

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Are you fearful that “*the Day [is] drawing near*”? Maybe after Friday’s Paris bombings and shootings you are. That’s what those kinds of heinous acts are intended to do: terrorize, make you fearful. I’m not afraid. Nor do I get all worked up about the convergence of four blood moons aligning with Jewish holy days or other such nonsense that purveyors of the end times peddle as they try to “scare” you to faith (as if that were possible), and then sell you their pamphlets, or at least convince you to buy the MREs (meals ready to eat) they have for sale, so that you can survive the coming apocalypse.

I really don’t understand how so many can be so gullible. It’s a racket; they’re preying on gullible people in the name of Jesus. Shame on them!

That’s not to say that there is no end of all things. Jesus tells us, “*heaven and earth will pass away.*” Again, Jesus says, the Son of Man will come again with great power and glory. So be gone with the scoffers who say, “*I got news for you. Jesus ain’t coming back.*” And be gone with the swindlers who try to fleece the naïve and unsuspecting out of their money.

Indeed, “*the Day [is] drawing near,*” and although we can’t know exactly when it will happen, we can recognize the signs. “*Peter and James and John and Andrew asked [Jesus] privately, ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are about to be accomplished?’*” And Jesus told them. He tells us, too, in the Gospel what the signs of the end are — so that no one might lead us astray, so that we might not wander after blood moons or put our hope in other false teachings.

Jesus spoke of the destruction of the temple, and the disciples seemed intuitively to know that that meant the beginning of the end. That’s why they asked Him about it later. Jesus said that the temple, as a stone building, would be utterly destroyed. Not one stone on top of another. And if you’re looking for signs, well that has happened. In AD 70, the temple was destroyed during the Siege of Jerusalem. And although there are been several attempts at rebuilding, and there are still Jewish prayers for a new temple, with the temple mount being the site of the Muslim Dome of the Rock, I think it’s safe to say that no new stone temple will likely ever be built.

As Christians, why would we ever look for such an occurrence? The true Temple, one not made with hands, has been rebuilt, three days after its destruction. Of course, you know that when Jesus talked about the temple being destroyed and rebuilt in three days, He was talking about His own crucifixion and resurrection. And He renders a stone temple completely unnecessary. The temple was originally

built as a place for the priests to offer up sacrifices for the sins of the people. But now the one perfect sacrifice has been offered up for the sins of the world. It is finished. No more need of a temple. Besides, even those daily sacrifices never took away sins of themselves, says our epistle text. The true atonement for sin would come by the sacrifice of the perfect Lamb, of which all those other sacrifices were but a foreshadowing. Jesus is that Lamb.

Second, Jesus says, there will be false christs who will lead people astray—people who will say, “*I am He!*” That is, they will say, I am the “I AM,” Yahweh, the Lord. They are surely among us. But, friends, don't be led astray. When Jesus returns, it will not be in relative anonymity. He will not sneak in. His coming will be as apparent as lightning in the sky. He will come with the sound of a trumpet and with the shout of an archangel, accompanied by myriads of the heavenly host. You'll know it, and every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. And every tongue will confess not false christs, but Jesus as the Christ, God and Lord.

Third, Jesus said, there will be wars and rumors of war. There will be earthquakes and famines. But these have been commonplace throughout history. A New York Times article states that “*Of the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace for [only] 268 of them, or just 8 percent of recorded history.*” So understandably Jesus says that these are not the signs of the actual end, but are signs to keep us alert and vigilant and to encourage us to struggle on.

There are still more: we will be punished for being Christians, Jesus says. We will be brought before governors and kings, undoubtedly like Luther that we might recant, but with God's help we will bear witness of Christ. We will have an opportunity to speak the good news of Christ crucified and risen to people who have never heard it. Families will turn against each other, Jesus says, brother betraying brother, parents their children, and vice versa, and even have them put to death.

Does any of this sound familiar, if not in this country yet, certainly around the world? We've just recently passed the Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, and last week, we included a petition in our prayers for those enduring persecution. It is a fact of being a Christian, and that we have been shielded from that persecution for a time is just an accident of history. Times are “a changing.”

Nevertheless, do not give in to despair. Jesus' discourse on the end times is not meant to frighten believers or scare unbelievers to faith in Christ, if that were possible. They are warnings to us to be on guard, and that means being steadfast in God's word, for that is our bulwark against the ungodly forces that seek to destroy us. Remain steadfast in God's word, and when you are brought before governors

and kings, you will have words to say, for the Spirit will have impressed Himself onto your hearts and minds. Remain steadfast in God's word, and you will be given the strength to endure to the end.

Be assured by God's word and the promises therein, not the bunkers you have built or the food and water you have stockpiled! Such preparations will do you no good when the Day stops drawing near and finally arrives.

Be assured by the blood of Jesus with which He entered into the holy place, and sprinkled us clean from an evil conscience. Be helped by meeting together in the house of God, bold to enter into His presence in His thrice-holy name, for Jesus has opened the way for you through the curtain of His flesh. Draw near with confidence having had your bodies washed with pure water, bold to confess your sins and confess your hope in Christ Jesus, for He has promised you forgiveness and rest — and He is faithful, and He makes hearts faithful, true, and bold. Come *“with a true heart in full assurance of faith,”* and be sanctified and perfected further by kneeling at this altar and eating the body and blood of our high priest, who offered Himself for all time as a single sacrifice for your sins. Be stirred up to do the work God has given you to do — good works, works of love — for you know what they are. The Lord has put them in your hearts and written them in your minds.

Be about these things, brothers and sisters, and fear not about the end. Yes, you can expect trouble, but with the Spirit working through these things, you are ready for the Day. You shall be delivered. Your name shall be found in the book. Remain steadfast in these things to the end — word and washing and worship, faith and feast — and worry not, for you shall be saved.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.