

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Ready or Not—Here I Come!, Part 1

Scripture: Matthew 24:36-42

Code: 2373

We open our Bibles this morning to Matthew chapter 24, looking again at the signs of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the signs of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I don't know about your childhood, but my childhood was filled with lots of games. I – when I look back and think of myself as a child, I don't think of myself in a house, I think of myself outdoors. Maybe that's because I lived much of my life in Southern California. And we used to play all kinds of outdoor games. And one of the ones that we often played, and you did too, was Hide and Seek. And somebody was "it" and everybody ran and hid and the game was sort of triggered when the person who was "it" said, "Here I come" – what's the rest? – "ready or not." You played it, too. Wasn't a very sophisticated game, but that's the way it went. "Here I come, ready or not."

Well, that statement, if referred to the Lord Jesus Christ, has great and profound eschatological implications. And the text in Matthew 24 that we'll be looking at this morning really could be titled "Here I come, ready or not" because that's exactly what it teaches. It is a text that deals with the suddenness and the unexpectedness of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We're going to be looking at verses 36 through 42 of Matthew 24, and this is really only part one in the message that takes us all the way down through verse 51.

Now, I want you to remember the setting so that you understand where we are in this tremendous gospel and in the life of our Lord. He is only a few hours now from betrayal and execution on the cross. He sits on the Mount of Olives and His disciples approach Him with a very important question that's on their minds and it's given us in verse 3. They say, "Tell us, when shall these things be and what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the age?"

They have this feeling inside that the end of the age of man is very near, that the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ is coming very soon. They have been led to believe that because He is, after all, the King and He is there. He has done signs and wonders to prove His kingdom power. He has recently denounced the false religious leaders of Israel. He has cleansed out the temple of all of the godless enterprises that were being done in that place. He has also announced that there will come soon a desolation of the whole temple complex, and He even has pronounced the truth that He would come in glory. And all of these things have led them to believe that it must be very, very soon. In fact, Luke 19:11 says they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. I mean it seemed to them that He was there announcing Himself as King, He was there destroying the false religious

system that existed in order that He might establish the true spiritual kingdom promised to them by the prophets of old. And so they were filled with anticipation.

Now, their question has two parts. It has a what-shall-be-the-sign-of-Thy-coming part and a when-shall-these-things-be. What are the signs and when will it happen? Now, our Lord began by answering the what-are-the-signs question. And the answer we've already studied, from verse 4 through 35. In that section, He tells them the sign of His coming. And it's particularly given in verse 29 where it says the moon doesn't give its light, the sun is dark, the stars fall, the powers of the heavens are shaken, and then shall appear the sign. And the sign is the Son of Man in heaven. That's the sign of His coming to earth, when they see Him in heaven.

Now, it will be preceded by some other general signs described from verse 4 through 28. So there will be some general signs. By the way, those general signs are triggered by a very particular event in verse 15, the abomination of desolation, when the antichrist sets up the idol of himself in the Holy of Holies in the temple of Jerusalem and demands that the whole world worship him. That triggers the birth pains. That triggers the signs, the general signs. So you start with the abomination of desolation, that's the first of the signs. Then there are general signs described in the rest of that portion we looked at which culminate in the sign, which is the appearance of the Son of Man in heaven. That's the sign.

Now, all of these signs, beginning with the abomination of desolation until the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, are very rapid signs. They come in a very brief period of time. The Bible tells us three and a half years, or 42 months, or 12 hundred and 60 days. And that's why they're called birth pains; they are rapidly increasing, intensified as they come toward the kingdom. They are general indicators and finally a specific indicator of the coming of the Lord Jesus. Now, that's the what-are-the-signs question.

Now, beginning in verse 36, He discusses the when question. When specifically will He come? In other words, we see the general idea of that time period but when specifically will He come? And beginning in verse 36 and all the way down through verse 31 of chapter 25, He deals with the when-shall-these-things-be. And that's where we begin our study this morning.

Look at verse 36. Here's the key to the rest of that section. "But of that day and hour knoweth no one. No, not the angels of heaven nor the Son but My Father only." And with that statement, He directs their thinking to the issue of when and tells them the when is an unknown. The signs that precede the second coming have been clearly given. They are unmistakably detailed here in Matthew 24 and also in Revelation chapters 6 through 18. You can't miss those. And the generation that is alive during that period will see those signs. They will be observable signs. They will be worldwide signs. They will be unmistakable indications of the collapse of the world and its systems as well as the universe. But the specific moment, that is – notice it in verse 36 – the day and hour are not known. They're not known.

And we must remind ourselves that He is speaking of a day and an hour.

Down in verse 42, "Watch therefore for you know not what hour." "What hour." Verse 44, "Therefore be ye also ready for such an hour as you think not." Verse 50, "The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looks not for him and in an hour he is not aware of." Verse 13 of chapter 25, "Watch therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man comes." So He's talking about the specific moment.

Now, listen. The time period of the second coming will be known, it has to be known. It has to be known because of all the sequence of events. The abomination of desolation will be an historical event. The tremendous worldwide conflicts, the wars, the rumors of wars, the nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, the famines, the pestilences, the descriptions of Revelation 6 to 18 where the fresh water is devastated and the salt water is devastated and the sea is turned to blood and where the day is set off its normal cycle and daylight is shortened and there's a greater amount of darkness, and all of those events that are very observable will indicate that it is the general period and the general time of the second coming. But the day and the hour will not be known. That will come with suddenness in an unexpected way. The period of the Tribulation, very clearly indicated, and we know the coming of the Son of Man, verse 29 says, is immediately after the Tribulation. But how immediately, we don't know.

To approach it another way, remember this: That both Daniel in the Old Testament and John in the New Testament writing in Revelation tell us that the Tribulation period, the Great Tribulation, is a period of three and a half years, 42 months, 12 hundred and 60 days. We find that in Daniel 7:25, 9:27, and 12:7. We find it in Revelation 11 verses 2 and 3, in Revelation chapter 12 verse 14 and Revelation 13 verse 5. So there are all those indicators, very clearly, that that's a three-and-a-half-year period. It starts with the abomination of desolation in verse 15, the antichrist setting up his self-worship. So that's very observable.

Then it'll be three and a half years. Immediately after, says verse 29, comes the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. Now, how immediately after, we don't know. And once the sign comes, we don't know how long it'll be before He actually establishes the kingdom. So there's some latitude in that. There's a period of time in there – Daniel gives us a hint of it because in Daniel 12:11, Daniel speaks of a period of testing and tribulation of 12 hundred and 90 days, so he adds another 30 days on the end. And then in Daniel 12:12, he speaks of 13 hundred and 35 days – he adds another 45, making a total of 75 days. So Daniel sees a three-and-a-half-year period, 42 months, 12 hundred and 60 days, and then he sees another period, which is not described, as to its content of 75 days.

So we don't know exactly the day and the hour. The time period, yes; the general period, yes. Now, we only know that once that period has begun, right? We don't know it now because we don't know what generation that's going to come upon. It will be initiated with the Rapture of the church. That

hasn't happened. And then three and a half years of peace as antichrist comes to the political rescue of the Middle Eastern country of Israel and brings them safety and starts to build his revived Roman Empire in Europe. And everything's going along fine. And then it's in the middle of that seven-year period that all this begins when he sets up the worship of himself.

So the Rapture, the rise of antichrist, the birth pains, the sign of the Son of Man, those have not happened yet. We don't know what generation they will come upon. It could be this generation. It could happen any moment, the church removed and the Tribulation begins. So we don't know what generation it is. But the generation that it comes upon, even with all those signs, even with all that goes on, still won't know the exact day and the exact hour when Christ is coming. That is a secret. Now, this is not talking about the Rapture, this is talking about the second coming. We're at the end of the Tribulation here, as is every obvious from verse 29. We have passed through the time of the Tribulation in the thinking of Matthew and the teaching of our Lord.

So it is a time that no one knows about. Now, notice verse 36 and we'll look at some specifics. It is a day and an hour we're looking at, not an era. We don't know what generation it'll come upon, but we do know this, that whatever generation it starts with, it'll end with, right? That's verses 32 to 35. The generation that sees the beginning is going to see the end because it's going to come so fast. So fast. Three and a half years of Tribulation will be over and then sort of an indetermined period of time, somewhere in there, the Lord will come and set up His kingdom immediately after the Tribulation, but it'll come fast. But no one knows the day or the hour, the specific moment. And He starts by saying "no one knows," and He's referring there to the humans, mankind, and natural men. They don't know. They don't know. It's not revealed to them.

It's also pointed up in Matthew 25:13, as I read a moment ago, "Ye know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man comes." God has chosen not to reveal that specific moment and to give no specific sign of that specific moment. And there's reason in His great wisdom for that. If men knew the exact moment when the Lord would come, they might be godless until just short of that moment. Or even the people who were prepared might be living in panic or might be giving up, thinking the time was too short. Life would become hopeless if you knew exactly when the Lord was going to come. There could be no plans, there could be no ongoing relationships, and everything would be affected dramatically by that knowledge. So the Lord has chosen not to give us that knowledge but to live every moment expecting His coming, every moment expecting His intervention, so that there is preparedness all the time. If the world knew the very moment of the coming of Christ, it would dawdle itself away thinking that in that last and final moment it might take the steps to make things right just in time and so God has not told us that. So no man knows that. It is hidden from men.

And then He says, "No, not the angels of heaven." Even the angels don't know it. The natural world does not know it and neither does the supernatural world. Now, angels are the intimates of God. In Isaiah 6, they are hovering around the throne of God doing His bidding. In Matthew 18:10, they are

seen face-to-face with God in intimate communion with Him. They are very close to God. They are around the throne. They commune with Him regularly to do His bidding.

Furthermore, if you remember in Matthew 13, it tells us that the angels are the agents of judgment in the second coming. When God reaches out to judge the world and gather men into that judgment, He sends His angels who are the reapers, you remember, to gather the wheat and the tares in. So angels are very involved in the judgment activity. In verse 31 of our chapter we're looking at now, the angels are the ones sent out to gather the elect as well. So though angels are the intimates of God and though they are face-to-face with God in a spiritual sense, doing His bidding, and though they are the agents of judgment and the gathering in of the godly and the ungodly in that time of Christ's coming, they – in spite of all of that – do not know the exact moment. God has chosen not to reveal it to them. And He has His reasons. I'm not privy to those reasons because Scripture doesn't reveal them. But they do not know, either.

Now, the better manuscripts of Matthew indicate to us that it also should be included in the text “nor the Son” – “nor the Son.” In Mark 13:32, which is the parallel passage, it is definitely included by Mark, “Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels who are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” And it would be best to include it here in Matthew. I think in the New American Standard and the New International version, they correctly do include it. Jesus says, “Even the Son of Man doesn't know” – “even I don't know.” And, of course, this has created all kinds of interesting discussion. How is it that Jesus Christ, who is God, cannot know something? How is it that Jesus Christ, who is God, who is omniscient – which means He knows everything – can't know something or doesn't know something?

Well, that's, I believe, rather easily explained if we understand the meaning of His incarnation. Jesus Christ is fully God, very God of very Gods, as theologians used to say, very God of very God. He is God fully and totally because you can't be part God, He is all God. But when He became a man, He voluntarily restricted the use of His godhood, of His divine attributes. It wasn't that He laid the attributes aside; it wasn't that He set His deity aside; it was that He restricted the use of those things. He had them as instruments but chose not to pick them up and use them. So He lived, as it were, without using His omniscience unless the Father told Him to use it.

We know He was omniscient on some occasions. John 2, He says He needed not that anybody should tell Him what was in the heart of a man because He knew what was in the heart of a man. There are many indications of His great knowledge, of His divine knowledge. But He restricted the use of His omniscience to those things which the Father desired Him to know. That is the design of the incarnation. When the Bible says He became a Son, He took upon Him the form of a servant. It means that He submitted Himself to that which the Father wanted Him to do, that which the Father wanted Him to say, and that which the Father wanted Him to know. That's why in John 15:15, you have a very, very important verse in understanding Christ. It says this – Jesus speaking to the

disciples – “Henceforth, I call you not servants for the servant knows not what his lord does. But I have called you friends” – now listen to this – “for all things that I have heard of My Father, I have made known unto you.”

In other words, Jesus’ knowledge in His incarnation was qualified by what the Father had revealed to Him. And the Father revealed things to Him through Scripture; that is, the Old Testament, as He studied the Scripture, through experience as He walked in the world and saw the moving of the power of God, and through direct revelation. But Jesus limited His knowledge to what the Father chose to reveal to Him. He didn’t have to do that but He chose to do that to play the role of a servant to accomplish the redemption of mankind. It’s a very important concept so that when it says He humbled Himself and took upon Him the form of a servant, was made in fashion as a man, and so forth, it means that He limited the use of those attributes. And if you studied, for example, in the passages that deal with His early life, you will remember that it says Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, you remember, and favor with God and man. He grew in wisdom.

You say, “How could He grow in wisdom if He was God?” Because He grew in wisdom in the sense that He limited His knowledge to what the Father revealed to Him, so as long as He lived, the Father was constantly revealing things to Him, so He was growing in wisdom. You understand that? That was a self- imposed, if you will, humiliation of the divine nature to accomplish your redemption and mine. And so as you look at Him here, in a sense He is still growing in wisdom. He is still increasing in knowledge because the Father has yet not revealed this to Him.

Now, it is my own personal feeling that after the resurrection, this was revealed to Him. That when He came out of the grave in the glory of His resurrection life, it says in Matthew 28:18, He said to His disciples, “All authority is given unto Me in heaven and earth.” And I think what that’s saying is nothing is missing; I have authority over all things. And then in Acts 1:7, He said this: “But unto you it is not given to know the times and the seasons which My Father has put in His own power,” and He doesn’t include Himself anymore. He says “unto you it isn’t given.” So it may well be that after the resurrection, His knowledge was complete. It’s as if the Father only revealed to Him the next great event, and He never revealed to Him the full moment of His second coming until He had already come out of the grave and accomplished the resurrection, and then the Father opened to Him the next event in His marvelous, marvelous work.

And so He says people don’t know and angels don’t know and for now even I don’t know, to show the tremendous unexpectedness, suddenness, and mystery of the moment of the coming of Jesus Christ. And then at the end of verse 36, “But My Father only.” And remember, He always called Him Father except for one occasion when He said, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” because He was dying on the cross and separated from God. Every other time He spoke to God, He spoke to Him as Father. That was His favorite term for God. And “only” is emphasized. He’s the only one who knows. And, of course, that’s why I believe that when Jesus entered into His glory, if not immediately

after His resurrection, certainly after His ascension, He then was entered back into the fullness of that which He had before the incarnation and this moment right now, He knows fully when that second coming moment will be. But in the midst of that incarnation, that had been abandoned in favor of learning what the Father would tell Him and nothing more.

And so we don't know. That moment, we don't know. And that's – there's a reason for that. Because the Lord wants every generation to live in expectancy, every generation to live – are you ready for this word? – in preparedness. We don't know what generation it's going to come upon. But when it comes, it's going to come in a holocaust and it's going to come rapid-fire. And we don't know what generation that will be, and even the generation that comes on isn't going to know the exact moment. So Christians ever since the New Testament have always lived in the eagerness of the coming of Christ.

The Corinthians, for example, Paul writes to them in 1 Corinthians 1 and says, "So that you come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." There's a first generation church in Corinth waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. They're waiting as if He were to come in their own generation. And then in Hebrews, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together," the writer says in chapter 10 verse 24 and 25, "and much the more as you see the day approaching," as if those people who were getting that letter to the Hebrews were going to live to see the day approaching. And then in Philippians, the apostle Paul writes in chapter 3 verse 20, "Our citizenship is in heaven from which also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul says we're looking up there to see if He isn't coming any moment. And in James, you find the very same thing. In James chapter 5 verse 8: "Be patient; establish your hearts for the coming of the Lord draws near." And in 1 Peter chapter 4 verse 7, "The end of all things is at hand." And 1 John 2:18, "It is the last days." And Revelation 22:20, "Behold, I come quickly; even so, come, Lord Jesus," says John.

So you see, the writers even in the New Testament time were looking for the second coming of Jesus Christ. They didn't fully understand the time that would go by, they lived in expectancy. And every generation should because every generation should live in preparedness. You understand what I'm driving at? That's the point. If we expect it at any time, we're prepared for it at any time. And God only knows when it will be. God only knows when that specific moment will take place.

And so you ask the question, "Well, why is He waiting?" And I think I can give you an answer. The first part of that answer comes out of Revelation chapter 14 verse 15. I believe He is waiting for this reason. "Another angel came out of the temple" – Revelation 14:15 – "crying with a loud voice to Him that sat on the cloud." That's a picture indicated to us in verse 14 of the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, sitting in heaven, and the angel comes and cries with a loud voice, "Thrust in the sickle and reap for the time is come for Thee to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And He that sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth and the earth was reaped."

The imagery here is very, very important. You plant and you take care of the planting and the grain grows to its full ripeness and then you harvest. And the picture here is this: The Lord has waited for the ripening of evil. He has waited for the ripening of sin. And God is not going to move in in judgment on this world until the harvest is ripe, until sin has run its course, until it has spent itself, if you will, until all the ungodliness of the mystery of iniquity – that is, the evil of evil yet unrevealed – and it's hard to imagine that there could be some evil yet unrevealed, isn't it? It's hard to imagine that in our world. But the unrevealed evil of that future time when sin runs its full, rampant course will reach its apex and then the sickle will be put in and the harvest will be accomplished. So the reason God has waited for these two thousand years is, first of all, because He is allowing sin to run its reckless course, to spend itself, to ripen to the point where it will be fully, finally, and forever harvested.

There's another reason, and that reason is indicated to us in Romans chapter 11 verse 25. And it says, "I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, this unrevealed truth, lest you should be wise in your own conceit, but blindness, that blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in." The fullness of the Gentiles speaks of the gathering in of the church in this age. And I believe another reason the Lord waits is for the gathering of the church. I believe He is waiting to gather all the saints whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. He is waiting to collect the Gentiles who will forever and ever and ever throughout eternity give Him glory, give Him praise, give Him honor, give Him adoration and serve Him. He is gathering together occupants for His eternal heaven to praise and glorify His name. And also, after "the fullness of the Gentiles be come in" – verse 26 says – "so all Israel will be saved." There has to be also in the future the salvation of Israel, that Jew and Gentile together through all eternity may praise God.

So there's been a time going on since the first coming. We've waited all this two thousand years and He's not yet come. And the reasons are twofold. One, that sin may ripen; two, that the redeemed who have been planned for His glory eternally may be brought to that eternal glory. So it is for sin and for salvation.

Now look at 2 Peter chapter 3 for a moment, and this, too, relates to the same point. In 2 Peter chapter 3, we say, "Boy, this is taking such a long time. This is just going on and on and on. When is it going to end?" But what we forget – in verse 8 – "Be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years is one day." In other words, God doesn't keep a clock. And what seems to us like a long period of time because we're creatures of time is no time at all to a timeless, eternal God. And the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men would be. It isn't that He can't fulfill it or that He's not living up to His Word, He is waiting because He's long-suffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. He is waiting until all the Gentiles and all the Jews planned from eternity past have come to redemption. And then will come the second coming. It's not that He can't act, it's that He's gathering His redeemed. It's not that a lot of time has gone by because for God no time is gone by at

all.

So how foolish are the scoffers in verse 3, aren't they? Scoffers that come in the last days, walking after their own lust – verse 4 says – and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming?” Where is the promise of His coming? Why He isn't going to come. We've waited and we've waited and we've waited and we've waited. And since the fathers fell asleep, all the way back to the patriarchs, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation, they say. We're uniformists – uniformitarianists. Now, we believe in the uniformity theory, everything goes on the same, nothing ever changes. But in order to say this – verse 5 says – they have to be willingly ignorant that by the Word of God, the heavens were of old and the earth standing out of the water and in the water by which the world that then was being overflowed with water perished. They have to be willingly ignorant of the flood.

Listen, the world hasn't always continued the same. God wiped out the entire world except for eight people, didn't He, in the flood. It hasn't continued the way it was. And there's evidence all over the world, all over the globe, for a universal worldwide flood where God drowned all of human civilization. In Genesis chapter 6, God looked over the whole of man and said He saw nothing but wickedness and evil continually and decided to drown them all except for the eight righteous souls on the face of the earth: Noah, his wife, three sons and their wives. And if you're going to say, “Well, all things have always continued the way they were,” you've forgotten that that happened. All things have not continued the way they were.

The reason there is a time here is because – in verse 8 – God doesn't even see time and secondly, because He's waiting to gather all of His elect. But – verse 10 says – the day of the Lord will come, won't it? It will come. And it'll come like a thief in the night. Unexpectedly and suddenly is the point, when we don't expect it, when we don't think about it, when we don't realize it. And then He discusses the passing away of the heavens and the earth and all of this. And it's interesting to me that Peter sort of throws his arms around the whole big picture of the second coming and doesn't make a distinction. And I mean by that this: At the time when the Lord comes in His second coming to begin His thousand-year kingdom, the heavens are dramatically changed and the earth is changed as well. We know that. The stars fall. The moon doesn't give its light. The sun goes out. All the water, fresh water, salt water, the configurations of the earth are changed. The whole thing is in chaos, the powers of the heavens are shaken. We believe that all of this is going to take place in the Millennial period, as He recreates – as it were – a new heaven and a new earth for the kingdom, for the Millennium. There will be, in a sense, a new kind of heaven and a new earth at the second coming.

Then at the end of the kingdom – in Revelation 21 – John talks about the new heaven and the new earth. And I believe we have to see, then, that this re-creation process is two-phased, if you will. That when Jesus comes, there will be a modification of the universe. And at the end of the kingdom, there will be a re-creation of a new heaven and a new earth that are eternal. During the kingdom it'll be a

restored earth as we know it and a restored heavens as we know it. In the final eternal state, it'll be a new heaven and a new earth, something we've never known.

So in a sense, Peter just sweeps us all the way to the whole dissolution of everything at the end of the kingdom and says to us, in effect, that when Jesus comes, there'll be a disintegration of everything as we know it in space and on the earth and a new heaven and a new earth, he says in verse 13. And so in that sense, he's very likely sweeping us to the total change that comes at the end of the kingdom. But that change begins before the thousand years as we have a restored heaven and a restored earth. And we know that because the collapse is very clear in the Tribulation and something new comes out of that and then finally something even more glorious in the eternal state.

So it's interesting to think about. God creating an unfallen world, then the world is fallen. Then the world is restored the way the Lord wants it to be for the kingdom of Jesus Christ. And then ultimately, it's re-created for the new heaven and the new earth in the eternal state. And so the history of the globe, in a sense, and of the universe can be seen in this great prophetic literature.

Now, it's going to come then Peter says. It's going to come. When it's going to come, nobody knows. Now let's go back to verse 36. No one really knows the exact day and hour. We know the generation, right? We do, don't we? Because it's the generation that sees the birth pains, verses 32 to 35. That's the generation. But the day and the hour, nobody knows. No one knows. So what should be the attitude of every generation? What should be the attitude of every person, since we don't know the exact moment? Particularly, what should be the attitude of the people who see the birth pains? What should be the attitude of this generation that's alive in that time? The generation that sees the abomination of desolation, the generation that sees the rise of the antichrist, the generation that sees the changing of the face of the earth, that sees all the disasters, natural and spiritual and supernatural and whatever, what should be their attitude?

First of all should be alertness. Secondly, readiness. And thirdly, faithfulness. And we're going to look only at the first one, alertness, verse 37. The unexpectedness of the second coming calls for alertness. "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be."

Now, here again, we find what Peter does in his epistle in relating the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and its judgment, its cataclysmic holocaust of judgment back to the flood. It is the only illustration in human history that can even come close because it totally destroyed the face of the earth. And so we're going to find that the attitude that prevailed during the time of Noah will be the attitude that will prevail during the time of the second coming. That's what he means when he says, "As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." It's going to be like it was in Noah's time just before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You know, not only do people not know the day and the hour the Lord is coming, but most of them aren't even going to care. Even with all the signs and all the wonders and all the things going on, they're not going to care. They're not even going to think about it. They won't even be considering that as an alternative. It's hard to imagine that. I mean it's really hard to imagine that. They'll be scoffing and mocking like in 2 Peter chapter 3. And they'll be getting out their little slide rules and they'll be getting out their little charts and they'll be fussing around with their computers and they'll be analyzing the universe to try to explain scientifically why everything's going haywire. Why there are earthquakes and why there are all kinds of movements in the heavens and why the tides are all messed up and why the moon goes out and why the sun isn't working properly and why daylight has been shortened and why there's blood in the seas and there's bitterness in the fresh water and why people are slaughtering each other and why there are terrible massacres all around the world. They're going to be trying to figure all this out sociologically, scientifically, rationally. But they're not going to look to the truth of the Word of God.

You say it's almost impossible to believe but that's exactly right. I mean why would we expect them to be any different than when the Lord Jesus Christ was here the first time, right? I mean they could see Him. They could hear Him. They watched Him remove disease from the land of Palestine. They watched Him raise the dead. And they still couldn't conclude the right things. In fact, the religious leaders decided that He was of the devil.

So the mind of man is blinded, you see. And the world of our Lord's time was so selfish, so self-centered, so pious, so hypocritical, so materialistic, so sinful, so godless, so devoid of spiritual life and perception that it couldn't even see the Savior when He walked in its midst. Why should we expect the world of the future to be any different when they see the signs of His coming?

In Matthew chapter 16, do you remember the first three verses of that? Tremendous indictment. The Pharisees and the Sadducees came and tested Jesus and they desired that He would show them a sign from heaven. I mean it's ludicrous to ask such a thing. "Give us a sign from heaven." They had seen thousands upon thousands of such signs from Him. And He answered and said to them, "When it's evening you say fair weather, the sky is red. And in the morning you say foul weather today for the sky is red and overcast. Oh, you hypocrites, you can discern the face of the sky but you cannot discern the signs of the times." You're supposed to be religious leaders, you're great at telling the weather, but you haven't got a clue about what God's doing.

You see, they shut their minds to the truth of God just as the history of Israel has been a history of ignoring the Word of God. They ignored the prophets of God. They ignored the miracles of those prophets. They ignored the words of those prophets. They murdered the prophets. They murdered the Son of God. And when it comes to the signs of His coming and the Great Tribulation, the world will be just as darkened, just as imperceiving, just as blind as they have ever been to what's going on. And they will do what they've always done, they will explain it away, some rational means.

The fact is, they're going to be more wicked in that time than any time in the history of the world. The Bible tells us in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 that during the time of the Tribulation, the restrainer is taken away. The Holy Spirit is in the world today restraining evil, holding back evil. It seems as though He's letting a little more out all the time. But finally when the Tribulation comes, He takes His hands off and evil runs its full course. And then Revelation 9 says hell belches out all the temporarily bound demons and they overrun the earth. So the population of demons immediately increases dramatically. And then it tells us that Michael and Satan have a fight and Satan is cast out of heaven to earth, Revelation 12.

So now you've got Satan on the earth and all the demons have been up and out of hell like filthy unclean frogs, as it were, coming out of hell, and all the demons that are already here and no restraints and the world just goes amuck in sin. And that kind of debauched world, gross beyond what we can imagine – that's why it's called the mystery of iniquity, it is iniquity at a level that's not even yet revealed or known or experienced in 2 Thessalonians 2 – that world will be so vile and so wretched, so preoccupied with sin and sex and drugs and alcohol, so engulfed in its materialistic preservation of political economic Babylon, so evil, so filled with hate for each other, for God, for the truth, that when all of this happens, there will be all kinds of explanations except the willingness to understand the truth. They're not going to be willing to understand the truth. And He says it'll be like it was in the days of Noah.

You see, in the days of Noah, people ignored the truth, didn't they? Do you know how long Noah preached? Second Peter 2:5 calls Noah a preacher of righteousness. Do you think he just built a big wooden chest – that's the word ark, it's a – the word is the word for a wooden chest, he built a big wooden chest in the middle of the desert and told people there was going to be a flood. And they laughed because it had never rained. There was no such thing as rain. And there was no water there. And you know how long he built that boat? A hundred and twenty years and they laughed and they ridiculed and they mocked and they derided him.

But 2 Peter 2:5 says he was a preacher of righteousness. He wasn't just a boat builder, he was a preacher. Before he was a boat builder, he was a preacher. And for 120 years while he built the boat, he must have been asked a million times, "Why are you building the boat?" Right? "Why are you building the boat?" And that was the trigger for the sermon, "Because God is going to judge the wickedness of this world, and only those who put their faith in Him are going to escape. And I'm building the boat as a way of escape. Would you like to come on?" And they laughed and they laughed and they mocked. For 120 years, they went on with life as usual while he preached judgment, preached judgment, preached judgment, and demonstrated it to them by building a great big wooden chest right in the middle of everywhere so everyone could see it. And they didn't buy it. And I'm sure the first time a raindrop hit somebody's nose, they thought a dinosaur sneezed behind a hill or something. Still wouldn't believe it. They didn't want to believe that. They could have come up

with all kinds of excuses not to believe that.

Well, how was it in the days of Noah? Verse 38: “Whereas in the days of Noah that were before the flood, they” – that is, the people – “were eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered into the ark and knew not until the flood came and took them all away, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.”

Unbelievable. A hundred and twenty years this man preached and preached and preached and preached and preached. And they didn't believe it until they were washed away in the flood. And there are going to be signs and signs and signs for three and a half years, 42 months, 12 hundred and 60 days. There will be worldwide clear signs that the whole thing is coming apart. And there will be preachers of righteousness, the hundred and forty-four thousand, the two witnesses of Revelation 11, the redeemed host of Gentiles from all over the world of Revelation 7. And they will be enhanced by the gospel preached by the angel that preaches the everlasting gospel all over the globe. They will hear the message but they will not believe it, they will not believe it until they are literally washed away in the ultimate holocaust of judgment in the second coming. They'll come up with all kinds of reasons to mock and scoff and laugh and ridicule. And if they were that wicked in the day of Noah, they will be more wicked in the day of the coming of the Son of Man.

Now look what it says. They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage. Now, those aren't sins. Eating and drinking are not sins and marrying and giving in marriage are not sins. Marrying refers to the people who get married, giving in marriage refers to the families who give their young people to be married. What it means is life went on as usual, right? I mean it just means they just went through the routine. They just lived as if nothing would ever change. They totally disregarded what was going on. They didn't see its implications. They kept on eating in Noah's day and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage as if there would never be an end. So eating and drinking, that's personal routine. Marrying and giving in marriage, that's family routine, social activity. They just went through the cycles of normal personal family and business enterprise, life as usual, just went through the routine. They tried to adjust a little bit to this character Noah and what he was saying, but life went on as usual. And that's exactly what'll happen in the Tribulation.

We, I think, as Christians live under some idea that when all of this starts, there's going to be all over the world, people are just going to, “Oh, this is it, this is it.” Listen, there will be a redeemed remnant. There will be a massive redeemed remnant, innumerable, according to Revelation 7. There will be the revival and the faith of the nation Israel. But there will be also a worldwide rejection of all of these things as having anything to do with anything related to God. Secularism, the epitome of it. And in the days of Noah before the flood, they just went on with their routine until the day Noah entered into the *kibtos*, the ark, the wooden chest.

And then you know what it says in Genesis 7:11 to 16? That when they went in the ark, they what? Shut the door. And probably it didn't take long when the water started rising that some folks were knocking, but it was too late. Too late. They didn't realize – verse 39 – *ginsk* – they didn't realize until the *kataklusmos* came – cataclysm. It means to wash down, until the washing down came, just washed them all away into damnation, into death, into judgment, into a godless eternity. “And so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be,” it says at the end of verse 37. “And so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be,” it says at the end of verse 39. Twice, it says that. It will be just the same. Life as usual, go on with the routine until it's too late – it's too late. Instant devastation.

And so that generation will be like Noah's generation, warned and warned and warned and warned and warned. That generation was warned for 120 years. Folks lived longer then. The future generation will be warned for three and a half years. The fact is, they're being warned right now. They've been warned ever since the New Testament was written. Whatever generation it is that'll be alive when that happens – it could be this one – but they're not going to awake to it until they're swept away in judgment.

And then He gets very specific in verse 40 and 41. “Then shall two be in the field, one shall be taken, the other left. Two grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken, and the other left.” The word “one” in verse 40 is masculine in gender. The “one” in verse 41 is feminine in gender. That means verse 40 speaks of a man in the field, two men in the field, one taken, one left. Verse 41 of women, two women grinding at the mill, one taken and the other left. The man's task in that particular agricultural part of the world in that time was to be in the field and the women were there with the stone, the mill, grinding that which was harvested by the men. And so it's just life as usual, and in the midst of the routine of life, one shall be taken.

What do we mean, “taken”? I've heard people say this means the Rapture. You can't bring the Rapture in here. This is long after that. This is talking about taken in judgment. Go back to verse 39. “Till the cataclysm came and took them away.” It's based on that imagery. It's based on that picture of the flood sweeping men away into death. Two are going to be in the field when that final devastating flood of fire comes. And one is taken in judgment. Two at the mill and one is taken in judgment. And the other left – the other left – what are they left for? They're left to go into what? Into the kingdom. And they become those who populate the Millennial kingdom. They are the redeemed. So you'll have people on the job. Some will be believers and some will be unbelievers. The unbelievers will be swept away and the believers will be preserved.

By the way, that separation process is described in detail in the judgment of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31 to 46, where He takes the goats on the one hand and sends them into everlasting punishment, His sheep on the other hand and gives them the kingdom. So they are left. Very important. They are left for the kingdom. So it is this that we have to keep in mind. When the Millennial kingdom comes and begins, the people who will be left to go into it will be believers who

were not swept away in the judgment of all the ungodly. So the kingdom on earth, the Millennial kingdom, will be populated by those believers who have lived through the reign of terror of the antichrist and he has not destroyed them. They're still alive when Christ comes. Christ sweeps away in a holocaust of judgment all the ungodly, but the godly that still remain and are alive will go into His eternal – rather, into His Millennial kingdom to populate that kingdom. So that kingdom is populated, then, by physical beings, real people like we are, who've lived through antichrist's reign of terror, who believed in the truth of the gospel and were not destroyed. Maybe some of them even believed at the last moment.

You remember what it says in Acts chapter 2? That at the very time when the Lord comes, it describes all of those events, quoting from Joel 2, and it says at that great time, you know, when the signs in the heavens take place and the kingdom is about to begin, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"? I believe in that final moment as the King comes to establish His kingdom, there will be some who will call upon the name of the Lord in time to be saved. In time. They will be preserved along with those who believed before that, during the Tribulation time, and they together will go into that kingdom period to populate the earth, to reproduce, to have children, to live the kingdom that God has promised in the Old Testament. And so they'll be left. So there will be time of great separation when He comes.

Now, all of that to say this – verse 42 – very important: "Watch therefore for you know not what hour your Lord doth come." When the Lord comes, the ungodly will be swept away and the godly will be left, remaining safe to enter the kingdom. That is the promise. But we don't know, and the generation that's alive at the time won't know, the exact moment of that. So there needs to be preparedness. They'll be just going on with life, two in a field, two at a mill – and by the way, Luke 17:34 adds two lying in bed, which is an interesting note and should have been an indication to some of the ancient people that the earth was round because if you've got daylight in one part of the world and night in the other, you've got to have a spherical globe. But the world will be going on with its routine and there will come the judgment and then the door will be shut forever. Just like in Matthew 25:10 in the parable of the virgins, it says they that were ready went in with Him to the marriage and the door was shut. When that time comes, a separation will be made.

And the Lord knows how to make that separation. He knows. He knows who to leave and who to sweep away. In Malachi, you know, when He was breathing out judgment, judgment, judgment, it says, "and those that were righteous, those that loved the Lord, believed in the Lord, had faith in Him, met and talked with each other." And you know what they said was, "Boy, we might get swept away in this whole deal, too." And then the Word of God says to them, "No, you shall be Mine in the day I make up My jewels." As if to say the Lord knows them that are His, right? He knows.

Second Peter 2 verse 4: "If God spared not the angels that sinned but cast them down to hell and delivered them to chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment, and spared not the old world but

saved Noah, the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly” – in other words, if God knew who the sinful angels were and punished them and saved the good ones, if God knew who the sinful people were, destroyed them and saved Noah and the righteous – “and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly and delivered just Lot” – in other words, if God knew how to get Lot out of Sodom and Gomorrah and Noah out of the flood and the holy angels out of the devastation of heaven, then – verse 9 says – “the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of the temptation” or the trial. So when the judgment comes, the Lord will know how to sort out and then reserve the unjust to the day of judgment to be punished, 2 Peter 2:9. So He knows how to separate them.

But the word here is – verse 42 – be alert. It’s a present imperative, be continually alert. Every generation, every person, be alert, “For you know not what hour your Lord does come.” It’s a cry for constant vigilance, constant alertness. He will come and men who recognize that He is coming will be alert to that coming, spiritually aware.

Listen, this is not fiction, this is fact. This is how it will be. Just as the prophets said how it would be in His first coming and He fulfilled every prophecy, so will He in His second coming. Watch, therefore, for you don’t know what hour your Lord comes. And if He’s not your Lord now, He will be your Lord then. And His Lordship will be made manifest in His right to send you into eternity, into hell, into punishment. He is Lord. And at that moment, every knee will bow. Some in loving adoration, some in terror, but every knee will bow. Let’s bow in prayer.

As we close this morning, you, me, all of us could be living in that generation which will see the Rapture of the church, the holocaust of the Tribulation, the sign of the Son of Man, and the birth of the kingdom. Could be this generation. Are you ready? Are you alert? Are you reading the signs of the times? Are you right with the Lord Jesus Christ? That whole end time era, I believe, is initiated by the taking out of the church. And we’ll be kept from that hour which comes to try the whole world. And I invite you to come to Jesus Christ and with us be kept from that hour. And while the world is undergoing the terrors of the Tribulation, we shall be rejoicing in the presence of the Savior in heaven, living in the place He’s prepared for us. And if you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, you may know Him by a simple act of faith, inviting Him into your life, the one who lived and died and rose again for you. Confess your sin, embrace Him as your Lord and Savior.

And those of you who are Christians, again may I just speak to my own heart as well, this is a reminder for us that we need to make investments that are eternal. This whole thing is going to burn up. This whole thing is going to be destroyed. And only what we have invested in eternity will be – will survive, will remain. And I just ask God to renew my commitment to make eternal investments with all that I have – all that I have, possessions, resources, abilities, time, everything.

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