

said that if a man could climb to a height of 3,000 feet he could extend his range to 72 miles. Then, and fancy it, if you could climb to 1,000 feet you could see 42 miles. What a great challenge! The higher you climb, the more you can see. For example, in a jet plane, a man can climb to the point where he can actually see 250 miles. We say, "That is marvelous." There are people who can see things far away, but they miss the things which are close to them; they miss these beautiful things that are right in sight. As James Smetham found this out when he was eight years old. He bought a four-penny box of water colors which the good sales lady have for three pennies because that was all that he had. His eyes saw more as time went along and he became an art master at Westminster Training College in London. He could find beauty in trees, in flowers, in hills, and in the faces of his friends. Many people told him that he should go to Rome or Venice and see some beautiful canals and sights. He said that his difficulty was to appreciate his own little garden and the beautiful peach trees, the rose bush on the wall. It is glorious to have good eyes to see a long way off, but that is not everything. We need to pray that God will give us eyes to see the beautiful things in the common things of life.

Jesus could view things from a great distance as well as the present.

I. Understanding the times!

It is always a hazardous undertaking to attempt to somehow capture the spirit of an age or to attempt in an effort to label the times in which one lives. I suppose someone would call this a "beat generation" of restless youths and impulses throughout the nation as new frontiers are crossed every day. There is a great deal of apathy in this "beat generation." It baffles even government on every hand.

Much of the culture and the ideas of this age no longer make sense. For example, the modern art with its twisted, meaningless contours spread out over a wilderness of canvas. Society has given us gadgets that never work better and we could care less, so the "Saturday Review" reports.

Things on the surface indicate the contrary and are not completely soundproof. The problem is rather that we cannot tell the time.

In the arena of this world there is a lapse of confidence in our own ability to understand and to control sense.

As there are show-downs in government and among statesman, this world is more unsettled every day.

As Yale University president said in an introduction to

American Diplomacy entitled "Wormwood and Gaul" he traced the successive waves of dislusionment that swept across the public mind and also exposed the diplomatic blunders by political parties.

The result is bewilderment and this is a haunting question-- what can I do about the under-tōē in human affairs that threaten to carry us out to unknown depths? We are embarrassed in this trouble world whose symbol for this generation is like a question mark and each religion seems to falter in perplexity because of the magnitude of the problems which we face.

Jesus once rebuked religious leaders for their inability to see the momentous events that moved about them. To be sure," he said in Matthew 16:2-3, "you are experts on the weather" as prophets of the weather but to discern the signs of the times, you are not able to see them." These weather-wise men scanned the skies and searched for rain, but they were blind concerning the marvelous things that were taking place. This was an indictment by Jesus and even could be carried over to our day.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus set himself steadily against every form of pious Jewish patriotism. He sought to wage war with Rome in the name of God. He said that unless the nation changed its course, he warned that it would come to the same doom (Luke 13:1-3).

Jesus reached His climax as He confronted the Holy City for

the final time and His lament over Jerusalem as listed in Matthew 23:37-38 seared the disciples' hearts, rang into their ears like thunder. They could not help but remind Jesus, perhaps in gentle rebuke, that whatever else happened, these stones were sure to stand in the temple (Matthew 24:1). But He would not have it that way; even the supreme Jewish sanctuary was certainly to be reduced to rubble (Matthew 24:2).

This was the last straw for the destruction of the temple would result in the abrupt end of religion as they knew it. It would seem to make nonsense of their Scriptures--the Old Testament, as well as their entire system of tradition.

So they turned the tables on their Master; He had insisted that they interpret the signs of the times. Now in the privacy of Olivet they demanded that He explain the shocking sign which would bring life as they knew it to an end (Matthew 24:3).

In answer to their question, Jesus gave not one, but two signs and His reply guides us as we attempt to read the right signs. (We, like the disciples of old, stand bewildered. There was first the sign of tragedy and then the sign of triumph (verse 15 and 30). How far can you see concerning the signs of the times? Boys and girls are fascinated by this question. One day the skilled (Captain Fermon Stone) took his slide rule and computer and said that the average person of average height standing at sea level can see 2 and 9/10th's miles on a clear day. Then he

material, and the churches have become contented.

We have courted chaos and impending doom.

Paul Harvey has assembled a group of shocking statistics concerning our beloved nation which ought to bring every Christian to his knees.

The 116 million church goers in the United States are more than ever before. That's an increase of 30% in ten years.

But illegitimacy has increased 300%.

Pornography has become a \$500 million a year business.

Veneral disease has increased 72% in one year.

Our crime bill is \$20 billion a year and crime is increasing four times faster than our population is increasing.

Juvenile crimes is increasing 5 times faster.

For every dollar we spend on churches, we spend \$12 thousand on crime.

Our nation has 7 million alcoholics and 3 1/2 million problem drinkers.

Combine all the churches, synagogues, and temples and they are outnumbered by our taverns by 175 thousand.

Combine all the money we spend on religious education, medicine, and automobiles and the money we give to gamblers is greater than all of those put together.

Ours is the most civilized, most Christianized nation on earth, yet 37 million of our own children receive absolutely

II. The sign of tragedy--Matthew 24:15

First in Jesus day! He described the first sign in a technical term that perhaps had some religious history to it. Immediately His disciples would remember the days of Daniel. They would remember when hated Antiochus Epiphanes went out of his way to desecrate and profane the temple with senseless vulgarities as he overlorded the sacred and offered swine's flesh on the great altar. He set up public rules for prosecutions in the sacred courts and violated the holy place by erecting there a statue of Zeus.

To do this was to go cross grain against the religion and the feeling of the people. Daniel gave it the name of "Abomination of Desolation."

Moffet translates it as the "appaling horror" and this phrase came to stand for a detestible triumph of evil in the very face of Almighty God.

Despite the fact that the Maccabees temporarily delivered the Jews from the ultimate idolatry, Jesus was not fooled by that. He said that they would face it again. He refused to minimize the fear and the potentiality of human iniquity. Men who take up the sword shall perish by the sword for evil does not overcome evil, but rather begets more in time. Jesus knew full well that wicked men would continue in what they could do

It was only in a few days that they would lay their hands upon the holy things and upon Him and would nailed Him to a cross. They would then place Him, as though abandoned by God and man, up for spectacle and He would suffer indignities and the profaning of everything precious to Him and a repudiation for all of which He stood for. This would be an appalling horror and all men would behold Him.

With the leaders, so with his followers, his disciples would reproduce the retrechedness of his passion in their own experience.

There would be false prophets, wars, famine, persecution, hatred and these would be but a prelude to the terrible moment when all appeared to be lost.

In complete truthfulness, Jesus warned that matters would go from bad to worse with no relief in sight. Finally they would behold the sickening abomination of desolation--the unmistakable sign of the collaspe of every cherished value.

Before many years had passed the worst prophecies of Jesus were fully confirmed. Refusing to accept this strategy of overcoming evil with good, the Jews sought instead to fight fire with fire. After preliminary schrimishes to try to hold the Holy City, it was seized by Titus and they began to starve. He sought to enclose multitudes into subjection.

Soon the streets were littered with decaying corpses. Hungry mad mothers were reduced to cannibalism and roasted their children for a bite of food.

When the walls were finally breached, the defendants retreated into the temple in the insane confidence that God would somehow save them. But they were slaughtered in the Holy Place itself.

Before the Romans were done, every sacred thing was in shambles. The entire church was destroyed. As though it were, the place of faith had been reduced to desolation and wasteland. Jesus had indeed read the signs of the times right when he said and promised the abomination of desolation.

How is it in our day? Are there any striking signs that we, too, will see where the sacred things of life are going to be left desolate?

Unless events take an unexpected turn, we stand to witness the disolusionment of many and of our own most cherished values when we think about the clock of history that is clicking fast in our own time and Satan is pushing the hands toward midnight.

We have sown the bitter seeds of suspicion, disgust and hatred, and it will do no good for us to hope for a crop failure.

Our moral fiber has grown flabby; our homes have lost their place of honor; our culture has been turned into materialistic

participated in the suicide of civilization. The generation or so ago had confidence in secularism and silenced the preacher who dared proclaim an outdated message of gloom. But today the scientist has stolen the preacher's message and boldly they are recovering this message--that everything precious, everything beautiful, everything will be sacrificed. It is urgent that we see the signs of our times.

II. A sign of triumph (Matt. 24:30).

In Jesus day if tragedy was the first word of Jesus, it certainly was not his last word. He dared to believe that when man is at his sinning worst, God is at His saving best. All of the universe will fall before the appearance of His glory. His sign will be an insignia rallying those saints as He explained in verse 31.

In the first instance, Jesus applied this astonishing paradox to His own personal destiny. To be sure His friends would forsake and betray Him and even blasphemy Him.

His enemies would subject to every indignity imaginable. He would indeed suffer many things.

Finally the full force of human tragedy would go up in the awful cries in the space of those three days in which He was in the tomb.

Again, as with the Master, so with the servant! If the

no religious instruction. He said that what he was saying was that we have more preachers in the United States, but we are paying less attention to them than at any time in our nation's history. They are being ignored.

Would you not agree with him that we are no longer fishers of men--that America, as the great Frenchman said, "Is great because she is good and if American ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."

To every Christian this responsibility is yours. What will you do? Now when Jesus was describing the generation in which He lived, it is strange that He described it as the abomination of desolation. If we seek to understand our own generation, I fear that we will have similiar feelings. Whereunto shall we liken this generation? What are we to say about the reaction of our generation to the gospel of Jesus Christ? There are many things in our day that point to the signs of the times.

First, we are a (prosperity hardened generation). With the highest living standard of any people of any time, the people of our day seem to be hardly conscious of any need of God or anything that God can provide. They look to money and things that money can buy. There is little feeling of dependance upon God. The dear prosperity has all but hardened the heart and blinded the eyes of the great mass today.

This generation is (knowledge hardened). We have come to know so much about so many things through our improved communication

and information centers that it is difficult to interest people in the truth of God. But facts without wisdom to interpret and rightly use them can be disastrous.

This generation is pleasure hardened and coupled with our emphasis upon things which seek after pleasure--whether it be the purchase of new luxury, an expensive vacation, or ease and self-indulgent living, the main objective seems to be pleasure.

Like Solomon, many a man could say today, "Whatsoever mine eyes desire, I kept not from them. I withheld not my heart from any joy." This generation bent on temperal, fleshly pleasure has not much thrill left in the gospel for them.

BONANZA: Costs \$311,000 Each Week For The T.V. Program: Advertisers say walk

This generation is emotionally hardened. The reading, the listening, and the viewing diet served daily to the American home is saturated with emotional excitement. The tragic, never ending situations of the soap-operas, the dramatic mysteries, the action packed westerns, the adventure pictures--all of these play heavily upon our emotions. We shed tears over the situation facing our hero. The tragedy is that we have become emotionally hardened and it is difficult to get people concerned about their souls. They hear the gospel, but they

People are mixed up - I read about a man who likes to tell how he are not moved to mourn over their sins. Walked 5 mi. to school - Now he has to walk 5 mi. to work - The kids drive the car to school!

This generation is advertising hardness. Every day in every way slogans and claims are shouted at us. As effective as much advertising is, it is producing a hardened public. It

is difficult to penetrate the shell with the real truth--the greatest promise of the world, the gospel of Jesus.
Early to Bed - Early to Rise - Work like The Devil - And Advertise.

This generation is disaster hardened. We have lived under international war and tension for over 20 years. Wars and rumors of wars threaten; the fear of nuclear bombs and chemical warfare and other possible disasters has made it difficult to arouse people by the warnings of God concerning His judgement.

We have become hardened to these and the good news of God is passed off lightly. The entire vocabulary of horror which describes this fearful possibility is ever in our midst. The extermination, the terror, the contamination, the diabolical, mad, futile suicidal attempt in this world! It is striking that one key word used by Jesus could describe nuclear war--desolation. The use of nuclear weapons would cause men to run from their cities like ants and to go into caves which we call fall-out shelters. The wind would act as a conveyor belt to produce mass death and the sky would be as an open sewer.

In 1961 the press tried to bury on the back page fifteen lines of the tragic announcement that Claude Easterly of Texas who had lead that first atomic bombing had had to be placed away in an institution by the Veteran's Administration. The cause was a reaction--the meaning Schizophrenic. His mind simply could not stand to live in the new atomic age which he had helped to create. It is still an open question as to whether any man can live long with the memory that he had

immediately after the tribulation (verse 29).

We need not to explain it away. The disciples would have derived little comfort from some idea that the answer might be coming many millenniums away and neither would we. We stumble because the application of this truth demands that we relate an eternal event with our own time. But is that such an impossible task after all?

We readily acknowledge that the first coming of Christ on the cross was a unique, historical event. We admit that the events calling modern man to be crucified with Christ, as Paul put it (why) then are we reluctant to follow Paul in the conviction that the final coming of Christ on the clouds is also a unique event. It is essential as well. It does not exhaust or evaporate the meaning of the cross. The experiences here we have in the flesh. The final coming of Christ is to insist that it become meaningful to us now.

The first and final comings of Christ are valid for men. Precisely, we need to magnify this event.

Too often we turn back and cling only to the sacred past because of what has happened. It is somehow more certain to us. The first coming is no more true because it has happened than the final coming is true because it will happen. When the eternal axis is in time, the axis for all time, like Christ on the cross. It is no more practical for our time than Christ on the cloud. To make something meaningful that happened 2000 years ago requires a miracle of the Holy Spirit.

disciples were to feel the full force from that evil which produced this tragedy, they would also experience the full impact of that redemption which promised His triumph.

In verse 29 immediately after the tribulation, they would see the sign of triumph. Just as for Jesus, defeat had been turned into victory, so for them, despair would be turned into rejoicing. He had ceased his passion with the overriding conviction that earth's darkest moment would provide the opportunity for heaven's finest hour. To that certainty, He pointed His disciples. His passion to their own experience, just as the seasons followed one another, the winter of discontentment would give way to the joys of summer (verses 32-33).

Jesus rallied his anxious disciples with the dramatic announcement that if, as Paul would later put it, they suffered with Him, they would also be glorified with Him.

Tragedy was but the raw material out of which God would fashion triumph. God would step in and take hold of all of this disaster and fashion out of it a victory. Thus, at the very moment when they would be bowed in shame, the disciples were bidden to look up, to raise their heads, for the redemption was drawing near (Luke 21:28).

Once more, many years later, they found it to be so. The Lord did shorten the days for the sake of the elect (verse 22). The flickering flames were not snuffed out under the Romans.

Nero's reign of terror and only to set the Christian's determination and deepen their devotion.

What did the church do in response to these ultimate threats? Out of the rubble of Jerusalem and the horror of Rome they began to (write) the gospel. Every page was alive and declared that men could find hope in Christ.

How is it in our day? In each successive generation, the Christian is called to rehearse the redemptive pattern of Jesus who is the Alpha and Omega--the first and the last, the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Sin abounds and so the disciple is nailed to a cross of tragedy, but grace even more abounds, and so the same disciples shares the triumph of the Son of Man. In the very hour of apparent déspair, the Christian lives in expectation of awaiting his redemption.

Our problem like that of the first disciples lies essentially in the future. Just as they could not bear to face the day in which the temple would be reduced to desolation, the prospects that stare us in the face today make us remember that God is sovereign in all of man's tomorrows. We do not know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future.

Paul has said so clearly that nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:39). He lists a whole group of

calamities that may gather to crush us, but then he says that we are more than conquerors through the risen Christ. Life is not just a predictament that preceeds death. It is a wonderful time and a gateway to a new life. He says that there is no despair however blinding that can make the present in such a way as to shackle God in the future. We need to set this vision before us for Christianity is in warfare against Communism, against the class struggle, and against the economic struggle. Even some of the leaders of the nation are telling us that we are going to have a perfect Utopia. Over and against this hope, the Christian is taught that human destiny will not be determined by wars and rumors of wars but by the spiritual triumph of Christ the Lord. We have a deeper conviction that He controls even our daily lives.

Why then are we silent on this urgent scene when there is little proclamation of the victorious coming of Christ. A man who would mention it would be called a crank! As we, as a result, have not given this message of hope in the very day when it is needed!!

The reason for this strange silence is not hard to find. We fret over the appearance and the hope of Jesus by making some kind of chronological calculations, as it were, to set up a time piece to somehow symbolize our faith.

But clearly Jesus was certain that this dramatic action would unfold verse 34-35 and that the triumph would follow.

He can certainly do as much for something that may be
2000 years hence. It is no harder for us to say, "I have been
crucified with Christ and mine eyes have seen the glory of the
coming of the Lord."

It is simply wonderful that we should see this in the
proper diminution. We should keep this on the landscape of life
before us; we should let this be some hope to live by.

The first Christians, immediately after the cross, were
enriched by the resurrection. And yet their eyes were fixed
steadfastly on the future. The Holy Spirit would call to
memory, "Jesus Christ, the first fruits who had tasted of death."

Today, we manufacture our own redemption. We must
wait for and look for this hope which is the gift of God. The
final redemption of God in this great movement will be the
blessings we search for.

All of this constitutes the last days--the signs of the
times. Some things have already started happening. This
means that we, like the first followers of Christ, are in the
midst of the total events--that by faith we live on the found-
ations of the first coming and by hope we live in the expect-
ation of the final coming. Through the indwelling spirit, our
times are out of joint and we cannot control these times. The
only alternative we have can be found in our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come; our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home.

So. May - Oct. 30, 64 A.M. - ✓
So. May - March 21, 65 A.M. -

R. =

Nov. Exp. Assn.

Thurs - night I was proud of The Baptist -
A Full Church North End Church -
Cantata D. V. Choir - The Sports Band -
Message by Sec. of ^{Commission} N.C. -
Raleigh - Most inspirational message
on music I have ever heard -
High rich Low -
also sermon by Paul Moore -

Fri. - Good attendance -
Your Pastor selected for another year, as Moderator -
I will need your prayer in guiding over
50 churches in a program of cooperation for
the Kingdom graciously -
These are difficult days in which we live -
worst in churches - in the world - in the
State ~~A~~
There are many problems to handle -
I appointed the largest committee ever appointed
in the history of the Assoc. last Fri. - over
50 people from 3 cities - this tells of the scope -
We had a good program on Fri. with 4 excellent
speakers - Seminary Prof. - a college president -
we hope to maintain a high quality of program -
joining with & fellowshiping with fellow-Baptist is
indeed a privilege -

Understanding the time is most interesting -
All of you spend an hour today - now what do
you intend to do with it?

Perhaps you are like the farmer who lost
a great deal of time -

It seems the farmer had driven his team
of mules to town and he returned
very late at home in the evening.
"What took you so long?" his wife
asked.

"On the way back," he explained, "I
picked up the preacher, and from
then on, the mules didn't
understand a thing I said!"