

The Word of Truth Ministry Presents

Special Full Length Studies

#SS10

The Signs of the Times

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The familiar phrase "the signs of the times" came to mankind from the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ. These words, when He spoke them, had nothing whatsoever to do with His second coming. In spite of this, many generations of "the prophets of doom" have laid hold of these words and used them to bolster their own wild predictions concerning the future of mankind and the second coming of Jesus Christ. Thus the phrase "the signs of the times" has been forced into an unholy alliance with a thousand-and-one sensational events, all of which are declared to be the most positive signs of the imminent return of Christ. When this text is restored to its context, the honest mind will readily admit that these words had no such meaning when the Lord first spoke them.

Consider the circumstances that brought forth these words. The Pharisees and Sadducees were enemies, but they found common ground in their rejection of Christ. Together they came to Him and asked that He show them a sign from heaven. In answer He spoke of their custom of looking at the sky, reading the signs there, then predicting the weather. He then denounced them as hypocrites since they could discern the face of the sky but acted as if they could not discern **"the signs of the times."** See **Matthew 16:1-3**.

This makes it evident that He was not speaking of any signs that would precede and point to His second coming, or that would indicate its nearness. The fact and reality of His first coming and personal presence upon the earth was the event that was before

them. His second coming was not yet in the picture. It would have been most unfair for the Lord to have publicly branded these men as hypocrites because they could not discern signs that announced or pointed to His second coming. There could have been no such signs at that time. How absurd it would have been for the Pharisees, or even His faithful disciples, to have looked upon certain strange events and accepted them as signs of His second coming. Since the work of His first coming was not then complete, how could there have been signs of His second coming. Furthermore, the 1900 years of history that have elapsed since these words were spoken reveal how mistaken and misled anyone would have been if they had taken anything in that day to have been a sign of His second advent.

When we face the facts, there can be no other conclusion- -the phrase "the signs of the times" as it came from the lips of the Lord Jesus, and as it now comes to us from the Bible, has no connection with the second coming of Jesus Christ.

A Great Deception

In the past century many who professed to be preachers of the prophetic message of the Bible have practiced a great deception upon themselves and upon their hearers by taking the spectacular and sensational events that are always transpiring and presenting these as positive signs of the imminency of the second coming. The passage of time has proved that they were completely wrong, never right, always mistaken. The only ones who have been as consistently wrong have been the date-setters who by a hundred different methods of calculation have set the date for the return of Christ. The history of the past has demonstrated they were wrong, and future events will continue to show their errors. And this is just as true of those who have presented some outstanding event as a sign that the coming of Christ is imminent. In spite of the thousands of things presented as the most positive signs, the Lord has not yet come. Nevertheless, there still seems to be a good market for each new book wherein claim is made that a new set of signs is presented that indicate the Lord is coming soon.

If the Pharisees had discerned "the signs of the times" they would have known that they were living in the days of the Son of God upon the earth. The appearance upon the earth of God's anointed One had long been prophesied. Certain definite signs were to give testimony to the reality of His presence, and these were manifest in that day. A great display of signs, miracles, and wonders were being seen, and each of these pointed to the fact that the Christ of God was upon the earth in human form. The man Nicodemus had considered these signs and declared: "**We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with Him.**" John 3:2. The miracles performed by our Lord were the signs of those times-signs that spoke eloquently of the presence of the Son of God upon the

earth, but the Pharisees failed to discern them. These signs did not point to some future event. They spoke of a then present reality. They had nothing to do with the second coming. They pointed to the reality of His first coming.

Those who today profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ should earnestly seek to avoid the mistake made by the Pharisees. They could not discern the signs of their times. We will make the same mistake if we fail to discern the signs of our times. There are signs of the times in which we live, signs which we need to read, signs which reveal to us the character of the day in which we live.

God's Present Dispensation

We do not live in the days of the Son of God upon the earth, and the signs that gave witness to that fact and truth are not seen today. They would be out of place and give a false witness if they were seen today. Neither do we live in that strange period of thirty three years of which the book of Acts is the history. The kingdom of God was then upon the earth in a stage comparable to the blade stage of growing grain. In that time God always confirmed His word with signs following, and these signs gave witness to the character of that time. We are living in a time and under a condition when all of God's kingdom purposes are postponed. We are living under a distinct and new dispensation or administration. This is the administration of the grace of God and there are many signs on every hand that give witness to this fact. If we fail to discern these, if we close our eyes to them, we will be making the same mistake that the Pharisees made when they failed to discern the signs of the times in which they lived.

An administration or a dispensation is a method of dealing. Neither word has to do with a period of time. God's administrations are God's methods of dealing with mankind, or with some portion of mankind which He has marked out. God's present administration, His present method of dealing, is entirely gracious. **It** makes no difference whether a man is a saint or a sinner, God is dealing with him only in grace. This fact is known from a divine secret revealed to Paul, which was then made known by Him to those for whom it was intended, the nations (**Eph. 3:1,2**). Today, if God cannot act in grace, then He will not act at all. This is witnessed to by almost 1900 years of human history, by every fact of human life and experience, by the signs that abound on every hand.

Let the reader consider his own life as an example. Has God rewarded you according to your own sins? Has God dealt with you according to your iniquities? Has each sin and transgression of yours brought their just recompense of reward? What has been God's method of dealing with you?

To these questions there can be only one answer. You have not been dealt with according to your sins. You have not been dealt with in strict justice. You have been dealt with in grace-in that love and favor that God shows to the undeserving. You may have thought at times that God was punishing you, but you were mistaken. You may have thought you were experiencing a display of God's wrath, but you were wrong. God has not punished you and no wrath has been shown. To make such claims is to slander the grace that He is continually showing. God has for the present ignored your sins in order that He might display His grace toward you. Every day of your life gives witness to this. The signs of His grace abound on every hand. These are the facts of life that tell us we are living in and under an administration of divine grace. These are the signs of our times. It is tragic that so many fail to discern them.

We must not be so childish as to think that a sign must be some stupendous miracle. Great progress has been made when one has learned with Elijah that God may not be in the wind, in the earthquake, or in the fire, but may be in the still small voice (I Kings 19). But still greater progress will be made when we realize that God can speak by means of absolute silence. If silence is golden, and if silence can be eloquent, then we today are face-to-face with a golden eloquence to which every ear should be in tune.

God's Secret Working

If we read the signs that exist on every hand today, we will know that God's present administration is in secret, that is, that God's present method of dealing is secret. He operates in secret, and this has caused many to conclude that He is not acting at all. To act in secret is always proper when one is acting in grace. All acts of justice must be evident and in the open. You have every right to secretly slip a twenty dollar note under the door of your needy neighbor, but you have no right to take twenty dollars from him unless you publicly invoke the due processes of law. By acting in grace and by acting in secret, God is steadily and fully accomplishing His present purpose to write within the history of His long dealings with mankind a complete record of the graciousness of His character. He does this today in a way that is untraceable, but in a coming day it will all be traced out and made known for His glory.

Every sign today tells us that we are living in the time of God's silence. There are no indications that it is otherwise. If it were not for the truth found in the final revelation God gave to Paul, this would be one of the greatest mysteries of our existence.

On every hand there are thousands of voices making the claim that God is speaking to them and through them. Yet in all the nineteen centuries that have passed since the close of the book of Acts not one thing has come out of these claims that revealed

anything that has added one iota to man's knowledge or understanding of God. Men may imagine that God is speaking, but the facts of life demonstrate that this is the time of God's silence. We may not like it this way, and in our dissatisfaction we may implore God to break His silence and to speak from heaven. But God will not do this until His present purpose in His present silence is complete.

When God speaks, He must back up His word with acts of justice, and this would end His long display of grace. We can as a rule ignore the acts of a child in regard to things concerning which we have not spoken, but once we speak, any violation of our word demands that we act in justice and righteousness.

The Word of God which we possess, especially that truth contained in the final revelation given to the Apostle Paul, should lead us to see that we live in a time when God's method of dealing is entirely gracious, when every act of God is an act of love to the undeserving, a time when God maintains a strict silence, and a time when He operates in secret. The Bible tells us this and every fact and experience of life gives witness to these truths. These are our signs. They tell us of the times in which we live.

Let us discern the signs of our times.

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