



BEHOLD THE
SIGNS



BEHOLD THE
SON



Sermon Aids

✦ ADVENT CYCLE B ✦



BEHOLD THE SIGNS

ADVENT WEEK I



LESSONS:

Isaiah 63:16b-17, 64:1-8
Psalm 80:1-7
1 Corinthians 1:3-9
Mark 13:24-37

Signs of power
Signs of restoration
Signs of community
Signs of second coming

Historical setting and context:

ISAIAH: Following the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 BCE, the Persian king Cyrus, succeeded in defeating the king of the Median empire—550 BCE—and the king of Babylonia—539 BCE—and molded the two kingdoms into what was to become the greatest Mid-Eastern empire of the times, Persia. The power and influence this empire extended as far as the western coast of Asia Minor—modern day Turkey.

Some scholars claim that the Isaiah of today's text lived early in the Exile. Others claim a later date. Whenever it was, the message was a powerful one for Israel. It is part of a larger text, which has been called "one of the most moving passages of the OT. It is the community lament, in which the appeal is made to Yahweh's steadfast love [hesed] in the past history of his people." (Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol.2, p. 743) It is an appeal for God to show his power in this time as he has done in the past. It is a plea for him to forgive Israel and to restore them to a position of favor.

PSALMS: This is a group lament, which is a prayer for deliverance from the national enemies. It probably originated in the Northern Kingdom. (cf. The mention of the tribes of Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh) Verses 3 and 7 are a refrain asking God to restore—protect—his people.

I CORINTHIANS: The church in Corinth was located in one of the most important cities in Greece and also the Roman Empire. Paul is concerned that the Corinthian congregation manifest signs of Christian community to the world. (i.e. a close caring, loving fellowship) He reminds them of what they have received from God in the person of Jesus, the Christ. They are to be the daily living evidence of what God has done in fulfilling his promise to the world of a Savior. The spiritual gifts that they have received are to be liberally shared both within their own community and with the Corinthian community at large. If what God has done in and through Jesus of Nazareth is true, then there is great power abroad in the world and they are to be witnesses to this in their lives and fellowship.

MARK: Chapter 13 has been called "The Little Apocalypse" because of its comments about the last times and the end of things. Human beings, being what they are, have been fascinated, since shortly after ascension of Jesus, with trying to decipher when the end of all things—the Second Coming—will be. And for some, it has been an obsession. This was true in New Testament times, and it has been true at one time or another in the 2000 years since then. Today, as in every era, we need to guard against the same attitudes that Mark did in his day. This text is not some kind of code to be broken so that we can predict the time of Jesus' return. It is about being ready, whenever the time is. The caution is: Don't pay any attention to those who say they know when "The Time" is. They don't know what they're talking about. The key concept is: Be ready at all times because only God knows when it is time for all things to come to an end. The key words are "be alert," "be watchful" and "be pre-pared." If you are these things, that is all that is necessary. The when doesn't matter.

Key Points:

1. The Importance of Signs—they give us information: No Parking; Speed Limit 35; Golden Arches. They show us the way: Exit; Entrance; Airport Baggage Claim. They tell us where we are: Entering Kalispell, MT; Cimmaron, NM; Pike Street and 3rd Ave. (Seattle, WA) They tell us how far we have to go: Tampa 30 miles; Montreal 60 km.

2. Advent Signs in the lessons: hope; promise; power; humility; warning; expectation; preparedness. How do these signs help us get ready to receive God?

3. What are some examples of Advent signs in our lives?

1 Corinthians 1:3-9—living out grace and peace

Galatians 5:22—spiritual gifts

Trusting God and placing our lives in God's hands

Step 11 of Alcoholics Anonymous, especially the second half of the step:
“Sought through prayer and meditation to maintain our conscious contact with God, as we understood him, praying only for the knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry that out.”

4. Be aware of signs this coming week. How are they helping us “get ready?” Are any of the signs misleading?

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