

Realism: Right Expectations for the Last Days

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Date: 29 May 2022

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- [0 : 00] But I'm going to turn now to our reading this morning and we're continuing a little series in the last chapter of Matthew's Gospel. So please turn in your Bible to Matthew chapter 23. And we're reading from Matthew 23, just the last paragraph there from verse 37. And into chapter 24. So Matthew 23 and verse 37.
- 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 would not. See, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me from now on until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
- Jesus left the temple and was going away when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them.
- [1 : 22] You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.
- 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 close of the age?
- And Jesus answered them. See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name saying, I'm the Christ. And they will lead many astray.
- 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. For nation will rise against nation.
- And kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation.
- [2 : 25] And put you to death. And you will be hated by all the nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away. And betray one another.
- And hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased. The love of many will grow cold.
- But the one who endures to the end. Will be saved. 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. Amen. And may God bless his word to us this morning.
- Well would you turn with me to the end of Matthew chapter 23. We're going to be looking particularly at the first part of Matthew chapter 24 this morning.
- [3 : 28] Now as we come into this part of Jesus teaching. We'll find it's not easy. And it's often caused great confusion.
- In fact I would say harm to many Christians. When verses here are being picked out and misused. For all kinds of speculation about the so-called end times.

But in fact. That is the very opposite of Jesus purpose here. It's not to foment sensational speculation.

But it is to urge sober preparation for God's judgment. Which will certainly come. To those that he was first addressing here. But also to all the world.

So we've got to rightly handle and rightly understand our Lord's teaching here. And we'll only do that if we pay close attention to its context.

[4 : 31] Here in Matthew's gospel. And especially in this section itself. First of all in the context of Matthew's whole book. Matthew is showing us all the way through the gospel.

Two clear things. First of all it's a book of action. He's showing us Jesus as the king of the world. Who is inaugurating his everlasting kingdom. First four chapters presents the king.

The son of David. The son of Abraham. Who fulfills all the promises of the law and the prophets. Then from chapter 4 verse 17. Jesus begins his ministry. Proclaiming his rule.

The king is proclaimed in his teaching. And in his demonstration of power. Then from Peter's great confession of the Christ. In chapter 16 verse 21. We have the persecution of the king by his own people.

Leading ultimately to his passion. Which is how the kingdom is inaugurated through his death and his resurrection. So the gospel is a book of action.

[5 : 31] It is telling the story of the king bringing in his kingdom. But secondly it's also a book of teaching. Jesus himself is teaching all about his kingdom.

How it comes. And what it means. And we've seen some of these five great teaching blocks. Where Matthew draws together by subject matter. Christ's teaching on vital aspects of his kingdom.

First of all there's a sermon on the mount. Very well known. Chapters 5 to 7. They teach the character of true kingdom people. Then chapter 10. The next block. Teaches the calling of these people.

It's a call to kingdom mission. Then you've got chapter 13. And the parables of the kingdom. Which teach all about the certainty of Christ's kingdom. But also the present concealment.

The now and the not yet of his kingdom. Then a little while ago back in chapter 18. We saw Christ teaching about the true community of the kingdom. That is his family.

[6 : 29] The true church. The people who are living on earth. But already living for heaven. And then finally here in chapters 24 and 25. In the last block of teaching.

It's all about what the coming of his kingdom will look like. And what it's going to mean to live in the last days. That is the days after Christ's death and resurrection. Right through to the end.

When he comes again to judge the whole world. So if we take this teaching section. In the context of the whole book. And all the others.

Where Matthew always groups together. Teaching about one subject. Coherently together. That is what we should expect here. A coherent discourse. About all the last days.

The gospel age. Right up until the final judgment. So then we need to look. Of course. At the immediate context. The context.

[7 : 28] Right where it is here. Which again will help us to read it. Correctly. And I notice first of all. Matthew gives us once again. Very familiar structural clues.

That tell us. That chapter 24 and 25 here. Are one single unit of teaching. That we have to interpret in that way. Look at chapter 24 verse 3.

Very familiar formula. It begins all five of the teaching blocks. In Matthew. Where Jesus sat down. His disciples gather around. And he begins to teach them. And he teaches them.

All the way through. If you look to chapter 26 verse 1. Where it tells us. Jesus finished. All these sayings. He sits down and teaches.

He teaches. And Matthew says. He finished. Teaching all these things. So we've got to read. Not just chapter 24 on its own. But chapter 24 and 25. As part of the same message.

[8 : 23] As we'll see. That is very very important. Secondly. Notice how. Verses 1 and 2 of chapter 24. Are linked very clearly. With chapter 23. That we looked at last week.

Where Jesus. Pronounces. A judgment to come. On Jerusalem. Verse 36. Within. That very generation. Their house. The temple. Would be left to them desolate.

And look at verses 1 and 2. Of chapter 24. You see. It's an acted out prophecy. Isn't it? Jesus. Literally. Leaves the temple. And goes away.

And then in verse 2. He confirms. What he's just said. With his words. Not one stone. Is going to be left. Upon the other. Of this temple. And it's that action.

And it's that statement. Isn't it? That provokes the question. In verse 3. From the disciples. Which the whole of the rest. Of the discourse here. Then answers. And notice the shape.

[9 : 21] Of the question there. In verse 3. And of Jesus' answer. This is absolutely vital. They ask. When will these things be? That is. The destruction of the temple. He's just talked about.

And. What will be the signs. Of your coming. At the close of the age. Now the coming there. Is the word parousia. That's the word used by the.

New Testament. Apostles. Always in their letters. Of Jesus' second coming. His coming to judge the world. But you see. For these disciples here. Those two things. Seem to be inseparable. God's judgment on Israel.

And her temple. And God's judgment on the whole world. They seem to assume. Will be one and the same thing. But in his answer. While Jesus explains. Yes. These things are inseparable.

Theologically. They must be distinguished. Chronologically. In time. Both God's judgment. On the Israelite nation.

[10 : 20] And his judgment. On the world. Are. Are. As a consequence. Of Christ's work. His death. And his resurrection. Which does fulfill. All the Old Testament. Prophecies. About the end of the world.

The day of the Lord. The latter days. God's. Intervention. In salvation. And in judgment. movement. But Jesus. Not only. Confirms.

The prophetic. Teaching. He also. Clarifies it. Now. We've seen that. All the way through. Jesus. Teaching ministry. He's teaching people.

Isn't he? Yes. The day of the Lord. Has come. The kingdom has come. Repent. The kingdom of heaven. Is at hand. That's how he began. His ministry. But. Though these last days.

The latter days. Of the prophets. Were now begun. Jesus said. They're not yet. Fully come. The very end. Of these last days. Will only come. When Christ returns.

[11 : 16] To finally judge all people. That was the message. Of all the parables. Of chapter 13. When the harvest time. Comes. Only then. Will the wheat. And the chaff. Be separated. Only then. Will the good fish.

And the bad fish. Be separated. Only then. Will what is hidden. But very real now. The kingdom of God. Be revealed at last. To the whole world. As the pearl of great price. The treasure that.

Is worth all others. And just the same here. Jesus very clearly. Has two clear horizons. In view. He speaks. Very clearly.

Of an imminent judgment. On the earthly nation of Israel. And its people. And its temple. And. He also speaks. Just as clearly.

About a judgment. On the whole world. And indeed. On all the time. In between these things. The whole. Era. That the New Testament. Refers to. As the last days.

[12 : 12] So we have to keep. Both of these horizons. Very clearly. In view. As demanded. By the context. The whole of Jesus teaching. Throughout Matthew's gospel. But also. The specific context.

Here. Referring to chapter 23. And Jesus question. And his very clear. Answer. And he deliberately. Distinguishes. Very clearly. These two clear judgments.

In order. To prepare. His listeners. For both of these things. For his first hearers. He is preparing them. For a coming. Physical destruction. Of Jerusalem. Which came under the Romans. In AD 70.

And for all his disciples. Then. But also. Ever since. Even more importantly. He is preparing them. For the coming judgment. Of God. On this whole world. So Jesus whole purpose.

In his teaching here. Is on sober. Preparation. For real judgment. Not. At all. Wild speculation. About the date of the end of the world. And unless we're clear about that.

[13 : 11] We will get into all kinds. Of cute confusion. And real danger. On the one hand. There are others. Who find in. The Olivet Discourse. Chapter 24 here.

A rich repository of signs. That will predict. The time of the second coming of Jesus. And people can become very obsessed. With these signs.

Of the end times. And they scour history. And current affairs. Especially in the Middle East. Especially to do with the modern day state of Israel. For signs.

Of the parousia. The coming of Jesus. In the 1960s and 70s. It was the. The six day war. And the Yom Kippur war. And it was. The Gulf Wars.

And all sorts of other things. Today. There's many people. Who look at all the eruptions. That have happened with COVID. With Russia and Ukraine. With all sorts of. Very real concerns. About growing authoritarianism.

[14 : 06] And oppressive ideologies. In the world. And so on. And we should be concerned. About these things. Of course. But people see. In these signs. They think. Things Jesus is speaking about.

Here in Matthew 24. And assume. That the parousia is coming. And some people. Would even go further. And stockpile food. And guns. And flee to the mountains.

To escape. This tribulation. That's coming. Well. There might be actually. Very good reasons. To stock up on. On food. And fuel. With inflation. Running rampant. And all the stuff.

That we're seeing. But if you think. That doing those things. Is really going to protect you. From the coming day. Of judgment. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then I'm afraid. And you're badly mistaken.

And you've also failed. To see Jesus words here. Properly. And read them properly. Look at verse 6. He says. We will see. All these kinds of things. But. Notice. The end is.

[15 : 02] Not. Yet. In verse 16. And he does talk about. Fleeing to the mountains. Notice. He is talking about. Those living in Judea. Not in the United Kingdom.

Or the United States. Or anywhere else. For that matter. He was talking about. A coming judgment. On Judea. On Jerusalem. In that generation. That could. Be escaped from.

By fleeing to the mountains. Which indeed. Many Christians did. And escaped. Because they heeded Jesus. And the kind of. Speculative attitude. Like that. Also totally ignores.

Verse 36. Look. Jesus. He clearly says. That concerning. That day. His coming. To judge the whole earth. No one. Knows.

The timing. Not even. The son himself. Only God. The father. And that's the problem. You see. Of many. Millennial. And dispensational.

[15 : 57] Schemes. Of. Interpretation. They don't do justice. To Matthew. As a clear. And ordered. Teacher. And theologian. And it fails. To read the discourse.

In its proper context. And for its proper purpose. Its purpose. Is godly preparation. About how to live now. And every day. And always.

Ready for judgment. When it comes. Not to lead us into fruitless speculation. Which so often just leads to. To fanaticism. And fear. Speak to those who grew up.

In the Plymouth Brethren. Watching films like Left Behind. And The Thief in the Night. And so on. Terrified youngsters. He started seeing signs of the end.

Everywhere. I had a friend. Who once came home from school. To an empty house. Wondering where his parents were. And then unknown to him. His next door neighbor. Had just not long started learning the trumpet.

[16 : 53] Came into this totally empty house. He heard the trumpet blasting. And he assumed the rapture had happened. And he'd been left behind. He was terrified. Well you laugh. That is not Jesus purpose.

In his teaching here. Let me assure you. It is not to foster speculation. About the future. It's to bring godliness. In the present.

Then at the other extreme. Of course. There are those. Who see this teaching here. As having nothing at all. To do with the future. At least not the future. After AD 70.

Everything. They think in this chapter. Is just about. The past. So there's no future coming of Christ. No future judgment. And no. Future resurrection.

And they think that either. Because as. Some liberal scholars believe. They think Jesus was just wrong. He did predict. A second coming. In glory. Within a generation. But. He was wrong. And that's that.

[17 : 54] There are people. Who are. Bible believing people. Who equally say. That Jesus. Said. He would come to judge. Within a generation. And therefore. He must have done that. As promised.

And so he did. And in 1870. Jesus came. He judged Israel. As promised. But also. He spiritually. Resurrected. All of his elect. Then. And so.

Since then. We've been living. In this fully. Realized. Resurrected. Kingdom. As it were. That's a view called. Hyper. Preterism. Got more followers.

Probably. In the United States. Than here. But those people. Do take the Bible. Literally. And so. In fact. They believe. That they are.

Honoring God's word. But actually. By denying. The bodily return. Of Christ. As judge. Actually. They're putting themselves. Right outside. Credal. Christianity.

[18 : 49] It's quite hard. To fathom that view. Because. When you read. The New Testament. Epistles. They constantly. Point to Christ's. Coming again. We await. A savior. From heaven.

Says Paul. Paul condemns. Heretics. Like Hymenaeus. And. Philetus. And second. Timothy. Who are. Leading people astray. He says. By teaching. That the resurrection.

Had already happened. Making shipwreck. Of their faith. But you see. If you take. The context. Of Matthew. Here. At all. Seriously. You simply.

Cannot. Hold that view. Because. Crucially. As I've already said. The discourse. Is not. Just chapter 24. It includes.

The whole. Of chapter 25. Which. Very clearly. Is a chapter. All about. A judgment. That is still to come. Where Jesus says. Like wise virgins.

[19 : 42] You must watch. Because you do not know. Either the day. Or the hour. Of his coming. Chapter 25. Verse 13. Or you've got to be like. Faithful servants. You prove faithful.

When after a long time. Jesus says. In the parable. The master returns. And the whole climax. Of chapter 25. Comes. From verse 31 onwards.

When the son of man. Comes in his glory. To sit on his throne. And to. Judge. The whole world. Separating the sheep. From the goats. In a judgment. That is still. Clearly.

In the future. It's concerned. With heaven and hell. With eternal punishment. And eternal life. So we must set. This passage.

In its context. The immediate context here. Which is both. Chapter 24 and 25. And indeed. The whole context. Of all of Jesus teaching. In the gospel. About a kingdom.

[20 : 37] Which has already begun. But is still. To a large extent. Hidden. And only one day. Will be revealed. At last. To the whole world. At his coming. In glory.

So chapters 24 and 25. Here do give. A sure word. About the near future. For that generation. Jesus was speaking to. That's now in the past. For us. His first coming.

Was the. The great and awesome. Day of the Lord. For Israel. As Malachi the prophet. Spoke of. John the Baptist. Was the Elijah figure. Who came to warn. In that day. And their rejection.

Of John. And their rejection. Of Jesus. Well that led. To the judgment. And the utter destruction. Of the temple. But Jesus words. Here were also.

Speaking about. The great day. That was promised. For the whole world. And that also. Was begun. In his coming. Isaiah spoke. Of these days. Didn't he? About the new creation. Of a new heavens.

[21 : 33] And a new earth. When at last. All flesh. Would worship. The Lord. And the glory. Of the new world. Would fill the earth. Do you remember. When Isaiah.

At the end of his. Prophecy. Spoke of those things. He spoke of the dawning. Of the new creation. As like a birth process. As like one in labor. Bringing forth. A new world. And that is exactly.

The language. That Jesus uses here. Look at. Verse 8. Of chapter 24. These are the beginnings. Says Jesus. Of the. Birth pains. Peter uses exactly.

That language. In Acts 2. And 24. We saw it on Easter Sunday. Of the resurrection. Of Jesus. Paul uses the same language. Of the day of the Lord. In 1st Thessalonians. Chapter 5. The coming.

Of the kingdom. Of heaven. Is like the onset. Of labor. It's the end. Of the waiting time. But it's the beginning. Of the birth process.

[22 : 28] Which is a painful time. But it is one. That ends. With a great joy. Of new creation. But until the very end. Jesus says.

There will be labor. And toil. As we live through. These last days. The birth pangs. Of the kingdom of God. And that's what. Jesus teaching here. In these two chapters.

Is all about. How to live. As real Christians. As followers of Jesus. As true. Kingdom people. Preparing for that. Great day. That is to come. The day of judgment. And preparing rightly.

Which will only do. If we listen to Jesus. Jesus. Who is the judge of all. Who is coming again. He's the one who's coming. To bring an end. To that waiting.

To finally give birth. To the glorious kingdom of heaven. In its consummation. So whether it's Matthew's first readers. Or whether it's us listening today. We're all living.

[23 : 25] In these same last days. We're all part of that same day. Which Paul calls. The day of salvation. The day of the kingdom of Christ. Christ. And it will be marked.

By exactly the same characteristics. All the way through. From Christ's first coming. To his second. From the inauguration of that kingdom. Right through its.

Continuation. In the whole age of the gospel. And to its consummation. When Jesus returns. These days. Will be. Days of birth pangs.

Of turmoil. Of tribulation. Of shaking. Of the heavens and the earth. And if we listen to Jesus. He will teach us. How to live. In these days. And we need first of all.

Realism. We need to have right. Expectations. For these last days. To the very end. That's the first. Fourteen verses here. Chapter 24. A general overview.

[24 : 20] Of all these days. And what they're going to be like. But then we need readiness. Also. With right actions. For the days that we live in. That's the rest of chapter 20. Chapter 24. And then we need responsiveness.

We need the right attitude. Always. Right to the very end. That's the three parables. That Jesus. Then tells. In the end of chapter 24. Into 25. And above all.

We need righteousness. Which is what will be revealed. In the real experience. Of the last days. And that's what Jesus. Speaks about. At the end of chapter 25. In the parable of the sheep.

And the goats. What are Jesus. His own priorities. In his teaching. About. Eschatology. About the last things. What is the most important thing.

Jesus says. We need to know. About the end of this world. Well it is not. Fruitless. Speculation. About the day. Or the hour. What it is.

[25 : 19] Is faithful preparation. Regardless. Of the timing. Of Christ's return. He urges on us. That because he is coming.

In judgment. To judge the whole earth. We need realism. And we need readiness. And we need responsiveness. To his words. So that we'll be found righteous. At the end. So over the next few weeks.

We're going to listen to Jesus. As he tells us. How to be prepared. Always. For that great day. And first of all. Then in the time that we've. We've got left today.

After that long introduction. We're going to focus on. Verses 4 to 14. Where Jesus begins. By teaching us. Realism. We must have. Realistic expectations.

For all of the last days. If we're going to respond. With the kind of true faith. That will endure. To the end. And therefore. That will receive. That full salvation. And notice this.

[26 : 16] Christian realism. Is the very opposite. Of frantic alarmism. The very first thing. Jesus says. Look at verse 4. It's a necessary negative. Don't.

Be led astray. Same with verse 6. Don't. Be alarmed. But verse 13. Do. Persist.

And endure faithfully. That's the message. The very opposite. Isn't it? Of the sort of sensationalized warnings. That you get in some of these books. That Christians read. So often. About the end times.

Keep your head. And keep the faith. Is what Jesus is saying to us. And his clear aim. And his clear command. Is that we do endure.

In faith. And endure in love. To him. Right to the very end. And so to encourage us. He tells us very plainly. What we're to expect. And he tells us.

[27 : 10] Absolutely clearly. How we are to react. A great comfort. Isn't it? To know that Jesus knows it all. And he's prepared it. Prepared us for it.

By teaching us. All we have to do. Is listen to him. All we have to do. Is follow his instruction. And he's made it simple. As simple as ABC. Indeed. ABC.

D. E. And F. And a very important G. As we'll see. What are we to expect. In this age. Right to the end. Well first of all. A. Antichrists. Verse 5.

False. Saviors. False. Christs. Many of them. And verse 11. False prophets also. To lead people astray. Now the term.

Antichrist. Has been made a bit outlandish. And weird. Among some people. Films like. The Omen. And so on. That terrified me. When I was a teenager. And there are some Christians.

[28 : 05] Who are obsessed. With antichrist. With. 666. 666. Is the mark of the antichrist. And all that sort of thing. And people can be unhealthily. Obsessed. With things that are outlandish.

And bizarre. But. But Jesus is simply saying here. That there will be many. Who claim to speak. And act in his name. And come. Saying they are completing his work.

But actually. They lead people astray. From him. From the true Christ. And the true gospel. New Testament letters. Are full of. Examples of just that. False teachers.

People who say. Well yes. Jesus is part of the story. But. What you really need now. To experience a full salvation. Is. Our teaching. This practice. Or whatever it might be. And the last 2000 years.

Of church history. Have. Been littered with all sorts of things. New religions. That have sprung up. Like Islam. For example. It says. Yes. Jesus was a prophet. But of course. Muhammad comes as the prophet.

[29 : 07] Well that's led many people astray. The world over. All sorts of cults. That have come out of the Christian church. Like the Moonies. Or like the Jehovah's Witnesses. Or. Christian Science. And so on.

Who've said. Well the Reverend Sung Young Moon. Or. Or Joseph Smith. Or Mary Baker Eddy. Have come. With a fullness. Of the teaching that Christ. Needs to complete. Led many a street.

Including today. Or today. We have all sorts of. False Christ. Don't we? False saviors. The green earth worshippers.

The trans cult. Offering salvation. In. In. In veganism. Or in gender reassignment. Or whatever new righteousness. Is going to be the next thing of our age. Many false prophets will arise.

Says Jesus. And they will lead many. Astray. Even. In the church. Look down to verse 24. Even among the elect. Real Christians. Will be at great risk.

[30 : 05] Says Jesus. From false Christs. And false prophets. So clearly. These antichrists. Are at large. Clearly.

They're influential. Even within. The professing church. So you see. When the reformers. Referred to. Medieval popes.

As antichrists. Well in the sense of Jesus words. Here. That was perfectly true. They were leading people astray. Leading them away. From true salvation. From the true gospel. In the name of Christ.

And just as there. Are still plenty. Of so-called Christian leaders. And theologians. And bishops. And moderators. And indeed. Whole generals. Assemblies of churches. Who lead people astray.

In the name of Christ. By rejecting the true word of Christ. They are buying dying. At the altar of antichrist. That Jesus tells us. To expect all of this. False Christ.

[31 : 02] False prophets. Will arise. And will lead many astray. But verse 4. See that no one leads you astray. And even when things seem to go.

From bad to worse. As Paul says. To us that they will. As the coming of the Lord. Draws near. And people will be more and more. Deluded. And believe all kinds. Of utter falsehood. Don't you be led astray.

Expect. Antichrists. Even in the professing church. And resist them. Says Jesus. And expect. B. Bloodshed.

And barbarity. In the world. Right till the end. Verse 6. Wars. And rumors of wars. Worse wars. And verse 7. Nation against nation. Kingdom against kingdom.

Well that's. The history of the world. That we know isn't it? It's the present day. And it will be the future. Because it's all part. Of the inevitable turmoil. That is. The birthing.

[32 : 00] Of the new creation. In Christ. So don't be alarmed. Says Jesus. Verse 6. All this must take place. The end is not yet. There's so much alarm.

Around us today. Isn't there? Fears. Constantly stoked. By the media. Relentlessly. We lurch. From one cause of alarm. To the next. With barely a breather. First it's the COVID.

Catastrophe. Then we're back. To the climate catastrophe. Now it's war in Ukraine. Then it's talk of World War 3. Well that may well come. Who knows? The folly of.

World leaders. On all sides. Seems to know no limit. And of course. There are sinister. Vested interests. Aren't there? Those who profit. Enormously. From making war.

President Eisenhower. Warned. Didn't he? About the military. Industrial complex. Multi-billion dollar. Power. That benefits from war. Our world is a very fragile place.

[32 : 59] Isn't it? It's a very wicked place. As well. And Jesus says very plainly. Bloodshed and barbarity. Will be writ large. Through history. But Christian people.

Of all people. Are not to be alarmed. By this. We're not to be obsessed. With predicting Armageddon. Not to get obsessed. With end times prophecy.

We are to be the people. Who show calm. Sanity. The end. Is not yet. Just because war is around us. We don't panic.

We're to pray. And we're to persevere. Says Jesus. And the same also. When we face sea. Calamities. Which will come. Certainly. Both naturally. So called.

And man-made. Verse 7. Famines. And earthquakes. And other natural disasters. Seems that. Famine. Affecting us.

[33 : 55] Here. Directly. Might well be on the cards soon. With a combination. That we're seeing. Of huge inflation. Lockdown. Chaos. And war. All entirely. Man-made follies. But famine.

Of course. Constantly. Affects many in the world. As do all kinds of calamities. Because we live in a world. Under the curse. And all of that. Is ultimately. The result of human sin. But even if such things.

Do worsen. Greatly. Until the final dissolution. Of this world. We are not to panic. Verse 8. All these. Are but the beginning. Of the birth pains.

And these groanings. You see. Should point us. More and more. To our hope. Our hope of salvation. Paul talks about that. In Romans 8. Doesn't he? And says. We should be eagerly waiting. With much endurance.

As we experience. The groanings of the world. All of these things. Breed hope. For the Christian. Not despair. Hope and longing. For our home of righteousness.

[34 : 54] Which will be revealed. At Christ's coming. As he promises. And we do need that hope. Don't we? Because Jesus says here. That there will be.

For every true believer. Times of real. Deed. Distress. That's the NIV translation. Of verse 9.

In our version. Tribulation. There again. In verse 21. In verse 29. These will be characteristic. Of the last days. For Christians. The triumphalistic idea.

Here is there. Of a sort of golden age of peace. Where all trouble. Is conquered for believers. Before Christ comes. No. There's distress. Says Jesus. There's martyrdom. There is hatred.

For all. From all the world. Because of me. Well. It's very evident. Isn't it? In many nations today. Christians are heavily persecuted.

[35 : 51] And increasingly. We're hated in our own nation. In our own culture. And Jesus says. Christians will share in. Not just. The general perils.

Of a fallen world. But they will face. Special hatred. Special persecution. Because they're Christians. Paul says it very plainly too. All. All. Who desire to live.

A godly life. In Christ Jesus. Will. Be. Persecuted. I think we instinctively. Assume. Don't we. That that doesn't really. Apply to us. Because even in our own reactions.

Often when Christians. Or churches. Are attacked. In the media. Or bad mouth. Or scorned. Or worse. Even many Christians. Assume. Oh well. They must be in the wrong. They must have deserved it. They must have brought it.

Upon themselves. But Jesus says. Persecution comes. Not. Because the Christian church. Is being foolish. But because they're being. Faithful to his name. He says.

[36 : 50] That's not having a bad witness. That's the mark of true witness. To Jesus Christ. The word witness. Comes from the Greek word. Meaning martyr. It's when the world.

Is trying to stone you to death. That you know. That you are bearing witness. All the truly godly. Will be persecuted. Says Paul.

While evil people. And imposters. Go from bad to worse. Deceiving. And being deceived. And the cause of so much distress.

Especially for Christians. Is due to. E. Verse 12. Evil. Rampant lawlessness. In society. The Greek word there is.

Anomia. No law. No law. And a. Morality. And notice the connection there. With verse 11 and 12. It's the false teaching.

[37 : 43] Which legitimizes. Amoral. Lawlessness. The false teaching. Blesses the very antithesis. Of God's holy ways. It's a kind of spirituality. That demands no moral transformation.

And of course. That is very attractive. Very popular. And many of course. In the professing church. Crave that popularity. With the world. And so they will embrace.

A spirituality. That's happy to say. Yes. Be true to yourself. Be a law. Unto yourself. Express yourself. Exactly as you are. And want to be. I feel.

Therefore I am. That's the gospel of our age. Isn't it? And that's what has become. The gospel of our national churches. But you see.

Jesus says. That's no gospel at all. Nor is it. The true love of God at all. Look at verse 12. It is love. Grown cold. It has no.

[38 : 40] Transforming warmth. Of Christ. Within it. It leads away from Christ. Away from salvation. Which brings us to F.

Falling away. Verses 10 to 12. Speak of that. Don't they? The apostasy. And Jesus says. Many. Will fall away. And betray one another.

And hate one another. That is within the professing church. Their love of the real Jesus. He says. Will go cold. And their love for the true family of Jesus. The true church. Will grow cold.

But we see that. Don't we? And Jesus says. We're to expect it. Whole New Testament. They're clear on that. Read Hebrews. Read 1 John. Read Judas. As we'll be looking at tonight.

And Paul I think does suggest. That these things will perhaps. Become more and more marked. Towards the return of Christ. But it will be a feature. Of all the last days. And Jesus wants to jolt us.

[39 : 40] Into seriousness about that. A to F is very sobering. Isn't it? No triumphalistic fantasy. No warm cuddles. No.

We need realism. Says Jesus. Right expectations. For the days in which we live. And we need to listen. And learn from Jesus. If we are to endure. But there's one more letter.

That we mustn't forget. And that's G. For gospel. Look at verse 13 and 14. The gospel will triumph.

Not despite these things. But through these things. In these things. It more than conquers. Don't miss these verses. Look at the three wills. That speak of the great certainty here.

Of endurance. And of evangelism. The one who endures. Says Jesus. Will be saved. The gospel of the kingdom. Will be proclaimed. To the whole world.

[40 : 39] And then. And only then. The end will come. The goal is not in doubt. God is sovereign. God is in control. His gospel will triumph. Among all the nations.

Every tribe. And language. And people. Nothing can ever stop. The plan and purpose. Of God. To bring to the goal. Of utter fulfillment. His glorious kingdom.

In the birth. Of a whole new creation. And when we look at the world. And it seems very. Very different. When it seems otherwise. When there seems to be. Nothing but calamity.

Tribulation. And persecution. And disasters. And all the rest. Jesus says to us. That is not my kingdom. Dying in the womb. It is the very evidence.

Of its sure emergence. To birth. It is the beginning. Of the birth pains. That will bring forth. A new world. That will herald the glory.

[41 : 35] Of the heavenly kingdom. Fully revealed. That Jesus returns. That's what we're to expect. Friends. In these last days.

Well how are we to respond then. To these expectations. Well I think Jesus gives us clear. Commands. Three clear commands here. First be warned.

Don't be led astray. Verse four. Don't be alarmed. Either by foolish speculations. Or by fear. As you look at the world. And as you listen to. To some of those Christians. Who are preoccupied.

With end time prophecies. And don't be alarmed. By those. Who want to lead you away. From the love. Of the real Jesus. And obeying his commands.

Leading your way. To an easier way. That avoids the struggles. Or promises to. And avoids persecution. For Jesus sake. No. Endure. To the end. As a good soldier of Christ.

- [42 : 31] The one who endures. Will be saved. Says Jesus. God is in control. And all of these calamities. Just remind us. That his judgments.
- Are already at work. In the world. And they will find. Consummation. In the last judgment. So be warned. And endure. Secondly. Be glad.
- All these things. Are the beginning. Of the birth pains. Of a glorious new creation. Paul says. Doesn't he. That the whole. Of creation. Groans. In the pains.
- Of childbirth. Waiting for release. Waiting. Waiting. For that great day. Of bodily resurrection. And it's coming. Doesn't make such a difference. To have that hope. To know that is true.
- So that when we experience. The pains. Of ill health. In our bodies. Or calamities. Or wars. Or persecution. Or whatever. Or just the battle of sin. In our lives. To know that these are the birth pains.
- [43 : 29] That labor. Will not last forever. And it will come forth. In great joy. That's the hope. In which we're saved. Be glad.
- Rejoice. Because the day is drawing near. When labor has begun. The birth is going to happen. Be warned.
- Be glad. Finally. Be bold. Bold. Bold in spreading. The gospel of Jesus Christ. To the whole world. Because Peter says. That is what will speed his coming. Do you long for peace in the world.
- And not war? Well it's not going to come. Through the United Nations. Or NATO. Or anything else. Do you long for an end. To famines. To suffering. And all of these things. Well. That's not going to come.
- Just through charity. And aid. Even good aid. Even Christian. Charity. Do you want an end. To earthquakes. And natural disasters. And all of these things. That won't come to an end.
- [44 : 26] Just by better warning systems. Do you long for an end. To the persecution. Of Christian believers. All over the world. Of course. But that won't come.
- Through campaigns for justice. Even good ones. That we love. Like the Barnabas Fund. Like Release International. Don't misunderstand me. All these things have a place. Of course they do. We should be rightly engaged.
- In showing love and care. To all. And especially to those. Within the household of faith. But none of these things. Will ever bring in. The new creation.
- They're just necessary things. Aren't they? For a dying world. The kingdom will be consummated. Says Jesus. Only one way. Look at verse 14. Through the priority. Of the proclamation.
- Of the gospel of the kingdom. As a testimony. To all nations. Then. The end. Will come. The great goal.
- [45 : 21] That Peter speaks about. In his second letter. The rebirth. Of the whole cosmos. Through the dissolution. Of this present world. And he urges us. Peter says there.
- Look forward. To the day of God. And speed. It's coming. He wants us to join in. God's midwifery team. In the birth. Of the new creation.
- And we do that. By being bold. In the proclamation. Of the gospel. Of the kingdom. To the whole world. Give yourselves to that. Says Jesus. And the end will come.
- All will be completed. Be warned. There will be many difficult days. To live through. But be glad. Because labor has begun.
- And the new birth is coming. So until then. Be bold. Proclaiming the gospel. Speeding. It's coming. Some Christians.

[46 : 18] Are very very. Easily unsettled. All kinds of. Prophetic speculation. All kinds of fears. And these things. But friends. When you listen to Jesus. It's simple.

As simple as A, B, C. And D. And E and F. But above all G. Let's pray.

The one who endures. To the end. Will be saved. And the gospel of the kingdom.

Will be proclaimed. Throughout the whole world. As a testament. To all nations. And then the end. Will come. Heavenly Father.

We thank you. That in your son. We have all the knowledge. That we need. For our life. And for our salvation. And we thank you.

[47 : 19] That we have. A gospel to proclaim. Good news. For all. Throughout the earth. To help us Lord. Whatever. We should see.

And experience. In our lifetimes. Help us. We pray. To be devoted. Boldly. To proclaiming. This great gospel. Of our saviour's name.

Help us. To live lives together. Singing his glory. And telling his worth. Until he comes. For Jesus sake.

Amen.