

# VULTURES AND CARCASSES

Read Matthew 24:27-28

What an odd thing for Jesus to say!

After describing the eruptions of sin and the earth-shaking cataclysms which will usher in the end of the world, Jesus quotes a Palestinian shepherd's proverb: "Where there's a carcass, the vultures will gather."

What does that mean?

The point of the old folk-saying was that certain things just naturally go together—like fish and water, or thunder and lightning.

Where there is carrion you will have scavengers..

But what does that have to do with the endtimes?

The most likely explanation would be that the carcasses represent creation in its final death-throes and the vultures represent the demonic forces that will prey upon the human beings who have rejected salvation in Jesus Christ and abandoned themselves to sin and death.

In the endtimes, Jesus says, the convulsions of a creation under the curse of sin are going to intensify as

more and more people fall into despair and abandon themselves to destruction.

Jesus lists these death-throes: deceitfulness, wars, famines, earthquakes, the persecution of Christians, people falling away from their faith, hatred between factions, the rise of false prophets, an increase in wickedness, and love growing cold.

Such are the signs of the endtimes.

The first thing we can say about these signs is that they have already been given.

Lies, wars, famine, earthquakes, the persecution of Christians, people falling away from their faith, hatred, false prophets, wickedness, love growing cold?

We see these things going on around us, even as we speak, and that is why a lot of people are convinced that these may be the endtimes.

Where ever you look, you can see the social fabric unraveling.

Wars all over the planet, nuclear threats from rogue nations, suicide bombings, acrimony between political factions in our own country, terrorist threats everywhere.

It certainly seems like these could be the endtimes.

However we're not the first to see signs of the endtimes in our own generation.

After the carnage of the First World War, the Irish poet William Butler Yeats thought the endtimes were at hand and he described them in his poem *The Second Coming*:

*“Turning and turning in the widening gyre; the falcon cannot hear the falconer; things fall apart—the center cannot hold. Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, the blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned. The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity. Surely...the second coming is at hand!”*

For anyone willing to look, it's not hard to see the signs of the endtimes and the vultures circling overhead as people abandon themselves to sin.

Lies and half-truths have become the stock in trade of our political leaders.

Love is growing cold as evidenced by a 50% divorce rate and the loss of civility in our daily lives.

The entertainment industry wallows in vulgarity and openly mocks the Christian faith.

Unborn children are dispensed with for the sake of convenience and some states have legalized euthanasia.

Fornication and sexual perversion are mainstreamed as acceptable lifestyles.

As someone said, *“If God doesn’t destroy America for her sins he’ll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah.”*

Rampant sinning is tearing our country and our world apart.

What is harder for us to see is the sin in ourselves that tears us apart.

We like to think that we are immune to the sin that surrounds us and we don’t tend to see that the vultures are laying their eggs in us as well.

Jesus said, *“Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”*

The human heart, which the Psalmist calls “deceitful above all things” is the hatching ground for sin and if we don’t notice it and repent of it it can turn us into either vultures or carcasses.

Every time we relish the news of fresh disasters; every time we get a thrill out of hearing about a new catastrophe; every time we resent our neighbor's success or take pleasure in his misfortune; every time we covet our neighbor's wife or his house or his car or his boat—every time we do these things we are treating our fellow human beings like carrion instead of brothers and sisters.

We are trying to draw life from their suffering.

We don't like to think of ourselves as vultures, but deep down we all have the potential for becoming one.

That's why we don't like to spend much time peering into our own dark souls: we have a pretty good idea of what is lurking there.

But if we don't look, then we won't learn to take our sin seriously. And if we don't take our sin seriously then we don't take our redemption seriously either.

And if we don't take our redemption seriously, our faith becomes a shallow thing, consisting only of some vague idea of minor offenses on our part; minor irritation on God's part; and a minor inconvenience on Jesus' part.

And that, my friends, is a recipe for falling away from a saving faith.

Of the shame we should feel about all of our sins none is greater than our unwillingness to take our sins seriously.

We're like a teenager who knows he's going to receive a lousy report card in a few weeks and be in big trouble with his parents, but isn't particularly concerned because that is then and now is now!

I think that's why Jesus uses shocking language to get our attention.

The world is collapsing in its own sins, the vultures are circling and we are either ignoring them or cheering them on.

We're like the human vultures who stood around the cross that day—laughing and wagging their heads while the Lord of life hung there in agony, dying for their sins.

They didn't understand what was going on and their descendants still don't.

But the Good News that I have for you today is that Jesus knows all this ***and he still loves us!***

He loved those who abandoned him, He loved those who gloated over his misery—and He loves us.

He didn't die only for the sins of Peter and Paul and Martin Luther and Mother Theresa; he died for the sins of Ted Bundy and Charles Manson and Vladimir Putin and Jeffrey Epstein.

And for you and me.

Who can imagine a God like that?

A God who would suffer the torments of hell for people who hated him?

As Charles Wesley wrote in one of his hymns: *“And can it be that I should gain an interest in my Savior’s blood? Died he for me who caused his pain, for me who scorned his perfect love? Amazing love! How can it be that you, my God, would die for me?”*

Our problem is that we lose sight of the wonder of it.

As the world takes sin more and more casually we are tempted to take our own sins casually, and as our consciences are bothered less and less by our sins, the Atonement counts for less and less in our faith.

Our hearts lose sight of the awe of it and we end up with a pabulum faith: life's pretty good in this world and it'll be even better in the next.

We start to think of our sins as an inconvenience instead of a lethal poison; as a common cold instead of cancer.

And since we take our sin lightly, we take our salvation lightly as well.

What, after all, is there to be saved from?

From being cast into an eternal lake of fire and sulfur?

Who believes that anymore?

Well, you'd better believe it!

Because all the horrible precursors of the end of the world that are playing out before our eyes—the tsunamis and hurricanes, the genocidal wars and mass murders, the famines and earthquakes—they're but a small sampling of what hell is like.

When the wrath of God finally falls upon this earth in its full, undiluted power, men will crawl into caves and beg the mountains to fall upon them to save them from its terrors.

But not believers!

The same signs that will paralyze unbelievers with fear will bring rejoicing to God's children!



Did you notice that Jesus called all the horrible signs that will accompany the end of the age “the beginning of birth pains”?

Under El Shaddai’s control, the death spasms of this world ***are converted into birth pains!***

Out of all the destruction, disaster and death, God is going to bring a new creation!

All those who have rejected God’s mercy and placed their trust and their hopes in what this world has to offer will be gnawing their tongues in agony and begging the mountains to fall upon them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb.

But we who have placed all our hopes in His mercy will be lifting up our heads and beholding our salvation drawing near!

The vultures at Calvary gloated over a dead carcass.

But God had a resurrection in mind!

And when the great and terrible day of the Lord comes upon this earth; when men are fainting from terror at the roaring of the sea and the shaking of the heavens; all those who have placed their hope in Jesus will see the sun of righteousness rising with healing in its wings, and they will rejoice, leaping like calves who have been released from their stalls into the field!

Let us pray that that day is coming soon!

Come Lord Jesus.

Amen.

