

The Great Sayings in the Gospels
Message 134
The Second Coming of Christ, pt 1
Matthew 24:1-14

Introduction:

This chapter along with Romans chapter 9 and Ephesians chapter 1 is one of the most problematic and difficult chapters of modern Evangelical Christianity. What I am going to share with you today is the result of personal study and contemplation, not something that I learned from a book or in a classroom. In fact, when I came to the conclusions that I will share today I did not know if anyone, ever, had reached the same position. You can imagine my surprise and delight when I learned that I had stumbled upon a very old understanding of this passage that many have shared through church history, at least in the generalities of it.

If you have ever studied the subject of the Second Coming of Christ, read a book on the topic, or listened to any degree to modern preachers on it, you probably do not have the same opinion that I do. That is OK.

The historical position of Evangelical Christianity is that there ***will be*** a bodily return of the Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the dead, some to life and some to eternal death, a Great Judgment, and an eternity following of blessedness to the believers and suffering for the unbelievers. It is only in our day that a ***specific understanding of the details*** of that event has come to be the test of one's orthodoxy. To be clear, what one ***must believe*** to identify with the believers of the past and the Word of God is that Jesus will return, the dead will be raised to be judged at His Judgment Seat, and that the believers will inherit the New Earth and the unbelievers the Lake of Fire. If one believes that he/she is orthodox.

It is only in the last 200 years that a specific timetable has been developed and a theology worked out that essentially eliminates all who disagree from being considered "Bible believing Christians." This is very sad and, I believe, a great error.

All that I ask you to do is think with me through the study of this passage and consider the thoughts that I offer.

Jesus had just finished His horrific denunciation of the Pharisees and scribes concerning this hypocritical behavior toward and handling of the Word of God. As He concluded His remarks, He said, "your house is left unto you desolate."

It seems that He turned and walked out of the temple grounds with His disciples in tow and they undertook to strike up a conversation with Him about the 'buildings of the temple,' to which He gave the reply, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another." It may be that they became greatly concerned about the 'house left desolate' comment and desired some clarification. Did Jesus really mean that Jerusalem, which included the temple, was going to become a desolate place?

I. This brings us to the three questions they asked.

When the scriptures, and especially the Lord Jesus, begin to be specific, it is really important to pay really close attention to the words and the wording.

Matt 24:1-3

- 1 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple.
- 2 And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.
- 3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?

One of the first things that I noticed when I first studied this passage many years ago is that there are, indeed, three questions. When I noticed this, I wondered as to whether He actually answered the questions that were asked. I found out that He did.

The three questions, as I understand them, are these:

1. When shall *these things* be? That is, when will Jerusalem become desolate and the stones of the temple be thrown down so that no two remain attached to one another?
2. What shall be the *sign* of thy coming? What event will precede your return to the earth?
3. (What will be the sign) of the end of the world?

It is probable that the disciples presumed that these three things were closely attached to one another and that they might all happen within a short time frame. They probably also believed that all of this would happen in their lifetimes, and certainly one of them did.

As we shall see, Jesus carefully included signal words in the answers to each of the questions that connect answer and question.

One of the problems, I think, that people often have with this passage is that Jesus seemingly answered the questions in a different order than they were asked. It seems that He first answered the last question, then the first one, and, finally, the second.

II. What shall be the sign of the end of the world? First answer, Third question.

Jesus signified which question He was answering by the wording of the closing statement of the answer, “then shall the end come.” Only one of the questions concerned ‘the end,’ so I believe that we are bound to consider that this answers that question.

- 4 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.
- 5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.

First of all, Jesus warned His disciples, be aware of the fact that deceivers will come and will pull away many professing believers to themselves. It is worthy of note that some of the largest and most effective of cults and false belief systems have arisen around people who purported to have special and divine understanding of coming events and the end of the world.

Some of those are still with us and it seems that scarcely a decade goes past without some new heresy cropping up over the same old issue.

Jesus then mentioned a number of events that lay in the future from His day, events of such power and impressiveness that people would be tempted to take them as the ‘sign of the end of the world.’

- 6 And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.
- 7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.
- 8 All these are the beginning of sorrows.

Scarcely a century has gone by that has not known war, famine, plagues of disease, and earthquakes. These disturbing and catastrophic events have been seized upon by opportunists who endeavor to turn the panic of the general population into money and power for themselves.

Even today, every new event in the Middle East has its’ prophet with a new book describing how this event foreshadows the coming of Christ. If all of the money that has been spent on those books had been spent to advance the gospel to the nations, I wonder where we would be today.

“Be not troubled” are the words of Our Master. Do not be upset and especially do not turn aside to some false teacher because of events such as these thinking that they are ‘signs.’ These things are not the sign of the end of the world except in a very general and limited sense. They are “the beginning of sorrows” for sure, but they are not the harbingers of the Great Calamity that the End of the World will bring.

Christians from the time of Jesus were not to be expecting some grand time of ease and comfort. Instead, the disciples learned, trouble and afflictions, apostasy and betrayal, false prophets and deceptions lay in their future.

- 9 Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.
- 10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.
- 11 And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.
- 12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

If we were to summarize the history of the world and the church over the last two millennia, what different words would we use? It seems that Jesus 'nailed it,' not that we should expect any less.

It is interesting also to note that Jesus did not give His disciples any reason to hope that some secret coming of His would 'rapture' them out of struggle, difficulty, and persecution. In fact, He plainly said "they shall deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you." Now, this was certainly true of those men hearing His words that day but it has also proven to be true over and over again. And still it continues. Christians are being murdered for no other reason than that they are Christian. Churches are being burned and bombed and families are being drive from their homes under persecution. We know of a few souls who are in prison for their faith and I wonder how many there are about whom we know nothing.

"Ye shall be hated." In our own country Christians whose only sin is living by their conscience and the Word of God are being held up to ridicule and are being sued in court for the state to force them to violate what they humbly believe is their duty. If anyone pursuing national office lets it be known that he/she is a sincere and devoted Evangelical Christian, they are instantly subjected to ridicule, criticism, and vile commentary by the national media and the political 'elite' of our day. We like to think of ourselves as a 'Christian nation' but hatred for true Christianity runs deep and is rapidly expanding in our culture.

The reality of v.10 is just beginning but, I believe, will continue to grow unless we have a real Awakening. Churches are abandoning the Word of God as the standard for moral behavior and I do think that you will see them becoming the enemies of those churches who do not follow their lead over the next few years.

"And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many." We just had the "Blood Moon" thing and I assure you that new books are being printed as I speak to you this morning. No doubt someone is sitting with pen in hand waiting on the next big event in the Middle East to rush a book to the publishers with some profound prediction about what it means concerning the coming of Christ.

It does seem, however, that v.12 is more particularly appropriate to our day than to many previous ones. It is the love of saints themselves that Jesus is talking about, not the love of the unbelievers for one another, and it is the love of the saints for the Lord and for one another that is being specifically referenced.

Never until our day has it been possible for the abounding wickedness of the world system to come right into the homes and pockets of the people of God. And, as a group, we are affected by that and our love for God together with our love for the brethren has been influenced. I will not accuse you but I will confess that it is true for me. The wickedness that surrounds us affects me, pulls me, seeks to attach itself to me, and it is very difficult for me to keep my love for God and His people warm, fresh and alive. What about you?

As the culture around us deteriorates and collapses morally, you and I must make a concerted

effort to move in the opposite direction. For decades now the church has been following the world down the sewer only at a 'respectable distance' behind. Rather than charting a course in the opposite direction and warring against the encroaching decay, we (speaking generally) have been content to coast along and let the current take us along with it.

Little by little and bit by bit we have let down our standards of holiness. And as our children have embraced the wickedness of the culture, we have allowed that to soften our attitude toward sin. It is time to reverse course.

Brothers and sisters, the test of the reality of our faith is upon us. It is not coming, it is not in the future, it is not a 'someday' thing, it is now, here, with us and among us.

What will you do? How will you prepare? How will we remain warm in our love for Christ and one another while iniquity abounds around us? Do you not realize that failing the test will be for many spiritually fatal and that for all eternity?

13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

"The end," is the signal that this is the answer to the question, "what shall be the sign of the end of the world." And that 'sign' is the proclamation of the gospel "in all the world for a witness unto all nations."

So, we already have the 'sign' of the end of the world. Or, do we? *Something* has been preached throughout the whole world, but is it the true gospel of Jesus Christ? I am told by men who are in some of the nations considered already evangelized and they tell me that the gospel is almost nonexistent, that what is there is either superstition going in the name of Christianity or perversions of the gospel that make it really a non-gospel. There are huge cities in the civilized world that have virtually no witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ whatsoever.

We should labor to support those who preach truth wherever they are and remember that native sons are far more useful in many ways than foreign missionaries. They are already there and already surviving. They know and love their people and are many times able to live more simply and cheaply than Westerners who might be sent to them.

Although there are many who think that the project of evangelizing the world is almost finished, I am not so sure. I do believe that an Awakening in our day would do far more to spur the effort on than multiplied millions of dollars given to mission societies and boards.

The other thing that we must notice here in these closing words of the First Answer is that endurance will be an issue and it will be more and more so as we approach the end of the age. In the parable of the unjust judge in Luke 18, Jesus said this:

Luke 18:7-8

7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?

8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

The very same concept that Jesus used here in v.13, He repeated to John many years later when He appeared to him while he was on the prison island of Patmos.

Rev 2:11 “...He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”

Rev 3:5 “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”

Rev 3:12 “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”

In spite of the grace and faithfulness of God, few will ultimately endure the pressure of persecution on the one hand and abounding lawlessness on the other. Those who get all excited about the coming of Christ should really make sure that they are ready to meet Him, that they actually have an enduring faith.

You and I must really get about the business of making sure that our relationship with God is pure and strong, that our hearts truly burn with passionate love for Him and for His people, that we love Him so much that we put aside all compromise.

We must be walking purely before Him and seeking to improve on that day by day. Otherwise, we are sliding down into the pit that shall devour all of the unfaithful and unbelieving on the Last Day.

So, what will be the sign of the end of the world? When the gospel, the true gospel, is preached in all the world for a witness to all nations in a way that is satisfactory to God, then the end shall come.

Until then, there will be incredible tests to the faith and faithfulness of those who name the name of Christ. Only the ones who endure to the end shall be saved.