

## What Jesus Taught about Signs of the Times

Matt. 24:3-14

The question the disciples asked, "When shall these things be?" is a question about the signs of the times. The disciples were positive and focused their interest on the apparent ways that God's glory would be demonstrated at the end. This was a prospect they expected to be right in the middle of and enjoy tremendously. Jesus saw things more darkly and anticipated the judgment and the subsequent tragedy to be experienced by all who were not ready. The disciples were confident and anxious for the end to arrive. Jesus was burdened for the lost. He could see the level of misery and suffering that was to come and to look forward was to feel these things.

There are a number of key statements that Jesus made in His talk with the disciples. His first word was, "Take heed that no one deceives you." The subject of the end is one that excites people. Believing that there is an end and that it will be brought about by means of God's intervention in this world leads to a vulnerability to deception whenever some declare that for this reason or another the end is now. It seems that the Y-2 scare affected the Christian community more than any other. When the world was skeptical, Christian radio was hot and all over the conspiracy. And the world was right and the Christians were wrong. Brethren, these things should not be. Our understanding of Scripture should be a source of wisdom that would protect us from deception rather than make us vulnerable to it. Jesus warned that the deception that would be an issue was the claims that Christ has come and that the end is near.

The second key word is "All these are the beginning of sorrow." We live in a fallen world. We who know the Scriptures understand this even as the world tries to deny that there are any consequences for evil. It is sin that is ultimately responsible for all suffering. It is sin that is the cause of the ultimate demise of the world. So the world is dying incrementally, not all at once. Wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes and all disasters whether natural or otherwise are all

part of the process of the destruction of our world. None of this should surprise us. It is to be expected. In themselves these events do not suggest that the end is particularly near. Since we live in a fallen world suffering and death are always with us. They are, in fact, a message from God meant to awaken us to our need of Himself. Humanity is self-destructive. Redeemed humanity reverses this direction fosters grace, mercy and compassion.

Next, Jesus said, "But he who endures to the end shall be saved." The evil in the world will turn against the good. Trouble and persecution will follow those who follow Christ. Jesus said that if the world hated Me then know that it will also hate you. Here Jesus said "Then many will be offended, will betray one another and will hate one another..." Persecution brings pressure on the church so that if anyone is not genuine in their faith, they will be exposed because they will not be willing to lose everything for Christ. Rather than allow this to cause dissension, the church must have compassion for those who have not yet embraced the Savior. When you are faithful to Christ, you have everything, even when you have nothing. Jesus is with you. He brings comfort and strength and grace to endure. When we are with Jesus we have no worries. This is beautifully expressed by the Lord, "But he who endures to the end will be saved."

Then Jesus said, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." At the time that Jesus spoke these words no one had any idea of how big the world was. This remained true for centuries. The modern missionary movement was sparked in part by this verse with the idea that by taking the gospel to the ends of the earth (as Jesus commanded) the coming of Christ would be hastened. The question remains, has the reach of the gospel in all the world as a witness to all the nations satisfied the condition set forth in this verse? Two things are at work in respect to this mission. 1) the world is getting smaller. Indigenous tribal groups are disappearing. Communication is expanding to the point that national walls are breaking down. 2) The reach of the Gospel continues to grow. The Bible is now available in more languages than ever in history. But many countries continue to be closed and the people have little or no gospel exposure. Whenever this threshold is met, Jesus said, "Then the end will come."

In respect to this condition being met, It would be difficult to be assured with certainty that it had been met at this point in time or in the foreseeable future and so Jesus added, "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place..." "Then let those who in Judea flee to the mountains..." So, trigger number one is the gospel preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations. Trigger number 2 is the abomination of desolation as prophesied by Daniel. This is a prophecy that was originally fulfilled by Antiochus Epiphanes in about 150 BC. It may have been repeated in some fashion when the temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. But Jesus clearly attaches the prophecy to His coming and to the great tribulation. The abomination of desolation was a desecration of the temple in Jerusalem. At present there is no temple in Jerusalem, an Islamic Mosque sits on the site of the old Jewish temple as built by Solomon and restored by Ezra and later by Herod the Great. Is it possible for the abomination of desolation to occur when there is no temple? If not, then the time for the tribulation and the events of the end is not yet.

Next Jesus said, "For as the lightning comes from the East and flashes to the West so also will the coming of the Son of man be..." This word is addressed to debunk any who would claim that they were the Christ and who were men who were born and grew up in a normal way as Jesus would have appeared to have done. Jesus is the Christ and He came in that way once but He will not do so again. Any such claim is false. When Jesus comes again He will come suddenly and instantly. His appearance will be like lightning. There is no warning system that can predict the when and where of Lightning. It is just there. Jesus will come in that way.

Finally, Jesus said that when He comes, "all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory and He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." Jesus comes in judgment. It is a judgment that results in mourning among all the tribes of the earth. It is a judgment that gathers the elect from the 4 winds, and they are gathered to be with the Lord. In anticipation of the end we

must ask, "Do you know the Lord? Have you given your life to Christ? Secondly, how is your walk with the Lord? Will you greet the Lord with confidence or with shame?"