

## **In These Times Don't Be Deceived** **Matthew 24:1-8**

Well let's turn in our Bibles please to Matthew chapter 24. Now we completed our exposition two weeks ago of Matthew chapter 23, which was the last public teaching that Jesus gave to the nation of Israel. Now in chapters 24 and 25, we find Jesus privately instructing His own disciples. And what we said as we introduced Matthew 24 and 25 is that these two chapters deal with the subject of eschatology, that is, the study of the end times.

Now in order to grasp the overall thrust and flow of thought in Matthew chapter 24, I want to read the entire chapter to you today. Now clearly, we will not be dealing with the whole chapter, but only the first eight verses. But those verses stand in a context, and the context is the totality of the chapter, and therefore, as we proceed through the chapter, I want us to relate the part to the whole, and therefore I want to read to you the whole this morning before we begin our exposition of the text itself. So follow along then as I read the entire chapter, Matthew chapter 24.

“<sup>1</sup> And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. <sup>2</sup> And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

“<sup>3</sup> And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? <sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. <sup>5</sup> For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. <sup>6</sup> And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. <sup>7</sup> For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. <sup>8</sup> All these are the beginning of sorrows.

“<sup>9</sup> Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. <sup>10</sup> And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. <sup>11</sup> And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. <sup>12</sup> And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. <sup>13</sup> But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. <sup>14</sup> And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.

“<sup>15</sup> When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) <sup>16</sup> then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains: <sup>17</sup> let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: <sup>18</sup> neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. <sup>19</sup> And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! <sup>20</sup> But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: <sup>21</sup> for then shall be great tribulation, such

as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. <sup>22</sup> And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

“<sup>23</sup> Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. <sup>24</sup> For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. <sup>25</sup> Behold, I have told you before. <sup>26</sup> Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. <sup>27</sup> For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. <sup>28</sup> For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.

“<sup>29</sup> Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: <sup>30</sup> and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup> And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

“<sup>32</sup> Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: <sup>33</sup> so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. <sup>34</sup> Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled. <sup>35</sup> Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.

“<sup>36</sup> But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. <sup>37</sup> But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. <sup>38</sup> For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, <sup>39</sup> and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. <sup>40</sup> Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. <sup>42</sup> Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

“<sup>43</sup> But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. <sup>44</sup> Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh. <sup>45</sup> Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? <sup>46</sup> Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. <sup>47</sup> Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods. <sup>48</sup> But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; <sup>49</sup> and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; <sup>50</sup> the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, <sup>51</sup> and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Now last week, we introduced our study of Matthew chapter 24 with two leading thoughts. First of all, last week we talked about the importance of eschatology, and we said that eschatology is the conclusion and the outcome of the gospel, and that it cannot be divorced from the gospel. Therefore, if the gospel is important, then eschatology is equally important, because a gospel without an eschatology is no gospel at all. It is of the essence of the gospel that it provide us with a vision of the future and a hope for the future of deliverance from hell and deliverance into heaven, and without that, its message of salvation becomes meaningless.

Therefore, since the gospel necessarily leads us into a consideration of our future, and eschatology is the study of future things, then it follows that they who would understand and preach the gospel must also understand and preach eschatology as well.

Then secondly last time, we talked not only about the importance of eschatology, we talked about the simplicity of eschatology. We said that God's prophetic scheme consists of only two ages: this age, which extends from the creation to the second coming of Christ; and the age to come, which extends from the second coming of Christ on into eternity.

And so eschatology is not complex. This age, and the age to come, exhaust all of prophetic time. Every prophetic event fits into one of these two ages. So there's not three ages—this age, the Millennium, and the age to come. There's just two ages. There's not seven ages, as the Dispensationalists would have us think. Repeatedly, Jesus spoke of these two ages. Repeatedly, He spoke of this world and the world to come, and this age and the age to come. And we saw that, for example, in Matthew 12 and verse 32, where Jesus said, Whoever speaks a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

So we looked at many passages in which this two-world framework was set forth. We saw it in Mark 10:29-30. We saw it in Luke 20, verses 34 to 36. We saw it in Paul's writing, in Ephesians 1 and verse 21, and several other passages as well.

And so we saw this two-age terminology permeates the New Testament, and it is foundational to establishing a proper framework within which to understand every prophetic passage in the Scriptures. Even the Millennium must fit into this two-age framework. It, of course, precedes the second coming of Christ, meaning that we are living in the millennial period described in Revelation chapter 20, right now, in this age, and in this world.

Well, we come now to a consideration of Matthew chapter 24 itself, a passage regarding which there is no small controversy as to what the various parts mean. Now I do not intend in this exposition of Matthew chapter 24 to set forth and then rebut every possible interpretation of this passage. Such a task would be both distracting and confusing. Rather, what I intend to do is to set forth what I believe is the correct perspective and interpretation of this passage, and by doing so, bring clarity to our understanding of what it all means and what Jesus intended to convey.

And so I will just be setting forth the true interpretation of the passage, and I will not be spending time rebutting and explaining all the other possible interpretations of it that are advanced.

But as we go through this passage, what is most important to keep in mind as we study it, is that whatever the details of Matthew 24 refer to, the main emphasis of this passage is on the necessity of being faithful to Jesus Christ in the face of persecution and tribulation. Let me repeat that. The main emphasis of Matthew 24 and Matthew 25, for they're both eschatological, is on the necessity of being faithful to Christ in the face of persecution and tribulation.

This chapter, chapter 24, tells us that there will be much difficulty in the days ahead, both from deceivers and also from persecutors. And it emphasizes that we must remain loyal to Christ until the end, if we would be found to be saved on the day of judgment. Because of the intensity of the coming persecution that Jesus speaks of, many people will fall away from the faith. They will fall away from Christ. They will begin to follow the false teachers, and the false Christs, and ultimately the Antichrist himself. They will then begin to persecute the true Christians. These are the apostates from the Christian faith, and we must not be among them. When Jesus Christ returns, He should find us faithful and He should find us busy in the work and the cause of His kingdom.

So that is the big picture that we need to keep in mind as we study the details of this difficult time that lies ahead of us, which Jesus describes in Matthew chapter 24. And Jesus sets these predictions before us so that we will not be surprised when they come, we will not be offended when they come, and we will not fall into deception when they come. Blessed is that servant of Christ when Christ returns for him that shall be found still loyal to Christ, still loving Christ, and still serving Christ, in spite of the persecution and the tribulation that he is going to experience.

And so although it is a certainly desirable goal to pursue, understanding every little detail of every prophetic text is not what matters in the end. What matters in the end, people, is that we understand the big picture of prophetic truth, and out of that understanding we remain faithful to Christ to the end of our lives. That's what matters.

So let us not get all hung up on the details of whether we agree on the nuance and the meaning of this phrase or that phrase as we go through Matthew 24. Rather, let us keep in mind the big picture, that this chapter is designed to prepare us for the tribulation that lies ahead of us in our lives, and to encourage us to persevere in faith in Christ and faithfulness to Christ, in the face of all the deception and the persecution that we are immersed in, so that we endure to the end in loyalty to Christ, and thus are found to be those who are saved on the day of judgment.

Well then, let us open our passage in Matthew chapter 24, and seek to grasp its message and the teaching that Christ has for us. In the first place, then, let's consider together this morning the occasion of the discourse.

Now the occasion of this long discourse that goes from Matthew 24 clear to the end of Matthew chapter 25, is found in verses 1 to 3. Verses 1 to 3 say: “<sup>1</sup> And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to shew him the buildings of the temple. <sup>2</sup> And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down. <sup>3</sup> And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” Those three verses provide the occasion for the whole remainder of the discourse.

Now you recall that in Matthew chapter 23, which we just got done studying, Jesus had pronounced woe upon Israel for her hypocrisy and her hatred of Christ and His people and His servants, and Jesus therefore declared in Matthew 23 and verse 38 that Israel’s house would be decimated and destroyed, that it would be left unto her desolate.

Now such a pronouncement at the end of Matthew chapter 23 and verse 38 must have amazed the disciples. They could not imagine such a magnificent and important building being left desolate and forsaken and deserted. So they began, in Matthew 24, to point out to Jesus the marvelous nature of the temple and the buildings around it, to draw His attention to its magnificence. Verse 1: His disciples came to him for to show Him the buildings the temple. And so they were saying, Look at this phenomenally magnificent structure, and these giant blocks of marble out of which it’s made, and these pillars that are phenomenally strong. And the implication was, How could this be made desolate? How could this be destroyed?

Well, Jesus is completely unmoved by such considerations as the magnificence and the beauty and the strength of the temple and the buildings around it. And He repeats and reinforces what He said in Matthew 23 about the desolation of Israel’s house. Jesus says in verse 2, Do you see this temple and these buildings? They will be decimated, they will be leveled, they will be reduced to rubble. It will be completely thrown down to the point that no part of any wall will be left. There will not be left one stone on top of another.

Now this statement that Jesus made in verse 2 amazed the disciples. It seemed incomprehensible to them that this temple and all the buildings around it would just be leveled to the ground and reduced to rubble. They are dumbstruck.

But Jesus continues to walk, and He continues to walk out of the temple, and they continue to follow Him. And they leave the temple, they leave the city, and go out of the eastern gate of the city. They go down the hill to the bottom of the Kidron valley. They go up the other side, up the slope of the mount of Olives, and they sit down somewhere upon it.

Now you’ll notice in verses 1 and 2, they’re at the temple. And then in verse 3 it says, He sat down in the mount of Olives. So there’s a considerable break between verses 2 and 3. This was a journey of about a half a mile, and it would have taken probably about a half hour to make, as they wound down the steep slope to the bottom of the Kidron valley, crossed the Kidron brook,

and wound their way up the side of the mount of Olives and sat down somewhere on that mountain.

And so here they are, sitting on that mountain, and along the way, the disciples have digested the awful pronouncement that Jesus has made, and questions now begin to arise in their minds and to spill out of their mouths as they sat on the mountain, on the hill opposite from Jerusalem and to the east of it.

Notice if you will verse 3. “And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” And so in verse 3, the disciples ask, regarding Jesus’ previous statements, When will this happen? That is, when will this great judgment occur that will leave the house of Israel desolate and destroyed?

Now—if this is all they wished to know, and if they had asked this single question, When will the house of Israel be destroyed and left desolate, then Jesus might have said, Well, it’ll happen in about 37 years, (70 AD) and Jerusalem and the temple will be destroyed by Rome. But that’s not all they asked. They didn’t just ask, When is the temple going to be leveled? They asked two more questions in verse 3, questions that completely overshadowed in importance that first question, and which became the primary subject of Jesus’ answer.

The two additional questions they asked were these. Notice verse 3, What shall be the sign of thy coming, and what shall be the sign of the end of the world? Now perhaps they thought all three of these events would occur at the same time, so they lumped these three questions together. It seems they thought that the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem would certainly mean the end of the world, and bring about the second coming of Christ. It would all happen at once.

But they were mistaken about this. The fall of the temple and the fall of Jerusalem would not occur at the same time as the second coming of Christ and the end of the world. And Jesus corrects their error by telling them in the subsequent discourse that a lengthy period of time would intervene between the fall of Jerusalem and His second coming and the end of the world.

Now this does not mean that there was no connection between the fall of Jerusalem and the end of the world. There was indeed a connection between the judgment to be executed on the Jewish nation and the second coming of Christ and the end of the world, and the connection is this: The city of Jerusalem’s approaching catastrophe was going to be a type and a foreshadowing of the great tribulation that would occur just before the second coming and the end of the world.

And so, as Jesus describes the great tribulation later in this chapter, He describes it in the language of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, and the flight from that destruction which the Christians engaged in when it occurred in 70 A.D. The fall of Jerusalem and the desolation of the temple is alluded to by Christ in His answer in Matthew 24, but only by way of

warning the Christians as to how to avoid it when it comes in 70 A.D., and by way of setting it forth as a foreshadow of an even greater, indeed a *far* greater tribulation that would occur at the end of the age.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple is not the main subject of Christ's discourse, or even the subject of very much of it at all. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple is merely a background issue in this discourse. The primary subject of His discourse is the answer to those two last questions: What shall be the sign of thy coming, and what shall be the sign of the end of the world? The answer to those two questions is at the forefront of all that Jesus says in this discourse. And as we shall see, His coming and the end of the world occur together, because the second coming of Christ *causes* the end of the world and brings it about.

So Jesus says in Matthew 23, The temple and Jerusalem are going to be left desolate. The disciples say in Matthew 24, Have you seen the temple? Did you notice how well it's built? And Jesus said, It's going to be leveled. And they say, When is that going to happen, and what is the sign of *your* coming and the end of the world?—thinking those all came together. And Jesus is saying, Well, let me tell you about my coming and the end of the world.

And, yes, the destruction of the temple is going to happen, and here's what you need to do when it does: You need to run away. But this is really just a foreshadowing of a far greater tribulation—one that will be *so* much greater that there's never been another one like it before, and there'll never be another one like it afterward. And the fall of Jerusalem just foreshadows that. Let me tell you about that, and how that tribulation then will lead to my second coming and the destruction of the world and the bringing in of the new heavens and the new earth.

Now that's the thrust of the passage. That's what Jesus is doing here. Jesus is answering those last two questions—What will be the sign of thy coming and the end of the world? And incidentally He deals with the destruction of Jerusalem, but it's not the primary subject at all of the passage. It's just provided for two reasons—One, here's what you need to do to escape; and two, this is a picture of what's coming in the end. That, then, is the occasion of the discourse in verses 1 to 3.

In the second place then this morning, let's consider together the characteristics of this age. The characteristics of this age are set out in verses 4 to 8. Now there are three characteristics of this age that are going to be manifest throughout this age, prior to the end events that will conclude this age.

First of all, the first characteristic of this age is that there will be great religious deception. Notice verses 4 and 5. Answering this question, "What shall be the sign of thy coming and the end of the world," <sup>4</sup> Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. <sup>5</sup> For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many." And so what Jesus begins to do is describe the period from the time He was sitting there until the time that the great

tribulation begins, which time period we're in right now, and He begins to describe the characteristics of that age, and that timeframe.

First of all, He says in verses 4 and 5 that there will be great religious deception. Jesus opens His discourse to His disciples about the sign of His coming and the end of the world with a warning against being deceived. In verse 4 He says, "Take heed that no man deceive you," and then He repeats this warning against deception in verse 5, when He says, "Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many." Verse 4: "Take heed that no man deceive you"; verse 5: They "shall deceive many." Clearly, there will be much deception regarding many matters, but in particular, in this age, there will be many individuals who will claim to be the Messiah of God and to be Jesus Christ on earth.

Now, this is something that has been going on repeatedly for the last 2,000 years, since Jesus uttered these words. Numerous individuals have claimed to be Christ on earth, all the way from mental institution inmates, to Eastern religion gurus, to Roman Catholic popes, to doomsday cult leaders. At numerous points in past history, religious deception and religious deceivers have led many to think that the coming of Christ was immediately imminent, or that Christ had already come to this earth and was personified in this individual or that individual, when clearly, that was not the case.

There has been, there is now, and there will be in the future a lot of religious impostors, a lot of religious date-setters, a lot of religious apocalyptic cults leading people into false beliefs about the second coming of Christ and the end of the world. And Jesus foretold us about such people, and warned us against falling into their deception. So a characteristic of this age that we are currently living in is that there will be great religious deception.

The second characteristic of the age in which we're living is not only that there will be great religious deception, but there will also be great political turmoil. This in verses 6 to 7a. Notice verse 6: "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. <sup>7</sup> For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."

So this describes the great political turmoil that's going to take place in this age. In the last 2,000 years, there have been countless wars, some of them involving the whole world. Nations have risen up against nations, and kingdoms have risen up against kingdoms, and they're doing so to this very day. There has never been a point in history since the time that Christ uttered these words that there has not been multiple conflicts going on across the globe. Some of these wars have been so great, like World War I and World War II, that many people have thought Armageddon is upon us, and the end is now. But it did not prove to be the case, did it?

Jesus said in verse 6, Do not let these wars—even those that may involve most of the nations of the world at the same time—trouble you to the point that you think, This must be the end. Jesus said, These things must come to pass. They are manifestations of human depravity. But He says



in verse 6, The end is not yet.” Such political turmoil is no sign of the end times. World War I, World War II, were not signs of the end times. And all the wars in the Middle East are not signs of the end times.

The third characteristic of this age in which we are currently living is not only that there will be great religious deception during it; not only that there will be great political turmoil during it; but thirdly, there will be tremendous natural disasters. Notice verses 7b to 8. It says in verse 7b: “and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. <sup>8</sup> All these are the beginning of sorrows.”

Throughout this present age, there will be great convulsions in nature. There will be droughts and outbreaks of pests that will destroy crops and bring about mass starvation in various places in the world—great famines. There will be pestilences, there will be outbreaks of disease that will cause millions to die—things like the Bubonic Plague, and the influenza of 1913, and Ebola, and many other contagious diseases that have risen up throughout the last 2,000 years. And millions of people have died from these things in very short periods of time.

And then He says there will not only be famine and pestilences, He says there will be massive earthquakes, earthquakes in which tens of thousands, and sometimes hundreds of thousands of people die all over the globe. You remember in 2004, the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami—that magnitude 9.2 earthquake in the Indian Ocean—when 230,000 people died in a day.

Now all of these things—great religious deception, great political turmoil, tremendous natural disasters—all of these things have characterized the world for the last 2,000 years, haven’t they? And yet, none of them are signs of the end, or of the coming of Christ. When these things occur—great religious deception, great political turmoil, tremendous natural disasters—when these things occur, Jesus says, the end is not yet. They are just the beginning of sorrows. The real sorrows are later, after these events. These sorrows described in verses 4 to 7 are just the beginning of sorrows. They are nothing compared with the sorrows that will occur when the end times actually start and are finally upon us.

So what we have in verses 4 to 8 is a description of what has been going on for the last 2,000 years, and what will continue to go on for, God knows how many more years, until the end times begin with the loosing of Satan. When Satan is loosed, that’s when the end times begin. But until Satan is loosed, the events of verses 4 to 8 will continue to be the norm from this point forward, just like they have been the norm for the last 2,000 years, and none of them are signs of the second coming or of the end of the world.

So where are we, in the prophetic time clock? We are in verses 4 to 8, a long period of great religious deception, great political turmoil, and great natural disasters, none of which are signs of the second coming. Now there *are* signs of the second coming, and we will declare what those signs are when we get to them in our text, but Jesus specifically warns us not to view anything mentioned in verses 4 to 8 as things that are signs of the second coming. They are merely the

norm for this present period, and will be the norm until Satan is loosed for his little season, and that begins in verse 9, which we will study next week. But the lesson of this passage is, Don't be deceived into thinking that because the things described in verses 4 to 8 are happening, the second coming is somehow imminent.

Now, I was raised in a milieu where the things in the newspaper were read right into the Scriptures and declared to be signs of the second coming. I remember reading Hal Lindsey's book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, and he talked about the ten-headed beast of Revelation, and how that was the ten-nation European Common Market. And they were going to become the seat of Antichrist, and so-on. And then of course, every time there was a war in the Middle East between Israel and one of her neighbors—Well, this was the trigger, or possibly the beginning of Armageddon, or whatever. And all of that was a bunch of nonsense.

I used to hear a song sung a lot—the Gaithers used to sing it, which tells you how old I am. And here's the words: "Years of time have come and gone since I first heard it told how Jesus would come again some day. If back then it seemed so real that I just can't help but feel how much closer His coming is today. Signs of the times are everywhere. There's a brand new feeling in the air. Keep your eyes upon the eastern sky, lift up your head, redemption draweth nigh." Now get this: "Wars and strife on every hand, and violence fills the land, still some people doubt He'll ever come again. But the word of God is true, He'll redeem His chosen few. Don't lose hope. Soon, Christ Jesus will descend. Signs of the times are everywhere. There's a brand new feeling in the air. Keep your eyes upon the eastern sky, lift up your head, redemption draweth nigh."

Now that is a manifestation of the kind of false beliefs about eschatology that were floating around when I was a young Christian, and still float around today. And what they're doing is, they're saying that because there's wars and strife on every hand and violence fills the land, the second coming has got to be right around the corner. And Jesus says, When there's wars and rumors of wars, and nation rises against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, the end isn't yet. And the Gaither hymn writer says, Those are the signs that the end is here.

And that's why you can't get your theology from popular hymnody, or from the writings of so many wild-eyed fanatics, who make great profit from writing exciting books and producing exciting movies about being left behind, and all the nonsense that is associated with that kind of eschatology.

What we want to do is just stick with the text. We want to say what the passage says. You don't have to get all complicated with it, okay? Just take it for what it says, in the sequence in which it says it, recognizing that there are certain principles of recapitulation, and we're going to see those in our passage. But nevertheless, Christ says, These are the signs of the period of time prior to the coming of Christ; these are not the signs of the coming of Christ. So don't be deceived if we wind up in another world war. It isn't going to be the sign of the second coming. There are signs of the second coming, and we're going to talk about them. But wars and natural disasters and great movements of religious deception are not it.

You know, it used to be that the Antichrist was going to be some kind of a Jew, and then he was the Pope, and now he's going to be a Muslim, okay? And the thing is, as world events happen and there's geopolitical shifts in power and activity, the identity of the Antichrist keeps changing to fit today's newspaper, right? Forget all that stuff. That isn't how it works, and that's not what Jesus was teaching.

So don't get all anxious, thinking, Well, you know, I really shouldn't start a business, or I really shouldn't have kids, or I really shouldn't do this, because Jesus is coming back. Let me tell you, the second coming of Jesus is not imminent. There will be definite signs that will occur before He comes back. We will be able to see those signs and discern those signs, and that day will not overtake us as a thief. For us, the second coming isn't the thief in the night. It is for the ungodly, but it isn't for us.

We see the fig tree budding; we see the signs that tell us when it's near. And you know what? None of those signs exist yet. Therefore, we need to just carry on, fighting religious deception, being peaceful in the midst of international strife, and when there's great convulsions of nature, recognize that this is just part of the groaning of the natural creation under the curse. And don't start getting all eschatological when these things occur. Well let's pray together.

Father, thank you so much for your word. And Lord, it's frustrating to deal with this piecemeal, one week at a time, but Lord, I just pray that as we do so, we would be able to remember what's previously been said and put it all together, and keep it all as a unit.

Lord, I pray that you would grant us illumination and understanding and insight so that we would have balanced and blessed understanding of the events of the coming of Christ and the end of the world. Father, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.