

## THE SIGN OF THE TIMES (BUT KEEP LOOKING TO JESUS)

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### Matthew 24:1-31

Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple, and His disciples came up to show Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down." Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. 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. "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), "then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. "Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out; or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together. "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then 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."

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This is just one of several areas in Scripture that talks about the very last of days. This is part of what is called the Olivet Discourse where Jesus and His disciples had come out of the temple and went up on the Mount of Olives, which was near the town of Jerusalem. The Olivet Discourse is also in **Mark 13** and **Luke 21**. What I was looking for in preparing this message was where Jesus said, "take heed". The point of this message, as well as should be any message is in taking heed to always be looking unto Jesus. Yes, we are, or should be, always looking for Jesus' return, but in the meantime we are to be always looking unto Jesus. **Hebrews 12:1-2** says, "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [that is, all those who preceded us in faith], let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." There is only one Jesus, who is the Son of God, who referred to Himself also as the Son of Man, who is the Christ, and is the Savior of the world, to all who will believe. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (**John 3:16-17**) Jesus who is of God, was sent by God to die on a cross for our sins. He rose from the dead on the third day, He appeared to His disciples and many others and then He rose up to heaven. One of those who are of the great cloud of witnesses that have preceded us was Stephen. He was being stoned for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, and just before He died, it says of him in **Acts 7:55-56**, "But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, and said, "Look! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" At the trial of Jesus before He was crucified, the High Priest said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." (**Matthew 26:63-64**) Yes, Jesus is presently at the right hand of the Father, yet Jesus is also interceding for us while Satan (whose name means "accuser") is accusing us, pointing out our sins and frailties before God, just as he did with Job (**Job 1:6-12**). But the accusations fall upon deaf ears in heaven, because Jesus' work on the cross paid our sin debt in full; therefore, God

always sees in His children the perfect righteousness of Jesus. When Jesus died on the cross, His righteousness (perfect holiness) was imputed to us, while our sin was imputed to Him at His death. This is the great exchange Paul talks about in **2 Corinthians 5:21**, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." That took away forever our sinful state before God, so God can accept us as blameless before Him.

There's more good news. Jesus said, "**If you love Me, keep My commandments**. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever— the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you." (**John 14:15-18**) Just as Peter said in **Acts 5:30-32**, "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel [and to all who will believe] and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.""

It is guaranteed that we will see "famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places" and "many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold." Paul spoke to Timothy, his spiritual son, about what we can expect. "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (**2 Timothy 3:1-5**) We are indeed in the last of days. There are many who claim to know Jesus. There are many who claim to love God. There are many who will join you in worship, raising their hands in praise to God yet their heart is far from the love of God. Paul told Timothy to keep away from such persons. Yet, how will the lost come to Christ if we shut ourselves up in our homes, or our tents, or we go off deep into the woods and live in solitude. God thought it important enough to call **us** out of the darkness and into His marvelous light. By God's great mercy more are to follow, to heed His call to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and to as Jesus said, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (**Mark 1:15**)

This message isn't meant to really be about end-times doctrine. You can get a room together full of Biblical scholars and they will all have varying beliefs as to how all of the end-times prophesy will

play out. Yet this is for certain. First, we can have full assurance of our salvation in Jesus Christ our Lord. The Apostle Paul said to Timothy in **2 Timothy 2:11-13**, "For if we **died with Him**, we shall also live with Him. If we **endure**, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself." Yes, there are times when our faith is on the ropes, so to speak, times where we wonder, "where are you God?" Yet, if we died with Christ, meaning we truly are born again, walking according to the Spirit of Christ that He gives us and not living according to the desires of the sinful flesh, "if we endure we will also reign with Him." Just as Jesus said, "But he who endures to the end shall be saved."

Yet, sadly, lawlessness will increase, the love of many will grow cold. Jesus explained what is behind the actions of those who rebel against God and turn against God's people. Just after Jesus said what is in John 3:16-17, He said, "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." (**John 3:18-21**) Yes, the message of salvation and eternal life appeals to many, if not all people. Yet Jesus also calls us to repentance, to consider ourselves dead to sin, to no longer follow the lusts of the flesh. God is love but He is also Righteousness and Light. We can't have just His love without His other attributes. God is ultimately calling us and preparing us to be one in Him in His eternal kingdom. Some people will forever refuse the Righteousness of God. God's perfect plan for us is spoken of by Paul in **Romans 12:1-2**, "I beseech [I beg you] you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." God is preparing His children to be made into the image of Jesus Christ, His Son. You can't just accept Jesus for dying on the cross for your sins and reject His plan for changing your being, your character into Christ-likeness. That is **God's plan** for our lives.

Some will choose darkness rather than light. But meanwhile we are to be living in His light, letting His light shine through us, and to be always praying for, not only our brothers and sisters in Christ, but also praying for those who haven't received Jesus yet, who aren't living IN Christ. And then also, we keep looking to Jesus, to help us in our times of need, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can be

led into all truth, we can find His comfort, we can & will overcome. This is God's plan, from beginning to end. Therefore the one we should keep our focus on is God and in His Word. The more we keep our focus on the world and those of the world, we can become paralyzed with grief and despair. And let's remember brothers and sister in Christ, what Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (**John 16:33**) Jesus has already overcome the world and in Him, we WILL overcome too. The days may sometimes seem long and the end may not be in our sights but rest assured, WE WILL OVERCOME in Christ Jesus our Savior and Lord!

Whether Jesus is coming tonight or whether He will tarry for another generation we must, as was our message last Sunday, be about our Father's business. That is why we're still here, to continue to share the love and the gospel of Jesus Christ. It isn't always pleasant and enjoyable when we are presently suffering but we have Jesus. No one can meet you at where you're at, in suffering or in pain, like Jesus can. "Cast all your care[s] upon Him, for He cares for you." (**1 Peter 5:7**) There's only one person who died for your sins, and took all of your sins upon Himself. Jesus. "If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." (**1 Corinthians 12:26**) Jesus too is a member of the body of Christ. While we as Christians do try and love one another and to bear one another's burdens, we unfortunately cannot meet one another's needs as perfectly as Jesus can. Yes God does tell us to bear one another's burdens (**Galatians 6:2**), we then must make every effort to do just that but no one can bear our burdens as Jesus can. "Cast all your care[s] upon Him, for He cares for you."

**Romans 8:35-39**, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

We aren't asked to overcome this world on our own. Jesus saves us, and is getting us ready for that great day of His return. And one way or another, we will soon be with Jesus, whether He comes on a cloud to get us or whether we meet Him at the end of our natural days here on earth, "our salvation is nearer than when we first believed!" (**Romans 13:11**)