

The signs of the times

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Date: 10 September 2023

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[0 : 00] Good morning. The Lord has blessed us today to gather as His church, to fellowship, to be encouraged, to be challenged, and to go forth serving.

And so welcome here. As we've had the first day of Sunday school, it marks again. The fall is here, and God is faithful.

Time keeps going, and we cannot stall it. I was touched by the songs this morning, and I want to draw our attention to the second song that we sung, song 407, Near the Cross.

And if you want, pull out your book and just glance at it. Just thought I'd read some bits and pieces of it.

The title is Near the Cross, and it's written in the first person. And so we could put our name in there. And Jesus, keep me, put your name in there, near the cross.

[1 : 28] There, a precious fountain. And free to all, a healing glory's mountain. And in the cross, in the cross, my glory ever, till my raptured soul shall find rest beyond the river.

And so the whole song speaks of a personal walk with God. Till the day God takes me home, till my raptured soul shall find rest.

And so it's, in a sense, it's a prayer, or a meditation, that the author has used from his own heart. But as we sing it, in the future, maybe think of it as, is that me?

Does this describe me? As we look at the words of that song. So, just thought I'd bring that out. Very, very beautiful, the way the author of that hymn did that.

So, I think all of the hymns have a special meaning, and in the way that they've been composed. And this one is like a prayer.

[2 : 46] So, just thought I'd draw our attention to that. Thank you, Charlie, for reading the passage for us in Matthew 24.

I've titled the message, The Signs of the Times. And we all like to see signs.

Do we not? It's something visible, something tangible. But, Jesus says, signs are not always resulting from faith.

In fact, often they're the opposite. And when the Jews asked for more signs, whether he was the Messiah, he didn't give them any. He said, you need to believe by faith.

But here in Matthew 24, the disciples ask for signs, when will we know that the end is here? And that's a question that probably all of us have too.

[4 : 04] And if I ask this morning, are we close to the end? What are your thoughts? much closer than we think?

Okay. What do we base that on? I see lots of nods that we're thinking on these things. What do we base that on? How do we know?

How do we know? What do we know? Okay.

So, Christ's explanations. And we had an answer back there. The signs. Yeah. That's the same. Yeah. And so, we cannot go on what I think or perceive, but rather, what are we to look for?

What are we to look for? And so, Jesus does give us some signs to look for. And we want to look at them this morning.

[5 : 12] And yes, I agree. I too think we are coming closer rapidly. The signs, the indicators that Christ gave are there.

And so, this morning, we want to look at that. Now, I want to make a statement here. As we read Matthew 24, in its context, it is first and foremost written to the Jews.

They ask him, what will be the signs of your coming? How will we know? And he has written it in the context of the Jewish nation. And throughout Matthew 24, we find it pertains to the Jews.

But having said that, there are indications indications for the church to glean and to be ready. And so, we want to take it with that point of view.

And so, starting us off, as they're sitting on the Mount of Olives, and the disciples come to him, it says privately, the 12 of them, and they're asking him what, or tell us, when shall these things be?

[6 : 45] What will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age? The sign of your coming and the end of the age.

Meaning, the end of time here on earth. When Jesus will come back. So, in essence, they're saying, how will we know when we're close to your return?

How do we know? And so, Jesus proceeds to answer. There's three pieces to this, or three questions in essence.

When will these things be? Jesus has just said that regarding the temple, that the day is coming where not one stone shall be left upon another.

And they ask, when will these things be? And then they follow with two more questions. What will be the sign of your coming? And what will, and the end of the age?

[7 : 56] And so, Jesus proceeds to answer the second and the third question here. we know that the first one was fulfilled in the year 70 A.D.

when Jerusalem was destroyed, conquered by the Romans, and not one stone was left upon another. That is well-documented history, and the Jews were scattered from Israel at that time.

And so, but he proceeds to give us information on the end now. And so, we have the church age in between. And so, in verse four, Jesus proceeds to answer and we have a number of points that he brings out that we are to look at in Matthew 24.

Some of these signs will ultimately be fulfilled during the tribulation period. They'll have its ultimate fulfillment, but there are already birth pangs today.

And that's what we're witnessing. And so, let's have a look at it. And Jesus answered and said to them, take heed that no one deceives you.

[9 : 24] Is that a sign? It's a warning that there will be deception. And when the end comes, when we're close, there will be the utmost in deception.

He explains, for many will come in my name saying, I am the Christ and will deceive many. And already we have seen an increase of that activity where prophets stand up and I am the Christ.

In the last century, in the last 50, 60 years, there's been multiple individuals that have stood up and claimed to be the Christ. In fact, within the Jews, they've had a rabbi in the last few years here, whom they're promoting as the Messiah.

There is an increase of this. But ultimately, the fulfillment of this is going to be the Antichrist presenting himself as the Savior of mankind's problems.

And he will come on the scene to make world peace in the midst of turmoil and will present himself as the Savior to our problems.

[10 : 59] And let's turn to 2 Thessalonians 2, verse 9. We remember that in Daniel, he said that he will make peace, a peace contract, a covenant, and he will break that at the midpoint.

here, 2 Thessalonians 2, verse 9. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteousness, deception among those who perish because they did not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved.

And so Satan will come on as Mr. Miracle, as the answer to your problems.

And if we think of this state, the lawless one is being revealed, the world will be in chaos. Already, we seem to be well on the way to chaos, but people will turn to him with his power, his signs, and lying wonders.

Could this be the Christ? Could this be the Christ? Along with this, I just want to present the concept, and many of you have heard this before, that Satan always tries to duplicate what God does.

[12 : 59] is the God. He will try, as he establishes his government, the Trinity, the triune God, as Father, Son, and Spirit.

As Satan being the Father, the Antichrist as the Son, and the false prophet or the false beast as the Holy Spirit. As we'll read when we get to Revelation 13, it's explained in more detail there.

And so here, the Antichrist as the Messiah, as the Son, it's deception to the utmost. And sadly, many, many will fall for it.

So as Jesus answers the Jews, and he says, when they ask, what will be the sign of your coming? watch out that you're not deceived.

It's the first thing off of his lips. Be careful. Be careful. You know, an interesting concept with this, if the Antichrist comes on as the world's savior, what will his followers be called?

[14 : 23] will they be called the true church, the Christians, and that anybody that does turn to the real Christ will be outlawed as a heretic?

it's an interesting thought that we will have a new level of deception as the Antichrist comes out that way.

So that is the first thing Jesus is concerned about. Be careful that you're not deceived. Be careful. Going back to Matthew 24.

Matthew 24. Okay, and the second point, and you will hear of wars and rumors of wars.

See that you are not troubled for all things, or all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. wars and rumors of wars.

[15 : 48] Wars have always been to some degree, but as of late, while we have the biggest war now is Russia and against the West, Ukraine backed by Europe and America.

And so we have a major world conflict happening the last, it's going on, it's over a year and a half now that that's been happening.

And if we think it is only Ukraine and Russia, we need to open our eyes. this is a world conflict.

And Ukraine has been fed and supported by the wealth of the world. Otherwise, that war would have ended a long time ago.

This is a war happening, but continually there are rumors of wars. On the increase, Israel being in the middle of it, and there are always threats of war against them.

- [17 : 05] Within the Asian nations, there is continual threat of war. It's looming. And if you're watching the news at all, it's making the headlines continually.
- The threat of nuclear war is looming. And Jesus says there will be wars and rumors of wars.
- Or you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled. Does that trouble us?
- Are we tempted to be troubled by what's going on in the world? The unrest. And he says, see that you're not troubled. For all these things must come to pass, but the end.
- And I sometimes think, you know, Lord, how long can this possibly go on? But he says the end is not yet when you see these things.
- [18 : 14] things. And it appears that we're here as we read these things. We're in the beginning of sorrows or birth pangs as the end starts to unveil, unravel.
- Okay, and then going on to verse 7.
- For nations will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. So we're seeing continuing of conflict, but then the three words here are famines, pestilences, and earthquakes.
- And we definitely see an increase of these things as well. And it has been for some time.
- We've had in the midst of plenty for us in the West, we've had major famines in the world, especially in countries or in continents like Africa, countries there.
- [19 : 37] There's been major hunger. And even the last 20, 30 years in our lifetime, but it's increasing.
- And earthquakes are continually on the rise. And yesterday, an earthquake in Morocco, in African country, and the last I heard, the death toll was 1,100 casualties there.
- Earlier this year in Turkey, what was the rate there? It was tens of thousands. I forget the exact number, but closer to 50,000 people that perished.
- So we have an increase of earthquakes. If you're tuned in to world news, there's not a day that goes by where there's not earthquakes.
- Yesterday, there was one in California as well, Northern California, just a 5.01. They're expecting a big one there that's been predicted. But there's an increase of these things as the world groans and is making itself ready for the end.
- [20 : 57] And pestilences as well happening. We may look at COVID as a pestilence that came upon society.
- This summer, the wildfire situation in the world surpassed anything that history has ever revealed.
- In so many countries in the world, problematic wildfires are out of control. And whatever the reason is, is this a pestilence?
- Floods. In the last two months, there has been floods in many of the dry countries. Torrential rains are these signs of the times.
- Because it's unprecedented. We've had them here and there infrequently, but now all of a sudden, they're ramping up.
- [22 : 06] And it's becoming enormous. And we're seeing God allowing these things to happen. I think all these things are part of the word pestilence.
- That is, God allows these things to come upon us. Now, in Mark, it says there will be earthquakes in various places.

There will be famines and troubles. He doesn't use the word pestilence, but troubles. These are the beginning of sorrows. And in Luke, the account says there will be a great earthquake, or there will be great earthquakes in various places, famines and pestilences, and there will be fearful sights and great signs from heaven.

So Luke goes even further, and some of this is yet to come, as fearful sights and great signs from heaven, as the world will experience more and more of that.

So these are signs we can be confident of. Verse 8, all these are the beginning of sorrows.

[23 : 31] Now, I don't know how many of you follow the political structure of the world to a degree. it is actually quite interesting, if you do, but the world is aligning itself in parties that is lining up with scripture.

As we're seeing a new world power developing, emerging, with China being at the forefront of it, along with Russia as an ally, and so on, and they're working against the existing.

And we're seeing that shift before our eyes as America is losing its strength. And so all of this is playing out as God predicted it would.

And I want to again mention there is a war coming as Ezekiel mentions in chapter 38 and 39 and it names the countries of Russia and Iran and Turkey and Sudan and Libya as a coalition against Israel.

And we're seeing that coming together as these countries are starting to work together. These are all signs of the end.

[24 : 59] and yet as Christians you know the news is negative. We don't like to dwell on it and I encourage you not to dwell on too much.

But it's healthy for us to know what's going on. To tune in to reliable sources. And that as well is hard to find a reliable source.

But they are out there. I find it interesting that as we think of earthquakes pestilences and famines you know the first four horses the first four judgments in revelations are the white horse the red horse the black horse the pale horse the first four seal judgments in the tribulation period and the white horse representing peace being made on earth watch out that you're not deceived the red horse the second seal representing war war it fits in with what Jesus says here about wars and rumors of wars nation against nation the black horse representing famine hunger and and with war there's usually famine that follows and hunger and and that's also in

Jesus' list and and lastly the fourth one is the pale horse which represents death here on earth and and as a result of the wars of the pestilences the famines the earthquakes there is much death that will follow and so we see that in Matthew the signs given the ultimate fulfillment will likely be in the tribulation period and yet for the church today they're indicators we need to be alert and to be awake moving on to verse 9 in Matthew 24 then they will then they will deliver you up the tribulation and kill you and you will be nations for my name's sake and then many will offend will be offended will betray one another and will hate one another this also as

Jesus says will come at the end and both Mark and Luke mention that family will turn on family members in the end and will and will bring them reveal them up for persecution will tattle on them and so this very likely the ultimate fulfillment is in the tribulation period and may very well be even in the second half where the antichrist is reigning and to betray people that are not serving the antichrist the ultimate fulfillment but we see that even in the church age already but it will strengthen it will continue as the end comes verse 11 and 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 so lawlessness is already abounding it's surfacing more and more and we see it as also a sign of the times as there's so much happening in the last five and ten years where there's outright lawlessness anti-God movements by humanity across the globe and I think that the the the whole issue of transgender is a slap in God's face it's showing

[30 : 04] God we're we're pushing you out we know better and it is accepted globally it's everywhere and it's it's kind of the crown of lawlessness so far and it's it's a deliberate attack on God saying you do not exist we will not bow this is what's happening lawlessness and and Jesus is warning us we are seeing the beginning of sorrows that will increase all the more last message we talked about the the restraining force being removed so that lawlessness could surface all the way and discuss that likely was at the rapture the world will see a lawlessness that surpasses today by likely huge dimensions yet degrees of lawlessness and evil reigning on this planet and so but we are seeing the birth pangs of that the last sign here 14 and the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations and then the end will come it's the gospel of the kingdom notice the wording there of the kingdom and it is that

Jesus Christ will come to reign it's the coming kingdom the millennial kingdom it's the gospel of the kingdom will be preached to all the world repent Jesus is coming and the the church has been active in evangelism for 2000 years there's been world evangelism very aggressive in some areas and and yet we have come short of reaching all the nations all the peoples and during the tribulation period all the world will be reached with the gospel of the kingdom and I believe this ties in with the 144,000 Jews that are sealed as in

Revelation chapter 7 that are protected supernaturally will be evangelizing the world and nobody will be able to kill them to harm them for their time and there we will see the fulfillment of Jesus' words and all the world will be evangelized the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in every nation that does not take away from our mandate today to preach the gospel to tell the world and yet there is a deeper fulfillment coming and especially upon the Jewish nation so these are the beginning of the signs that Jesus gives which we are seeing the beginning of them and in verse 15 I'm just going to read it to get context therefore when the domination 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 and we're going to cover this more deeply down the road here but this is in a context spoken to the Jewish people when you see the abomination of desolation when you see the antichrist in the temple declaring himself to be God demanding to be worshipped flee to the mountains and it's a word to the Jews run it's going to happen in your country and the persecution that will follow will be severe like never before so we know this whole chapter in its context is written first and foremost for the Jews but we need to glean the signs from this as well and to see what is applicable to

I want to skip forward to the parable of the fig tree in verse 32 of Matthew 24. Matthew 24 verse 32 now learn this parable from the fig tree when its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves you know that summer is near so you also when you see all these things know that it is near at the doors assuredly I say to you this generation will by no means pass away to all these things take place she's giving a parable of the fig tree the count of Luke says the fig tree and all trees as they set forth bud up for us here in spring when winter releases its grip the trees bud let out and all of a sudden we expect there will be foliage there will be leaves that will come and fruit that will follow later on and he's using this parable this story to illustrate so that when you see these things in their fulfillment know that the tree has budded and you know it's there it's in the foreseeable future and and he says this generation that sees these signs in its fulfillment will by no means pass away and so lots of discrepancy about what this all means to whom is this applied there's there's many that believe the fig tree is Israel and the budding happened when Israel became a nation in 1948 and that this generation will not pass away till

[37 : 21] Jesus comes well how many years ago is 1948 Israel celebrated anniversary this spring 75 their 75th anniversary 75 years ago I personally do not hold with that that this is a direct reference to Israel becoming a nation and that the generation that lived at that time will not pass away for many of them have already passed away and generations are generally 30 years or less 75 year old people are often already grandparents and great grandparents regardless of how you see this what he does promise the generation that sees the fulfillment of these signs will live to see the return of Christ and he's speaking directly to the Jews when you see this happen you will experience the return of Christ and so that is the parable of the fig tree because Luke says all trees

I believe it's not directly a reference to Israel as the generation but it's the generation that lives at that time is it our generation we cannot say that with certainty we cannot because Jesus says these are the beginning of sorrows but the end is not yet and yet it is coming okay I want us to turn in my last point and as we conclude let's turn to 1st Thessalonians chapter 5 and we're going to glean a few thoughts here as we wrap this up what does this mean for us the church more directly as Matthew is for the Jews more directly 1st Thessalonians 5 verse 1 through 11 but concerning the times and the seasons

I was talking to the church you have no need that I should write to you the times and the seasons you know he's not talking about the day or the hour the preciseness of the coming of Christ but the times and the seasons the general are we in that time frame are we coming into that area he says regarding the times and the seasons I have no need that I should write to you for you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night for when they say peace and safety then sudden destruction comes upon them as labor upon pains upon a pregnant woman and they shall not escape but you brethren are not in darkness so that this day should overtake you as a thief so will the day of the

Lord come as a thief in the night for the believers no no he says verse he's speaking to the believers you you know you yourselves know that the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night and then he references the unbelievers for when they notice the shift in pronouns now they the world when they say peace and safety that's what the antichrist will come to bring peace and safety then sudden destruction comes upon them as labor pains upon a pregnant woman and they shall not escape the follow through of the day of the Lord the tribulation period the pains that will follow and they will not escape this is for the world but you brethren are not in darkness you're not of the world so so that this day should overtake you as a thief so that for

Christians the day of Christ the rapture will not be as a thief we are to expect it and to be ready for it and to be watching and waiting the imminent return of Christ you are all sons of light and sons of the day we are not of the night or of darkness so the truth is we are to be awake we are to see the signs and expect the return of Christ verse excuse me verse six therefore because of this we are sons of light let us not sleep as others do but let us watch and be sober let those who sleep sleep at night and those who get drunk are drunk at night but let us who are of the day be sober putting on the breast plate of faith and love and as a helmet the hope of salvation so we are to be sober to be alert the word sober in verse eight let us who are of the day be sober it means to be calm and collected not to panic or to have anxiety so as we wait for the day of the

[43 : 55] Lord for him coming for the church we are to be sober calm and collected in our thoughts not not to show worry and anxiety regarding what are what's happening in the world around us and further he says we are to put on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet the hope of salvation so let's let's look at that just briefly putting on the breastplate of faith and love just looking at the last years with with the the COVID thing that went around the whole globe we had an option to put on the breast plate of faith and love or fear or fear just an example of a pestilence in countries today that are wracked by floods and wildfires that may be the pestilence we are to put on the breastplate of faith we are to put our faith in

God he is in control regardless of how troublesome things get now this is real life and this is the instructions for the church as they wait for the return of Christ as we feel it's close and the world is becoming more and more turbulent and each side are topped dollar and dollar and we are to expect it and so to put on the breastplate of faith and love you know those couple years of COVID restrictions and confusion we experience love did we show love or did it cause divisions which is the opposite put to the test these things will test us and he's calling our attention to keep our eyes on our

Lord faith put on the breast plate of faith and practice love through these strong these turbulent times when we get tried and as a helmet the hope of salvation and as the helmet protects my head and my brain in my thoughts the hope of salvation faith the assurance what God has for me at the end will see me through this and we're to put on the helmet of salvation to hold on to that and then he gives two verses for God did not appoint us to wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us that whether we wake or sleep we should live together with him and so referring to the return of

Christ in the rapture and that God did not appoint us but as we wait for that day that we are sober that we stay calm and collected aware of what God says will come that when it comes we're not shocked and taken by surprise you know what it takes it takes us letting go of our own agendas here on earth I'm going to repeat that remaining calm and collected and focused on Christ when things come our way with my goals and objectives here in this life I will have to let go of my goals and triumph in my faith and maybe

COVID was a little example of that where we were stretched I can't do this anymore there's boundaries here I have to give up this some people quit their work more of these things may come to stretch us but we will realize that my earthly goals will need to give way and I will be focused on heaven alone as the ultimate calm and collected Jesus is preparing the church that we are to this but then he the words of comfort for we are not appointed to wrath but for salvation he is coming and we believe he is coming soon and so we hold on to that the helmet of salvation may the

[50 : 00] Lord bless us let's pray father such encouragement we have as we as we live in these times and Lord as we see much turbulence evil things we don't understand and father we think it has to be close but in your time Lord but we do know the times and the seasons and we are in them so Lord help us give us strength to focus on you to be calm and collected to be sober minded and to wait for your imminent return and Lord this is for your glory and for our joy in Jesus name amen