

Are We Coming to the End of the World?

Texts: Matthew 24:1-3; II Timothy 3:1-5

When reading the Bible in my younger years, the return of the Lord seemed so very distant, even though we saw clearly the Bible teaches the imminent return of our Lord. I suppose the distance was there because the description of the last days seemed so different from the world that we lived in. Now as we see the alignment of the nations mentioned in the Bible always in the headlines with wars and rumors of wars, the return is getting closer. What would have read as science fiction a few years ago has become our present reality.

One of our church members asked me a question in reference to the pandemic that started in China and has spread to 190 other countries, "Pastor, what does all of this mean?" Let me say in all honesty, I do not know what everything means. I can most readily say with the songwriter, "I don't know about tomorrow, but I know Who holds my hand." Jesus was asked several questions as revealed in the Gospels. He gave the longest answer to a specific question asked by His disciples two days before His death. "...Tell us...what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:3b). Although I don't have the answers, God has revealed enough to let us know that not only does He know what everything means, but He is sovereign over everything that is happening and everything that is going to happen. Let's observe what Christ has told us about the end of the world as we know it. Christ revealed a parallel to Matthew 24 when He revealed Revelation 6 to John on the Isle of Patmos.

What shall we look for? How shall we know we are in the season of His return?

1. DECEPTION

Matthew 24:4, 5, 11

Revelation 6:1, 2 (The White Horse)

John is caught up in Revelation 4, representing the rapture of the Church to Heaven. In Revelation 5, Christ, the conquering Lamb of God and Lion of the Tribe of Judah, prevails to open a seven-sealed scroll, which is symbolic of having the authority of opening an inherited will. The first seal of the scroll that is opened is a rider on a white horse. This is the Antichrist or the powers of the antichrist. He is, as one writer said, "The Dark Prince on a white horse." He imitates what the Lord Jesus is going to do in Revelation 19 when Christ returns on a white horse. The Antichrist is an imposter. He comes and starts the tribulation. Christ returns and ends tribulation. The Antichrist conquers by deception; he has a bow but no arrows and will conquer peacefully without war. Like Jeremiah said, they will hear, "...Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14).

2. HOSTILITIES

Matthew 24:6, 7a

Revelation 6:3, 4 (The Red Horse)

It is estimated that at any given time there is an average of 44 wars going on worldwide. Albert Einstein didn't like to have his picture taken, but he had a photographer friend who candidly took his photo from time to time. One day Einstein's friend had his camera focused on the genius as Einstein started talking about his own

despair of his formula, $E=mc^2$, and his letter to President Roosevelt that had indirectly made the atomic bomb possible, and his research that had caused the deaths of so many human lives. He then grew silent. His eyes took on a look of immense sadness. There was a question and a reproach in them. At that very moment, his friend released the shutter. Einstein looked up. The cameraman asked, "So you don't believe there will ever be peace?" "No," he answered. "As long as there is man, there will be war." Einstein said on another occasion, "The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything except our way of thinking. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive." We as Christians understand the only true way a person's thinking can be correct is that if he or she has the born again experience through Christ.

3. HUNGER

Matthew 24:7b, "...famines..."

Revelation 6:5, 6 (The Black Horse)

Dr. John Walvoord said, "To put it in ordinary language, the situation would be such that one would have to spend a day's wages for a loaf of bread with no money left to buy anything else." Life will be reduced to the barest of necessities. Famine almost always follows in the aftermath of war. The Antichrist will control a world writhing in the clutches of stabbing hunger. In the global economic collapse we see Revelation 13:17 is placed in action: "And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."

4. "PANDEMIC-MONIUM"

Matthew 24:7b, "...pestilences..." (The Pale Horse)

Revelation 6:7, 8

I have taken two words to form this point of the message, *pandemic* and *pandemonium*, in other words, a worldwide, out-of-control epidemic with chaos unrestrained. Several people have described the streets of our major cities as though we were living in the "wild, wild West." And we haven't seen anything yet according to prophecy. Our word "pale" is translated from the Greek word *chloros*, which is the source for our English word chlorine. It usually denotes a pale green color. Robert L. Thomas said, this word "designates the yellowish green of decay, the pallor of death. It is the pale ashen color that images a face bleached because of terror. It recalls a corpse in the advanced state of corruption."

Death becomes so prevalent that it is used as a proper noun. And it is followed by Hell, the abode of all who reject Christ. Death will come by sword, hunger and death from the beasts of the earth. One view is that during the Tribulation the normal food supplies for animals will be destroyed and they will move into survival mode reeking havoc on human life. Another view is that it represents the brutal killing power of the vicious beastly character of the powers of Antichrist. Dr. Mark Hitchcock said in his book *The End* written in 2012, that one view "...believes the wild beasts refer to animals and birds that originate many plagues such as AIDS, Ebola, bird flu, and other deadly diseases." During the Tribulation one fourth of the world's population will perish.

5. GEOGRAPHICAL AND ASTRONOMICAL TURMOIL

Matthew 24:7c; Revelation 6:12-14

Revelation 16:17-20 and Revelation 6:14b prophesy that the greatest earthquake is coming that is so tremendous that entire islands will be wiped out and massive mountain ranges will be flattened. Then we are told in Revelation 6:12-14 that the moon will turn blood red (Joel 2:30, 31; Acts 2:19, 20) and such a disturbance in the atmosphere allowing asteroids or other heavenly bodies will be falling to the earth as though the stars have fallen out of their sockets in the heavens. And when one looks up, the sky is so dark, it is though it has been rolled up like a scroll.

6. UNMITIGATED INIQUITY AND MARTYRDOM

Matthew 24:9-13, 37

II Timothy 3:1-8

7. SATURATION OF THE GOSPEL

Matthew 24:14

8. THE FINAL HOLOCAUST

Matthew 24:15-26; 32-34

9. THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST IN GLORY

Matthew 24:27-31

CONCLUSION:

A. The Immanency of Christ's Return

Matthew 24:36-44

B. Let Us Be Faithful

Matthew 24:45-51; Matthew 24:36

These prophecies are called the "...beginning of sorrows...." This phrase is referring to the birth pangs that increase with more intensity until finally the birth. They are prophecies specifically referring to the coming of Christ in glory. You might say the signs we observe are the Braxton Hicks of the second coming. John Walvoord used a beautiful analogy of the two phases of our Lord's return. When we see Christmas decorations, lights, advertisements, etc., we know that Christmas is approaching. We hear little, sometimes nothing, about Thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is like the rapture; we don't see it coming. The closer we are to Christmas, we're even closer to Thanksgiving.

"...Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Revelation 22:20b).

-Pastor Pope-