**Life Before the Second Coming, Pt 2**

Matthew 24:1-28

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Kingdom Come! (Gospel of Matthew Series)

Prepared by: Matthew S. Black

Sunday, September 25, 2016, 10:30am at Living Hope Church of Roselle, Illinois

**livinghopechurch.net**

“This present world which is passing-away[[1]](#footnote-1) is like an old man's face, full of wrinkles, and foul with weeping: we are waiting when Jesus shall be revealed from heaven, and shall come and wipe the old man's face.”

~ **Samuel Rutherford**

Announcements

1. I want to personally invite you to a FREE conference at our church!
* Please consider attending our Leadership Conference hosted at our church **next Friday** September 30 (6:30pm – 9:00pm) and Saturday October 1 (9:00am – 11:30am).
* This conference is being put on by the generosity of several other churches in the Chicago area and will take place at Living Hope coming next week.

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pen your Bible to **Matthew 24**.We are getting back to our series in the book of Matthew entitled “Kingdom Come.” This morning we are looking at a message entitled: “Life Before the Second Coming, Part 2”

**Proposition**: We need to be on the alert and be ready for Jesus to come at any time.

**Aizkorri** **Hiking Trail**

When Jill and I lived in the Basque Region of Spain on the border of France, we realized that one of the great pastimes there is Mountain Trail hiking. The favorite mountain to hike there is the Aizkorri mountain. Some of you were there in 2008, but not all of you went on the hiking trail. But if we were to hit the Aizkorri trail together, I would have to give you some warnings about how the trail is, so that you wouldn’t get discouraged or distracted or give up. Let me say that the Aizkorri trail is special.

* First of all there is an ancient **Roman road** from Bible times. But the trail itself is quite interesting.
* At first it is a very fun trail with **natural springs** that you can drink from. But then it becomes interesting.
* Sometimes the trail is very narrow and **treacherous**. Sometimes it is wide.
* There are even sometimes **wild horses** along the way (actually they are quite domesticated since so many people hike the trail.)
* There are times when the **trail continues through the forest**, and you have to **walk straight up** through the trees, *hanging on for dear life*.
* Finally, you get to the end of the trail where there is the top of the mountain. The last 300 feet are the hardest. There are no trees and no trail, just the grassy top of the mountain, and it’s so steep, it’s like **walking up a wall**.
* As it begins to **flatten out** on top, there are more wild (domesticated) horses.

**Don’t Get Discouraged**

* But in order to get there, you **must not be discouraged** by the journey along the way. Several people who started out on the trail in our group had to turn around because while they liked the natural springs, some of the treacherous parts of the trail were too discouraging and they had to turn around and go back down the mountain.
* And while the Roman road and the wild horses are fascinating, you don’t want to get **sidetracked** or **distracted** on the trail or you’ll never make it up.
* You must keep your eye on the goal so that you will make it to the top.

**Ten (10) Characteristics of Life Before Jesus Comes**

Like the **Aizkorri trail**, Jesus tells us ahead of time about the blessings and the dangers of life in the new covenant time, so that we will not get discouraged or distracted!

In Matthew 24, Jesus gives a **different kind of trail**. He tells his disciples what to expect in life before His Second coming. The first section of Matthew 24 (vs 1-28) are all about being ready for life before Jesus comes.

We need to be aware of all the circumstances and environments you are going to encounter so you can **be ready**!!

Sometimes I wished along the Aizkorri trail that a helicopter would drop me a rope and carry me to the top of the mountain. That’s going to happen one day on our trail to see Jesus. He’s going to come back, and immediately we will be to our destination.

Jesus explains that there are **10 tests** of being ready for Christ’s return. It’s a period time that is described in verse 29 as “the tribulation of those days” or that time period, that age. This age of grace, this age of the New Covenant in Christ is very tumultuous. Jesus is giving training for all of us here today. Listen closely so that we can live godly!

**Structure of the Passage**

So before we read, I want you to see the structure of the passage. Three words: living, appearing, and waiting for the Second Coming.

* **LIVING**. In verses 4-28, Jesus lists 10 **CHARACTERISTICS** of life before He comes again.
* **APPEARING**. And then verses 29-31 describe Jesus’ Second coming, the glorious **APPEARING** of our Lord Jesus Christ.
* **WAITING**. Then in the rest of Mt 24:45-51 and all of Mt 25 we have 3 three parables and a prophecy of the final judgement that tell us **HOW TO WAIT** for the Second Coming.

**“These Days,” Last Days, New Covenant Days**

Also, there is a key “word marker in this passage that will help you understand. Jesus talks about “these days” and he’s talking about the entire New Covenant period. So when we read this passage lets be aware of that.

This is one of the most exciting passages of Scripture in Jesus’ teaching. I’m excited and ready to read it, aren’t you? Let’s read it now!

**Holy Scripture**

**Matthew 24:1-31**, “Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. **2**But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.”

**3**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?”

**4**And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. **5**For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the **Christ**,’ and **they will lead many astray**. **6**And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. **7**For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. **8**All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

**9**“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. **10**And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.**11**And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. **12**And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. **13**But the one who endures to the end will be saved. **14**And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

**15**“So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), **16**then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. **17**Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, **18**and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. **19**And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! **20**Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. **21**For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.

**22**And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. **23**Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. **24**For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. **25**See, I have told you beforehand. **26**So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. **27**For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. **28**Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

**29**“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **30**Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, 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. **31**And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

**The Buildings of the Temple**

The disciples were fascinated with the architecture of Herod’s Temple. They believed the Temple was indestructible. “Mark says they urged him to look at the “massive stones” and “magnificent buildings” (Mark 13:1). The temple was indeed spectacular. With polished limestone walls, sheathed (in places) in gold leaf that glistened in the sun, it was the architectural wonder of the region.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Your House is Left to You Desolate**

This isn’t site seeing. They were disturbed by the judgement Jesus had just uttered: the Temple is desolate. **Matthew 23:37-38**, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! **38**See, your house is left to you desolate.” What? Your house and your people (as far as the Old Testament way of doing things is left desolate. There is a new way! The new covenant way. They don’t understand, so they begin to give Jesus a tour of the Temple.

The idea they are getting across to Jesus is: “The Temple will never be left desolate.”

As we look at **Matthew 24**, Jesus is leaving the Temple in Jerusalem with Peter, Andrew, James, and John. As they leave the city, one of the disciples commented to Jesus as to how beautiful and magnificent the Jewish temple was. And it was, by all accounts, a magnificent structure.

**Tacitus**, a Roman historian, said that the temple was a place of immense wealth.

It must have been a truly ***awesome sight***. Now while the disciples were in awe over the magnificence of the temple, Jesus told them that it would eventually be overthrown and completely torn down.

\So Jesus makes it very clear in **Mt 24:2**, “But he answered them, “You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.” And within 40 years later, in AD 70, that’s exactly what happened. The Romans under General Titus, surrounded the city, overran it, and tore down the temple leaving it in a heap of rubble.

**A Drunken Soldier**

It is said that at the fall of Jerusalem, the last surviving Jews of the city fled to the temple, because it was the strongest and most secure building in the city. Roman soldiers surrounded it, and one drunken soldier started a fire that soon engulfed the whole building. Ornate gold detail work in the roof melted down in the cracks between the stone walls of the temple, and to retrieve the gold, the Roman commander ordered that the temple be dismantled stone by stone. The destruction was so complete that today they have true difficulty learning exactly where the foundation of the temple was.

THE BIRTH PAINS ILLUSTRATION

**A Time of Birth Pains: Marks of the New Covenant Age**

Jesus here in verses 4-28 is going to give them clarity that they did not have at this time. He’s going to tell them of a time of “birth pains” before His Second coming. In verses 4-7 Jesus describes what is going to occur in the time period before He comes again in glory. Verse 8 is a key verse in understanding what Jesus is saying. Jesus says in Mt 24:8, “All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.”

Jesus describes the birth pains before His Second Coming. Just as a woman has horrible labor pains before delivering the beautiful child, so Jesus says there are horrible labor pains that come before Him making the earth new again in His Second Coming. Jesus says there will be 10 labor pains, or 10 characteristics of the New Covenant age before he comes.

**The Entire World Groans!**

The whole earth groans in labor pains for the birth of the new creation in the Second coming! **Romans 8:18-19, 21-23**, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. **19**For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.”

Look at verse 21, “…the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. **22**For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. **23**And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

**Outline**

So in verses 4-28, Jesus gives us 10 labor pains that characterize this New Covenant Era. In our lives before the Second coming, we need to be ready for…

1. false teachers and false christs (vs. 4-5, 11, 23-26),
2. international rivalries (“kingdom against kingdom”), “wars and rumors of wars” (vs. 6-8),
3. persecution of the church (vs. 9),
4. a falling away of some who profess Christ (vs. 10-11),
5. a time when lawlessness and wickedness increases in society (vs. 12),
6. a time when “the love of many will grow cold” (vs. 12), - Christ is heaven now!
7. Christians to endure (vs. 13).
8. the worldwide preaching of the Gospel (vs. 14),
9. the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (vs. 15-21), and
10. a time of danger and peril (vs. 22)

Jesus says in Mt 24:8, “All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.” In other words, these are the characteristics that describe the new covenant age. This era will be marked be these things.

**Don’t Be Alarmed: Be READY!**

He says in **Mt 24:5**, “**See that you are not alarmed**, for this must take place, but the end is not yet.” These are things that are characteristic of the entire new covenant age. It’s going to be a difficult time, so don’t be surprised! Don’t be alarmed! These things must take place. They don’t signify the end is near, for Jesus could come at any moment. His return is imminent – He could come at any moment. Paul and the first Christians expected Him to come in their generation. Every generation experiences all these things.

All these things “must take place, but the end is not yet” (vs. 5).

1. Be ready for **man-centered teachers** and false christs, (vs. 4-5, 11, 23-26).

Now this is the only mark that is mentioned three times. It saturates the entire passage. Theologians call this inclusio.

**Mt 24:4-5**, “And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. **5**For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the **Christ**,’ and **they will lead many astray**.”

**Mt 24:11**, “And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray

**Mt 24:23-26**, “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. **24**For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. **25**See, I have told you beforehand. **26**So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it.”

**Man-Centered Ministries**

The first sign of the New Covenant age is man-centered ministries. False teachers will come in the Christ’s name deceiving many. Some will even claim to be the Christ. This has been true through the ages. Sadly, it’s true in recent days. As we come to the end of the age, we must be careful that we don’t get caught up in men and movements, but we keep our focus on walking with Christ.

**False Christs**

There are many worldviews that promote false christs both in and outside of organized Christianity.

* **Hinduism** has7000 christs and 100 millions of false gods. Certainly this characterizes what Jesus said would occur. **One (1) billion people** are now being deceived by false christs.
* Some in **mainstream orthodox Islam** are already predicting their version of Jesus’ return as early as 2022, starting an Islamic prophetic clock set to run over the next 6 years, which will end in Armageddon. This christ is not divine and is not the Jesus of the Bible, but is from the imagination of those who wrote the Koran. At this moment **1.6 billion Muslims are being deceived** not only by a false prophet but by a false christ.
* The Protestant **Reformers** often named the **Roman pope** as an antichrist. He sits in the Temple (God’s church) proclaiming himself to the vicar of Christ. He is worshipped and venerated. There are **1.1 billion Catholics** in the world – many of whom are deceived by the Roman pope.
* The new religion of the age, and the religion of antichrist is **secular humanism**. The world is now becoming one. Secular humanism is the belief that humanity is capable of morality and self-fulfillment without belief in God. Secular humanism puts self at the center. This is mainly what is taught in our public schools beginning at the turn of the 20th century with John Dewey and Margaret Sanger.

John Dewey declared that if he could **reach the children**, he could change the world in one generation. He was absolutely right. He came about in the 1930s and said all he needed was a generation, and he could bring the whole society to believe in his philosophy of secular humanism. He said that if he could have the textbooks of the public schools, he could own American culture. He also helped bring in what is now known as Planned Parenthood, and his philosophy is the one that made abortion legal in 1973.

So we see there are plenty of false christs and false teachers outside the flock. But what about inside the flock? Are there false teachers in the church?

**Wolves will Enter in to Destroy the Flock**

Not only will false teachers and false christs be outside the flock, but inside it as well. In **Acts 20** Paul speaks to the Ephesian Elders and warns them: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

**Wolves in Sheep’s Clothing**

“The pages of history are filled with the tragic stories of false messiahs, false prophets, and their enthusiastic but deluded disciples.”[[3]](#footnote-3) We must always be on guard. We must not ultimately be led by men, but by Christ. There is a delicate balance.

Jesus tells us in **Matthew 7:21-23**, that there will be many false teachers who do miracles and proclaim to know Christ as Lord, but Jesus does not know them.

He says in **Mt 7:15**, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are **ravenous wolves**.”

**Known the By Their Fruits**

But these wolves will be exposed at the Last Judgement when Christ comes. He says in **Mt 7:19-20**, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20**Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”

They are lawless, man-centered deceivers and entertainers whose focus is not ***HOLINESS*** but rather ***HUMAN COMFORT*** and their own exaltation.

We read in **Mt 7:22-23**, “On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ 23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”

**Paul’s Warnings of False Teachers**

As we look toward the end, we must be so careful that we depend on the power of the Holy Spirit, and not the power of some “cult of personality. There is an addiction among the masses to the “cult of personality”.

* Paul said in **2 Tim. 4:3**, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.”
* **2 Cor. 11:14-15,** “And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. **15**So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.”

**What about the Antichrist?**

**1 John 2:18**, “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.”

2 Thess 2 says that there will be a falling away ("rebellion") and antichrist revealed before Christ comes.

**2 Thess 2:1-4**, “Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.”

We can most certainly see this “falling away” in history. A great many in the church fell away to the Roman catholic church and began to trust in a works salvation.

**Antichrists in History**

There have many antichrists through history, and there will be one at the end of time. Each generation has an false christs and antichrists.

As John said in **1 John 2:18**, “Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now **many antichrists** have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour.”

* **Antiochus Epiphanes** – In 168 BC Antiochus marched to Jerusalem, killed the high priest, and dedicated the Temple to Zeus, erecting an image of Zeus in his own likeness on the altar, and sacrificed a pig in the Temple. This is known to Jews as the 'great desecration' or 'abomination of desecration' (from Daniel 11:31 & 12:11).
* **Caligula** – In 40AD (ten years before 2 Thess. 2 was written) Caligula (who was insane) designated himself as a god (he also divinized his horse). He made it a capital offense to be a priest in the Temple, and he had plans to sacrifice to the gods and be worshipped as a god in the Temple at Jerusalem, but he died before he could carry it out.
* **Nero** – had “Lord” and “God” put on the coinage.
* **The Pope** – now the pope can speak “ex cathedra” infallibly. Beginning especially at the Reformers, the pope was seen to be an antichrist.
* **Hitler** – In 1933, Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany, and promised a thousand year Reich. Of course it lasted a mere 12 years ending with his suicide in 1945.
* Even today the Supreme **Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei** promises a false christ to come in 2022. He is directing that true Christians everywhere (whom he calls infidels) be beheaded.

**How Will We Know When Antichrist Has Come?**

The point is there are many antichrists, so much so that every generation believes that Christ can come. How will I know who the antichrist has come? **2 Thess 2:8** says that you'll know when Christ destroys him, “the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.”

1. Be ready for **international rivalries & disasters**, (vs. 6-8).

Jesus says this New Covenant time is a tie of great anguish because of the world’s disposition. There will be **continuous international rivalry**.

**Wars and Rivalries Typical of the New Covenant Times**

**Matthew 24:6-8**, “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. **7**For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. **8**All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.”

From the earliest of times there have been international rivalries.

Many times teachers will use this text to say Christ is now most certainly coming. But look how Jesus laces his warnings with the reality that this kind of thing is typical in the new covenant time period.

* **Verse 6,** “for this must take place, but the end is not yet.”
* **Verse 8**, “All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.”

These verses prove that these kinds of events will escalate as the coming of Christ draws near. In other words, these things are **not characteristic only of the time just before the end, but they mark the entire new covenant time period**.

These signs will increase as His coming draws near. Be ready.

**The Twentieth Century**

During the twentieth century, “end times” preaching and conferences were at a fever pitch. You had so many wars – **WWI, WWII, Korea and Vietnam**. People thought for sure that this was surely the end. But remember what Jesus said in **Mt 24:8**, “All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.”

**Rivalries and Disasters on an International Scale**

International rivalries and international disasters are going to be intense. Wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, and famines will precede Jesus’ return, but they are not signs of the end of the age. There will be many of these things before the end comes.

**Life Before Jesus Comes is Like a Painful Birth Experience**

The end of the world is similar to an **infant who emerges from a very painful birth experience**. Jesus compared wars, rumors of war, earthquakes, and famines to the beginning of these pains. These events, as predicted, would simply signify that the end was near. He called them the beginning of “labor pains.”

**Birth Pains / Contractions More and More Intense**

Now “birth-pains” are significant in this context. For when a woman goes into labor she has sudden contractions a few minutes apart, and as time goes by those contractions become more and more frequent and intense. Like a snowball going down a hill, her pain progresses like a snowball that gets larger as it rolls down. So it is with labor pains. They start slow and build up along the way. By the time the baby is in the birth canal the pain is at a climax. Then there’s a child!

So it is with the end-times. False religion, wars and rumors of wars, nations rising up against other nations, and earthquakes/famines in various places signify that the labor pains have begun in relation to the end-times events. Just as labor pains come upon a woman suddenly (though expectedly) the end-times events will come about suddenly.

**Don’t Be Discouraged or Distracted**

In the midst of any great war or any great famine or any great earthquake, it is natural to believe that the world is coming to an end. But Jesus said there is a far more specific sign that would indicate His return, and He describes this later.

Don’t be discouraged or distracted when you see this. Be ready and faithful! **Mt 24:8**, “All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.”

1. Be ready for **persecution of the church**, (vs. 9).

**Mt 23:9**, “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be **hated by all nations** for my name's sake.” That includes this nation. We could have never dreamed it, but here in America, and anti-Christian tide has risen. We knew it was coming. Jesus predicted it. We will be hated by all nations, because the world hates Christ. Jesus says (vs. 9): “you will be **hated by all nations** for my name's sake.”

It’s for Jesus’ Name we are hated. **John 3:19**, “men love the darkness rather than the light because their deeds are evil.”

* **2Ti 3:12**, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

**First Wave of Persecution: Jewish**

The first wave of this begins in the first century before the destruction of the Jewish Temple, when it says Christians will be “beaten in synagogues.”

**The Second Wave of Persecution: Romans**

The first great wave of persecution was brought on later on in 64AD. In that year, Nero would blame the Christians for burning down Rome in the famous fire that destroyed most of the city. He destroyed Christians with a vengeance.

* ***Peter*** is crucified upside down to begin this persecution.
* ***Paul*** would die by beheading in 67AD.

Nero hated and mocked Christians. He gladly and brutally tortured and killed them. They were covered with the hides of wild animals, and torn to pieces by dogs and lions. They were often nailed to crosses. And when the day waned, they were commonly set ablaze on fire, serving as evening lights in Nero’s gardens.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Modern Persecution**

According to the World Evangelical Alliance, over **200 million Christians** in at least 60 countries are **denied fundamental human rights** solely because of their faith.

**More Persecution Today than Ever!**

Persecution is on the rise in China, Africa, India, and in the Arab lands.

Christian Freedom International has found that more than 200 million followers are facing persecution in 105 countries. One Christian dies a martyr every five minutes in these countries. The report has found **that more Christians have been martyred in the 20th and 21st centuries** than during the previous 19 combined.

This persecution began in the first century. But it has continued unrelentingly for the last 2000 years. This persecution will continue until the Lord comes, but it will increase before He comes.

**Religious Freedom Not Guaranteed in America**

We are not guaranteed shelter and safety as Christians in America. In fact we are quickly losing our freedoms to worship here in this country.

Christianity is not something we simply live for, but we must believe it no matter what our laws or freedoms are. Thank God that we live in a free land. We cannot take our freedom for granted.

There will likely very soon come a time in the USA when Christians will be openly persecuted. That day has arrived for many parts of the country. We must not be surprised when persecution increases. We must be determined to be faithful!

We read of the triumphant church in heaven in **Rev. 12:11**, “And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for **they loved not their lives even unto death**.”

**Be Faithful Under Persecution**

Be faithful when you are persecuted. It’s going to get worse. Don’t get discouraged. Don’t be a “doomsdayer” in your attitude. Rejoice in Jesus! Don’t be overwhelmed – we have Jesus! **Be faithful!**

Remember the words of Jesus:

* **Mt 5:11** “Blessed are you **when others revile you** and **persecute** you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.”
* **Mt 10:22**, “and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

**Christians Endure Under Persecution**

Christians **endure** under persecution. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit. We are faithful in the midst of difficulty and persecution. We read in Ezekiel that we have a new heart and God has put His Spirit within us and “cause [us] to walk in [His] statutes and keep [His] judgments” (**Eze. 36:36**).

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is **Jude 24-25**, “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, 25 To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”

**Be Holy and Faithful in the Midst of Rejection**

Don’t be attached to your comfort. The purpose of life is not our comfort, but our holiness. We are to love nothing and no one more than Christ. This world is coming to a close. You may be rejected by family and friends because of Christ. There’s coming a time soon when all Christians will be looked upon as unreasonable.

As believers we are unfashionable. We are to be the antithesis of this world. We are to stand as a light in the darkness. We must have thick skin and a big heart. We are going to suffer.

1. Be ready for **a falling away of false converts**, (vs. 10).

**Mt 23:10**, “And then many will **fall away**and betray one another and hate one another.”

Jesus had a Judas in his midst during his entire ministry. Judas was filled with the devil, but it did not hinder the power or the purity of Christ or His ministry.

We need to realize that there are false converts in the midst of us.

**Certain False Converts Crept in Unnoticed**

**Jude 1:1-4**, “Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 **For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality** and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.”

**Four Soils (True & False Conversions)**

In Mark 4, we have true and false converts compared to one another. In the parable of the four soils (or four hearts), we have a complete unbeliever, two false converts, and a true believer compared.

* Hard heart (like compacted dirt on a path
* Stony heart (not very deep soil)
* Thorny heart (filled with thorns and weeds)
* Good heart (tender soil – receives the good seed and endures under trials).

Four types of hearts represented by soils, but only one out of the four are truly saved. The false converts even seem to bring forth some measure of fruit. We must ask the question: is it possible for the Word of God to make some penetration into the human heart, at least to the extent that it is understood and superficially received and yet the person ultimately be lost? *Apparently it is quite possible.*

Let’s examine these four kinds of hearts. It is probably best to put them in three categories: the unbeliever, the make believers, and the true believer.

***The Heart of the Unbeliever***

The seed sown by the wayside was rejected. The is the person who hears the Gospel, but it could not penetrate his hard heart. This person does not even profess to be saved.

***The Heart of the Make Believers***

Christ goes on to describe two false converts. We learn to spot false converts by the many characteristics Christ gives of them. Let’s take a look at them.

**Immediate results**

With a false convert, according to Mark 4:5, there are immediate results—“immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil*.”* The person agrees with the Gospel, but he has not weighed what it really means. He immediately gives credence to something he has not deeply pondered and does not entirely understand. He accepts Christ superficially. He is not shaken to his core because of the great sin in his life or the awesome holiness of God. He does not tremble before a holy God. Yet, immediately there are fantastic results. He may attend every service of the church. Perhaps he starts tithing. He even responds to the messages at times with a public “Amen!” Compared to other true believers, he may even seem to have more fruit than they have. He seems to too good to be true, and in fact he is. He is shallow: “immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil*.*” There is no depth of understanding. The Gospel has not taken root.

**Shallow Roots**

Mark 4:6 says, “when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away*.*” Christ explains what this means in Mark 4:16-17, “when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away*.*”

The sunlight is representative of the “**tribulation or persecution**” that come with the trials of life and also of the persecution that comes by being identified with Jesus Christ. The false convert has no deep roots of assurance that Christ is the Almighty Savior and merciful God, and that as such has all things in His absolute control. Therefore, when the sunlight of difficulties come, the false convert’s flashy and immediate results begin to wither up and die. If you could see beneath the surface, you would understand why. The tree that had seemed to flourish has shallow roots. The false convert lacks the moisture and nourishment of the deep understanding of the Gospel. His heart is still bedrock and stubborn, and so the false convert falls away and returns to the world of sin.

A true believer on the other hand has a deep understanding of Christ’s ability to save and His control of all things. When tribulation, temptation and persecution come, the true believer flourishes, because He finds Christ’s grace sufficient in impossible situations. His roots go deep into the very person of Christ.

**Receives the Word with Gladness but Falls Away**

The false convert initially receives the Word of God with joy and gladness (Mark 4:16; Mt. 13:20)—even with tears. If everyone who heard the Gospel from me and received it with tears of fear and joy were still serving Christ today, we would have a much larger congregation! I think every faithful pastor can attest to the fact that many seem to respond with conviction and later joy, but for every ten that respond, perhaps one continues on. They do “*believe*” for a season (Luke 8:13). Yet it is not a saving faith, because it is not mixed with repentance. Faith, if it does not reveal itself in the life, is no faith at all, but a dead faith. Jesus said, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

**No Fruit**

In false converts, there is a superficial root, but they “withered away, because [they] had no moisture” (**Luke 8:6**). Christ said, “And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful” (Mark 4:18-19). Indeed, the false convert bears no fruit because his heart has never been changed. He still has a weedy unregenerate heart that chokes the Gospel with the cares of this world. There are immediate tangible results, but the results are superficial because conversion has not occurred. When the false convert is really put to the test he goes back to his own ways. The false convert seemed to grow momentarily–yet his weedy heart had not been changed. His unregenerate heart is again filled with anxieties, allowing this world to have the first place in the heart over Jesus Christ. The false convert does not produce fruit because he was never given the new heart of the true believer in the first place.

***The Heart of the True Believer***

Mark chapter 4 tells of the person with a good heart represented by soil without the weeds and stony ground of resistance to the Gospel seed. Obviously, there is no one who naturally has a tender heart for God or even seeks after God (Rom. 3:10-11). Every one of us is infested with the weeds and stones of pride and rebellion. God must clear the soil of weeds and stones through the work of the Spirit of God in the heart (Eze. 36:27). When the heart is prepared and cultivated by God, it can rightly be called “*good ground*.” Whenever the Gospel seed falls into good ground it bears noticeable, meaningful fruit in varying degrees. Christ says that the true believer is one that will “*hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold*” (Mark 4:20). Let it be understood that while every believer does not bear the same amount of fruit, every believer does bear the same kind of fruit!

1. Be ready for **lawlessness to increase**, (vs. 12).

**Mt 23:12**, “And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.”

**Lawless Living**

Lawless living will increase more and more as we near the end. Nothing is more apparent in this present evil age than the abounding of lawlessness and evil in our society.

Morals have gone by the wayside. The American people and the people of the world are addicted to pleasure and money.

As long as the economy is good, people don’t care what is happening in society or who is winning the elections. People have long voted with their wallets.

**Another Type of Lawlessness is Coming**

Another type of lawlessness is coming to America and is already in full bloom in the world. It’s where the governments of the world look the other way when Christians are persecuted. That’s likely what Jesus has in mind here.

And so that causes the enthusiasm and love that many Christians have to grow cold.

1. Be ready for **love to grow cold**, (vs. 12).

**Mt 23:12**, “And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.”

**The Love of Many Will Grow Cold**

The great persecution will take its toll, in that *many will fall away* (‘be tripped up), and the love of many will grow cold.[[5]](#footnote-5) I saw this in India in the attacks that seem to happen each year. Churches are blown up. Homes of Christians are ransacked, and the police in India and Pakistan just stand there and do nothing. They let it happen. There is lawlessness.

And one day you might want to take matters into your own hands. You might lose a father or mother or child because of persecution, and you may be tempted to be bitter and vengeful. Don’t do it.

**Bombings in Lahore, Pakistan**

Last year in Pakistan when the bombs went off in Christian churches and killed so many, the love of many Christians grew cold, and they found one of the bombers and beat him to death. We must not react this way as Christians!

**When Persecution Comes…**

When persecution comes, remember the words of Jesus in **Luke 6:27-29**, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **28**bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.**29**To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also.”

**Lawlessness in America**

The lawlessness that we have in America is of a different nature, and it is causing the love of the saints to grow cold.

The entertainment industry is numbing the hearts of God’s people. Gratuitous violence and sex and crude humor is killing the church.

The lawlessness of our society might cause Christians to give up.

1. Be ready for **Christians to endure**, (vs. 13).

**Mt 23:13**, “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”

**Galatians 6:9**, “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”

The doctrine of perseverance is a very comforting doctrine. We see in Hebrews 10:39, “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and **preserve their souls**.”

**The Doctrine of God’s Preservation**

The doctrine of perseverance is really the doctrine of God’s preservation of the saints.

* The Lord will keep us from falling (Jude 24-25)
* The Lord who has begun the work in us will finish it (Phil 1:6)
* The Lord said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb 13:5).
1. Be ready for **the worldwide preaching of the Gospel**, (vs. 14).

**Mt 23:14**, “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

Who would have thought that the little group of disciples would bring the Gospel into all the world. It went into the then-known world.

But do you see how it goes stronger and stronger like birth pains? With the advent of the internet and mass communication, the Gospel is going farther and reaching more than ever before.

I have friends around the world that fly to remote villages to reach the most unreached people groups. The Lord’s coming is nearer than ever before!

1. Be ready for the **destruction fo the Temple**, (vs. 15-21).

**Mt 23:15-21**, “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), **16**then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. **17**Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, **18**and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. **19**And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! **20**Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. **21**For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be.”

We will talk more about this next week, but let me say that this took place in 70AD. In AD 68 the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem. Jesus said, whatever you are doing when you see those armies, flee!

* Vs 17, “Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house”
* Vs 18 – If you are in the field when you see the Roman armies, do not stop to get your coat. It will be your deathknell if you do so.
* Vs 19, Pray your women aren’t pregnant.
* Vs 20, Pray you are not fleeing on a Sabbath day when the gates to the city are barricaded.
* Why? Because it’s going to be a time of great tribulation like the Jews had never experienced and never will experience. You say, how is that possible? What about the holocaust? We will talk about that next week.
* And so the abomination that makes the holy place (the entire Temple complex) desolate enters in and raises their Roman flags bearing the eagle on to the Temple, defiling it.
* This is one of the sharpest birth pains that Jesus gives. It’s unthinkable to the disciples that this would happen, but it does. We’ll talk about this more next week.
1. Be ready for a time of **danger and peril**, (vs. 22).

**Mt 23:22**, “And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”

The days of the New Covenant period are going to be so full of turmoil that they need to be cut short, or else kingdom would rise against kingdom, perhaps in nuclear holocaust, and “no human being would be saved.” \**I mentioned that this time would be shorter than the OT period last week. I don’t why I said that. There’s no evidence for that. We don’t know how long it will last, but we do know Jesus will cut it short.*

Praise God that our Lord does not make this go on forever. There will come a day when Jesus comes again!

CONCLUSION

**Don’t Give Up**

Don’t give up! You need to “fight the good fight, finish the course, and keep the faith!” Don’t give up! Be faithful! Look for the coming of Christ.

**Lift up your heads, for your redemption is nearer than you can imagine!**

**Great Tribulation**

The new covenant age is one of “great tribulation.” But immediately after the birth pains reach a fever pitch, the trumpet will sound.

**Mt 24:29-31**, “**29**“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **30**Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, 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. **31**And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

All the **difficulty** will be done. All the **tribulation** will be put away and we will celebrate our king for eternity.

**Aizkorri Mountain**

We’ll be like those on top of Aizkorri mountain. The struggle will be over. The tribulation will be done.

We will look down and see our entire journey and how the Lord was with us in that great tribulation all the way!

“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen” (**Rev 1:7**).

“Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints” (**Jude 1:14**).

Come quickly, Lord Jesus!

1. 1 Cor. 7:31, “…the present form of this world is passing away.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Doriani, D. M. (2008). *Matthew & 2*. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.) (Vol. 2, p. 349). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Mk 13:5). Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Carrington, Phillip, *The Early Christian Church* (1957); Davis, William Stearns, *Readings In Ancient History* (1913); Duruy, Victor, *History of Rome and the Roman People, vol V* (1883). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. France, R. T. (1985). *Matthew: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 341). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)