

The Signs of Christ's Coming, Part 2

Scripture: Matthew 24:4-5

Code: 2367

Now we come to the study of the Word of God in Matthew chapter 24. Matthew 24 and 25 is known as "The Olivet Discourse." It is a discourse or a sermon by our Lord Jesus Christ, delivered on the Mount of Olives. Its subject is the second coming of Christ. So it is His own sermon, His own message about His own second coming. It's a glorious, glorious message, and we look forward eagerly to grasping its great, great truths.

You know, just to give you a little bit of setting, you need to remember that Jesus came to Israel to be their Redeemer, their Savior, their Deliverer, their Messiah, their King. But John says, "He came to His own and His own received Him not." Thirty-three years after He entered this world, He's about to exit. He began His ministry by offering Himself to the people of Israel and He ended it by them rejecting Him. It's only a couple of days now before He will be executed on a cross by the very people He came to save and to rule.

Now, if you've been with us in our study of Matthew, you know that He has just given final pronouncement of judgment on Israel. His words are in verse 37 of chapter 23. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them who are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and you would not. Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

That is the last public speech Jesus ever gave to the people of Israel. His final words to them are words of judgment. He never preaches another sermon. In chapter 21, chapter 22, and chapter 23, He pronounced judgment on the nation Israel, judgment on the false leaders and judgment on the people who followed their deceptions. His judgment came in the form of direct statements of judgment. It came in the form of parables of judgment. And finally, in chapter 23, a literally blistering denunciation of the false leaders that led the people astray, and He closes it by saying, "Your house is left unto you desolate." A pronouncement of judgment.

But that pronouncement of judgment, most interestingly, is followed in verse 39 by these words: "For I say unto you, you shall not see Me henceforth till you shall say, 'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.'" Now, "He that cometh in the name of the Lord" is a Messianic title. And He says you won't see Me again until I come as Messiah and King. So on the one hand, He pronounces judgment; on the other hand, He says I'll be back. On the one hand, He says your house is left unto you desolate, wasted; on the other hand, He says I will return, as it were, to restore it again.

Now, this particular conclusion to His message, no doubt, filled His disciples' hearts with great hope. Sure, they heard that He pronounced judgment, but they also heard that He would come as the one who would establish His kingdom. They had waited for this for all the years that they had been with Jesus. And I believe at this very moment, at the close of the sermon in Matthew 23, the disciples were probably at the high point of their experience with Jesus through all the three years of their ministry. They heard Him say that He was going to bring judgment. And they also heard Him say that He was going to come in the name of the Lord – a Messianic truth. And so they felt because of the way they understood the Old Testament prophets, as we saw in our last study, that this was it. He was going to bring judgment and that judgment would be a purging and a cleansing and then immediately would be followed by His kingdom. They believed that they were on the edge of the Messianic kingdom.

In fact, in Luke chapter 19 verse 11, we have a verse that really supports that idea. In Luke 19:11, listen to this: "As they heard things, He added and spoke a parable because He was near to Jerusalem." This is when they're just on the way to Jerusalem on – in the beginning of this week. And it says He added this parable "because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear." The disciples, from the time He approached Jerusalem, thought the kingdom should immediately appear, and so they were living in that anticipation, and when the crowd threw palm branches and clothing in front of Him as He rode "the colt the foal of an ass" and they shouted, "Hosanna, blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord, Hosanna to the Son of David," they thought this was all a part of readying the people for the kingdom. And then as He went into the temple and cleansed the temple, they thought that was the purging of the hypocrites. And now as He says He is going to come in judgment, they feel this is going to be the purification of Jerusalem which they believed was going to happen. And then He's going to come in the name of the Lord as their Messiah. They see all of this happening immediately.

In fact, as they leave the temple ground in chapter 24 verse 2, Jesus, looking at the temple, says, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down." And He even tells them that the temple itself will be destroyed, and that fit into their teaching, too, because they remembered that Ezekiel said in the kingdom there would be a new temple. And this temple, after all, was built not even by a Jew but by Herod, the Idumaeen. And it was a temple that was occupied presently by hypocrites and false religionists. And so it all was sort of coming together in their minds. The Messiah had reached the moment when He was going to bring His kingdom. And they disregarded His words about dying, about a seed falling into the ground to die. They ignored what He said about having to be delivered over to the chief priests and scribes and to be crucified and to rise again the third day. And all they could see was the kingdom, the kingdom, the kingdom. And sure enough, He had already begun to cleanse the temple and now He was going to destroy it. He was going to judge the ungodly and purge the nation, and then He was going to come in full glory as King of kings and Lord of lords, and they believed they were imminently at that point. This was how they

interpreted the prophets.

Remember I told you last week the sequence of their kind of eschatology or their doctrine of the last days? They believed, because of the way they studied the prophets, they believed – and it's revealed in the literature of that time, the non-biblical literature – that first there would be a time of great tribulation. They probably thought they were in that and had been it a long time under the Roman and Greek oppression. It would be followed by the coming of a herald who would announce the Messiah. That was John the Baptist as far as they were concerned. Then the Messiah would come, and He did. Then He would purge the godless nations. Then He would purge Jerusalem. Then He would gather the dispersed Jews from around the world and establish His kingdom. Well, they thought they were right on schedule. They had been through time of tribulation. The forerunner had come. The Messiah was there. He had begun the purging of Jerusalem. It would be followed, surely, by the destruction of the godless nations, the gathering of the scattered Jews, and the setting up of the kingdom. They thought they were right at that moment – the kingdom would come.

You see, they didn't have any sense of a long time period between the first and second coming. They didn't have any idea that Christ would come and then He would go back and it would be a long period of thousands of years before He returned. That's not the way the prophets spoke. They only spoke of one coming of the Messiah. They didn't fill in that large gap in the middle. That's why the New Testament calls that a mystery which was hidden in time past. The whole church age as we know it is an unrevealed thing in the Old Testament. It's not spoken of there. There's a big gap which they did not understand.

Let me illustrate that to you by having you take your Bible and look to Isaiah 61, and just one illustration will show you what I mean. In Isaiah 61, we have a picture of the coming Messiah. And it says in verse 1: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me." It's the Messiah speaking here in anticipation of His coming. "Because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the meek. He sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, the opening of prison to those who are bound, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all that mourn, to appoint unto those who mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord that He might be glorified." That's a marvelous prophecy. Then from verse 4 down to verse 11, you have more of that prophecy. Now, notice what's in it. First He comes to preach in verse 1 and to set at liberty the captives, and so forth. And then to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, that is the year of the Lord's salvation. Then it's followed by, "And the day of vengeance of our God."

In other words, the prophet sees the Messiah coming, preaching the gospel, and bringing the vengeance of the day of God at the very same time. But that isn't how it is. And then, of course, that's followed immediately by the kingdom which is a time of comfort for mourners, a time of beauty for

ashes, oil of joy for mourning, garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, and the planting of trees of righteousness, and so forth and so on. And then it's – all the way down to verse 11, "The earth will bring forth her bud, the garden causes things to grow that are sown in it to spring forth, and in that way the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations." In other words, the whole Messianic work is seen in one unit.

Now go to Luke 4 and let me show you something. Luke 4, Jesus in Nazareth, in the synagogue, verse 16, "As His custom was, went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read and there was delivered unto Him the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written." And He found Isaiah 61:1 and following, and He read, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He's anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor, He sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, preach deliverance to the captives, recover the sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord," and He closed the book.

Now wait a minute. He only got halfway through Isaiah 61:2. The next line is: "And the day of vengeance of our God." Why didn't He talk about that part? Why didn't He read that part? Because that is what? Future. And here was an indication that what Isaiah saw as a whole, Jesus would fulfill in two separate parts. And that's why He closed the book after preaching the acceptable year of the Lord. The first time the Savior came, He came to preach. The second time He comes, He comes to what? To judge. And so it wasn't until the gospels unfold that we begin to see the distinction between the first and second coming. Even the disciples – and now you may go back to Matthew 24 – even the disciples didn't perceive His coming as a second coming. They perceived that He will come only in the sense of coming in fullness as Messiah, only in the sense in coming as the fully anointed King and ruler and Lord of lords, only in the sense of coming to His kingdom in glory. And so they think it's all going to happen in one moment. It all happens at one time – the Messiah's here, the kingdom's got to follow immediately. They don't understand this long period of time in which the Lord is redeeming the people from all over the earth.

And so they ask the questions in verse 3. "Tell us, when shall these things be?" And implied in the "when?" is today or tomorrow, or next week, or how fast. "And what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age? What is the sign we're looking for?" I mean, it's as if they were on their tiptoes, waiting for something to happen momentarily, they were so excited. They could sense that the child of Isaiah 9 was ready to take on His shoulders the government of the kingdom of God. They could sense that the stone cut out without hands of Daniel was ready to crush the power of evil men, that the Messiah, the Prince, was ready to make an end of sins and make reconciliation for iniquity and bring in everlasting righteousness and anoint the most holy King. They could sense that the Son of Man would be given dominion and glory in a kingdom that was everlasting. They could sense what Isaiah had said, what Daniel had said, what Ezekiel had said was about to happen. What Zechariah had said was about to come in the day of the Lord. And they think it's momentary. And so they say, "When?" and "What is the sign?"

Now, what makes them feel such anticipation? The fact that He promised the destruction and desolation of Jerusalem, the fact that He promised He would come in the name of the Lord, the fact that He said the temple would be devastated. They think it's imminent. And so He has to explain to them that it isn't, that it's yet in the future, that it's a great way off. And that is the purpose from verse 4 on. It is a prophetic sermon that sweeps them and us into a time not yet come. Does not describe time between then and 70 A.D., the destruction of Jerusalem. There's no way that can be possible. The terms won't allow us to believe that. It does not describe the church age – it can't. It has to describe the future time, right before the coming of Christ. They want to know the signs of the coming of Christ, the signs of the end of the age, and the signs that say this is it, this is it, it's coming. And so he sweeps them all the way to the end time.

Now, to let us know this is not the time period prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, it's not just the church age, as many commentators have wanted to lead us to believe, but that it's the end time, let me give you some key interpretive indicators, all right? So follow along.

Notice, first of all, verse 8. This is very important. Verse 8. Now, in verses 4 to 14, he describes many of the signs of the coming of Christ. People coming and saying, "I am Christ," and deceiving, wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, famine, earthquake in verse 7. Verse 9, persecution and killing and hating. And then there's defection from the faith and false prophets in verse 11. And the love of many grows cold in verse 12. The gospel of the kingdom is preached in verse 14. He's describing all kinds of signs that are going to come at the end of the age. They're signs of the coming of the Messiah.

Now notice verse 8. "All these signs are the beginning of birth pains." Very important. It's the Greek word for birth pains, the actual pain a woman has in bringing forth a child. It is the beginning of birth pain.

Now let me ask you a simple question. When does birth pain occur? At conception? That's ridiculous. During pregnancy? Equally ridiculous. Birth pain occurs when? Just prior to birth, at the very end, that's the last thing that happens and you know you're there. In fact, you start monitoring the frequency of birth pains until they come in a rapid succession and then it's time for the issuing forth of life. Birth pains happen at the end. They're not strung out all through the pregnancy. And neither are these things strung out all through the history of the church age. They are things which occur in rapid-fire succession that issue in the birth, as it were, of the Messianic kingdom.

Now, to illustrate that to you, I want you to look with me at 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. First Thessalonians chapter 5. And here is another use of the same illustration. And Paul is talking also here about the coming of the Lord and he says, "Of the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write unto you, for yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord comes as a thief in

the night.” He says, “I don’t need to give you an eschatology; you have that. And if you have nothing else, you have the Sermon on the Mount. I mean, you have – if you have nothing else, you have the Olivet Discourse, you have the teaching of our Lord. So you know that the day of the Lord, that is the coming of Christ to set up His kingdom, comes like a thief in the night.” Now, how does a thief in the night come? Very quietly, unexpectedly, suddenly. Unexpectedly, suddenly it happens.

And then in verse 3 he says, “For when they shall say, ‘Peace and safety, everything looks okay,’ then sudden destruction comes.” The coming of Christ is sudden. The destruction with it is sudden. And then he says, “It’s like birth pains on a woman with child” – same illustration. When he wants to illustrate something that comes suddenly and devastatingly, just before the day of the Lord, he uses the illustration of birth pains. So this is consistent with the use that Jesus has. Birth pains, in the Jewish mind, came suddenly and expectantly just before birth. And that is the way the illustration is used in 1 Thessalonians and that is the way the illustration is used in Matthew 24. So when it says these are the beginning of birth pains, this has to put us at the end. It has to.

So our Lord is saying before the end, there will be a sequence of birth pains. Now listen to this: Birth pains come at first infrequently, right? And then more frequently and more frequently and more frequently until they’re coming in very frequent sort of expulsions until that child is sent out of the body. And that’s exactly the way it will be in the end time. There will come birth pains, events separated by distance, and then less distance and less distance and less distance until finally, right at the time of the coming of Christ, there will be an explosion of concurrent holocaust events all across the earth. So the frequency, the chronology of frequency becomes condensed more and more and more and more and more until finally, the kingdom comes. Now, that is the illustration of our Lord in verse 8, so that tells us He is talking about the end time, just before the kingdom.

Now, a second indicator, and one that I think is equally important, is found in verse 13. Verse 13: “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.” What is the end? Well, the end is mentioned in verse 13 and the end is mentioned in verse 6. The end is not yet, He says. What end is He talking about? You go back to verse 3, “The end of the age.” He’s talking about the end of the age. It has to be that that is His subject. And so in verse 13 when He says, “He that shall endure to the end,” what end is He talking about? The end of the age.

Now, if this is all about people enduring till the end of the age, it’s got to be people who are alive at the end of the age, right? In other words, the people who go through these events, who go through these birth pains and endure until the end of them and the end of the age, will be saved. So He has to be talking about people then. I’m not going to endure until the end unless this all happens real fast and unless I miss my guess about the Rapture. The disciples didn’t endure to the end because the end hasn’t come yet. The point is, the end of the age is the end of the age, and He’s talking about people going through these things and enduring until the end of the age. So He has to be talking about people who are alive at the end of the age who are able to endure it – very important one. The

troubles that come upon people are coming upon people who are alive at a time when they could endure to the end of the age.

Notice verse 14, another indicator. It says, "And the gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations and then shall the end come." What end? The end of the age again. And prior to the end of the age, there's going to be worldwide preaching of the gospel. Now, that couldn't have been true before 70 A.D. – there's no way. There was no preaching of the gospel around the world before 70 A.D., and it isn't even true today. There are many, many places in the world where the gospel is not being preached at all and has never been preached. But before the end, it will be preached in all the world. You say, "How is this going to happen?" I don't think it's happening sort of along the path of history, a little now, a little then, a little – I think before the end of the age, it says right here, supernaturally, instantaneously, miraculously, there will be a worldwide blanketing of the gospel by supernatural means so that everybody on the face of the earth is going to hear it. And I'll explain that tonight, and I'll explain how it's going to happen and who's going to do it. But that's tonight. But the point here is before the end of the age, there's going to be a worldwide preaching of the gospel. That's never happened. That's not today and that wasn't before 70 A.D.

Now, there's another indicator in verse 15. Notice verse 15. "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place. Whosoever readeth, let him understand, then let them who are in Judea flee to the mountains." In other words, it's all going to break loose when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet. Now, what is that? Oh, that's easy. All you need do is look at Daniel chapter 9 and he says in verse 27 that the antichrist is going to "cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease and for the overspreading of abominations, he will make it desolate." What he's going to do is, the antichrist goes into the temple in the future Tribulation time, he desecrates the temple, he commits sacrilege in the temple where the Jews have set up their worship, and it says he does it until the consummation – until the final end – and that determined or that which is determined by God to be done is poured out on the desolate. In other words, final judgment. He does it at the very end, in the final day of man when God is going to pour out judgment. He does it, Daniel says, at a time when the Prince comes to finish transgression, make an end of sin, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness.

In other words, in Daniel 9:24-27, the prophet says the abomination of desolation takes place right before the Prince who sets up everlasting righteousness, right before final judgment and vengeance. So it has to be at the end time. So it says here in verse 15 of Matthew 24, "When you see the abomination of desolation, then you know you're seeing the signs of the end." And Daniel tells us that that happens just before the Messiah sets up His kingdom and judges the ungodly. So again, another indicator that we must be looking at a future time. That's exactly what Daniel had in mind.

Now notice verse 21. And here is another indicator that we're looking at a future time. It says, "In this time there will be great trouble, great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time known or ever shall be." It will be the worst time in the history of the world – the worst time in the history of the world. And when is the worst time in the history of the world? It's got to be the end time, right? It has to be. It has to be the time when God's vengeance breaks out.

Daniel speaks these same words in chapter 12. He says, "At that time." What time? The time of the end – very clearly the time of the end if you compare it with chapter 11. He's got the antichrist in chapter 11. Then comes Michael in verse 1 of 12, stands up, and there will be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time. And it's similar words to the words of our Lord. The worst time of trouble ever in the history of the world. Followed immediately by the resurrection to everlasting life and the resurrection to everlasting shame and contempt. So it is the time prior to the final resurrection, the time prior to the final judgment, the final vengeance, the final establishing of God's kingdom. So it has to be future – the time of great tribulation like the world has never known.

Another indicator is in verse 29. It says immediately after the tribulation of those days, immediately after this, the sun is dark and the moon doesn't give its light, the stars fall from heaven, the powers of heaven are shaken, and then appears the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. So Christ comes immediately after the Tribulation. The Tribulation of which He speaks is the Great Tribulation of verse 21. It's the time that's not like any other time; it has to be the time in the future. What time is it? According to Daniel in verse 15, it's the time of the abomination of desolation, and that is right before the second coming. So all these indicators tell us this must be future. It must be future.

Finally, look at verses 32 to 34 as another and last indicator. The Lord says – there's a parable, a branch puts forth its leaves, you know summer is near. You have a fig tree, you see leaves, and you know fruit is to follow. Fruit comes in the summer, you see the leaves, and you know the fruit's coming. In other words, it's just a signal. So likewise, when you see all these things – what things? Everything He's been talking about, a time of Tribulation like no other time in the history of the world, a time of all these other marks and signs that He's been through prior to that in chapter 24. "When you see those, know that it is near." What is near? The end of the age. "The sign of the Son of Man coming. And this generation" – what generation? The generation that is alive when the signs happen, the generation that sees them all coming to pass, "will not ever pass away till all of this is fulfilled." In other words, the fulfillment of all the time of the end is going to be seen by the people who see the signs. So the signs are reserved, then, for the people who are going to be alive at the end time. That takes this whole thing and pushes it into the future. The generation alive when the signs begin to unfold will be alive when Christ comes to set up His kingdom.

Now, you understand that the whole of the Olivet Discourse is future. Now, that is not to say that some of the things that will happen then don't happen now, but they'll happen then at a scale and on

a level and on proportions that are far beyond anything we've ever known now. We have war now, we have earthquake now, we have famine now, we have trouble in our world now, we have killing now, we have persecution now, we have hatred now, we even have some things happening in the sky that disturb us now, but nothing compared to the incredible display that's going to take place in that compressed, brief period of time called the birth pains of the kingdom when God sends the earth into wracked pain as it brings forth the King in His kingdom.

Now – now you know where you are, I hope, in Matthew? And you understand we've been taken into the future. One other note that I want you to notice – very, very important. Would you please notice verse 6: “And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, see that ye be not troubled.” Now verse 9: “Then shall they afflict you and shall kill you and you shall be hated.” Verse 15: “When you therefore see the abomination of desolation.” Verse 20: “But pray that your flight be not in winter,” so forth. Now, somebody might say, “Well, how can this be future when He's talking to the disciples and He says you, you, you, you, you? Isn't He talking to them?”

Let me just give you some help on this. This is an editorial privilege given to a prophet. When God picks up a prophet and transports him into a future time to speak on a future theme, he speaks directly to the people of that time. And so the use of “ye” or “you” doesn't in any way reflect on the fact that this has to be fulfilled by the people to whom He speaks. You, whoever you are alive in that time. You, whoever you are to whom this applies, that's all. It is you that is editorial in a sense. Whoever you are. This is the prophetic freedom to speak directly to the society in the future to which God has transported the prophet in the process of revelation. And if you want to see Old Testament use of that, it's all over the place. The prophets of the Old Testament frequently spoke directly to people who were yet to be born in the future saying to them you, you, you, though they had not even been born.

For example, look at Isaiah 33:17-24; Isaiah 66:10-14; Zechariah 9:9; Zechariah 3:17-20, and on and on and on. You don't need to turn to it now. Some of you are already lost. But all of those passages – you're very obedient, I want you to know that. But all of those passages and myriads of others have the prophets speaking in a direct way to people yet unborn to whom the prophecy will directly apply. So there's a prophetic privilege in so speaking.

Now, having put us into the future, understanding that we're looking at the time known as the Tribulation, that's what our Lord calls it, the Great Tribulation, a time in the future just before Christ comes, what are the signs? What are the signs to indicate His coming? What are the signs to indicate the establishment of His kingdom? What are the signs to indicate the end of man's age and the beginning of God's eternal, glorious kingdom? What are the signs?

Well, first we remind ourselves of verse 8. He gives us the beginning of those signs, the beginning of those birth pains – just the beginning of the birth pains. Remember what I told you now? They start out rather slowly. They start out slowly, they become more rapid, more rapid, more rapid until finally

at the end it's just a holocaust of things exploding all over every place. If you study, for example, the book of Revelation, you see the unfolding of the seals. And six seals are unfolded and then the seventh. And bursting out of the seventh seal comes seven trumpets – seven trumpets. And bursting out of the seventh trumpet comes seven bowls of wrath poured on the earth. And there's an increasing speed. The seals go over a period of years, it seems. The trumpets, over a period perhaps of weeks, and the vials, maybe over a period of hours or days as the birth pains become closer and closer, more compressed, more concurrent at the end.

So we're going to start with the Lord in the sermon seeing the beginning. And in the beginning, there will be six birth pains – six. I'm going to give you one this morning and the other five tonight – going to give you just one. The first is deception – deception. Now, we're not saying there's no deception today. We're not saying there wasn't deception then. There's always been deceiving and deception. There's always been people who come in the name of Christ, in the name of God, to lead people astray. There have always been false Christs and there always will be. But not like there will be at the end. Everything is heightened, intensified, and escalated. And although the Olivet Discourse does not deal with the Rapture of the church – we have to go to the epistles for that, this does not deal with it. Although the Olivet Discourse does not deal with the Rapture of the church, that's not to say there is no Rapture. And we believe that the church of Jesus Christ will be raptured out, and all of these things that take place will take place after the church has gone and after the Holy Spirit takes back His restraining power and lets all hell break loose. So that the evil of this deception will exceed all other deceptions. The evil of these wars will exceed all other wars. The evil of these conflicts will exceed all other conflicts. The evil of this hatred and this murder will exceed all other hatred and murder when there's no restrainer left in the world to restrain the evil of men.

So we're looking at a time when deception is at its apex. And that's the first mark, the first sign of the beginning of the birth pains. "And Jesus answered," verse 4, "and said to them, 'Beware'" – literally *blepete*, keep your eyes wide open – "that no man lead you astray." Don't be deceived – don't be deceived. There are going to be people in that period of time who are looking for answers, the world is going to begin to disintegrate, evil is going to run wild. I mean, evil is going to be absolutely rampaging. In fact, it even tells us in verse 12 "because lawlessness shall abound." You think it's bad now? You can't even fathom what it'll be like then, when all hell breaks loose on the earth and the church is gone and the restrainer's not here. And so He says beware because of deception. Don't let anybody lead you astray.

And here is a world just disintegrating. Here is a world falling apart. Here is a world where natural affection is gone, according to what Paul says to Timothy. A world where all of social relationships are disrupted. A world that is in economic chaos. A world that is living in mad, furious sinning. And everything begins to come to pieces, everything begins to collapse. And that is a world looking for leaders. And that is a world looking for Messiahs and saviors and deliverers, and as soon as they start crying out for those kinds of leaders, there are going to be false Messiahs all over the place

offering themselves as the solution. And it says in verse 5, “Many” – see it there? – “Many shall come in My name saying ‘I am Christ’” – they’re going to be all over the place – “and shall deceive many.” You think we have our deceivers now, and we do, and we have our false Christs and false Messiahs all over the place, and they’ve always been around, but nothing like they’re going to be in that desperate, desperate time. And so He says don’t be deceived, they’re going to come in the end time, many who will deceive you, who will want you to believe they are the Christ, and they will come in My name, He says, saying they’re the Messiah.

This Olivet Discourse, portions of it, are also recorded in Mark 13 and Luke 21. And in Luke 21:8, Luke records, “And He said, ‘Take heed that you be not deceived for many shall come in My name saying I am Christ.’” And Luke adds, “The time draws near.” In other words, they’re going to say, “It’s time for my kingdom, it’s time for my kingdom.” And the Lord says, “Go ye not therefore after them.” They’re going to come and say, “I am the Christ, it’s time for my kingdom.” You know, we’ve had them, many of them, but not like they’ll be in that day in a world that is in absolute desperation, in a world that is screaming and crying for deliverers and leaders, in a world where men are still bent on religion. We have a very religious bent in our nature, and they’re going to seek religious leaders, and it’s going to be a proliferation of frauds and charlatans and false Messiahs.

In fact, look at verse 23, “If any man shall say unto you, ‘Lo, here is Christ,’ ‘There is Christ,’ believe it not for there shall arise false Christs and false prophets and shall show great signs and wonders insomuch as if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect.” In other words, they’re not going to be just like some of the false teachers in this era, they’re going to be able to do signs and wonders. They’re going to be able to do magic. They’re going to do supernatural demon-inspired deeds that are going to captivate the attention of the world.

And this myriad of false Christs ultimately will culminate in one false Christ known as whom? Antichrist. And he will be the epitome of the false Christs. He will be the ultimate demonized individual, Satan indwelt. And Daniel calls him the little horn, the king with the fierce face, the willful king. And John calls him the beast. And Paul calls him son of perdition and man of sin. And he comes as the culmination of all false Christs, and he is so convincing and so deceptive that Daniel 9:27 says even Israel as a nation makes a covenant with him and enters into league with him, believing him to be their deliverer. That’s how deceitful he is. And all the nations of the world fall into his deceptions and come under his power. He deceives many.

In fact, Scripture gives us an awful lot of information about him. In Daniel chapter 8 in verse 23 – just listen as I read this to you. “In the latter times, the time of the kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full.” What a statement. “When the transgressors are come to the full.” Do you know why human history waits? Do you know why God doesn’t intervene? He’s waiting for transgression to come to its full. It’s as if God wants to give sin all that sin needs to damn itself and then eliminate it from existence forever. It’s as if sin has to run its full course. And so in that day “when the

transgressors are come to the full, a king with a fierce face and understanding dark sentences shall stand up.”

What does it mean, “understanding dark sentences”? He has communion with the demons and the devils of hell. He is a medium who contacts the spirits beneath. “And his power shall be mighty, not by his own power, and he shall destroy wonderfully.” It’s not his own power; it’s the power of hell. “And he shall destroy with wonder” or “with awe.” An awesome conqueror. “And he shall prosper and continue and destroy the mighty and the holy people. And through his policy also he shall cause deceit to prosper in his hand.” He will be a very effective deceiver. “And he shall magnify himself in his heart and by peace destroy many.” He uses peace, he uses negotiation to consume the world and bring them into his power.

He is described, by the way, in Revelation 6. As the Tribulation unfolds, the first thing that happens, the beginning of the birth pains of Revelation 6 is the same beginning of the birth pains as we find right here in Matthew 24. Matthew 24 says: “First, beware of deceivers.” Revelation 6 says, “As the Tribulation begins, there will come a rider on a white horse, conquering. He has a bow but no arrows.” What does that mean? He intimidates but never shoots. He conquers with peace. So the beginning of the birth pains is deceit, false Christ. That’s Matthew 24. And the beginning of the Tribulation, Revelation 6, false peace, a false rider on a white horse who is imitating the true rider on the white horse of Revelation 19 who is whom? Christ Jesus. And so Daniel sees the same thing. In the latter time, when the transgression comes to the full, here comes this king. He comes in power. He does awesome things. He brings power to himself through peace and he stands up against the Prince of princes. He stands against Christ.

In chapter 11 of Daniel, we find out even more about him. In verse 36, he is there called the king that does according to his will, or the willful king. And, of course, he violates God’s Will. “He shall exalt himself, magnify himself above every god. He speaks marvelous things against the God of gods and prospers until the indignation be accomplished, for that which is determined shall be done.” He goes just until God’s wrath has run its course and that’s the end of him. But in that time, he will accomplish marvelous things. He will blaspheme God. It says he will honor the god of fortresses, in verse 38. And a god whom his fathers knew not shall he honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and pleasant things. He raises up new gods. He is an idolatrous antichrist.

And so his deception is incredible. In fact, his deception is described in greater detail in Revelation chapter 13. And there, John sees him not as a fierce face and not as a willful king but in another perspective, as a beast. He is a beast who rises up out of the nations and the symbolism is very vivid. He is a powerful beast. He is a devastating beast. In fact, in verse 4, people say, “Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him? There was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies and power was given to him to continue 42 months,” that’s three and a half years. He’s going to go for three and a half years. This is how the end starts. It starts with him and he goes

for 42 months or three and a half years, the second half of the 70th week of Daniel, that seven-year period, spoken of in Daniel 9:27.

See, Daniel said there's yet one week of tribulation, one week – it's a week of years, seven years. Half of it, in the middle, this antichrist takes his place, and for the last 42 months or three and a half years, he sits in great power. He opens his mouth, it says in verse 6, and he speaks blasphemy against God. He blasphemes God's name, God's tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it is given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them and power was given him over all kindreds, all tongues, all nations, and all that dwell on the earth shall worship him.

Can you imagine such deceitfulness? The world literally believes this is the Messiah, this is the Savior, which the world has so long longed to see. And coming alongside of him, in verse 11 of chapter 13, is another beast known as the false prophet. He has all the power of the first beast, and he causes the earth and all that dwell in it to worship the first beast. And he, verse 13, does great wonders, makes fire come down from heaven. Verse 14 says he deceives them that dwell on earth.

So Jesus says, "Look, keep your eyes open in the end that you be not deceived because there are coming false Christs in My name saying, 'I am Christ,' who will deceive many." How many? The whole world – the whole world. "Don't let it happen to you." What a warning. And who is behind this deception? The old deceiver himself, Revelation 12:9 says. "The dragon, the old serpent, the devil and Satan who deceives the whole world."

One other passage. Second Thessalonians 2. We'll close with this one. Second Thessalonians 2: "And now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and by our gathering together unto Him that you be not soon shaken in mind or be troubled neither by spirit nor by word nor by letter as from us as that the day of the Lord is present." Somebody was telling the Thessalonians that the day of the Lord had already started, that they were already in it. And he says, "Don't believe it. Don't you get disturbed by anybody, not a letter or anything, not anybody, not a spirit, not anybody. Don't let anybody make you think we've entered the day of the Lord." Why? Verse 3: "Let no one deceive you by any means for that day can't come except there come a falling away first and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." And Paul is in line with Daniel. And Paul is in line with Jesus. And Paul is in line with Revelation and saying the very same thing. Before the coming of the Lord, there will be the revealing of this man of sin, the son of perdition, the willful king, the king with fierce face, the beast who deceives the world. He opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped so that he, as God, sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

And it says, verse 8: "Then shall that wicked one be revealed." Verse 9: "Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders and with all deceivableness in unrighteousness in them that perish." He comes and deceives the whole world.

You see, the Bible is tremendously consistent. The whole thing, that second half of the Tribulation, the last three and a half years, begins with the ascendancy of the false Messiah. Prior to him, there will be a whole lot of them. And even perhaps during his reign, a whole lot of them, fighting against him unsuccessfully. So the first sign of the end of man's age is deception. Deception that is so effective, it literally ultimately results in the deception of the whole wide world. And it's no wonder that the Lord says, "You better beware."

Now, there are five more signs that are only the beginning, that happen in the early part of the Great Tribulation. And we're going to see what those five remaining ones are tonight, so don't miss it. Let's bow in prayer.

Remain for just a moment, as we close. And some of you might be saying, "Well, I hear what you're saying, but what does all this mean? How does it apply to me?" Let me tell you something. First of all, if you're a Christian, you ought to rejoice that Jesus is coming and that sin will be ended, done away. You ought to rejoice. You ought to be thrilled that God's character will no longer be dishonored, defamed, and blasphemed. You ought to be thrilled that the antichrist, the beast, the false prophet, Satan himself will be thrown forever into the lake of fire with all the Christ rejecters and God haters of all history. You ought to be thrilled that Jesus will be exalted and worshiped and adored forever and ever.

But at the same time, we ought to be saddened because when that happens, there will be the judgment of the ungodly. And they will forever be put out of the presence of God – forever lost. Forever lost. You say, "Well, maybe it won't happen." It'll happen. And Jesus just made sure we didn't doubt that by putting in the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem when He said, "Not one stone shall be left upon another." In 70 A.D., about 30 years later, that did happen. Not one stone was left upon another.

And I read this week in Josephus that the commander in chief, Titus Vespasian, stood in the midst of the temple ground and shouted to his soldiers not to do that, but they did it anyway. Titus, no doubt, represented Satan trying to stop the prophecy from being fulfilled, but God was mightier than Satan, and God had allowed the passionate hate of those Romans against the Jews to carry them to the place where they rejected the commands of their own general, and they tore that thing down against their own general's commands.

God's purposes can't be stopped and just as the temple was flattened and not one stone remained upon another, and that is exactly what happened, so these things will come to pass just as exactly. And when we know that, we know that history is in the control of God and destiny is in the control of Christ. And so we rejoice on the one hand for that inevitable destiny, and we sorrow on the other hand for what will come to those who know not the Savior. But we certainly don't just take this as an

idle curiosity. That would be the height of foolishness.

So on the one hand, if you know the Savior, rejoice. And if you don't, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell and come to the only one who can save, the Lord Jesus Christ, who has died for you and risen again and offers you forgiveness, eternal life, and blessedness in His heaven.

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