

The Day of the Lord, Part 3

1 Thessalonians 5:3

52-21

Open your Bible, if you will, to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. We're back to our little text of three verses which has become quite familiar to us over the last several weeks as we endeavor to understand its truth. I would like to read the first three verses of this fifth chapter so that you might have its setting in your mind. First Thessalonians 5 verse 1, "Now, as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying peace and safety, then destruction will come upon them suddenly, like birth pangs upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape." A writer by the name of Hendrikus Berkhof wrote a book called "Christ, the Meaning of History." And in that book he focuses on the old and crucial issue of: where is history leading? Where is it going? What is its purpose? What is its meaning? How does it end? Does it have a goal? He makes the statement in the book, quote: "Our generation is strangled by fear, fear for man, for his future and for the direction in which we are driven against our will and desire. And out of this comes a cry of illumination concerning the meaning of the existence of mankind and concerning the goal to which we are directed. It is a cry for an answer to the old question of the meaning of history." End quote.

In the century in which we live we have already seen two World Wars and have lived on the brink of another. We have experienced the holocaust of Hitler's Germany, the difficulty of the Korean conflict, the futility of Vietnam, many other revolutions, conflicts, rebellions and riots. And now, a time bomb looking like it may explode into another conflagration in the Middle East. And through it all, our generation continues to search for an answer about where is history going. It seems so hopeless, and that in the face of unbelievable intellectual, economic, scientific advancement. We can do so many things so far better than they could ever have been done before, but it seems as though we continue on the path of self destruction. How are we to live? How are we to work? How are we to love? How are we to play in the chaos and confusion of the meaninglessness of life?

Now, there are three possible interpretations, popular ones, to history. It can be viewed perhaps most simply in these three perspectives. Number one, the first view of history is a cyclical view. What this says is that history is an endless circle of repetition. It just continues to circle back through the same things over and over and over again. And we as people are also caught in that endless series of cycles through a process called reincarnation in which we reappear and reappear and reappear and reappear. This view of history basically says that there is no end, there is just the same over and over and over again. It gives no meaning to history, it has no meaning. It cannot gain any meaning because it can only repeat what has already been. And if there's been no meaning, there will be no meaning. A person might have goals in his life but history has no goals.

This particular view of history was very familiar to the ancient Greeks and held predominantly among them. In our more modern world, it is the philosophy of Hinduism and has been for centuries. The history is a series of repeated cycles in which you are reincarnated and reincarnated and

reincarnated to experience the same things over and over and over from a different vantage point. That Hindu worldview has become the world view of the New Age Movement and thus it has worked its way into western culture, New Age being nothing more than Hinduism in the west. And so, it is very popular today to believe in reincarnation, to believe in a cyclical view of history. John Marsh in his book "The Fullness of Time" writes, "If such a view be true then historical existence has been deprived of its significance. What I do know I have done in a previous world cycle and will do again in future world cycles. Responsibility and decision disappear, and with them any real significance to historical life which in fact becomes a rather grandiose natural cycle." He writes, "Just as the corn is sown, grows and ripens each year, so will the events of history recur time after time. Moreover, if all that can happen is the constant repetition of an event cycle, there is no possibility of meaning in the cycle itself. It achieves nothing in itself; neither can it contribute to anything outside itself. The events of history are devoid of significance." End quote.

And those who seek to find relief from this endless series of cycles, who seek to be freed from it, believe that the only way to get out of it is somehow to rise to a higher level of mystical consciousness that transcends reality and puts you in the nebulous unconsciousness of nirvana. And so, there is this mystical effort to ascend, to transcend, to elevate, to reach another plain so that you can lift yourself above the meaninglessness of mundane repetition.

There's a second worldview that is quite popular running also alongside the first one. We can call that an atheistic existential view of history. It says that history is a line, it is not a series of repetition, it is a line, but it's started by accident and no one knows how in the world it's going to end. There is no God. We are all the result of a collocation of atoms or some kind of primeval slime, that out of it oozed something or other that eventually became what is, and who knows what will eventually happen. There is no God. There is no rhyme or reason. There is no method. There is no purpose. There is no creator. There is no progenitor. There is no concluder. We are simply in an accidental existence, and the only way to live it is to cram it full of every bit of gusto you can possibly get and make it as meaningful in its meaninglessness as you possibly can.

"Existentialism of this type," writes Anthony Hoekema, "is without meaning. No significant pattern," he says, "can be found in history, no movement toward a goal, only a meaningless succession of events. And this being the case, one is left with what would appear to be sheer individualism, each person must try to find his way from non-authentic, to authentic existence by making significant decisions. But history as a whole is devoid of meaning."

These kinds of views of history are often articulated in parabolic form by writers. One familiar one is Albert Camus who wrote the novel "The Plague." And in that novel he talks about a city called Oran, and the city was overrun by rats, and these rats brought with them the dreaded bubonic plague. Valiantly, the doctor in the story and those associated with him battle this plague. Finally, they succeed in bringing the epidemic under control. At the end of the book, Camus puts these words, however, in the mouth of the doctor, quote: "It is only a question of time and the rats will be back." And that is Camus' comment on the purposelessness, the meaninglessness, the pointlessness of living in this world. They say, to those in an atheistic existential view of history, that everything remains exactly the way it's always been in terms of meaning and meaninglessness.

That's the popular view of philosophers and hedonists, but there's a third alternative. And the third alternative to those world views is that there is a sovereign creator God who is working out His purposeful plan in history. That is the Christian view of life. It has several components. Let me kind of

give them to you. The Christian view of history says that history is the working of God's purposes as explained in the Scripture. That's a very important statement. History is the working of God's purposes as explained in Scripture. Secondly, God is sovereign over all history. He rules it all. By providence which is the supernatural pulling together of all diverse natural factors and by miracle which is supernatural intervention into the natural, He controls it all. The Christian worldview of history also says that Christ is the main person of history, that all of history looks to Christ. His coming is the greatest and most notable event in human history. The Christian view of history says that God is moving all history toward a divinely planned goal, and every person has an ultimate appointment with God to determine his eternal destiny. God started it. God controls it. And God is bringing it to its conclusion.

As we look at the goal of history, as God's goal, as we understand that God is working out His eternally planned purposes in time, one event looms with a foreboding character over the end. Paul names that in verse 2 of our text. He calls that event the day of the Lord, a foreboding event that culminates human history. Now, as we have already learned in our two previous messages from this little section of Scripture, that term, "the day of the Lord," refers to the final cataclysmic judgment by God on unrepentant sinners who have rejected Jesus Christ. It is the day when the Lord unleashes His final fury.

The Thessalonians had already been taught some things about this, as Paul reminds them in 2 Thessalonians 2:5. They already had been instructed, in the time that he was with them several months before he writes this letter, about the day of the Lord. But there was something that they didn't know, and it is that which is the query on their minds. In verse 1 he says, "Now, as to the times and the epochs," the *chronos* and the *kairos*, "brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you." Very likely, Timothy who had recently visited them came back and said among their questions is a question about the day of the Lord: when is it coming? When is it coming? And he says to them simply in verse 1, "You have no need of anything to be written to you." Why? Because there is nothing to be said about the times. God has not told us that. In fact, Jesus said that the day of the Lord would come in an hour when you think not, in a day and an hour when no man knows. The times and the seasons, He said twice, are not for you to know. The Father hath them in His own power and even the Son of Man does not know them. All you need to know is the character of that day, and that it will come unexpectedly. So, that every generation of human existence since this New Testament was written has had to live with the reality that the day of the Lord could come in their life time.

And so, he says, you don't need to know the time. God has not chosen to reveal that to anyone. But though you don't need to know that, you do need to be reminded, verse 2, of what you already know full well, and that is that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. It's going to come unexpectedly, it's going to come unwelcomed, and it's going to come harmfully. That's how a thief comes. But the major concept is the unexpectedness of it. It will be a surprise to those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ.

And as we looked at the first point here, the point of its coming, and we've been looking at three points: its coming, its character, and its completeness. As we looked at the point of its coming, we simply stated for you that he reminds them that its coming is like a thief in the night, unexpectedly. And then, we began to launch off on that concept to try to fill in some of the gaps in our understanding so we'll better grasp what he means here. Every generation then lives with the possible expectation of the day of the Lord. Now, you'll remember that when we studied the Rapture

in chapter 4 verses 13 to 18, we also said that every generation of Christians has lived in the light of the fact that the Rapture could take place in their life time. We don't know when the Lord is coming to take His church out before the day of the Lord. We don't know when that is going to take place, so every generation has lived in the light of the fact that the Lord could come in their lifetime. And every ungodly generation has lived with the reality, though they may not have understood it or known it, that the Lord could come in final judgment in their lifetime.

Now, last time I reminded you that no passage dealing with the Rapture gives any preliminary signs that will indicate the Rapture is near. You have three explicit Rapture passages: John 14, 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4. They describe the Rapture of the church, the catching away of the church to be with Christ in heaven. None of those passages gives us any preliminary sign. So, we refer to the Rapture as a sign-less event. But, on the other hand, passages dealing with the day of the Lord do mention signs to indicate its nearness. And though the day or the hour cannot be known, the general timeframe can be known.

Now, remember what I shared with you last time: that Scripture says before the day of the Lord can come several things have to happen. According to Malachi 4:5, one like Elijah must come as a forerunner to the Messiah. And until that Elijah-like forerunner comes to announce the Messiah's arrival, the day of the Lord cannot come. Secondly, in Joel 3 and verse 9 it says that before the day of the Lord, the nations will be gathered into the valley of decision. The world will move toward Armageddon before the day of the Lord may come. So, when the Elijah-like forerunner comes and starts to announce the return of Christ in judgment, that's an indication it's near. And when the nations of the world begin to converge into the Middle East at Armageddon, that indicates that it's near.

In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, it also tells us that the apostasy will come. There will be a worldwide apostate religious system that will develop and grow. In that final form of world rebellion against the true God and the true gospel and the true faith will be preliminary to the day of the Lord. Also, we read in 2 Thessalonians 2 that the day of the Lord cannot come until the man of sin is revealed, the Antichrist, and until he moves into the temple and abominates the temple by setting up in the temple in Jerusalem the worship of himself.

Then, the final preliminary indicator we noted starts way in the Old Testament, moves all through the New Testament, and that is that the stars go out, the sun goes dark, the moon goes black and then the day of the Lord hits, the great and terrible day of the Lord. So, you have these signs that are preliminary to the day of the Lord.

So, those people who are living in the time period between the Rapture and the day of the Lord are going to have ample warning, ample warning. But, look at verse 3, what are they going to say? Are they going to be running around saying it's coming, it's coming, it's coming, it's coming? What are they going to be saying? "Peace and safety." How can they say that? It's inconceivable, and yet it's true. Non-Christians in that dark and deceitful Satanic kingdom of Antichrist will not be expecting the day of the Lord in spite of all the signs. And you remember I told you last time that this is a pattern that you can see clear back in the Old Testament. Whenever God announced judgment, the false prophets started to cry what? Peace, peace, peace, and God said they say peace when there is no peace. Whenever God said I'm going to judge and I'm going to bring retribution and vengeance, and wrath, the false prophets would say peace, there's coming peace, peace is coming, have no fear, all is well, everything is fine. But there's no peace. The same Satanically inspired false prophets in the

future are going to do exactly what they did in the past.

And it's amazing to think about that, because there will be so many indications that this is coming. Let me take you a little bit more deeply into those indications. Now, get your Bible and turn to Matthew chapter 24, and I want you to jump around between Matthew 24 and Revelation with me for a few moments, and I want to show you how much is going to be happening to give them the sign that the day of the Lord is on its way. And even though they don't know the specific day or hour, they should know the general time. In Matthew 24, please notice verse 3. Jesus is privately meeting with His disciples on the Mount of Olives after an incredible conflict with the false leaders in the temple. And they say to Him what people have always been asking, "Tell us, when will these things be and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age." They want to know the time. When is it going to happen? When are You going to come and take the kingdom? When are You going to come and judge the ungodly? When are You going to return? That's the question.

And Jesus gives them the answer. And the answer doesn't come until verse 29 and 30; they want to know what's the sign. He says when the sun goes dark, and the moon doesn't give its light, and the stars fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken, then the sign. The Son of Man appears in heaven, and He's ready to move in judgment. But there are some things even before that, even before that. That's sort of the last major sign. But look at all they're going to be able to see who live in that time.

Go down to verse 8. All these things, this discusses the whole section around verse 8, are the beginning of birth pangs. Now, what does He mean by that? Birth pains, listen very carefully, is a very graphic analogy. Birth pains come suddenly, suddenly upon a woman; they come repeatedly and they come progressively more intense. And that's the idea. The world is going to be hit with a pain, followed by another pain, followed by another pain, another pain, and it's going to be intensified, intensified, intensified until finally the event takes place. Birth pains are sudden, painful, repeated, intensified and they result in a great event. And that's why He selects that analogy. And He says there are going to be some things that should hit the world hard enough to know this event is coming. When a woman feels a birth pain, she knows what it's leading to. But these people aren't going to see it because there are going to be some false prophets running around saying peace and safety, peace and safety.

Notice Jesus' answer, how He points this out. First thing He says in verse 4, the first thing He says in answer to their question, He said to them, "See to it that no one," what? "Misleads you." There it is. Satan will always want to mislead about the truth of final judgment because it's going to include him. Don't let anyone mislead you about this. Here is written warning to the generation alive at the time of the day of the Lord.

And then, He goes in to the birth pains. What's the first birth pain? Verse 5, first birth pain, "Many will come in My name saying, I am the Christ, and will mislead many." The first birth pain is widespread deception by a proliferation of false religions, false prophets, false teachers, false leaders, false Christs, and out of them will rise one false Christ and say I am Christ, the Antichrist. You see, they have to be in place when it starts so they can explain it all away. They have to be first on the scene. Worldwide proliferation of false teachers, false leaders, false religionists, false Christs. I'll tell you, folks, we have a lot of them today, don't we? I think we're ready to sustain this kind of involvement. We've got enough false prophets to carry it off. And they're going to be running around explaining it all away with their Satanic explanations so people will not see it as that which leads to the day of the

Lord.

And as the birth pains intensify and escalate, so will the deception. The number of deceivers and deceived will grow and grow and grow as people start coming to them for answers to the coming of these tremendous calamities. And the epitome of these false Christs will be the Antichrist, the beast of Revelation 13, the little horn of Daniel, the willful king of Daniel, the man of sin of 2 Thessalonians by all of those names. The final world ruler who makes a pact with Israel. And I can see that happening. He will be a leader who will rise out of Europe. You have the great greatest power in the world soon will be revived Europe, 1992, you have a unified Europe. It's moving very rapidly that way, out of that concentrated power base in Europe and the revived Roman Empire, as it were, rises this great ruler. Israel, of course, tremendously vulnerable to its neighbors who want to destroy it, looking for some kind of solution, looking for some kind of protection, will do exactly what they did in the Old Testament when they made alliances with Egypt. They'll make an alliance with the Antichrist and Daniel 9 says a pact for seven years of protection. And they'll think now they've got the whole of the great power of Antichrist and all of his kingdom behind them to protect them. This great world ruler will move in to prominence. Three and a half years into that pact with Israel, he will move into the land, he will desecrate their temple and their worship, set himself as God to be worshiped. The false prophet will come along as his companion and point everybody to worshipping him. And he'll take over the world.

But, preliminary to that there will be an accumulation of false prophets and false teachers. We see that in degree today like no other time in human history. They're proliferating. That's the first birth pain. When they see the proliferation of this, and the movement of these false Christs, they should know the birth pains have begun.

Compare that with Revelation chapter 6 where you have the seals. There is a scroll in the hand of Christ here. This scroll is the title deed to the earth. It is time for the Lord to take back the earth. It is time for him to bring judgment. It is time for him to unfold His wrath and His judgment. And before the great and terrible day of the Lord breaks out at the sixth seal, there are five preliminary seals that begin to unfold God's wrath in a natural way. Then, at the sixth and seventh it comes in supernatural holocaust. But it starts to unfold from the first seal.

Now, in ancient times when you had a title deed or a will or a testament to leave a legacy to someone, the Roman government required that it was sealed seven times so that you couldn't break the seal. It was to be sealed seven times for security. And here, the Lord takes the title deed to the earth that is sealed seven times in proper legal fashion, and He breaks one seal at a time. And each time a seal is broken, the scroll unrolls a little bit. And it unrolls at the first seal and what does it reveal? Verse 2, a white horse, someone on it with a bow, which means power. The white horse was the conqueror's horse. He comes with a crown. He is a ruler and a sovereign. He conquers. You'll notice there's no war here. He has a bow but no arrows. It is a conquest of political nature, probably, of ideological, philosophical. It is a cold war conquering. It is a conquering by treaty, by manipulation or intimidation. And here is the Antichrist who comes and conquers with a false peace, without war, the ultimate false prophet. And this parallels the first birth pain.

Go back to Matthew chapter 24. The second birth pain is in verse 6, "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars, see that you're not frightened for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end, for nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom." The second birth pain is war. The false peace doesn't last very long. It isn't long until war begins to break out. The details of that

conflict are recorded for us in Daniel chapter 11. If you read them there. And also in the book of Revelation. The second birth pang parallels the second seal. Go back to Revelation again. In the second seal it says in verse 3, the second living creature says, "Come," and another, a red horse this time, "and to him who sat on it was granted to take peace from the earth." And here is war riding a horse. And people kill each other. And a great sword is given. Just like the wars and rumors of wars and nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom, in the second birth pain, the second seal is the same thing: war begins to hit the earth. And this war escalates, and moves more intensely through the time period of the Tribulation.

In fact, as you follow through the book of Revelation you see very clear indications of this escalating war. Chapter 9 of the book of Revelation talks about an army of 200 million that moves in a tremendous, tremendous massacre, killing a third of mankind in verse 18. And then, you have again in chapter 16 of the book of Revelation verse 13, the indication again of that same kind of thing, not only the kings from the east coming, but out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs, they are spirits of demons performing signs, going to the kings of the whole world to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the almighty. And so, you see this ultimately ends in Armageddon. So, war begins and escalates all the way to Armageddon.

The next birth pain you notice in Matthew 24 verse 7 and 8, it says in various places there will be famines and earthquakes, and He says all these things are just the beginning of birth pains. So, the third birth pain, famine and earthquake. We'll call that natural disaster, natural disaster. John saw the same thing. Go to Revelation 6, in the third seal, just like the third birth pain. There's a black horse, and he has a pair of scales. And you notice in verse 6 a quart of wheat for a denarius, three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and the wine. Those are famine prices when food is so expensive that no one can afford to buy it because it's so scarce. And so, John in the Revelation sees in the third seal the same thing that Jesus spoke of in the third birth pain: that is famine conditions around the world, natural disasters.

Go back to Matthew 24. The fourth pain comes in verse 9, "Then, they will deliver you to tribulation, kill you, you'll be hated by all nations on account of My name." Persecution. That's going to come too. There will be some believers in that time who have responded to the preaching of the gospel by the two witnesses of Revelation 11, perhaps have responded to the preaching of the gospel by the angel, the everlasting angel, who flies through heaven preaching the gospel. Perhaps, they're listening to the forerunner announcing the day of the Lord and there will be some who will believe, certainly Israel will be redeemed. And there will be a great host of Gentiles that no man can number, listed in Revelation chapter 7. And so, there will be those saved and then the world will turn on them and hate them and persecute them.

We find a parallel to this also in Revelation 6. Would you please look there? In the fourth seal, he discussed more of the natural disasters. A fourth of the people dying from sword and famine and pestilence and wild beasts, but then the fifth seal parallels the fourth birth pain. "I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained," and there you have those martyred saints.

So, follow this, will you? First there's a rise in this proliferation of false teachers and out of them comes the Antichrist who makes a pact with Israel for seven years. That is followed when that false sense of world peace begins to disintegrate. First, there are wars and rumors of wars, and then

nation against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and the world turns into a blood bath. That is followed by tremendous natural disasters brought upon the world through earthquakes, the collapse of heaven, the pollution of fresh water and salt water, the devastation caused by plagues, pestilences, diseases like AIDS and other things. And then, wild beasts set loose on mankind. That is followed by martyrdom of the true believers.

And then, you notice Matthew 24 verse 14, there is a final pain in these beginning of birth pains. "And the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all nations and then the end shall come." There's going to be a worldwide preaching of the gospel, worldwide declaration of the truth. As I said, by the two witnesses, by the 144,000 Jews of Revelation 7 who are sealed and protected from Antichrist's persecution so they can proclaim the truth, by the everlasting angel of Revelation 14:6 and 7 who preaches the gospel supernaturally. And it's after that the end comes. You're really moving to the end.

And then, in verse 15, the abomination of desolation which Daniel predicted, where the Antichrist shows his true colors, moves into the temple, throws out the Jewish worship that is going on there. He desecrates the Jewish temple, sets himself up as God. That's the abomination of desolation. And then, he says if you're there then you better run because you don't have much time. It's all going to come. Verse 21, "Then, there will be great tribulation." For the second three and a half years there is great tribulation. The apostasy starts to run rampant. Antichrist starts his massacring of those who believe. And there is tremendous intensification of judgment. You move from those first five seals to the trumpet judgments which are tremendously intense, and ultimately to the seven bowl judgments which are more devastating, as those birth pains get closer and closer and closer, more intense, more intense, more painful, more painful.

You say, "Well, now wait a minute. With all of that, don't they see it coming?" The answer is what? No, no. They don't see it coming. Why? Verse 5, "Because of false Christs who mislead them." Verse 11, "Because of false prophets who mislead many." Verse 12, "Because lawlessness is increased." In other words, they'll be really sinning to the max. The restrainer has taken back the restraint. The pit has belched out demons, so there are more demons now in the world than there have ever been. Sin is running wild, and they're loving it, and they're into it, and they're believing the lies of the false prophets who are saying peace and safety, peace and safety.

Verse 24, false Christs, false prophets will arise. And how do they do this? How do they mislead? "They show great signs and wonders so as to mislead. If it were possible, even the elect." There are Satanic signs, chicanery. They're fakes, phonies, maybe some of what they do is demonic, some of it is just fake, false. I tell you, I worry about this modern proliferation of signs and wonders. I don't think it's getting us ready for what God wants to do. I think it's getting us ready for what Antichrist wants to do. You have, even in the church today, people running around buying into anybody's signs and anybody's wonders, which they do not even test by the Word of God. There are going to be a lot of folks who say, "We did many wonderful works in Your name," to whom He will say, "I never knew you, depart from Me you workers of iniquity."

It's amazing that they're going to be deceived by signs and wonders. The whole world seems to be curious about this. Everybody wants it. That's why the charismatic movement proliferates, that's why mysticism proliferates, that's why the New Age proliferates. It promises supernatural experiences. It promises you can get in touch with demons, you can channel, you can touch a medium, you can see a miracle, you can, and it's everywhere. Everywhere. It's not getting ready for Christ's kingdom; it's

getting ready for Antichrist's dominion. And they're going to be in to sin, and they're going to be running to their false prophets for answers.

They're already doing that. When I get my haircut, I take the same route to the same barber I've been going to for 20 years, a good friend. And I've always gone by a house that has a little sign outside that says, "Psychic reader, tarot cards, future telling." I've gone by that for a long time. And the weeds used to grow there, and the house was kind of shabby and dilapidated, and business wasn't too hot, obviously. And I never really took note of it much after that, but the other day I went to the barber and I drove by, somebody had landscaped the whole place, it was painted, they had a brand new sign and there were two Mercedes in the driveway. And I concluded that business is moving up. This is a very disoriented, confused world and they're looking for some answers, and there's a premium on psychic readers, and mediums, and channelers and you know that. And so, they're going to tell all their lies. It will be so easy.

I remember reading a number of years ago a book that was written by a medium, and this medium received it through a demon spirit that gave the book, and the book was a fascinating book shown to me by a guy who was saved out of the occult. And in the book, this demon had given a message to explain away the Rapture. "Someday," this demon had said, "we are going to remove all the Christians from the earth so that the world can move to the highest level of its potential." If you think when the Rapture takes place and Christians all leave, everybody in the world is going to run to Christ, not so. The false prophets are going to surface and say now that these Christians who are retarding our development are out of the way, we can move to the new age. And as this world begins to collapse, they will explain it as the end of the old for the dawning of the new. And so, people are just going to plunge into sin and carry on as usual.

Look at verse 37. This is amazing. Matthew 24. The coming of the Son of Man is going to be just like the days of Noah. In the days of Noah and before the flood, they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were given in marriage. What does that mean? Life as usual. Eating, drinking takes care of now. Marrying, giving in marriage assumes you're going to be around for a long time. Life as usual. Just like in Noah's time. Noah preached righteousness for 120 years and they went on as usual. And after 120 years of warning them that a flood was coming, they all drowned. Nobody bought into it. They had their own false prophets telling them lies. And so, they'll not only be doing that, verse 40 says they'll be working in the field and some of them will be in a mill or a factory when it hits. They won't expect it.

Luke 17 verse 26 is a parallel passage. And Luke records the words of our Lord, "As it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating. They were drinking. They were marrying. They were giving in marriage. Until Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all." It was the same as it happened in the days of Lot. They were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building, they were just doing what they normally did. And one day Lot, left Sodom and God always delivers His people before His judgment. It rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. They were warned, too. Just like Noah's time was warned, just like the world of the future, the day of the Lord will be warned, they ignore it all.

You say, "How could they be so deceived? How could they be?" First of all, they have false prophets. First of all, they have false prophets. And listen, people believe that stuff when you can show signs and wonders. But listen to Revelation for a moment. Chapter 13 verse 8, "And all who dwell on the

earth will worship him,” meaning the beast, the Antichrist. “They’re all going to worship him.” And down in verse 11, “I saw another beast coming up out of the earth and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon.” This is the false prophet who is sort of second in command. “And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence.” He’s vice-beast. Verse 12, “He makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast.” They’re going to just believe the Antichrist and all his false prophets, including this one. How does he do it? Verse 13, “He performs,” what? “Great signs.” Listen, people, watch out for the signs and wonders movement. He even makes fire come down out of heaven on the earth in the presence of men. “And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast.” They believe because of what he can do.

But there’s another component, that’s right, another component. Second Thessalonians chapter 2, another component in their deception. This is shocking. Here comes the Antichrist with all power, 2 Thessalonians 2:9, and signs and false wonders. “And with this all the deception of wickedness for those who perish because they didn’t receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.” You’ve got Satan, Antichrist, false prophet, false teachers, proliferating all signs and wonders going on around them, and all the deceived blind people who refuse to be saved are going to be so deceived as to believe it all, right? One more component, verse 11, “And for this reason, because they refuse the truth and salvation, God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false.” Is that amazing? That seals their damnation. “In order that they all may be judged.” Why? “Because they didn’t believe the truth; the opposite of which is to take pleasure in wickedness.” So, all the birth pains and all they say, peace and safety, peace and safety.

Shocking, isn’t it? This is a pattern in the Old Testament. Whenever God says the day of the Lord is coming, that means a final cataclysmic judgment. And day of the Lord passages in the Old Testament which looked at the final eschatological day of the Lord also often looked at a historical event. In other words, there was an historical day in which God judged. And if you go back and look at some of those passages, before that historical day of the Lord hit, there were a number of natural things that occurred, natural problems, and wars, and attacks that were preliminary to that final day of the Lord. And you see that pattern in what I’ve shown you today.

So, the birth pains and the scroll unfolds those things which indicate the judgment is coming. Now, very briefly look at 1 Thessalonians 5, its character. Very simple, verse 3, its character. It will bring, it says in verse 3, destruction, destruction. The, *olethros*, disaster, ruin, used in the Septuagint to speak of eschatological destruction. It does not mean annihilation; it means destruction from the face of the Lord, utter hopeless ruin, the loss of everything. Not the destruction of being but the destruction of well-being, not the end of existence but the ruination of the purpose for existence. God’s going to ruin them, destroy them physically, and cast them into hell, destruction.

Notice, “Will come upon them,” aren’t you glad it doesn’t say us? Them, not us. Verse 4, “But you, brethren, are not in darkness that the day should overtake you like a thief.” We’re not going to be there to be overtaken by the day of the Lord; we will have been raptured. We left in chapter 4 so we’re not around in chapter 5. It’s going to come suddenly without a moment’s notice like lightning. And the devastation, we’ve already seen. The sky goes black, everything begins to disintegrate, everything in the natural world around men.

It is so graphically described at the end of chapter 6 that I need to just read it. “The sun becomes as black as sackcloth, there’s a great earthquake, the whole moon becomes like blood, the starts of the

sky fall to the earth as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind, the sky is split apart like a scroll, every mountain and island is moved out of its place.” That’s incredible. That’s all supernatural. “The kings of the earth, the great men, the commanders, the rich, the strong, every slave and every freeman,” that means everybody, “hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains, said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb for the great day of their wrath has come.’ And who is able to stand?” And when the seventh seal is broken, chapter 8 verse 1, there was silence, silence.

If you remember Joel and you remember Acts 2, you remember that the day of the Lord is marked by blood, fire, and smoke. When you’re reading Revelation some time, look how many times it mentions blood, fire, and smoke leading up to enduring the day of the Lord. This judgment will be blood, fire, smoke, darkness, earthquakes, plagues, lightning, thunder, hailstones, and it will destroy the wicked.

In fact, before the day of the Lord is ultimately over, in its second phase, Peter says the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat and the earth and its works will be burned up so that God will have to make a whole new heaven and a whole new earth. That’s how devastating it’s going to be. That’s where history is going, folks. That’s where history is going. And the false prophets, Peter says, think they’re so smart, the false prophets say, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” There’s an atheistic evolutionary world view. It’s just the same as it’s always been. Or perhaps there’s that cyclical view, well, it’s just the same old cycles, never changes. Oh? It’s going to change all right. It’s going to change in the day of the Lord.

Notice, would you please, verse 3, one more note on this second point. It’s going to come and it’s going to come suddenly and look at this, it’s going to come like what? Birth pangs upon a woman with child. Haven’t we heard about birth pangs before? The day of the Lord really begins with the what? The birth pangs. That’s the anticipation of the great and horrible, terrible day which unfolds at the sixth seal. But everything preliminary is part of the birth pangs leading up to that moment. Sudden, recurring, increasing pain until finally it hits. Its coming, its character.

Thirdly and briefly, its completeness. How comprehensive is the judgment? Well, I told you. It’s going to ultimately destroy the whole universe. Nobody will survive and it says at the end of verse 3, “They shall not,” what? “Escape.” Who is they? The same they that believe Antichrist and all his false prophets, lies about peace and safety. The same they that are the them upon whom the destruction comes. Nobody will *ekpheugō*, the word from which we get fugitive with *ek* added to it, they’ll not be able to run out, to escape completely, to get away. They can’t escape. When the day of the Lord hits, no one will escape, no one, none. Boy, what an important message that is to remind people about.

In Matthew 13:41 Jesus said, “The Son of Man will send His angels and they’ll gather out of His Kingdom all stumbling blocks and those who commit lawlessness, and cast them into the furnace of fire and there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Verse 49, “It will be that way at the end of the age, the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous and cast them into the furnace of fire.” Nobody escapes. Nobody. You remember the pensive statement of the writer of Hebrews? “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” And all the kings, and commanders, and rulers, and freemen, and slaves, and everybody will cry for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them, but none will escape, none.

In conclusion, a word of comfort, verse 4, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness that the day should overtake you like a thief, for you are all sons of light and sons of day, we're not of night nor of darkness." Isn't that wonderful? We're not going to be there for the darkness. We're not going to be there for the day to overtake us. We belong in the light. And verse 9 says it, "For God has not destined us for," what? "For wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, as we think about this, it is an awesome reality and must have implications for what we do with our life. Since this is true, I don't want to spend my life doing anything other than what I'm doing, to warn as many as possible of this coming judgment. And even this day and this place, there are those who hear my voice who will not experience the catching away of God's beloved church, those in Christ, because they have not believed the truth and turned from their sin and wickedness. And so they will experience Your judgment, either in the day of the Lord if they live that long, or an eternal hell if they die first. But Father, we pray that that would not be the case, that no one hearing this message would turn his or her back on the salvation that is in Christ. Thank You for the Lord Jesus who came into this world to pay the penalty for our sin and to offer us eternal life through His resurrection. May we preach, Lord, faithfully, the saving gospel to doomed men and women, and may they know that if they will turn from their sin, receive the gift of salvation that the Lord Jesus offers and follow Him, they will pass from the kingdom of darkness into His kingdom and from death to life. Amen.

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