"Discerning the Signs of History"

[26 June 1955]
[Montgomery, Ala.]

The following three versions of this sermon include a brief outline written on a notecard, a handwritten draft, and a typed manuscript. King cites numerous examples from world history demonstrating that "evil carries the seed of its own destruction.

"Discerning the Signs of History," Sermon notes

I am convinced that what human life, man-centered, has torn down, human life, God-centered can build up

1 He who oppresses another will ultimately suffer as a results of such oppression

3 Whenever the secular super-structure is cut alose from religious foundations disintegration sets in

2 A breakdown in the moral structure of a society leads to the ultimate break-down of the physical structure

AD CSKC Sermon file, folder 79, "Discerning the Signs of History"

"Discerning the Signs of History," Sermon outline

[And]
Luke 12:54, 55

"ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, how is it that ye know not how to interpret this time?" What is Jesus’ indictment? He was is saying that these people had an amazing awareness of the trends of astronomy and an appalling ignorance of the trends of history. They could read the face of the sky, but they could not read the face of the past. They had mastered the art of noticing the succession in the natural world. They were so ingenious that they could apply the law of cause and effect to the natural order. If a cloud appeared in the west they knew that a shower would soon emerge. If the south wind blew they knew that the tropical heat would soon appear. The sequence was certain. They knew that one was the harbinger of the other. [Three pages are missing]

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1 According to a 26 June 1955 Dexter program, King preached a sermon with this title. Reinhold Niebuhr’s book, Discerning the Signs of the Times, Sermons for Today and Tomorrow, may have inspired King’s title for this sermon (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1946). King wrote “discerning the signs of the time” above the passage Matthew 16:3 in his copy of the Bible.

2 "And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower, and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat and it cometh to pass.”

3 Cf Luke 12:56