

QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

52.2 When Will Jesus Christ Return?

Part II

Scriptures Matthew 24:37-42

We take as our premise the fact that Jesus Christ must return. The point is that there are just too many things said about Jesus in the Bible which simply have not happened yet. Granted, many things said about Him have taken place. I think Paul had this in mind when he reminded Corinthian believers, *“First of all...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.”* (I Corinthians 15:1-3) The Scriptures Paul had in mind were those Old Testament prophetic writings which described the coming Messiah and were subsequently fulfilled in Christ. The references having to do with Christ's nativity, His earthly ministry, suffering and resurrection, render solid confirmation of His credentials as Messiah.

Yet, Christ's first coming did not exhaust the prophecies. It is plain history awaits another coming to completely fulfill them. Failure to grasp the importance of those prophecies led the religious leaders to reject and crucify the Lord of Glory. Peter relates that the prophets themselves did not perceive the difference between the “sufferings” and the “glory” of Christ. They were not mindful of the time lapse between the cross and the glorification of Christ. It would be to our great shame to make such a mistake. We live on the side of Calvary which enables us to select those prophecies which have been fulfilled, and to anticipate the fulfilling of the remaining ones when He comes again. (I Peter 1:10-11)

IV. THE CHURCH AND CHRIST'S RETURN:

Our concern last week was with the fact that the time of Christ's return is known to believer's in only a general way. Paul wrote to believers in Thessalonica, *“But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you as a thief.”* (I Thessalonians 5:4) The picture is that of early morning light breaking upon certain thieves engaged in their pursuits, only to be taken by surprise. Thus, people will be caught unaware when Christ returns. However, it shall not be so for the discerning believer who is a child of the day and not of the night. Daniel 12:10 speaks of understanding belonging to those have insight according to God's enablement.

Hence, this is the mark of the true believer who is mindful of the times and seasons of crisis which constitute the signs Jesus originally defined as preliminary to His appearing. God does not leave His people in the dark. Believers take seriously the injunction of Titus 2:11-14, *“the grace of God that bringeth salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.”*

The fact that Christ's church does not know the exact time of the Lord's return forbids the setting of dates. What we are to do is to, in the words of the Lord, *“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. Therefore, be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”* (Matthew 24:42-44) It strikes me here that not to be watchful is to be guilty of setting a date in reverse. Not to look for Him today or to feel He is not coming today is to presume when He is coming. By **eliminating** today we are as guilty as the person who **sets** today. The Scripture teaches that it is for us to expect Him thousands of times when He does not appear, rather than to fail to expect Him when He does appear.

1. Jesus Taught in Mystery Form So as Not to Nullify the Watchful Spirit:

We can hardly suppose that Jesus was not aware of the delay in His return. The well known parables of Matthew 13 indicate that time would be needed for the sowing of the seed, the growth of wheat and tares, the leavening of the meal, and the gathering of the great dragnet. Of course so many people came to the faith in the first century, the early Christians were justified in being *“watchful,”* as in the case with every century. Jesus may have inferred a delay in the Parable of the Talents found in Matthew 25:19. He said, *“After a long time the Lord of those servants cometh...”* The church is to be mindful of the *“imminency”* of the Lord's return, which means He may come at any time. *“Imminency”* need not mean *“immediacy,”* but it does necessitate expectancy.

2. Three Signs Have to Do With the Church:

Matters which will signal the close of the age and bring back the King are the recruitment of the saints according to Acts 15:14-16 and Romans 11:25-26, increasing persecution against believers as mentioned in Matthew 24:15-28, and the widespread apostasy which will be the result of heretical teaching.

Of course, we have seen these signs for centuries to a greater or lesser degree. However, it remains for this matter of apostasy to emerge as a specific sign in terms of degree. What is being seen in our time in the theological arena is new to history. The entire world has been told that Christ is no more than a mere man and that the Bible is a product of human speculation and experience. Striking at the very heart of the Christian message, this evolutionary naturalistic interpretation has been felt by untold millions of people and is clearly an indication of Christ's imminent return. (I Timothy 4:1; II Timothy 3:1-5)

Moving on, our concern in this study is that of society and Christ's return. Jesus emphasized the fact He would come back about twenty times. The earliest reference we have is when He sent out the twelve with the words, *"Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come."* (Matthew 10:23) From that time on He gave promises and predictions of certain happenings which could be associated with His return. His last reference is recorded in Matthew 25:13, *"Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the son of man cometh."*

An interesting thought connected with the matter of watching, is that the night is divided into four watches, according to Christ in Mark 13:12. *"Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the Master of the House cometh, at **even**, or at **midnight**, or at **cock crowing**, or in the **morning**."* Church history easily divides into the Apostolic Period, the dark period of the Middle Ages, the Reformation Period, and the Modern Period when the darkness of the night is only intensified by the appearance of the Morning Star. It could be said we are living in the "morning watch," that 3-6 A.M. period which is the threshold of a new day. Having considered some conditions relative to the church at Christ's coming, let us now look at certain world conditions which will prevail when He comes, those which have to do with society and which are environmental.

V. SOCIETY AND THE RETURN OF CHRIST:

The Canadian Prime minister, Pierre Trudeau, is currently visiting the United States. On one occasion, while being interviewed on national television, he was asked what he considered to be Canada's most pressing national crisis. His response was surprising. He feared most the complete breakdown of society from within. He is not alone in his apprehensiveness. One distinguished politician cries for all law abiding citizens to "slam on the brakes on a sick

society.” The Bible predicts something of the state of society and world conditions when Christ returns. A specific generation will witness certain signs and undergo certain experiences at the time of Christ's coming. Are we members of that generation? What are the signs which tell?

1. International Signs:

“You are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars...nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom.” (Mathew 24:6-7a) We recognize there have always been wars. Since Cain killed Abel war has persisted. The Society of International Law reports that in the last 34 centuries, there have been only 268 peaceful years. Today the annual cost of arming the nations of the world in which we live is an astronomical 190 billion dollars per year. The enlightened twentieth century spends 40 percent more money on arming itself than educating itself and three times more on the killing potential than on public health. One American president has said of our generation, “Every man, woman and child lives under a nuclear Sword of Damocles, hanging by the slenderest of threads, capable of being cut at any moment by accident, or miscalculation, or by madness.”

2. Covenantal Signs:

“I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great.” (Genesis 12:1-3) *“And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand, again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left...And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”* (Isaiah 11:11-12) Many Christians feel that the promise given to Israel in Isaiah and related passages pertain to Abraham's literal seed. They believe and hold to a literal fulfillment of those promises having to do with the restoration and coming glory of Israel and the establishment of a Messianic kingdom here on earth with Christ reigning from Jerusalem. With that in mind, surely one of the clearest signs of Christ's return would be the modern state of Israel and the return of Jews to that land in great numbers. After 2500 years without self-government and 1800 years without a national homeland, history has been defied by reason of the fact that never before has a people maintained identity under such conditions. Other important passages are; Ezekiel 37:21-22; Luke 21:24; Jeremiah 16:14-15; 31:17, 32:41-42.

3. Environmental Signs:

"There shall be earthquakes." (Luke 21:11) *"There will be earthquakes in different parts of the world."* (Matthew.24:7 Ph) Seismological history records that in the fourteenth century there were 137 major earthquakes; in the fifteenth, 174; in the sixteenth, 253; in the seventeenth, 378; in the eighteenth, 640; in the nineteenth, 2,119. The Harvard seismologist, Donald Leet, records that as of 1968 there are 30 major earthquakes per year; with another 35 less serious ones. The Chicago Tribune reported an earthquake somewhere in the world every day over a two year period with the exception of only four days. West coast seismologists are aware of certain factors pressuring the earth's crust that are certain to bring a dramatic increase in earthquakes in the next 50 years. They say that because of stress along the San Andreas fault, California is long overdue for a major catastrophe. The shaking of the earth is a sign that the Lord is coming soon, according to Scripture. We are seeing it happen.

4. Social Signs:

"This also know, that in the last days perilous times shall come." (II Timothy 3:1-5) The word *"perilous"* means that which is troublesome, dangerous, and difficult to bear. The word is used in only one other place in the New Testament, in Matthew 8:28. There it describes two people possessed of demons who were so dangerous (fierce) no one could pass. In this Timothy passage we have a catalog of the horrors which will beset society prior to the Lord's return. We are seeing in our time revolt, violence, lawlessness, sexual incontinence, selfishness, and perversions which fulfill every adjective the apostle used in describing the close of the age. Certainly, there have been troubled times before, but it is questionable that the confusion, instability, and increase or magnitude of revolt against God has ever been as great. The universality of evil has scarcely been surpassed. The Wall Street Journal said it, "society is sick."

5. Technological and Philosophical Signs:

"But as for you Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, knowledge shall increase." (Daniel.12:4; See also II Timothy 3:7) The Scriptures indicate there will be an explosion of knowledge at the last time. Such is our day. Someone has said that ninety percent of the totality of man's knowledge has been accumulated in the last

fifty years, half of that in the last decade. Eighty percent of the scientists who ever lived are alive today. Fifteen thousand scientific journals are published annually with a world wide circulation. There are more literate people today than ever before. The Hebrew translation of Daniel 12:4 is, *"A sudden knowledge explosion will occur at the end of time."* Of course *"knowledge breeds conceit."* (I Corinthians 8:1) The ancient Jeremiah wrote, *"Every man is brutish in his knowledge."* (10:14) Philosophy prior to Christ's coming will reflect a pride which outlaws God. Philosophers of earlier times tended to be theists, those studied most today, Sartre, Camus, Huxley, Russell and Marx do not consider God a reasonable hypothesis. Luke 18:8 asks, *"Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, will he find faith (Gr: the faith) on the earth?"* (See also II Timothy 4:3-4; II Peter 3:3)

6. Political Signs:

"As ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." (I John 2:18) Anti-christian leaders have existed all during the history of the church, *"but at the last time Satan will gather the nations under a single head who will fill the world with wickedness."* (II Thessalonians 2:9-11) The word *"antichrist"* is used in the New Testament only by the Apostle John. (I John 2:18, 22;4:3; II John 7) We learn that the antichrist is expected in the last times (I John 2:18,22:4:3). The spirit of antichrist is that of apostasy, that is, what the word means, opponent of Christ. Not all interpretations apply the term antichrist to an individual some scholar's feel the term has to do with a political system or with false religion. It is significant to me that we have in the world a trend toward dictatorships.

7. Evangelical Signs:

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." (Matthew 24:14) *"It is necessary first that the good news be preached to all nations."* (Mark 13:10) Prior to the Lord's return the universal diffusion of the Gospel will take place. The news about Christ will be announced to all nations before the age of grace is closed. When Christ uttered these words it was very unlikely they would ever be fulfilled. The evangelization of the world has progressed so that today the Bible is translated into more than 1200 languages and the Gospel is being heard throughout the globe.

How much longer it will be before Christ comes back we cannot tell. But if ever there was a generation which should be mindful of the prophetic Scriptures and how they relate to current events, it is ours. Reference to the Lord's return in Scripture is always accompanied by an urgent exhortation to be ready. Let us take to heart both the signs and the appeal.

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