

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN CHURCH IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:1-4

"2011 and Counting..." (part 4)

THE SIGNS ARE ALL AROUND US!

Last week, Fr. Commins spoke of the signs Jesus gave mankind; that He is the only and true Son of God; that He is more than a wise man, a holy prophet, or high priest, He is the Living God in human flesh. There can be no one greater. And He gave us many signs that pointed to this reality. And He still does today. Chief among them are the signs He gives in His Word about those things that will happen before His Return. In fact, God uses signs in our lives and in His Word to show us that He indeed is true, faithful, and in control of the future.

We have already looked at the signs pertaining to Israel: 1) Israel reborn as a nation in 1948, 2) Jerusalem under Jewish control in 1967 (for the first time in over 2500 years), 3) ongoing plans to rebuild the Temple of Yahweh, 4) Israel in the crosshairs of the world's nations because of Jerusalem and Islam's fraudulent claim to it. 5) Israel surrounded by nearly two dozen nations that want its demise. And as we found from the prophecies recorded in **Zechariah 12 and 14**, how 6) Jerusalem is likened to a cup of wine that will intoxicate the nations and a stone upon which the nation of the world will come and try to remove but in doing so they will be destroyed.

WHAT WILL SOCIETY BE LIKE?

This morning, I want to look at the signs that will be prevalent in society as a whole before Christ's Second Coming. And there is one passage that gives us a specific overview. It is found in the Apostle Paul's Second Letter to Timothy, the last recorded letter we have from the Apostle Paul. He is awaiting possible execution and gives Timothy, a convert of Paul's and an early church leader, final words of encouragement, instruction, and prophecy. He tells Timothy what society will be like when Christ Returns. When I studied this passage again and reflected on what Western culture has become, it is really eye-opening to see how it is coming to pass right before our very eyes.

Please turn with me to **2 Timothy 3:1-4**: *"But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."*

Notice the three loves described: self, money, and pleasure. And everything in between is the result of these three loves. Now in philosophical terms, the love of self is secular humanism; the love of money is

materialism, and the love of pleasure is hedonism. And all three have come to dominate our Western culture. And such loves are spreading to other cultures as they become more prosperous and free.

I mean you can see the progression just in modern times. But before I begin let me just say that all of these things have always been in the heart of man, but what Paul is saying is that in the Last Days such things will be so common that every aspect of society will be affected.

THE LOVE OF SELF

Let's begin with the love of self. And I might add, this is the heart of all sin; the belief that you can live apart from God. It is the lie that duped Adam and Eve and it is the lie that continues to dupe people and even believers.

How has the love of self flourished in the modern age? It all started with the Declaration of Independence. You say, "What!?!?" That's right. Sure, our "Declaration" is a wonderful document, don't get me wrong. The most famous words, "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness... that to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed;*" turned our world upside down. It was to be a government of the people, by the people, and for by the people under the Law of God. It paved the way for a greater understanding and appreciation of human rights, of religious and political freedom, and economic growth.

But freedom and rights must be grounded in the framework of a Creator, of a Supreme Lawgiver, and for the vast majority of our citizens that Creator, that Lawgiver was none other than Almighty God our heavenly Father, and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Take this framework away and what happens? The individual becomes most important. Not the individual under the authority of Almighty God, but the individual period - his rights, his wishes. And so that which was meant to be a counter to tyranny and oppression has opened the door to oppression - the tyranny of the love of self.

Now how is this so? When a mother now has the right to terminate the life of her child because her baby might be inconvenient or burdensome! That, my friends, is catering to the love of self. When the rights of an atheist are so important that the majority has to acquiesce - no prayer in schools, no crosses, no nativity scenes or even Christmas trees on public property and so on, that my friends is another example of the love of self.

Or how about homosexual rights? Why is it that we are giving legal sanction to a group of people based on their sexual orientation and behavior? Never since the days of Rome has homosexuality been embraced by society. What is the problem? Not only is homosexuality dysfunctional, a perversion (just like any sin is a perversion of God's intention), it is not part of the original creation, it is a result of the Fall.

But do you know really what is at the heart of the problem? It is another example of the love of self. At the heart of homosexual love is narcissism. Why? Because you are in love with someone who is designed just like you. God made us different. He made us male and female, in His image, with different strengths and weaknesses, that He might make us one. That we would learn from one another, learn to be selfless and more like the other person so there would be a healthy balance. You can't have that with homosexuality and certainly not if you are going to raise healthy boys and girls! This is not only another example of the love of self, it is a rebellion against the Creator and the Created order. But our society is embracing this today with greater frequency.

How about sexual permissiveness? We have the highest divorce rate in history, 40% of all couples are cohabitating together without being married, more children born out of wedlock than ever before and we wonder why?

The media certainly plays a role, and not just Hollywood. Have you ever noticed all the books, all the seminars, the advertisements, all the five, seven, twelve step programs for self-improvement, self-help, self-awareness, self-enhancement, self... you name it. Our whole society is geared with making the individual the end all be all.

And then how about the HIPAA laws? I mean when I go into a hospital now and visit a parishioner the medical professionals can't tell me what's wrong with my member! In fact, once our sons and daughters reach 16, parents can't find out what is wrong with them unless they give the doctor permission. Are you kidding? LOVE OF SELF. Our government promotes it, the media promotes, it is everywhere we go.

You see, at the end of the day, the message our nation seeks to convey is that it is all about the self and making self happy. And do you know what the result is? No absolute truth. I have my views and you have yours. I have my truth and I have yours and so there are no standards. And people end up doing what is right in their own eyes just like in the days of Judges because now they have the freedom to do it. And then do you know what happens? You have people calling that which is evil, good, and that which is good, evil. Umm, where did I hear that before? See **Isaiah 5:20**

So it shouldn't e surprising that New Age is so popular -the idea that I can become a god. Or that the book, *The Secret*, that was so popular a few years ago. The book taught how one can go about self-actualization, of creating your own world in which you only surround yourself with those things that are pleasing and positive to what *you want*.

All of the above is why many people in parts of Asia, South America and Africa are concerned with Western culture. They see in it an eradication of traditional morals and family values. The tribe is no longer important, family is no longer important, traditional morality is no longer important. Self- freedom and self-fulfillment is the end all be all for society.

THE LOVE OF MONEY

The Apostle Paul wrote in **1 Tim. 6:10** that *"the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil."* Jesus said in **Mt. 6:24**, *"You cannot serve two masters, for you will either hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."*

There are more billionaires on the planet than ever before. We all know of Wall Street, the billions in gold reserves found in many of the nations of the world, and the incredible prosperity of so many. And yet, there is unbelievable poverty throughout the world. The gap between rich and poor has never been greater in all of history. In fact, did you know that 1,125 billionaires hold more wealth than half of the world's population? That means 1125 people hold more wealth than 3.4 billion others. Moreover, the poorest 40 percent of the world's population hold only 5% of the world's income, and the top 20% of the world's population consumes 86 percent of the world's goods. (cf. *The Hole in Our Gospel*, by Richard Stearns, President of World Vision)

There is a growing disparity between the rich and the poor of our world. We have enough resources and the technology to end extreme poverty, hunger, and many diseases for most in the world. Did you know that? But yet, it doesn't happen. Why? The love of self and the love of money, the twain always lead to corruption.

THE LOVE OF PLEASURE

Now what goes hand in hand with the love of self and the love of money? The love of pleasure. At no time in human history do we have more people who have more opportunities to pleasure themselves. Do you know how much Americans spend on entertainment and recreation? Take a guess. \$705 billion. That's an average of over \$2300 per American citizen. We spend almost as much on entertainment as we do on food!

Listen to these additional statistics also taken from book, *The Hole in Our Gospel*: \$58 billion on lotto tickets, \$31 Billion on pets, \$13 Billion on cosmetic surgery, BUT only \$5 billion is given by churchgoers to overseas missions! The US government gives \$39 billion in foreign aid. That may sound like a lot, but with a \$1.4 trillion deficit that doesn't even make a dent! \$1.4 trillion on me, myself, and I!

Now don't get me wrong, I am glad we have the freedoms and prosperity that we enjoy, but without God at the center, it will always degenerate into humanism, materialism and hedonism. It will be about self first, about how much money and material things one can get, about how much one can be entertained. Do you want to see this in action up close? Just go to a public university or college campus; the place where our future leaders and young people are trained and taught.

The truth is that sadly it is all around us. And it will only get worse, and it will set people up to be controlled by Big Brother. Why? One of two things will happen – 1) the system will collapse - or 2) people will be so addicted to all these pursuits of self, money, and pleasure that they will do anything the State wants them to in order to have their appetite satisfied.

A WARNING AND THE ANSWER

We have been brought up in this environment. It is an environment that is antithetical to the way of the cross, the way of Scripture, the way of our Lord. The Bible teaches us that life is not about self-fulfillment, it is first about self-denial. Jesus said, "***Whoever wishes to come after me, must deny himself.***" It's also not about money or material things. Jesus said, "***Don't worry about what you are going to eat or drink or wear but seek first the kingdom of God.***" It is not about self-gratification but it is about **self-control and self-discipline**. Discipline is at the heart of the word, "disciple."

Jesus said in **Lk. 9:23**, "***If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.***" It is a daily endeavor. It is a daily battle. It is a daily call.

And as the most prosperous Church (American) in the history of mankind, we need to consistently be on guard against falling into the snare of this triple threat - self, money and pleasure. What is the antithesis to this triple threat? The Cross. The Apostle Paul wrote in **1 Cor. 1:18**, "***For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.***"

It's the cross that is the heart of the gospel message. No cross, no crown. No crucifixion, no resurrection. And the message of the cross is that it is not about what we can do, it is about what God has done! We need help! We need to recognize our sin and ask for forgiveness. In other words, we need a **Savior**. We also need the power to say no to temptation and those things that pull us from God. We need self-control. And you can only get that by walking in the power of the Holy Spirit and letting Jesus be **Lord of your life**.

Ultimately, life is about transformation from the inside out and God is the only one who can do it. He does it through the Cross and through the Holy Spirit.

So take a look at the signs all around you. It is one more verification that God's Word is true. And we need to take heed. So on this day and in the days to come, keep shining the light, keep fighting the fight, keep walking the walk. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!

Next week, we will continue to look at the signs of society during the Last Days, looking again at **2 Timothy 3** (this time verses **5,7, 10-11a**) and how as Christians we are to respond to such signs.