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The Sign God Has Set Calls All People

To those who reject it, it is a call to Judgment

To those who hear it, it is a call to Glory

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

In the name of Christ Who is the Judge of all nations, Dear fellow redeemed.

1889 marked the year of one of the greatest disasters in Pennsylvania history. A few years prior, a number of industrial barons bought a lake and a dam which they named Lake Conemaugh. They wanted a retreat from the hustle and bustle of the city so they turned this lake into a hunting and fishing sports club. The dam they inherited was built in the early 1800s and it was very well constructed. However, the maintenance on it had been neglected. In the time these barons owned the dam, it would often spring small leaks. Instead of taking the time and money to repair the dam, they simply patched it with clay and straw. This would prove to be disastrous as on May 31, 1889, Johnstown and South Fork had one of the worst downpours ever recorded in Pennsylvania history. 6-10 inches of rain fell in 24 hours. Water began to rise almost to the point of rising above the dam, due to debris clogging the outlet for the water. When efforts to release the pressure on the dam failed, the President of the Sports Club sent a messenger to a nearby town to telegraph the towns of Johnstown and South Fork to evacuate immediately. However, the people of Johnstown and South Fork did not listen. They had heard so many false reports of the dam breaking from when it would spring those leaks that the barons simply patched that they thought there was no way the dam would be breaking. They couldn't be more wrong. The dam did break. The people of South Fork were fortunate enough to hear the raging water coming and most of them were able to escape up the mountainside. Only 4 people died in South Fork. Johnstown wasn't so lucky. An estimated 20 million gallons of water, moving at 40 mph, and reaching a height of 60 feet crashed into the town whose people had no time to react. 2,209 people lost their lives that day.

Warnings were given. The warnings were clear. But the people would not listen. The book of Isaiah likewise is full of clear warnings to the people of Judah. The Judgment of the Lord was coming soon because of their wickedness and disobedience. If they did not heed the warnings God sent, they would be given over to destruction at the hand of the Babylonians. In the verses right before our text for today, we see a prophecy of God through Isaiah that extends over us as well. It is a stark warning to repent and trust in Jesus or be given over to eternal destruction.

God is patient and king, but He is also a righteous Judge. He will judge all people according to their words. Matthew 12:36-37 *"I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, ³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."* But in His mercy, God sets a sign among all people as a warning and as a comfort. Our theme for today is: The Sign God has set calls all people. Those who reject it, to Judgment. Those who hear it to Glory.

Isaiah writes in 66:15-17, *"For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. ¹⁶ For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many. ¹⁷ "Those who sanctify and purify themselves to go into the gardens, following one in the midst, eating pig's flesh and the abomination and mice, shall come to an end together, declares the LORD."*

This is the warning God gives: To anyone who follows after the lusts of his own heart and puts his trust in his own abilities will be consumed by the fiery wrath and vengeance of the LORD. Who fits that description? Who follows after the lusts of their own heart, and only cares about themselves? Is it the Hollywood elite, or politicians in Washington, or maybe that neighbor down the street who is raunchy and rambunctious and couldn't care less about his lifestyle or going to church?

Sure, there are plenty of people in this world that fall into that category. They do not care about the things they say or the things they do. They couldn't care less if they lie, or cheat, or commit gross acts against God's law such as fornication, adultery, murder of unborn babies, and the like. In fact, these sins that were once widely condemned, are now being celebrated in our society. How is this even possible? Are people truly that evil? Unfortunately, this is the harsh reality of sin. Sin has so thoroughly corrupted man that what we would consider horrible things, are viewed as "normal," and "okay." Isaiah writes in 5:20-21, *"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter! ²¹ Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!"*

Now, there is another group of people who fit under that description of Isaiah: Us. By nature, you and I are just as bad as the worst of criminals. Even Paul calls himself the chief of sinners. Just like every other person born you and I have a sinful nature that only desires to commit sin. Our sinful nature abhors what God desires and it wants to pursue its own desires and rebel against God's Law. These prophecies of warning are meant for us. Woe to us if we call evil good and good evil. Woe to us if we think we are wise in our own eyes. Woe to us if we become like the world.

If God were to judge us according to our nature alone, we would fall under that call to judgment. The Gospel message? The blessed message that Jesus died for all the sins of every person on earth? We would reject it, **by nature**.

Thanks be to God that He doesn't leave us in the depravity of our sinful nature. *For I know their works and their thoughts. It shall be that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall*

come and see My glory. ¹⁹ *"I will set a sign among them; and those among them who escape I will send to the nations: to Tarshish and Pul and Lud, who draw the bow, and Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off who have not heard My fame nor seen My glory. And they shall declare My glory among the Gentiles.* The time already came for all nations to see the glory of God. This was accomplished when God Himself walked this Earth. Jesus is that sign that God set up both as a warning and a comfort. Jesus came to fulfill the Law for all mankind. In this way He came as a comfort by doing what we could not do. But He came as the **only** Savior and in that way He came as a warning. Anyone who did not put their trust in Him would inherit destruction.

Jesus came, He suffered the full wrath of God on the cross. He died the perfect death in the place of sinners. He rose from the dead and gave the proof that God accepted His payment for the sins of the world. So, where do you fit in? As Isaiah prophesies about the survivors, the ones who escaped going out to Tarshish, Pul, Lud, Tubal, and Javan, this was first fulfilled by the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon. Not all went back to Israel, but the spread out and took the Gospel message with them. This prophecy was fulfilled to a greater degree in the book of Acts. At the time of Isaiah, those nations were at the perimeter of Israel's empire to the north, to the south, to the east, and to the west, and so these survivors, God sent out to the outer regions of Israel's world with the promise of the coming Savior. So also, the Apostles went out, preaching that Gospel message that Christ had come to every corner of the known world. The Word of God did not remain dormant, but it continued to spread even until it reached the ears of current faithful believers like you and me.

You have seen the sign God has established, His Son, and the Holy Spirit has created the faith in your heart to hold onto it and believe it. Because the Holy Spirit has created faith in Christ in your heart, all of Christ's work is given to you. Jesus lived a perfect life for you. Jesus suffered the full power of God's wrath for your sins. Jesus died the perfect death so that death has no power over you. Jesus rose from the dead to guarantee that you also will rise from the dead.

Not only that, but you will receive the fulfillment at the end of Isaiah's prophecy: *"For as the new heavens and the new earth Which I will make shall remain before Me," says the LORD, 'So shall your descendants and your name remain.* ²³ *And it shall come to pass That from one New Moon to another, And from one Sabbath to another, All flesh shall come to worship before Me,' says the LORD"* Your name is inscribed in stone in the Book of Life. So, whenever our journey on this earth has ended, we will continue to, in perfect harmony, worship God throughout eternity.

Did you know there are some kinds of fish that are permanently blind? Scientists have discovered fish deep in the darkness of subterranean caves that have only a membrane where their eyes should be. They swim around in total darkness their entire lives. The Bible tells us that that's how people are by nature. Paul says that they're spiritually blind, *"...walking in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them.."* They're like blind fish, swimming around in a

darkened sea. They don't know that, of course; they're just going about their business. If they die that way, they perish eternally.

And you? You have the message that can save them. You have seen the glory of God in your own life. You have seen God's grace forgive the multitude of sins you have. You too are being sent out by God to the ends of the earth to reach those people who are spiritually blind, to give them the Gospel promise of sins forgiven through Jesus Christ.

This is the work God has given to all believers. Young and old male and female. This work is not without a reward. Your reward is sharing in the glory of God. Paul puts it this way in 2 Corinthians 3:18, *"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."*

God has set His sign for all to see. That sign is the life, death, and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. For those who reject Jesus, the sign is a call to Judgment and eternal death. But, to those who believe on His name, it is a call to everlasting glory in heaven. May the Lord preserve us in this faith. Amen.