

A little while back, we lost one of the chickens out of our coop. Something ate it. Whether a coyote or a fox I was never really quite sure, because all that I found when I found the chicken was feathers. And of course, if you have one dead chicken, it's a pretty good chance you're going to have a lot more dead chickens. So I did everything that I could to get ready just in case whatever ate that chicken came back. And so I borrowed and set up a number of small foot traps, probably not much bigger than that. Setting them all around the coop in the hopes that I would catch whatever it was that ate the first chicken, and we could deal with it appropriately. And of course, they weren't really in the way by any means. They weren't in the way of people, but they were still something you needed to pay attention to, something you had to watch. And because the kids were the ones who take care of the chickens, they needed to know especially where these traps were. And so I took my sons out there and pointed out where all of these traps were, and I even showed them with a stick by poking one the danger that they posed. Because yeah, they weren't big. Like I said, they were only about that big. Nowhere near big enough to catch somebody's foot. But a trap is still a trap. A trap is something you need to respect, something you need to pay attention to and avoid. And I think we proved that clearly just a couple days later when we found a small sparrow had set off one of the traps and got stuck in it. And the poor thing was dead by the time we found it, but it just goes to show that not knowing where that trap was proved to be fatal for that poor little bird.

But Christians, Jesus compares the day of his coming in our reading for today to a trap. Verse 34 says this: "But watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a trap." And the kind of trap that Jesus is talking about is most likely a bird trap, what was called the "snare of the fowler" in Psalm 91. Because bird catchers in those days used what is sometimes called a bownet. A bownet is a net which is put onto a frame and set up like a mouse trap, so that whenever the bird that comes along takes the bait, it snaps open and catches them in the trap so that they're no longer able to escape. These kinds of traps worked well enough that people could actually make a living in those days doing nothing else than catching and selling birds. That was their whole job. But a trap like this, like any trap, worked best by surprise. Because if the bird knew that it was there, it would avoid it. It wouldn't go anywhere near it. It's kind of like Proverbs chapter 1, verse [17], says: "In vain is a net spread in the sight of any bird." But if they didn't know that it was there, or worse they forgot that it was there, then they would be caught, and they would be killed in the process, just like that little sparrow in the foot trap by the coop.

But the coming day of the Lord, Jesus tells us, will be like a trap. Only it will be far greater than any earthly trap, than any simple bird trap. Because that day, Jesus tells us, will be a trap which is set for all the world. There is no setting it up hoping that you might catch something. This is something that will catch everyone in the world. And that day is a trap which is hidden from our eyes. We don't know the day or the hour. We don't know when that day will be. And that day will be like a trap which is sprung. There's no avoiding it. There's no getting around it. It is the day when Christ will come to judge the living and the dead. And that day, Christians, will be a day of fear. It will be a day of shaking, a day of distress. And that day is certainly coming. So will we be ready for it? Will we be able to escape it, as Jesus says in our reading? Or will we be distracted so that we will not be ready when it comes?

And just so that we understand what Jesus is trying to get at, think about what he is saying to his disciples in our reading for today. Because Jesus is warning his disciples about a much closer destruction which would soon be upon them, and that was the destruction of the city of Jerusalem. Because the disciples thought that Jerusalem was a very strong city, the kind of place that would never fall, the kind of place you never had to worry about. But Jesus shows them that that is not true. Judgment was coming and would soon fall upon the city. As he says in verse 6 of chapter 21: "As for these things that you see, the days will come when there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." So Jesus was pointing them to the year 70, just forty years or so after he said these words. In that year, the Roman armies would surround the city of Jerusalem, and they would capture it and tear it down and burn it to the ground and destroy the temple in the process. All of these things happened just as Jesus said that they would. And if the disciples were not paying attention, if they were distracted or watching something else, they would get caught in the city right along with everyone else. Trapped like a bird in Jerusalem along with the rest of the people. It would be too late to get away, too late to do anything about it. They would be destroyed. So they needed to watch. They needed to pay attention. Only then would they be able to escape and live.

So if Jesus is warning his disciples about the destruction of Jerusalem, how much more is he warning us about the destruction of the Last Day? Because the destruction of Jerusalem is just a small picture of the destruction that is to come. Because when Christ returns, Christians, the end of all things will come with him. He will come with power and great glory to judge the living and the dead. Except there's going to be no way to avoid it. There'll be no getting out of town early so that we don't have to deal with these things. And it's not going to be the destruction of just a few buildings or the destruction of just one city, but the entire creation itself will be destroyed by fire. And when that day comes, it will be like a thief in the night. And if we are not paying attention, that day will be a trap to catch us with no escape. We will be judged right along with the world. We will be like that sparrow in the trap or like Jerusalem surrounded by Roman armies. So Jesus warns us, just as he warned them: "Pay attention! Watch yourselves! That day will soon be here."

So how then do we pay attention? What should we do? Or maybe the better question to ask first is: what should we not do? What does it mean to not pay attention? Jesus tells us, again in verse 34: "Watch yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life and that they come upon you suddenly like a trap." So in other words, we won't be ready when our hearts are weighed down, when we are overloaded with the things of this world. Because when that happens, Christians, we start focusing on the wrong thing. We start looking in the wrong place, and as a result, we are not ready for when our Lord will come.

So we become weighed down with dissipation. Dissipation typically means heavy drinking, the kind of thing that you do when you get drunk at a party, but it can also mean just not having any self-control, to just be doing whatever it is that you want to do. When that happens, Christians, we become focused on ourselves, because one who is filled with dissipation is only living for pleasure, is only living for the moment, for the things of this world. It's being constantly distracted, constantly going here and there wherever you want. It's almost like someone else is driving your life. Someone else is in the driver's seat taking you to someplace you don't want to go. But when we become so focused on ourselves like this, Christians, it's like we're looking at

ourselves. And when we look at ourselves in this way, we will never see the trap coming, because we're looking in the wrong place.

We can also become weighed down with drunkenness, whether literally with alcohol or figuratively with anything. Because a drunk man also does not have self-control. But a drunk man also has poor judgment. He is not able to see things clearly. He is not able to judge things the way that they should be judged. And so a drunk man, for example, thinks that he is in a much better position than he actually is. He becomes overconfident, thinking that there is no danger when in fact there is danger. And so being weighed down with drunkenness like this, then, becomes like walking around with your eyes closed. You're never able to see the trap that is coming.

Or we may even become weighed down with the cares of this life. That could be something as simple as being worried and anxious about many things, saying: "What am I going to do if" or "what am I going to do if"? What if this happens, what if that happens? What will I do? That kind of anxiety makes us look at something other than what we should be looking at. Or it could just be looking at something in this life. Maybe something like our work, and thinking that that's the most important thing. If I'm focused on my job thinking that that's the most important thing I can be doing, I can very easily forget to look at God. And because I'm not looking at God but at the things of this life, I will never see the trap coming.

And so that's what happens here, Christians. That's what we need to see clearly. We are not ready for that day when our focus is in the wrong place, when we are looking at the wrong thing. If we don't have our eyes on God and on the things of God, then we will not be ready when Jesus comes.

So what then should we do? What does it mean to pay attention? How do we not get caught by that day? Jesus tells us that, too. He tells us, first of all, to stay awake. Because he tells us that this trap is coming. He tells us that that day will soon be here. Think about that, Christians. He's telling us that it's on the way. The world doesn't know that. The world will be taken totally by surprise, because it has no idea what's coming. But Jesus warns us. He tells us that it will happen. And when we know that, we can get ready. We can be prepared for that day.

And because of that, we can stay awake because of the things that God has given to us. We stay awake, for example, through the Word of God, when we are in the Word, when we hear what God has to say. We stay awake through worship, when we gather together to worship the Lord in holiness. We stay awake through the sacraments, when God gives us himself so that we might live. Apart from those things, Christians, we have no hope. We become totally distracted. If we are not in the things of God, there is no way that we could possibly stay awake. But God gives us these things for our good so that we can be prepared. When we focus on them, then we are looking at the right thing. And we will be prepared for what is to come.

But Jesus tells us, secondly, to pray, to pray that we would have the strength to escape and to stand before the Son of Man. Because if we do not pray, Christians, how will we ever find the strength that we need? The one who does not pray might think that he can rely on himself, but if we rely on ourselves, we will be caught in the trap when it comes. Because we don't have the

strength on our own to be able to stand. The one who does not pray is focused on the wrong thing. The one who does not pray is looking at the wrong thing. But Christians, when we do pray, we can find strength from God, because he will give it to us just as he has promised to do. So pray to the Lord at all times, Christians, and in that way, God will make you ready for that day. Because through prayer, God prepares us for what is to come.

So watch yourselves, Christians! Do not get weighed down by the things of this world. Keep your eyes on God. Keep your eyes fixed in the right place. Stay awake through the Word of God. Stay awake through worship. Stay awake through the sacraments. Stay awake through prayer. Because through all of these things, God gives you the strength that you need to escape. Because that day is coming, and it will soon be here! So let us be ready for it through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have told us that the day will come when your Son, Jesus Christ, will judge the world. We pray that you would help us to be ready for that day through the things that you have given us, and especially through your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.