

Sermon Subject: THE VOICE OF WARNING

Scripture: Malachi 3:1-5

Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in; behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap. And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years. And I will come near to you in judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts.

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Fear God, and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come.

Last week at this hour we pointed to the promise of Amos, that "surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants, the prophets." We gave it as our considered and sincere belief that Joseph Smith was a prophet, who both forth-told and foretold the things which God wishes to be revealed to the world in this dispensation. We touched briefly on one phase of his prophetic ministry, which was a voice of warning of the calamities which were coming upon the inhabitants of the earth unless men and nations repented, forsook the gods of their own making, and turned again to a worship of God in full sincerity and truth -- unless they heard and heeded the voice of Jesus Christ, and turned to his ways of peace.

Some of the calamities and judgments which Joseph Smith predicted have already come. He foretold in 1832 the Civil War which came upon this nation in 1860 as a judgment for the crime of slavery. He said that "war will be poured out upon all nations," beginning with the rebellion of South Carolina, and that the judgments of God would continue "until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations." He said "Peace shall be taken from the earth." He said "I will rend their kingdoms ... Ye cannot see it now; yet a little while and ye shall see it." The world has had no peace that is worthy of being called a peace, since the beginning of the Civil War in 1860. The kingdoms of this world have been rent asunder, until there is hardly a nation or kingdom left today which has the same form of government which it had a hundred years ago. Yes -- some of the calamities and judgments foretold by Joseph Smith have already come to pass. But there are more and worse judgments and calamities coming, if Joseph Smith was a true prophet. It must needs be, if the men who are now serving the gods of pride, of wealth, of self-interest, of power, of militarism, of self-indulgence, and pleasure-seeking, are to be turned again to Jehovah, and constrained to give allegiance to his kingdom, and to Christ as King. Only when all the temporal things in which men have trusted for salvation, prosperity, and safety have been swept away by the calamities of judgment, will some men be forced to turn to God -- too late.

God has always given advance notice and warning of impending judgment and calamity, Noah was sent to preach for a hundred and twenty years, to warn the

world of impending judgment and disaster and destruction, but only a few souls heeded the warning. Lot was warned to flee from Sodom, but only a few souls gave heed his warning and fled with him. Elijah warned Israel of a famine to come if they did not repent, but it took three years of drought and famine to convince the people that he was a true prophet of God, and to bring them to a temporary and half-hearted repentance. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all had something to say about the alternatives -- either repentance or conquest by Babylon, but the nation of Israel was destroyed and taken captive despite these warnings. Jesus warned most explicitly of the destruction of Jerusalem, giving specific signs by which the Jews might know that it was time to flee the city. Eusebius says that this warning was renewed in the church just before 70 A.D. by the prophets who were then still functioning in the church, and that those souls who heeded the plain, clear, explicit warnings and fled the city upon the appearance of the appointed signs were saved. The majority paid no heed to the warning. Torn by civil war within, decimated by famine and disease, besieged from without by the Roman armies of Titus, Jerusalem fell in the year of 70 A.D. with a loss of life which Josephus puts at one million, three hundred thousand souls. Thus were the warnings of Jesus vindicated. When God gives a warning, he means business.

There is a passage in the Book of Mormon which states rather plainly God's intention of crying repentance and lifting the warning voice to any people before destruction. Speaking of the Jews, the prophet Nephi says: "And never hath any of them been destroyed, save it were foretold them by the prophets of the Lord." In one of his prophetic warnings of judgments and destruction to come upon the world in this dispensation, Joseph Smith said in the name of the Lord: "Behold, I tell you these things even as I also told the people of the destruction of Jerusalem, and my word shall be verified at this time as it hath hitherto been verified." Or in other language, "My warnings heretofore have always come to pass; they shall come to pass in this dispensation of time, even as they have done in the past."

If Joseph Smith was a prophet of God (and we confidently believe that he was) then we of this generation are in peril, as individuals, as a nation, and as a world. Our lives, our wealth, our freedoms, our government, our civilization itself are all in jeopardy. Many other men -- good and wise and studious men who claim no particular prophetic insight, but who base their conclusions on fact of history -- are telling us the same things. There have been so many calamity-howlers in the past twenty years or so that people have shut their ears against them in self-defense. We have lived under the tensions of fear for so long that we have become wearied, and have calmly gone to sleep, only to be awakened by another rumor of war, or the hue and cry of another witch hunt, or the announcement of a new kind of bomb many times more destructive than the last. But remember that the people of Noah's day got a little weary of warnings too and as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the coming of the Son of Man.

God does not want us to be scared out of our wits by his warnings of impending doom. Doom is not inevitable. There is an alternative -- sincere repentance, individual and collective, repentance on the part of a wilful, blundering, rebellious world, and acceptance of Jesus Christ as King, as Redeemer, as Savior. But men cannot repent unless they are warned. Joseph Smith commanded the ministry of this church to cry nothing but repentance to this generation. He commanded us to lift up the voice of warning. Perhaps few will heed, but whether few or many heed, it is our God-given duty to lift the voice of warning to all peoples.

The thirty-third chapter of Ezekiel lays down a principle in a sort of parable, a principle which is apropos just here. Ezekiel says that if a watchman is put upon the walls of a city to watch for the enemy, and if he sees the enemy coming, and blows the trumpet, but the inhabitants of the city pay heed to his warning, then the blood of those who are slaughtered in the conquest of that city is upon their

own heads. But if the watchman sees the enemy coming and fails to blow the trumpet of warning, and then the city is sacked and destroyed, the blood of the slaughtered is upon the head of the watchman, who failed to give his warning.

Through the prophetic ministry of Joseph Smith, the voice of Christ has committed to us -- the ministers and members of his church -- a warning to be declared to the inhabitants of the earth in this generation. If we continue unceasingly to lift this voice of warning, and people pay no heed, the responsibility for their heedlessness is upon them. But if after having received this warning ourselves we fail to pass it on to others, the responsibility for their destruction when it comes will lie upon us.

In discussing the prophetic ministry of Joseph Smith we have already mentioned in a previous sermon some of the Biblical warnings which were pointed out to him as applying to our day and time. These include the third and fourth chapters of Malachi which foretell the final coming of Christ in judgment against the wicked; the eleventh chapter of Isaiah, which includes the warning that "he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked;" and the second chapter of Joel, which tells of wonders coming in heaven and earth -- blood, and fire, and vapors of smoke. He also pointed to Acts 3:23, which says that every soul which will not hear Christ, the great Prophet, shall be cut off from among the people, or destroyed, and declared that this would soon be fulfilled.

In addition to citing these Biblical warnings, which any man might have seen and read for himself, Joseph Smith wrote other warnings which he said were given him by the voice and Spirit of God. From some of them we wish to quote. "A desolating scourge shall go forth among them, the inhabitants of the earth, and shall continue to be poured out, from time to time, if they repent not, until the earth is empty, and the inhabitants thereof are consumed away, and utterly destroyed by the brightness of my coming." (D.C. 5:3) "Mind indignation is soon to be poured out without measure upon all nations, and this will I do when the cup of their iniquity is full." (Ibid 98:4) "Vengeance cometh speedily upon the ungodly, as the whirlwind, and who shall escape it; the Lord's scourge shall pass over by night and by day, and the report thereof shall vex all people: yet, it shall not be stayed until the Lord come; for the indignation of the Lord is kindled against their abominations, and all their wicked works..." (Ibid 94:5) "Behold, vengeance cometh speedily upon the inhabitants of the earth -- a day of wrath, a day of burning, a day of desolation, of weeping, of mourning, and of lamentation -- and as a whirlwind shall it come upon all the face of the earth, saith the Lord." (Ibid 105:9) "I, the Almighty, have laid my hands upon the nations to scourge them for their wickedness; and plagues shall go forth, and they shall not be taken from the earth until I have completed my work, which shall be cut short in righteousness.." (Ibid 83:16)

These warnings parallel and confirm many warnings of the New Testament which were intended for our day. When John the Revelator saw the angel fly through the midst of heaven having the everlasting gospel to restore to men on earth, the cry was, "Fear God, and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come." The restoration of the gospel was to be the sign of the beginning of judgment. The third chapter of Second Timothy contains Paul's warnings of conditions in the last days. Peter warned of the great day of the Lord in which the heavens shall shake, the earth tremble, the mountains melt, and the elements be filled with fervent heat, and all the corruptible works of earth burned up. (II Peter 3:10) The 18th chapter of Revelation gives a description of the Fall of Babylon, pointing out four times in one chapter that its great destruction shall come suddenly, in one day, in one hour.

In the midst of these warnings we need not despair. God knows how to deliver his own. He has promised, "My people will I preserve." When the tares are bound in bundles to be burned, the good grain will be gathered safely into his garner. Let us then repent of all our sins, our rebellions, our self-will, our half-heartedness, and pay more diligent heed to the voice of God, and the voice of his prophets, servants, and apostles. Let us heed the warning voice ourselves, and lift a warning voice to our neighbors among all the nations of earth, that in the day of judgment their blood may not be upon our heads. As we see the signs of the end multiplying about us, let us lift up our heads, and diligently watch and wait for the day of the coming of the Lord, which draweth nigh, and hasteth greatly.