those who least expect it. That there will be such security and indifference among men, let us prove by the words of Christ and the apostles. Christ says in the 34th and 35th verses: "Take heed to yourselves, lest haply your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come on you suddenly as a snare: for so shall it come upon all them that dwell on the face of all the earth." From these words it is clear, that men in great measure will give themselves over to surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life, and that, drowned as it were in these things, they will rest secure and continue to dwell on the earth as if the dreadful day were far away. For, were there no such security and heedlessness, that day would not break in unawares. But he says, it will come as a snare by which birds and beasts are caught at a time when most concerned about their food and least expecting to be entrapped. In this figure he gives us clearly to understand that the world will continue its carousing, eating and drinking, building and planting, and diligently seeking after earthly things, and will look upon the day of judgment as yet a thousand and more

years off, when, in the twinkling of an eye, they may stand before the terrible judgment bar of God.

3. The words of Christ in Luke 17, 24 say the same: "For as the lightning, when it lighteneth out of the one part under the heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall the Son of man be in his day." See here again that the day will break upon the world with the utmost suddenness. The same further appears in what follows in verses 26-29: "*As it was in the days of Noah, even so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise even as it came to pass in the days of Lot; they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but in the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. After the same manner it shall be in the day that the Son of man is revealed.*" These words abundantly show that people will rest so secure and will be so deeply buried beneath the cares of this life, that they will not believe the day is at hand.

4. There is now no doubt that Christ did not foretell these signs in the expectation that no one would note nor recognize them when they should appear; although few indeed will do so, just as in the days of Noah and Lot but few knew the punishment in store for them. Were this not true, the admonition of Christ would have been in vain: "When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh." Then, "Lift up your heads, because your redemption draweth nigh." There must then be some, at least, who do recognize the signs, and lift up their heads and wait for their redemption, although they do not really know on what day that will come. We should be careful, therefore, to note whether the signs are being fulfilled now, or have been or will be in the future.

5. I do not wish to force any one to believe as I do; neither will I permit anyone to deny me the right to believe that the last day is near at hand. These words and signs of Christ compel me to believe that such is the case. For the history of the centuries that have passed since the birth of Christ nowhere reveals conditions like those of the present. There has never been such building and planting in the world. There has never been such gluttonous and varied eating and drinking as now. Wearing apparel has reached its limit in costliness. Who has ever heard of such commerce as now encircles the earth? There have arisen all kinds of art and sculpture, embroidery and engraving, the like of which has not been seen during the whole Christian era.

6. In addition men are so delving into the mysteries of things that today a boy of twenty knows more than twenty doctors formerly knew. There is such a knowledge of languages

and all manner of wisdom that it must be confessed, the world has reached such great heights in the things that pertain to the body, or as Christ calls them, "cares of life", eating, drinking, building, planting, buying, selling, marrying and giving in marriage, that every one must see and say either ruin or a change must come. It is hard to see how a change can come. Day after day dawns and the same conditions remain. There was never such keenness, understanding and judgment among Christians in bodily and temporal things as now - I forbear to speak of the new inventions, printing, fire-arms, and other implements of war.

7. But not only have such great strides been made in the world of commerce, but also in the spiritual field have there been great changes. Error, sin, and falsehood have never held sway in the world as in these last centuries. The Gospel has been openly condemned at Constance, and the false teachings of the Pope have been adopted as law though he practiced the greatest extortion. Daily mass is celebrated many hundred thousand times in the world, and thereby the greatest sin committed. By confession, sacrament, indulgence, rules and laws, so many souls are driven to condemnation that it seems God has given the whole world over to the devil. In short it is not possible that there should be greater falsehood, more heinous error, more dreadful blindness, and more obdurate blasphemy than have ruled in the church through the bishops, cloisters, and universities. As a result Aristotle, a blind heathen, teaches and rules Christians more than does Christ.

8. Moreover the pope has attempted to abolish Christ and to become his vicar. He occupies the throne of Christ on earth, would to God he occupied the devil's throne instead. I forbear to speak of the grosser forms of sin, unchastity, murder, infidelity, covetousness, and the like, which are all practiced without shame or fear. Unchastity has taken forms against nature, and has affected no station or condition more than the spiritual character of the clergy - shall I call it spiritual, since it is so fleshly and void of all simplicity?

9. Whatever other signs may appear before Christ's coming, I know that, according to the words of Christ, these will be present: surfeiting and drunkenness, building and planting, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, and other cares of this life. Just as certain to me is also the saying of Christ in Math. 24, 15, where he speaks of the abomination of desolation, the Antichrist, under whose rule gross error, blindness, and sin shall flourish, just as they now flourish under the Pope in the most tyrannical and shameless form. This above all else compels me to believe that Christ will soon come to judgment; for such sins cry to heaven, and so provoke and defy the last day that it must soon break in upon them. If it were only the unchastity of the antediluvian world, or the worldliness of Sodom, I would not believe the last day is so near at hand. But to destroy,

root out, condemn and blaspheme divine service, God's Word and the Sacraments, the children of God and everything that belongs to God; and to worship and honor the devil instead and to proclaim his lies for the Word of God - such sins, I am firmly convinced, will put an end to the world before we are aware of it. Amen.

10. But the apostles have also prophesied concerning this self-security of men as the judgment day approaches. Paul says in 1 Thes. 5, 2-3: "The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. When they are saying, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them." Now we know that a thief never comes but when one feels most secure and least expects him. And 2 Pet. 3, 3-10 we read: "In the last days mockers shall come with mockery, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? From the day the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.... 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 etc." Who are they that walk after their own lusts but the papal clergy? They wish to be subject neither to God nor to man, but expect the world to recognize it as their right to live as they please and to do what they like. It is these that say, Where is the promise of his coming.? Do you think the last day will break in upon us so soon? Things will continue as they have in the past.

11. We also read in the history of the destruction of Jerusalem that many signs were fulfilled, yet they would not believe them to be tokens of the coming destruction until judgment was executed. Finally, from the beginning of the world, it has ever been so, that the unbelieving could not believe the day of calamity to be near - they always experienced it before they believed it. This is in fulfilment of Psalm 55, 23: "Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days," for they presume upon the continuance of their days and have no fear, and so the hour must come unawares. So here people are putting off the judgment for yet a thousand years when it may break in upon them in a night. This is the first-class of signs which presage the nearness of the day of God. Let us now consider the second class.

12. This sign to be given in the sun is that it will lose its brightness, after the manner in which it has often occurred, as Math. 24,29, says: "*The sun shall be darkened.*" I will not trespass here again but express my opinion. Some think that the sun is to be darkened as never to shine again; but this cannot be the meaning, for day and night must continue to the end, as God foretells, Gen. 8, 22: "*While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.*" This sign must therefore, not interfere with day and night and still be fulfilled before the judgment day, for it is a token of its coming. It cannot, therefore, be more than a darkening of the sun in its accustomed course.

13. Now at all times such a sign in the sun has been looked upon as foreboding misfortune or disaster. Which also often followed, as history abundantly shows. Thus we have had, it seems to me, the last few years more and more frequent eclipses of the sun than in any other like period of time. God has spared us and no great evil has come upon us. For this reason these signs are not noticed. In addition, astronomers have told us, and rightly so, that these eclipses are but natural phenomena. As a result the tokens are still more despised and carnal security increased. Nevertheless God in carrying on his work in silence, gives us security and moves forward in his plans. Whatever the natural course of the heavens may be, these signs are always tokens of his wrath and predict sure disaster for the future. If these are not seen, shall God make other suns and moons and stars and show other signs in them?

14. The course of the heavens has been so arranged from eternity that before the last day these signs must appear. The heathen say that the comet is a natural product; but God has created none that is not a token of future evil. Thus also the blind leader, Aristotle, writing a book about the phenomena of the heavens, attributes all to nature and declares these are no signs. Our learned men follow him and thus one fool fills the world with fools. Let us know that though the heavenly bodies wander in their courses according to law, God has still made these to be signs or tokens of his wrath.

"And in the moon."

15. This sign is given in Math. 24, 29, to the effect that "the moon shall not give her light"; that is, it will lose its brightness. The same is to be said of this as of the signs in the sun, no matter how natural it may be. Is it not true that scarcely a year has passed of late in which sun or moon or both have been eclipsed, sometimes one of them twice a year? If these are not signs, then, what are signs? It may be that at other times more were seen than now, but surely not in more rapid succession. When Jerusalem was to be destroyed, some signs preceded which had occurred before, but they were still new tokens.

"And in the stars,

16. According to Math. 24, 29, *"the stars shall fall from heaven."* This is seen almost daily. Whether it was seen as frequently in former days as now, I cannot say. Aristotle again talks about the nature of the thing; but the Gospel, which is the word and wisdom of God, pronounces the falling of the stars a sign and there let the matter rest. Wherefore if the stars fall or the sun and moon fail to give their light, be assured that these are signs of the last day; for the Gospel cannot utter falsehood. While in these years there have been so many showers of stars, they are all harbingers of the last day, just as Christ says;

for they must appear often in order that the great day may be abundantly pointed out and proclaimed. These signs appear and pass but no one considers them; so it shall be that they will wait for other signs just as the Jews are waiting for another Christ.

"And upon the earth distress of nations, in perplexity."

17. This is not to be understood that all nations and all people among these nations will so suffer; for you must note that these are to be signs. Stars do not fall from the heavens at all times the sun does not lose its brightness for a whole year or a month, but for an hour or two; the moon does not refuse to give its light for a whole week or a whole night, but, like the sun, for an hour or two-that all these may be tokens without changing or perverting the order of things. Hence not many will suffer distress and anxiety, but only a few; and even with these it will be only at times that they be signs to those who despise the idea, and attribute all to the complexion or to the melancholy or to the influence of the planets or to any other natural cause. Meanwhile such clear harbingers of the day pass by unobserved, and there happens what Christ said of the Jews in Math. 13,14, that though hearing and seeing they do not understand.

18. *"Distress of nations in perplexity"* does not refer to the body. For, as we have already heard, there will be peace and joy in abundance. People will eat and drink, build and plant, buy and sell, marry and be given in marriage, dance and play, and wrap themselves up in this present life as if they expected to abide here forever. I take it that it is the condition of agonized conscience. For since the Gospel, by which alone the troubled conscience can be 'comforted, is condemned, and in its stead there are set up doctrines of men, which teach us to lay aside sin and earn heaven by works; there must come a burdened and distressed conscience, a conscience that can find no rest, that would be pious, do good and be saved, that torments itself and yet does not know how to find satisfaction. Sin and conscience oppress, and however much is done no rest is found. By these the sinner becomes so distressed that he knows not what to do nor whither to flee. Hence arise so many vows and pilgrimages and worship of the saints and chapters for mass and vigils. Some castigate and torture themselves, some become monks, or that they may do more they become Carthusian - monks.

These are all works of distressed and perplexed consciences, and are in reality the distress and perplexity of which Luke here speaks. He uses two words which suggest this meaning, a man gets into close quarters as though he were cast into a narrow snare or prison; he becomes anxious and does not know how he may extricate himself; he becomes bewildered and attempts this and that and yet finds no way of escape. Under such conditions he would be distressed and perplexed. In such a condition are these

consciences; sin has taken them captive, they are in straits and are distressed. They want to escape but another grief overtakes them, they are perplexed for they know not where to begin – they try every expedient but find no help.

19. It is indeed true that the masses do not become so afflicted, but only the few and generally the most sensible, scrupulous, and good-hearted individuals who have no desire to harm any one and would live honorable lives. It may be they foster some secret sin, as for example unchastity. This burdens them day and night so that they never are truly happy. But this is game for the monks and priests, for here they can practice extortion, especially with women; here people confess, are taught, absolved, and go whithersoever the confessor directs. Meanwhile the people are the Lord's token of the last day. To such the Gospel is light and comfort while it condemns the others.

20. Neither can anyone deny this sign, for it has been so common these hundreds of years that many have become insane over it, as Gerson informs us. Although at all times there have been people so distressed and perplexed, it was formerly not so common as now. From the beginning of the world no human doctrine exercised the tenth part or even the hundredth part of the influence, or tortured and seared so many consciences as the doctrines of the pope and his disciples, the monks and priests. Such perplexed hearts will necessarily grow out of the papal doctrine of confession which has never been so earnestly promulgated as now. Therefore this has never been a token of the judgment until now. There must be many and great signs, therefore, and they be despised by most men.

"For the roaring of the sea and the billows."

21. This will take place through the winds, for all roaring of the waters comes by means of the storm. Therefore the Lord would say by these words that many and great storms will arise. By sea, however, is not to be understood simply the ocean, but all gathered waters, according to the language of Scripture, Gen. 1, 10: "And the gathering together of the waters called he seas," be they oceans, seas or lakes. Rivers on the other hand are changable flowing waters.

22. It is not to be supposed that all waters, streams, lakes, seas, oceans, will, at the same time and in the same way, become stormy and boisterous. Some seas are thus to be moved and this is to be the sign unto us. For as not all stars fall and not all nations are distressed in perplexity, so shall not all waters roar nor all places be visited by the storm.

23. Here heathen art will sit in the schools and with wide open mouth will say, "Did you see the storm or hear the sea and the waves roaring? Aristotle clearly teaches that these

are but natural phenomena." Let us pass these by and know that God's Word and tokens are despised by the wisdom of the gods. Do you hold fast to the Gospel - this teaches you to believe that storms and detonations in the sea are signs and tokens. And however many times such signals have been given in other days, they shall nevertheless become more numerous and terrible as the day of doom approaches.

24. It seems to me that within the space of ten or twelve years, there have been such storms and tempests and waters roaring as have never before been seen or heard. We are to consider, therefore, that although in former times these signs came singly and at less frequent intervals, now they appear many and frequent. In our time both sun and moon are darkened, stars fall, distress of nations is present, winds and waves are roaring, and many other signs are being fulfilled. They are all coming in a heap.

25. We have lately also seen so many comets and so many calamities have fallen from the skies and there has arisen the hitherto unknown disease, syphilis. Also how many signs and wonders have been seen in the heavens, as suns, moons, stars, rainbows, and many other strange sights. Dear hearer, let them be signs, great signs, tokens that mean much; so that neither the astronomers nor heathen astrologers can say they simply follow the ordinary course of nature, for they knew nothing of them before nor did they prophesy of them.

26. No astronomer will say that the course of the heavens foretold the coming of the terrible beast which the Tiber threw up a few years ago; a beast with the head of an ass, the breast and body of a woman, the foot of an elephant for its right hand, with the scales of a fish on its legs, and the head of a dragon in its hinder parts, etc. This beast typifies the papacy and the great wrath and punishment of God. Such a mass of signs presages greater results than the mind of man can conceive.

Before proceeding further it might be well to consider the testimony concerning the last day which the celebrated teacher, Lactantius Firmianus, gave about A. D. 320, in his work entitled "Divinarum Institutionum", in the seventh book and fifteenth chapter: When the end of the world draws near, the condition of human affairs must materially change and take on a more wicked form. Then will malice and wickedness prevail to such a degree that our age, in which malice and wickedness have almost reached their highest pitch, will be looked upon as happy and treasured as golden in comparison with that time when no one will be able to help or give advice. Then will righteousness become practically unknown, and blasphemy, covetousness, impure desires, and unchastity become common. Then will the godly become a prey to the most wicked and be vexed and grieved by them. At the same time only the wicked will be rich and well to do, while the

godly will be driven hither and thither in shame and poverty. justice will be perverted, law will be overthrown, and no one will have aught else but that which he can secure by his own strength. Daring and strength will possess all. There will be neither faith nor confidence left in man, neither peace, nor loveliness, nor shame, nor truth, and as a result, no safety, no government, no rest of any kind from the reprobate. For all lands will become rebellious, everywhere men will rage and war with one another, the whole world will be in arms, and bring destruction to itself. *"Men fainting for fear, and for expectation of the things which are coming on the world."*

27. Here, again it is not the profligate mass, who disregard God's tokens and refer all to natural causes, that shall realize these, but rather the better class, and the most distinguished, who take these things to heart and are given to reflection. By "men fainting for fear" is to be understood that they shall be frightened to death, or the next thing to death; and that their fear shall consume them and rob them of their strength. What do they fear and wait for? Christ says: "The things which are coming on the world;" that is, the last day, the terrible judgment, hell fire, and eternal death. Why do they fear and look for these things, and not the world upon whom they will come rather than upon them? Because these are the tokens of God which are to be despised and rejected by the world.

28. I am not yet able to say who these people are, unless it be those who are exposed to and have to do with the temptations of death and hell, concerning whom Tauler writes. For such temptations consume flesh and blood, yea, bone and marrow, and are death itself. No one can endure them except he be miraculously sustained. A number of patriarchs have tasted them, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David; but near the end of the world they will be more common. This token will then greatly increase, although it is present now more than is generally known. There are individuals who are in the perils of death and are wrestling with him; they feel that which will come over the whole world and fear that it will come upon and abide with them. It is to be hoped, however, that such people are in a state of grace. For Christ speaks as if he would separate the fear and the thing which they fear; and so divides these that he gives to them the fear and to the world that which they fear. It is to be presumed that by this fear and anxiety, they are to have their hell and death here, while the world, which fears nothing, will have death and hell hereafter.

"For the powers of the heavens shall be shaken."

29. By the powers of heaven some understand the angels of heaven. But since Christ speaks of signs, and says we shall see them and in them recognize the coming of the last day, they must surely be visible tokens and be perceived with the bodily senses. For those people whose consciences are in distress and whose hearts are failing from fear, though

this be an affection of the soul, yet manifest it by word and countenance. Therefore these powers of heaven must be such as can be really shaken and so perceived.

30. But the Scriptures speak in a two-fold way concerning the powers of heaven. At one time they are spoken of as the powerful heavens or the heavens which are among all creatures the most powerful, as is written, Gen. 1, 8, "And God called the firmament" – that is, expanse or fortress-"heaven"; for every creature under heaven is ruled and strengthened by the light, heat and movements of the heavens. What would the earth be without the heavens but a dark and desert waste? Like princes and nobles in the world, the Scriptures call the heavens powerful because they rule over the bodies beneath them.

31. At another time the powers of heaven signify the hosts of heaven, as Psalm 33, 6 says: "By the word of Jehovah were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." And Gen. 2, 1: "And the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." It is the common custom of the Scriptures to speak in this way of the powers of heaven. And it is clear from these passages that the hosts or powers of heaven include all that is in them; in the heavens, the sun, moon, stars, and other heavenly bodies; on earth, man and beast, birds and fish, trees, herbs and whatever else lives upon it.

32. The passage before us may therefore mean the powers of heaven in both senses, probably chiefly the hosts of heaven. Christ would say that all creatures shall be shaken and shall serve as tokens of that day; sun and moon with darkening, the stars with falling, the nations with wars, men with hearts failing from fear, the earth with earthquakes, the waters with winds and roaring, the air with infection and pestilence, and the heavens with their hosts.

33. I do not know just what is meant by the moving of the hosts of heaven unless it be manifestations like those of the great constellation of the planets in 1524. For the planets are certainly among the most important of the powers and hosts of heaven, and their remarkable gathering together into one constellation is surely a token for the world. Christ does not say that all the hosts of heaven will be moved, but some of them only; for not all stars shall fall from their places, nor all men be overcome with fear, nor all waters at the same time be in noisy commotion, nor sun and moon be every day darkened; for these are to be but signs, which can only occur at particular times and in a few places, that they may be something special, and singled out as tokens from the great mass which are not such. It is quite probable, therefore, that these movements of the powers of heaven are such movements of the constellations of the planets. Astrologers interpret them to

signify the coming of another flood; God grant that they may rather presage the coming of the last day.

34. Let us not be mistaken, however, and think that these constellations are the product of the natural course of the heavenly bodies. As such Christ calls them signs and desires us to take special note of them, appearing, as they do, not alone but with a multitude of other tokens. Let the unbeliever doubt and despise God's tokens and speak of them as simply natural; but let us hold fast to the Gospel.

35. There are many other signs elsewhere described in the Scriptures, such as earthquakes, famine, pestilence, and wars as in Luke 17,20 and Math. 24,7. We have seen much of these for they have been common at all times. Still they are tokens appearing by the side of others. It is a known fact also that wars at the present time are of such a character as to make former wars appear as mere child's play. But since our Gospel of today does not speak of these, let us not consider them further. Only let us consider them as signs, great signs, signifying great things; alas, they are already despised and forgotten!

"And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory."

36. Here power may again signify the hosts of angels, saints, and all creatures that will come with Christ to judgment (I believe this is the correct interpretation); or it may mean the special power and might which will characterize this coming of Christ in contradistinction to his first coming. He says not only that he will come, but that they shall see him come. At his birth he came also, but men did not recognize him. He comes now through the Gospel in a spiritual manner, into the hearts of believers. This also is not by observation. But his last coming will be such that all must see him as Rev. 1, 7 says, "And every eye shall see him." And they shall see that he is none other than the man Christ Jesus, in bodily form, as he was born of the virgin Mary and walked upon this earth. He might have said they shall see me, but that would not have clearly indicated his bodily form. But when he says: "*They shall see the Son of man,*" he clearly indicates that it will be a bodily coming, a bodily seeing in bodily form; a coming in great power and glory, accompanied by the hosts of heaven. He shall sit upon the clouds and be accompanied by all the saints. The Scriptures speak much of that day - and everywhere point to the same. This, then, is said concerning the signs. The Saviour adds words of comfort for Christians in the presence of these signs.

II. THE COMFORT CHRISTIANS HAVE WHEN THESE SIGNS APPEAR

"And when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh."

37. Here you may say, who can lift up his head in the face of such terrible wrath and judgment? If the whole world is filled with fear at that day, and lets fall its head and countenance out of terror and anxiety; how shall we look up and lift up our heads, which evidently means, how shall we manifest any joy in and longing for these signs? In answer I would say that all this is spoken only to those who are really Christians and not to heathen and Jews. True Christians are so afflicted with all manner of temptations and persecutions that in this life they are miserable. Therefore they wait and long and pray for redemption from sin and all evil; as we also pray in the Lord's Prayer, *"Thy kingdom come"*, and *"Deliver us from evil."* If we are true Christians we will earnestly and heartily join in this prayer. If we do not so pray, we are not yet true Christians.

38. If we pray aright, our condition must truly be such that, however terrible these signs may be, we will look up to them with joy and earnest desire, as Christ admonishes: When these things begin to come to pass, look up." He does not say, Be filled with fear or drop your heads; for there is coming that for which we have been so earnestly praying. If we really wish to be freed from sin and death and hell, we must look forward to this coming of the Lord with joy and pleasure. St. Paul also says, in 2 Tim. 4, 8, "Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day: and not only to me, but also to all them that have loved his appearing." If he gives the crown to those who love his appearing, what will he give to those who hate and dread it? Without doubt, to enemies, eternal condemnation. Titus 2, 13 says, "Looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of the Great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." And Luke 12, 36, *"And be ye yourselves like unto men looking for their lord, when he shall return from the marriage feast."*

39. But what do those do who are filled with fear and do not desire to have him come, when they pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done," "deliver us from the evil one?" Do they not stand in the presence of God and lie to their own hurt? Do they not strive against the will of God who will have this day for the redemption of the saints? It is necessary, therefore, that we exercise great care lest we be found to hate and to dread that day. Such dread is a bad omen and belongs to the damned, whose cold minds and hard hearts must be terrified and broken, if perchance they might reform.

40. But to believers that day will be comforting and sweet. That day will be the highest joy and safety to the believer, and the deepest terror and anguish to the unbeliever; just as also in this life the truths of the Gospel are exceedingly sweet to the godly and exceedingly hateful to the wicked. Why should the believer fear and not rather exceedingly rejoice since he trusts in Christ who comes as judge to redeem him and to be his everlasting portion.

41. But you say I would indeed await his coming with joy, if I were holy and without sin. I should answer, what relief do you find in fear and flight? It would not redeem you from sin if you were to be filled with terror for a thousand years. The damned are eternally filled with fear of that day, but this does not take away their sin; yea, this fear rather increases sin and renders man unfit to appear without sin on that day when it comes. Fear must pass out of the soul and there must enter in a desire for righteousness and for that day. But if you really desire to be free from sin and to be holy, then give thanks to God and continue to desire to be more free from sin. Would to God that such desires were so sincere and powerful in you as to bring you to your death.

42. There is no one so well prepared for the judgment day as he who longs to be without sin. If you have such, desire, what do you fear? You are then in perfect accord with the purpose of that day. It comes to set free from sin all who desire it, and you belong to that number. Return thanks to God and abide in that desire. Christ says his coming is for our redemption. But do not deceive yourself and be satisfied, perhaps, with the simple desire to be free from sin and to await the coming of the day without fear. Perhaps your heart is false and you are filled with fear, not because you would be free, from sin, but because in the face of that day you cannot sin free and untrammelled. See to it that the light within you be not darkness. For a heart that would be truly free from sin will certainly rejoice in the day that fulfills its desire. If the heart does not so rejoice there is no true desire to be loosed from its sin.

43. Therefore we must above all things lay aside all hatred and abhorrence of this day, and exercise diligence that we may really desire to have our sins taken away. When this is done, we may not only calmly await the day, but with heartfelt desire and joy pray for it and say, *"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done."* In this you must cast aside all feelings and conceit, hold fast to the comforting words of Christ, and rest in them alone.

44. Could he admonish, comfort, and strengthen you in a more delicate and loving manner? In the first place he says, You will hear of wars, but you should have no fears. And when he tells you to have no fears, what else does he mean than that he commands you to be of good cheer and to discern the signs with joy? Secondly, he tells you to look

up; thirdly, to lift up your heads; and fourthly, he speaks of your redemption. What can comfort and strengthen you if such a word does not? Do you think he would deceive you and try to lead you into a false confidence? My dear hearer, let such a word not have been said in vain: thank God and trust in it – there is no other comfort or advice if you cast this to the winds. It is not your condemnation but your redemption of which Christ speaks. Will you turn his words around and say, It is not your redemption but your condemnation? Will you flee from your own salvation? Will you not greet and thank your God who comes out to meet and to greet you?

45. He has no doubt also spoken this word for the fainthearted who, although they are devout and prepared for the last day, are yet filled with great anxiety and are hindered in taking part in his coming with that desire which should be found at the end of the world; therefore he calls attention to their redemption. For when at the end of the world sin will hold such sway, and by the side of sin the punishment for sin with pestilence, war and famine, it will be necessary to give to believers strength and comfort against both evils, sin and its punishment. Therefore he uses the sweet and comforting word redemption which is so dear to the heart of man. What is redemption? Who would not be redeemed? Who would have a desire to abide in the desert of sin and punishment? Who would not wish an end to such misery, and woe, such perils for souls, such ruin for man? Especially should this be the case when the Saviour allures, invites and comforts us in such an endearing way.

46. The godless fanatical preachers are to be censured who in their sermons deprive people of these words of Christ and faith in them, who desire to make people devout by terrifying them and who teach them to prepare for the last day by relying upon their good works as satisfaction for their sins. Here despair, fear and terror must remain and grow and with it hatred, aversion and abhorrence for the coming of the Lord, and enmity against God be established in the heart; for they picture Christ as nothing but a stern judge whose wrath must be appeased by works, and they never present him as the Redeemer, as he calls and offers himself, of whom we are to expect that out of pure grace he will redeem us from sin and evil.

47. Such is always the result where the Gospel is not rightly proclaimed. When hearts are only driven by commands and threats, they will only be estranged from God and be led to abhor him. We ought to terrify, but only the obstinate and hardened; and when these have become terrified and dejected also, we ought to strengthen and comfort.

48. From all this we learn how few there are who pray the Lord's Prayer acceptably even though it is prayed unceasingly in all the world. There are few who would not rather that

the day would never come. This is nothing else than to desire that the kingdom of God may not come. Therefore the heart prays contrary to the lips, and while God judges according to the heart, they judge according to the lips. For this reason they institute so many prayers, fill all the churches with their bawling and think they pray aright when in reality their prayer is: "May thy kingdom not come, or not just yet." Tell me, is not such a prayer blasphemy? Is it not of such a prayer that the Psalmist speaks in Ps. 109, 7, "Let his prayer be turned into sin." How men are applying all the wealth of the world to fill every nook and corner of it with such blasphemy, and then are calling it a divine service!

49. Yet he who feels such fear must not despair, but rather use it wisely. He uses it wisely who permits such fear to urge and admonish him to pray for grace that this fear might be taken away and he be given joy and delight in that day. Christ has promised, Math. 7, 8, "Everyone that asketh receiveth." Therefore those who are fearful are nearer their salvation than the hard-hearted and reprobate, who neither fear nor find comfort in that day. For though they do not have a desire for it, they have a something within which admonishes them to pray for such a desire.

50. On the other hand, he uses fear unwisely who allows it to increase and abides in the same, as though he could thereby be cleansed from sin. This leads to nothing good. Not fear, which, as John says, 1 John 4, 18, must be cast out, will remain in that day, but love which, St. Paul says in 1 Cor. 13, 8, must abide. Fear is to be a power to drive us to seek such love and pray for it. Where fear is not cast out it opposes the will of God and antagonizes your own salvation; it thus becomes a sin against the Holy Spirit. It is, however, not necessary to say that the individual must be altogether without fear, for we still have human nature abiding in us. This is weak and cannot exist altogether without the fear of death and the judgment; but the spirit must be uppermost in the mind, as Christ says,

Math. 26, 41, *"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." "And he spake to them a parable: Behold the fig tree, and all the trees: when they now shoot forth, ye see it and know of your own selves that the summer is now nigh. Even so ye also, when ye see these things coming to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh."*

51. Pure words of comfort are these. He does not put forth a parable from the fall or winter season when all the trees are bare and the dreary days begin; but a parable from the spring and summer season, when everything is joyous, when all creation buds forth and rejoices. By this he clearly teaches that we are to look forward to the last day with as much joy and delight as all creation shows in spring and summer. What is the meaning of

this parable if in it he does not teach us this? He could have found others that were not so joyous.

52. In applying it, he does not say your hell or condemnation is at hand, but the kingdom of God. What else does it signify that the kingdom of God is at hand than that our redemption is near? The kingdom of God is but ourselves, as Christ says, Luke 17, 21, "For lo, the kingdom of God is within you;" therefore, it draweth nigh when we are nearing our redemption from sin and evil. In this life it begins in the spirit; but since we must still battle with sin and suffer much evil, and since death is still before us, the kingdom of God is not yet perfect in us. But when once sin and death and all evil are taken away, then will it be perfect. This the last day will bring and not this life.

53. Therefore, my dear hearer, examine your life, probe your heart to ascertain how it is disposed toward this day. Do not put your trust in your own good life, for that would soon be put to shame; but think of and strengthen your faith in order that the day may not be a terror to you as to the damned, but be your joy as the day of your salvation and of the kingdom of God in you. Then when you think or hear of the same, your heart will leap for joy and earnestly long for its coming. If you do not wish to pronounce judgment upon yourself, then do not think that you would be able to stand in that day even with the meritorious deeds of all the saints. *"Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away, till all things be accomplished. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away."*

54. Why does the Lord so fortify his Word and confirm it beyond measure by parables, oaths, and tokens of the generation which shall remain though heaven and earth pass away? This all happens because, as was said above, all the world is so secure and with open eyes despises the signs to such a degree that perhaps no word of God has been so despised as this which foretells and characterizes the judgment day. It will appear to the world that there are no signs; and even though people should see them, they will still not believe. Even the very elect of God may doubt such words and tokens, in order that the day may come when the world is never so secure and thus be suddenly overwhelmed in its security, as St. Paul said above.

55. Therefore Christ would assure us and wake us up to look for the day when the signs appear. We are to realize that though the signs be uncertain, those are not in danger who look upon them as tokens, while those who despise them are in the greatest danger. Hence let us play with certainties and consider the above-named signs as truly such lest we run with the unspiritual. If we are mistaken, we have after all hit the mark; if they are mistaken, it is a mistake for eternity with them.

56. Jesus calls the Jews "*this generation.*" This passage, therefore, clearly indicates that the common saying is not true which holds that all the Jews will become Christians; and that the passage, John 10, 16, "And they shall become one flock and one shepherd," is not fulfilled when the Jews go over to the heathen, but when the heathen came to the Jews and became Christians at the time of the apostles, as St. Augustine often explains. Christ's words in John 10, 16 indicate the same, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and they shall become one flock and one shepherd." Note that he speaks clearly of the heathen who have come to the Jewish fold; therefore the passage has been long since fulfilled. But here he says, "This generation shall not pass away" till the end come; that is, the Jews who crucified Christ must remain as a token. And although many will be converted, the generation and Jewish character must remain.

57. Some have also been concerned about how heaven and earth will pass away, and they again call Aristotle to their aid. He must interpret the words of Christ for them, and he says, that heaven and earth will not pass away as to their essence but only as to their form. How much they think they are saying! If they so understood it that heaven and earth will continue to be something, they would indeed be right. But let us suffer the blind to go, and know that just as our bodies will be changed as to their essence, and yet be remade according to their essence, so heaven and earth at the last day with all the elements will be melted with fervent heat and turned to dust, together with the bodies of men, so that there will be nothing but fire everywhere. Then will everything be new - created in greatest beauty; our bodies will shine in brilliancy, and the sun be much more glorious than now. Peter speaks of this day, in 2 Pet. 3, 10-13, "*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. But, according to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.*"

Paul also testifies to the same in I Cor. 3,13, that "the last day shall be revealed in fire." And Isaiah 30, 26, "*The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold as the light of seven days, in the day that Jehovah bindeth up the hurt of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound.*" Likewise Isaiah 65,17, "*For, behold I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice forever in that which I create.*" Therefore this passing away is not only according to form but also as to essence; unless it be that you do not want to call it a passing away, if things turn to dust until no trace of them can be found, as the burned body turns to ashes and passes away.

58. But where do our souls dwell when the abode of every creature is afire and there is no earthly dwelling place? Answer: My dear hearer, where is the soul now? Or where is it when we sleep and are not conscious of what is taking place in our bodies and in the world around us? Do you think that God cannot so preserve or hold the souls of men in his hand that they will never know how heaven and earth passed away? Or do you think that he must have a bodily home for the soul, just as a shepherd has a stable for his sheep? It is enough for you to know that they are in God's hands and not in the care of any creature. Though you do not understand how it happens, do not be led astray. Since you have not yet learned what happens to you when you fall asleep or awaken, and can never know bow near you are to waking or sleeping, though you daily do both, how do you expect to understand all about this question? The Scripture says, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit," and so let it be. Meanwhile there will arise a new heaven and a new earth, and our bodies will be revived again to eternal salvation. Amen. If we knew just how the soul would be kept, faith would be at an end. But now we journey and know not just whither; yet we put our confidence in God, and rest in his keeping, and our faith abides in all its dignity.

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