

Signs of the Times I  
*Signs of God's Grace*

Weather forecasting has become very much a scientific endeavour. Today, meteorologists using various tools feel they have a pretty good grasp on indicating what we might expect, weather wise. They tell us what the weather will be like both in the near future as well as further on in the season and the year.

That doesn't mean they's always correct in their forecasts. Though they have their weather balloons, their thermometers and barometers, as well as their anemometers for measuring temperature, wind direction, and air pressure, to name only a few things. Yet, weather is quite unpredictable. There are some who may not have a bachelor or science degree nor work in a weather institute but who seem to have an uncanny ability to forecast the weather. My late mother-in-law had such an ability. She'd say, "*The leaves on the trees are all twisted around,.... Its going to rain.*" and invariably, that was the case.

Native people are known to have some prominent weather forecasters of their own, who, people say, can be relied upon to give you more than a hint of what is around the corner, weather wise, perhaps even months ahead. There's a story of old Sidney Blackhair, a Crow in Montana who, having learned to forecast from his father once predicted a mild winter for southeastern Montana and northern Wyoming based on such factors as: 1. a mid-September snowfall; 2. frequent rains; 3, ants not having gone into the ground yet; 4, snakes still being out and 5. and absence of frogs. And you know, he was right!

I think it's safe to say there is an intense interest in interpreting weather signs and indicators; as well as economic trends. Why, on the Stock Exchange you will find people trading in *futures, buying and selling certain assets* while speculating on the price movement of a particular asset.

Yet for all the interest in getting a handle on what things may be like tomorrow not a few people are oblivious to what the bible calls “the signs of the times.”<sup>1</sup> In the gospel according to Matthew, Jesus confronted the Pharisees and Sadducees, leaders of the Jews who had come to him to ask him to “*show them a sign from heaven*”?<sup>2</sup>

Their motivation for asking Jesus to do so however was all wrong. They were out to tempt him. They'd seen something of Jesus' extraordinary powers as the Son of God in healing people and casting out demons. But they had accused the Lord of practising black magic, doing these things while empowered by Satan. Now they asked him to perhaps drop some manna from the sky, as, they thought, Moses had done. Or perhaps he would give them a bit of a 'light and laser show' like Elijah who had caused fire to come down from heaven. Then surely they would have reason to accuse him of dabbling in the occult for sure!

But Jesus rebuked them even as he said, “*When evening comes you say, It will be fair weather, for the sky is red, and in the morning, “ Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.* You know how

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 16: 3

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, v. 1

to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the *signs of the times*. “

*“ Signs of the times, that is, epoch-making events that are indicators of history-making, time-changing historical happenings, and not just time changes from the past to the present to the future.*

The “*signs of the times*” are really those works of God which disclose his will and purpose” like those deeds we read about in Matthew 11:5, deeds which confirm that Jesus was the promised Christ. <sup>3</sup> For Jesus said, “

*the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.*

Then Jesus told them no sign would be given them “ *except the sign of Jonah*”. That sign, of that prophet’s ‘burial’ ( as it were) in the belly of a fish for three days and his subsequent rescue, to life! was the *sign of Jesus’ death and his glorious resurrection*.

In reality the most import ‘sign’ of the epoch making changes which would occur stood before them. For Jesus himself had the future in his hands. He would be **The** sign of the times. But they rejected him. In fact. that one group, those *Sadducees* didn’t even believe in the resurrection .

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<sup>3</sup> Venema, The Promise of the Future p. 114

The “signs of the times” are simply all those momentous events or things, or persons which confirm that history isn’t standing still but is moving towards what the bible calls, “ The day of the Lord”.

Now we should realize there are many mistaken views of those signs. One such view is the idea that these signs refer exclusively to the things which will happen right before the return of Christ. It is clear that there is a variety of signs however and they span *the whole time between Christ’s ascension into heaven and his return!*

Then too some of these signs have already been fulfilled. I only think of what the Lord said in Matthew 24 about wars and rumours of wars and about not one stone of temple in Jerusalem being left on top of another. That certainly was the case with the destruction of that temple and of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Although, and we hope to visit Matthew 24 again, a number of things foretold by the Lord Jesus there must certainly refer to events in the more distant future.

Someone has pointed out that another mistaken notion of these “ signs of the times” is that by “*reading them correctly*’ we would be able to know the exact time of Christ’s return.<sup>4</sup> Yet these signs don’t give us an exact timetable for Christ’s return. He will come, says the bible “like a thief in the night” unexpectedly, and “ No one knows the day or moment when the Bridegroom will appear.”

What we do know and should not lose sight of is the fact that throughout the Old Testament there are many ‘pointers’ to things which will characterize the days before Christ’s return. Wars, rumours

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<sup>4</sup> Venema, p. 114

of wars, cataclysmic events as well as false prophecy call God's people to vigilance and discernment. We need to realize that "*Today is the day of salvation*" and not just "someday", tomorrow.

Two signs that are indicators that God's powerful grace is at work is the fact *the preaching of the Gospel still goes out both near and far*. Did Christ not promise Peter when he had made that good confession, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God*" that he, Christ Jesus, would build his church and that the gates of hell ( or of death) would not be able to prevail against it? ( Matthew 16:18).

Already in the Old Testament there were those promises to Abraham, that God would make him the father "*of a multitude of nations*". Of a *multitude*, and not just of the Jews but of all those whom the Lord would grant true faith and so make them His people! The Psalmists too sing of this church-nation-gathering work of the Lord repeatedly.<sup>5</sup> There is that promise of a king, of the line of David who would rule the whole earth.<sup>6</sup> There is the prophecy of Isaiah, Jeremiah and others concerning the gift of salvation to many peoples and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh.<sup>7</sup>

So often, dear listeners when we think and speak of the "*signs of the times*" we only think of catastrophes, earthquakes and famines and the like. And indeed, we may not by-pass these for Christ himself did not. He himself said that these too belong to such signs and we hope to get back to them next time.

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<sup>5</sup> Ps. 8; 19: 1-4; 103:19;

<sup>6</sup> Ps 24, 47, 48, 100, 103, 145

<sup>7</sup> Joel 2:28

But let us not forget that the bible says that even amongst the Jews who, as a nation rejected the Christ God still has his elect whom he'd will certainly gather into his storehouse, His holy catholic church.<sup>8</sup>

And today, despite the opposition and the ridicule and suffering that many Christians undergo today, the preaching of the Gospel still finds the hearts of many, by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. The Word of the Living God makes inroads even in the midst of jungles full of superstition and heathendom, in cities, and among people suffering from poverty, especially, spiritual poverty.

For Jesus Christ, will and does make progress. He still makes the blind to see and the lame to walk. He makes what long was crooked straight. For all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him. Therefore look up, look up, and expect his coming. Trust him at His Word. You'll never be sorry, for His promises are sure . You can count on it. Amen and thanks so much for listening.

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<sup>8</sup> Romans 9-11