

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

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The Gospel of Matthew

The World is Groaning – Don't Fret

March 22, 2020

Sermon Text: Matthew 24:1-14

Scripture Reading: Romans 8

We must always be watching and be ready for Christ's return. We will know Him when He comes. We are not to be fearful or alarmed by the calamities that characterize this present world, nor try to read any of them as signs of Christ's return. We will know when He comes.

Follow along as I read from Matthew 24 once again, beginning at verse 1 –

Matthew 24:1-14 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.

As you know already, Matthew 24-25 together are known as the Olivet Discourse in which Christ is answering the disciples' questions about the timing of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (which was essentially the end of the Old Covenant and the earthly Israel) and of Jesus' return – His second coming.

Note that the destruction of the Temple, of Jerusalem and the scattering of the Jews marked the end of the Old Covenant era – something that was difficult for the Jews to understand. Their thinking was wrong, as is the thinking of many professing Christians today. The Old Covenant was not THE covenant of God. It was a picture of the real covenant established in Jesus Christ and His church.

Hebrews 3:1-6 Therefore, holy

brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, (2) who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. (3) For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (4) (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) (5) Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, (6) but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

The End is Not Yet

(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.

We saw last time that Jesus emphasizes right at the beginning *that we must be on guard against deceivers when it comes to this subject of His Second*

Coming. “Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray” He will add in verse 11. And I think we can conclude from what He adds in verse 6 –

(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.

...that it is at times of calamity and upheaval that we can expect such claims to particularly come at us. It’s true, is it not? An earthquake, a particularly devastating famine or flood or plague or and unusual cosmic event like a comet or eclipse, and almost always you will have some “prophet” or “messiah” come on the scene announcing a message from God. Wars and rumors of wars...*but we are not to be alarmed.* These things are going to take place in this fallen world *but they are not the sign of Christ’s coming.*

This is why we read Romans 8 as the Scripture reading earlier:

Romans 8:18-22 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. (20) For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope (21) that 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.

We do not enjoy these evils of a fallen creation of course, *but we are not to be alarmed by some report that “this is the end” as if some catastrophic apocalypse is upon us in which all humanity is destroyed.* That is not how the end of this present world is going to be and it certainly isn’t going to end in destruction for Christ’s people. In fact, we look forward to and pray for the soon coming of Christ. *See that you are not alarmed.*

“In spite of this clear warning which our Lord gave to his disciples, many present-day church members are filled with admiration for the minister or evangelist who speaks learnedly about ‘The Signs of the Times,’ and strives to show his audience that this or that terrible battle, serious earthquake, or devastating famine ‘on the basis of prophecy’ is the infallible ‘sign’ of Christ’s imminent return.” [William

Jesus continues:

(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.

Even if World War III broke out tomorrow, we could be confident that *the end is not yet*. We are not to listen to such claims and we need to guard ourselves against anything within us that *seeks* after things like this. All you need do to see many examples is go on Twitter or other public posting arenas and you will find all kinds of conspiracy theory types ready to feed people's sinful curiosity about "the end." And it is sinful. Jesus told us plainly:

Matthew 24:36 "But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

Acts 1:6-7 So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (7) He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that

the Father has fixed by his own authority.

It is not for us to know. Therefore, anytime someone claims that they know, then they are lying.

What did Jesus mean by this statement?

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(8) All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.

Wars, famines, earthquakes...the beginning of the birth pains. His picture obviously is that of a pregnant woman in the very early stages of delivery. Or, in fact I think more accurately, *false delivery pangs*. Women who have had a baby or husbands who have made a trip to the hospital late at night only to learn that it was false labor (not really false at all – she isn't imagining the pain), understand the imagery.

Wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines...these are all characteristic of a creation gone wrong. Of mankind gone wrong in sin. But if anyone says "the end is now" based upon these supposed signs, Jesus tells us it is false labor. The new creation is not being birthed at that moment. So, don't fall for any such deception. Here is Hendriksen once more:

“To be sure, the events here indicated have significance. They are stepping stones leading to the final goal. By means of them the end of the ages is both foreshadowed and brought closer, and God’s eternal plan is being carried forward.” [ibid]

In other words, for example, the relatively small earthquakes that we see occur (small in relation to the final one) are reminders of the Day when Christ will once more “shake” the earth.

Hebrews 12:26-27 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” (27) This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain.

Let’s go on:

(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.

Notice how Jesus is going to great lengths to prepare us for our time in this fallen world as His people. He doesn’t sugar coat anything. *He does not go on and on telling us how everything is going to be just peachy when we follow Him.* The world hates Christ and it hates His people:

John 15:18-19 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. (19) If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

I don’t think most Christians, at least in our country, believe this. They talk about it, they point to examples of it in oppressive countries, but they really want to believe that here every Christian can be popular with the world, in daily life, and in fact if they aren’t, they must be doing something wrong. *Jesus is telling us that the world’s hatred of him, and therefore of us, is going to continue and even increase. And if we want to know if we are truly following Him, then all we need do is look at what His experience was when he was in this world.*

Luke 6:26 “Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

Now, notice the result of this persecution:

(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.

You all know that I believe the vast majority of the visible church today is apostate, filled with false Christians. That seems incredible to many, and at times it seems incredible to me. But Jesus warns us that this will happen.

In my lifetime, and even in just these last 30 or 40 years, I can tell you that I have observed this very thing on the increase. As the degree of persecution increases – even if it is not literal martyrdom but mocking or some other cost – the number of false believers in the visible church will become more and more apparent. Some will renounce religion altogether. Others will take up with some false prophet religion disguised as “Christian.” Look at Jesus’ adjectives: *many. Many. Many.* What He is saying, I conclude, *is that these apostates will become the norm in the*

visible churches. That is to say, *visible local churches will be populated with counterfeits, pulpits will be filled with counterfeits, and genuine Christians will be driven out.*

Incredible you say? Well, is that not the very thing that played out in the Old Covenant “church”?

John 9:17-22 So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.” (18) The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight (19) and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” (20) His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. (21) But how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” (22) (His parents said these things because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone should confess Jesus to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.)

I think we should look at verse 10 once more:

(10) And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.

Fall away. Fall away from what? *From Christ*. Betray one another and hate one another. Who is the “one another”? *Fellow believers*. Understand? Think carefully about this. *Jesus is telling us that this betraying, this hating, this abandoning, is going to be carried out by people who claim to be Christians, who have been baptized, who have sat in the church and taken communion perhaps for years AND these apostates will become the chief persecutors of Christ’s true people.*

I deal with this very thing every single day. Real Christians being hated and persecuted and cast out *by people who claim to be Christians and who claim to be pastors and teachers and church members*. It has happened, and it is increasingly happening just as Jesus warns us about here.

Many, many, many. What is the opposite adjective? *Few, few, few*. And here is another “many” -

(12) And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

What is *lawlessness*? Initially you might be tempted to think of civil law – criminals and so on. But this is lawlessness:

1 John 3:4-6 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.

(5) You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. (6) No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him.

What is John talking about here? *Sin within the visible church. Sin by people who claim to be Christians*. And that is what Jesus is warning us about here in the Olivet Discourse. Think! We don’t need warning that non-Christians are going to walk in sin!! Duh! Most all the time that the Bible is warning us about these things, the arena in consideration is the visible church. Professing Christians. There is where the confusion lies if we do not understand these things clearly. And here is where the *discouragement* lies and the threat to our faith if we aren’t clear on this.

So, lawlessness, *sin*, will increase in the visible church and as a result, says Jesus, *the love of many will grow cold*. What does He mean? What is the

connection? He is describing a cause and effect.

because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

Love is the essence of true religion and true godliness. As sin increases and particularly as it is accepted in the visible churches and becomes approved of and justified by false teachers who pervert Scripture, true godliness decreases. People choose to follow the easy path of Broadway instead of the difficulties of the narrow way that leads to life. We must beware, we must be wise to what is happening, and we must never yield to it.

Look around yourself today. What do we see in the churches? We see abhorrent things not only being accepted and practiced by people who claim to know Christ, but these things are being taught as approved by God and even *as a higher form of spirituality*.

The true Christian is tolerant, accepting of new ideas, accepting of people who are 'different,' and accepting of the interpretations of Scripture recommended by others.

This is what Jesus is warning us about.

This is lawlessness and you can be sure that it is always accompanied by an increase in sin and a decrease in genuine godliness and religion.

(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.

We will plan to comment further on verse 14 next time, but for now let's take some encouragement from vs 13. In spite of all these evils – persecution, false teachers, widespread apostasy, betrayal by supposed brothers in Christ – the Lord *always preserves His true people, His remnant, His true church*. The gates of Hell will never prevail so as to extinguish the light. Never. There will always be real sheep who *endure to the end*. They endure it all and they persevere in faith and love for Christ.

All of this is why I am never discouraged about this little flock of believers right here. Never. In fact, I am encouraged by it. I do not want to be one of the many, I want to be sure I am among the few, and I hope that you do as well.

We must always be watching and be ready for Christ's return. We will know Him when He comes. We are not to be fearful or alarmed by the calamities that characterize this present world, nor try to read any of them as signs of Christ's return. We will know when He comes.