

The end of all things is coming, Christians. It's coming soon. It will happen quickly and without warning. Are you ready for it? Because I'm not just presenting to you some strange idea or some strange theory of when Jesus might come. We are simply taking the words of Jesus at face value. Jesus tells us that he will come in an instant and without warning. And so we have to ask ourselves, will we be ready to go in an instant and without delay? Or are we going to be entangled and caught up in the things of this life? That's the question we have to wrestle with today.

Because Jesus warns us about these things, Christians, by giving us a clear example in the city of Jerusalem itself, a city which was destroyed in 70 A.D. And what we see here in our Gospel lesson for today is Jesus warning his disciples at that time of what was about to come. They needed to pay attention. They needed to stay awake and watch, so that they would not be caught by surprise when that time finally came. And Jesus here is giving them a clear sign, a sign that they were supposed to watch for, a sign which would tell them without any doubt that the city was about to be destroyed. And when they saw that sign, they had better be ready to go in that instant, without any hesitation or without any waiting.

Jesus calls this sign in our reading "the abomination of desolation, spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place." Now what in the world does he mean by that? The "abomination" is something that God hates, something detestable to God. And "of desolation," something that makes desolate, means that it would bring about some kind of judgment upon that people. And in the book of Daniel, when Daniel is talking about the abomination of desolation, he was looking forward to an event that actually happened before the time of Jesus. In the year 167 B.C., there was a king by the name of Antiochus who was ruling over the Jews at that time. And he was persecuting them, doing all kinds of nasty things to them. But the very worst thing that Antiochus did was set up an altar inside the temple itself, a pagan altar, and he offered on that altar things that should not have been in God's house. Things like pigs and other things. And so he defiled the temple by his actions. He was the abomination that brought on the judgment because of his idolatry which he did inside the temple itself.

Now, Jesus is not pointing backwards when he's talking about the abomination of desolation. He's not pointing back towards Antiochus. He's pointing forward to something like Antiochus which would happen in the near future, something which would also bring about a judgment upon Israel. And that abomination of desolation that Jesus is talking about here were the Roman armies of Titus, who surrounded the city in 70 A.D. And after they had captured the city, Titus set up his standards, his banners, his military flags, inside the temple itself. Now, that was a problem, because these banners were actually idols to the Romans. They worshiped them. They offered sacrifices to them. They treated them like gods. And so Titus in his victory set up these standards inside God's temple and offered sacrifices to them, as proof that he was in fact the abomination of desolation that Jesus was talking about. He was the one who was bringing about a terrible judgment upon Israel, one far worse than anything Antiochus had ever done.

And so what Jesus is saying, then, here in our gospel reading is to watch, to pay attention. When you see that abomination coming, Jesus says, when you see the Roman armies on the way to destroy Jerusalem, get out! Leave! Leave the city. Leave everything behind. Leave in that moment, because there is no more time. This is what Jesus means when he says, if someone's on

the house top, don't go back down into the house to get some things together for the journey. There's no time! Get out of the city! Leave as quick as you can and run. Run so that you can save your lives! If someone is out in the field, Jesus says, and you see the Roman armies coming, don't go back to get your coat. There's no time. Time has run out. Get out of the city! Flee for the mountains. Get away so that you might save your lives! And he says, alas for those who are pregnant or nursing infants in those days, people who can't run, people who have a hard time moving quickly. Because you're gonna have to move quickly, because the armies are coming, the destruction of the city is near. Run while there is still time! Pray that it doesn't happen in winter when it would be cold and difficult to run. Pray that it doesn't happen on the Sabbath when you would be ashamed to do it. But above all, he says to them, be ready so that you may run and get out of the city while there is time to do so.

And don't listen, Jesus says, to anyone who tells you differently. Because there's gonna be false prophets and false Christs who come up and they'll tell you all kinds of things that you might want to hear, all kinds of things that sound pretty good. But they're not what Jesus himself has said. And so don't listen to them. They will lead you astray. Jesus has told you everything you need to know in that moment. And Jesus says, don't worry, also, that you're going to miss it. There will be no missing this judgment. You don't have to have somebody tell you where I am out in the wilderness or inside the inner room. When this judgment comes, everyone will see it. It will be like lightning striking in the east, and you see it as far as the west. It will be like seeing vultures hovering in the distance. You will not miss it. So be ready. Pay attention! So that when the time comes, you may go in an instant. That's the message that Jesus was giving to his disciples: to be ready for the end of the city, the end of the temple.

And it's the same message he gives to us too, Christians. Because Jesus will come back in an instant, at the twinkling of an eye, as quick as lightning. But there's one important difference between what Jesus says to these disciples and what he says to us. We have no sign that is coming. We have all the warning that we are ever going to get. The sign that Jesus will return on the last day is the destroyed temple itself. Jesus tells us to be ready, because when he returns in that twinkling of an eye, there will be no more time. And we have to be ready to go in that instant when he comes. So are you ready, Christians? Are you ready to go when Jesus returns?

Or are we trapped up in the things of this life? Are we more concerned about the things of this world than we are about the things of God? So that when Jesus comes again in that instant, we'll be more concerned about what we'd be leaving behind than about what we're going towards? Are we concerned about the things that we own, the material possessions which we have that we have worked so hard for? So that when Jesus returns on the last day, we'll be trying to go back down into our house to get something for the journey, because that's what's really the most important to us? Or we'll be out in the field and want to go home to get our coat, because, well, we might be cold on the journey? No. There will be no time, Christians. When Jesus returns, that is the end of all things. And these material things which we have gathered up for ourselves will disappear in a moment. There will be no more time for them and no time for us to go back for them.

Are we caught up with the concern that we'll always have more time? That Jesus is coming somewhere far in the future, but not right now, so we'll get to the things of God tomorrow? I'll

take care of that tomorrow. I always have tomorrow. But do you have tomorrow? We don't know. Jesus may come back right now. He has not told us the day or the hour. This very night your soul may be required of you when the Lord returns in glory. So are we going to be always looking for what we think is more time? Or are we going to look for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ?

And will we listen to those who tell us things that aren't quite true? Things that sound so good, that Jesus won't judge us when he comes again on the last day, that Jesus is coming somewhere far in the future, or maybe that he's not even coming at all? If we listen to these voices, Christians, we will not be ready. The Lord will catch us by surprise. And Jesus has given us everything that we need to know. All the warning that we need in what he has told us here in his living, mighty Word. So if we are trapped by the things of this life, Christians, if we are focused on something other than Jesus, we will not be ready, and Jesus will catch us by surprise.

So how then can we be ready? How then will we be ready when Jesus returns, like that? We will be ready, Christians, when we are in the things of God. To be watchful means to be in those things that God has given to us. So to be watchful means to be in his holy Word, to listen to the voice of God which speaks to us through his Scriptures. Because when we are listening to his voice and to no other, even if Jesus were to return before the end of this sermon, we would be ready for him, because this is where he is. We will also be ready, Christians, when we are engaged in prayer, when we call on God as our Father, when we call on him to save us in every circumstance. Because to call on him in prayer is to be in the things that he wants us to do. We will be ready, Christians, when we are in his gifts, his gifts of his sacraments, his gifts of his Word. When we receive his body and blood and receive him in our baptisms, we are being strengthened in faith unto life everlasting. We will be ready, because this is where we can find him.

But above all, Christians, if you want to be ready for the return of Jesus Christ, walk in the ways of God. Let us walk as though he is returning tomorrow. Walk as though he is returning right now. To leave behind the things of sin, to leave behind the works of darkness, to leave behind the ways of the flesh! Because when we leave all of that behind, and walk as God has created us to be, then we will be ready for when Jesus returns. Because sin holds us down, holds us back from the things of God. But through the power of God, when we walk in his ways, in the ways of righteousness, then we will be ready when Jesus returns on the last day.

So leave behind everything of this life, Christians. It's not to going to do you any good anyway. Look towards the things of God. Walk in the ways of God. The Lord is at hand. And when he returns, he will take us to himself, to be with him forever.

To Jesus, who will come to judge the living and the dead, be all glory, honor, and worship, now and forever. Amen.