

Signs of the End Times

The Bible vividly describes what the world will be like in the days immediately prior to the Lord's return. The "Signs of the End Times" sermon series briefly highlights several of these telling indicators. How closely do they mirror the state of our world today? Could we be living in the end times right now? These messages were first preached at both Calvary Baptist Church and Red Springs Baptist Church from January through early March of 2020.

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Historical Patterns and Precedent

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"So you also, when you see these things happening, recognize that the kingdom of God is near." - Luke 21:31

This morning we are beginning a new sermon series called "Signs of the End Times". Over the next 8-10 weeks we will be discussing several warning signs given in the Bible that indicate Christ's return is near. These varied signs will be categorized and presented in messages by type, with titles such as "Spiritual Delusion", "Natural Disasters", "Political Upheaval", "Increased Knowledge", and "Rampant Immorality". Though we will cover several signs of the end times, it is certainly possible and even likely that we will not address them all.

This series will not dogmatically insist on any specific timeline or sequence of events related to the end times. There are many differing and informed opinions about the exact details, participants, and even order of eschatological events such as the Rapture, the Tribulation, the Millennium, and so forth. While I have my own deeply held convictions about these issues, the scope of this series will be limited to a broad consideration of certain signs and indicators that suggest the end is approaching.

Furthermore, we will not attempt to interpret end time prophecies in this series. Over the years, many theologians and scholars have sought to explain the prophetic writings of John, Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and others. Their interpretations often differ extensively from one another. We will examine these things at another time. For now, rather than speculating and debating over the exact meaning of apocalyptic prophecy, we will instead focus on those clearly seen and easily identifiable signs that are given in Scripture.

We will begin this study today with a message titled "Historical Patterns and Precedent". Scripture indicates that certain pieces have to be in place prior to the Lord's second coming. If and when these preconditions have been met, the end is imminent. We will highlight one such historical event that occurred less than 100 years ago. Also, we will examine 2 Biblical patterns that began in ages past which generally point to the arrival of the last days.

I. THE 7000-YEAR AGE OF MAN THEORY

The Bible reveals that God established a basic pattern by which the passage of time is measured. In the beginning, God fashioned the heavens and earth over a period of 6 days. Then, having completed His creative work, the LORD rested on the 7th day (Genesis 1-2). Following this precedent, God later commanded His followers to observe a Sabbath day of rest once each week and to keep this particular day holy. This principle didn't apply exclusively to the days of the week, but also to the passage of years (Leviticus 23, 25). Farmers were to plant and harvest crops or tend to their vineyards for 6 consecutive years, then allow their fields and/or vines to lay fallow on the 7th year as a season of renewal and renourishment. Both the

weekly and yearly cycles of 7 were to be (and to some extent have been) continuously repeated throughout history.

Interestingly, the Bible twice equates a single day in God's timing to 1,000 years on man's calendar. Moses wrote in Psalm 90:4 that "a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it passes by". Centuries later, in 2 Peter 3:8, the former apostle wrote that "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day."

Combining these 2 elements, some have theorized what is known as "The 7000-Year Age of Man". It is based upon God's 7 day pattern, which He ordained during the creation. Using the aforementioned Biblical scale which equates 1 day to 1,000 years, this theory proposes that mankind will live upon the earth for 7,000 years (which is 7 "days"). This period will consist of 6,000 years (6 days) of "work" followed by 1,000 years (1 day) of "rest". After these years are concluded, eternity will officially begin.

This pattern is intriguing because it roughly corresponds to the historical timeline described in the Bible. Using the chronologies detailed in Scripture, Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden around 4,000 BC. This is when the passage of time became meaningful, since aging and physical death entered the world as the result of sin. Approximately 6,000 years have passed since then, bringing this world to the present time of about 2,000 AD. During these years mankind has labored upon the earth. This would leave 1,000 years - possibly referring to the Millennium - as a time of rest prior to the culmination of the age.

If one subscribes to this theory and to the pattern and timeline upon which it is based, the return of Christ must be very near. If this hypothesis is true, the time of Jesus' earthly kingdom and Millennial reign has arrived, which means His second coming is due at any moment. This fascinating theory is not an end time sign per se, nor is it based on any particular prophecy, but rather it originates from a Biblically-based historical pattern which suggests that humanity is living in the last days.

II. THE EARTHLY REPRESENTATIVE THEORY

Throughout the course of history, men and women of faith have always served as God's witnesses and representatives on the earth. During the most ancient times, God appeared directly to particular individuals and families. There was no designated people group or divinely established organization to represent God. This arrangement changed when God selected Abraham and his descendants from among all the people of the earth to be His chosen nation. During this era Israel was specifically called to represent God. This arrangement changed yet again when Jesus came and established the church. As members of His body, Christians everywhere were commissioned to be the Lord's witnesses.

These 3 distinct periods can be called "The Age of Particulars", "The Age of Israel", and "The Age of the Church". The first era spanned from the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden until the

calling of Abraham. The second started with the Abrahamic Covenant and ended with Christ. The third began at Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection and continues to the present time. What's notable is that both "The Age of the Particulars" and "The Age of Israel" each lasted approximately 2,000 years - from around 4,000 BC to 2,000 BC and 2,000 BC to 30 AD respectively. If "The Age of the Church" were to follow this same pattern, it would cease after roughly 2,000 as well. That would bring it to an end sometime in the vicinity of 2,000 AD - which is now! The Church Age concludes with the return of Christ and the onset of end time events.

III. THE REBIRTH OF ISRAEL

During the aftermath of World War II, in 1948, the nation of Israel was reborn. This remarkable occurrence is unparalleled in world history. While there are a few nations that have existed continuously in some form or fashion since ancient times, the state of Israel completely vanished for almost 2,000 years and was then miraculously resurrected.

Due to heavy persecution by the Romans following the New Testament era, most Jews were either killed or displaced. Many had already left the country and resettled elsewhere for other reasons. This mass dispersion of ethnic Jews to locations across Europe and Asia left the land of Israel largely unoccupied and unproductive for centuries. The Jewish people acclimated to other societies and cultures while the once-great nation of Israel faded into the pages of history. Then, when World War II ended, many Jewish survivors of the holocaust that had been perpetrated by Nazi Germany proudly migrated back to their ancestral homeland. Israel was reconstituted and recognized as an independent nation once again.

The rebirth of Israel is critical to eschatology. Most credible, scholarly interpretations of end times events include the nation of Israel. The Bible suggests that in the last days there will be a mass return of Jews to the ancient land of Israel, that it will be attacked on multiple occasions by various confederations of enemies, that the Antichrist will make and break a treaty with it, that a third Jewish temple might be constructed in Jerusalem, and that many Jews will finally accept Jesus as the Messiah. All of these events are contingent upon the existence of Israel as a nation-state. Thus, the rebirth of Israel was an important prerequisite to the onset of the end times. All the pieces are now in place for the return of Christ.

CONCLUSION

Based upon the historical patterns and evidence we've discussed today, it seems that the end times are near. As a matter of fact, I personally believe that Jesus will come again during my lifetime. If He does, I am ready. I've accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior and trusted in Him for the forgiveness of my sins. I have been born again, covered by the blood of the Lamb, made righteous in Christ, and now stand justified before and reconciled to Almighty God. Are you ready for the Lord's return? Are you ready for the End Times? If not, you best prepare yourselves now...

Spiritual Delusion

Originally Preached 1/19/2020

“...they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false...” - 2 Thessalonians 2:10b-11

Last week we began a new sermon series titled “Signs of the End Times”. During this series we are going to name and discuss several signs and indicators of the last days and the imminent return of Christ. Though we do not know and should not speculate about the exact day or hour of His coming (Mark 13:32), we can recognize the warning signals that will precede it and should always be watchful and prepared for His arrival.

In our previous message, we considered a few historical patterns and a prophecy-fulfilling event that seems to suggest Jesus’ kingdom is near. This morning we will focus on another end-time sign - widespread spiritual delusion. In the last days there will be many charlatans who grossly mislead the gullible masses. People will reject the truth and believe lies, as God will permit Satan to spread his malicious deceit far and wide.

Jesus compares this spiritual delusion, and many other signs of the end times, to birth pangs or contractions (Matthew 24:8). There have always been false teachers among the people of God who have lied about Him or misrepresented His Word. They have caused great hardship and caused many to fall away from the LORD. Yet, just as in the pains of childbirth, the instances of spiritual delusion and deception will become increasingly frequent, intense, and severe in the last days.

I. FALSE MESSIAHS (Matthew 24:4-5, 24)

According to the dictionary, the title messiah refers to “the promised deliverer of the Jewish nation prophesied in the Hebrew Bible (ie, Old Testament).” The true Messiah is clearly identified in the New Testament as Jesus Christ. Therefore, a false messiah is anyone (other than Jesus) who claims to be a divine savior sent by God to save His people.

There have been false messiahs since the beginning of Christianity. The New Testament mentions 2 of them, namely Theudas and Judas of Galilee, in Acts 5:36-37. The writings of the Jewish historian Josephus record that both of these men claimed to have supernatural abilities and a divine mandate to liberate the Jews. Both developed a large following of people who adhered to their claims. In the end, both of these false messiahs died or were killed, their followers scattered, and their movements ended.

Over the centuries many other individuals have falsely claimed to be the messiah - even into modern times. Many were Jewish, but others were not. Sadly, thousands of people have been deceived by such leaders and foolishly followed them. Typically, those who present themselves

as the messiah are often quite charismatic and alluring. They have a commanding presence about them. They speak eloquently and convincingly, in a manner that seems trustworthy and believable. Yet, all of these false messiahs are liars who lead people away from the truth.

One of the most prolific examples in my lifetime was David Koresh. He was the leader of a sect called the Branch Davidians. Koresh claimed to be the messiah, and he and his followers withdrew to a compound located near Waco, Texas. When the FBI learned of various illegal activities taking place there, they confronted the Branch Davidians. This led to a stand-off that lasted for almost 2 full months. In the end, the compound was set on fire resulting in the tragic death of almost 80 people.

Scripture teaches that God is jealous (Exodus 34:14). He will not share His glory with others who falsely claim to be divine (Isaiah 42:8). Those who profess to be God or the Son of God provoke His fury and wrath. Unfortunately, the harsh judgment that befalls them often impacts their weak-minded followers as well. The predictable end for many of these false messiahs and their cults is typically sudden and violent.

II. FALSE PROPHETS (Matthew 24:11, 23-24)

False prophets do not necessarily claim themselves to be divine, but rather teach spurious messages and doctrines that are contrary to the gospel and the Word of God. It is common for false messiahs and false prophets to work in conjunction with one another. In such cases, the teachings and confessions of the false prophet support and provide credibility to the misguided claims of the false messiah. Ultimately, this is the model that will be used by the Antichrist and his Prophet during the last days.

Other false prophets mislead people by distorting and misrepresenting the truths of God found in the Bible. They undermine or even deny fundamental Christian doctrines. False prophets do not speak on behalf of God, though they may claim to. Jesus describes such teachers as “wolves in sheep’s clothing” (Matthew 7:15). Though they appear to be godly and righteous, they are actually deceivers who lead people astray. They were common in ancient times, advocating heresies during both the Old and New Testament eras.

False prophets are typically motivated by their own self-interests. They regularly take advantage of people in order to satisfy their own lusts and sensualities (2 Peter 2:1-3). They sometimes advocate that material success is the premiere sign of God’s blessing. They may claim that God speaks directly to them through revelations that go beyond or even refute what is already recorded in scripture. False prophets generally shy away from uncomfortable topics such as sin and judgment. They preach that Jesus isn’t the Christ at all or that faith in Him isn’t the exclusive way unto salvation.

Today our churches are filled with false prophets. Some have become quite prominent and well-known, while others remain more obscure and localized. Some are intentionally deceptive

for personal gain while others are blissfully deceived themselves. Despite their sincerity or lack thereof, thousands of people are being misled by their fraudulent teachings. Unfortunately, this will continue until the second coming of Christ.

III. FANTASY AND DENIAL (2 Timothy 4:3-4, Matthew 24:37-39)

False messiahs and prophets are effective because most people are unfamiliar with the basic truths of God. They have never read the Bible or availed themselves to the timeless principles contained within it. As such, they have no absolute standard by which to judge or discern the reliability of what is being taught. They are ripe for deception. They stand for nothing and will fall for almost anything. Sadly, many people will believe whatever they read or hear if it is presented in a persuasive manner by someone who seems authoritative and genuine.

Scripture warns of a time when people will not endure sound doctrine, but instead will follow teachers who “tickle their ears” with feel-good messages that they want to hear. They will turn away from truth and embrace myths. They will accept that which conforms to their personal worldview and resist everything else. In fact, many will reject the notion of absolute truth altogether and instead insist that all truth is relative. Such absurdity will only lead to more confusion and bewilderment within society. People will even deny basic and obvious realities, such as the clear distinctions between men and women.

Jesus warned that the final days before His return will be like those in the time of Noah. A foolish and naive people will carry on about their business with a total disregard for His coming. Many will actively deny and even mock the truth. They will be completely charmed and mesmerized by the teachings of this world, accepting fantasy as fact, groping in darkness, and wholly unable to recognize and grasp the truths of God. Such pervasive delusion will be rampant in the end times.

CONCLUSION

Does the picture Jesus described to His disciples and that we've discussed at length this morning resemble our world today? Is there any evidence of spiritual delusion in modern society? Absolutely yes! People everywhere are being led astray by all sorts of wicked philosophies and ideologies. Spiritual blindness and deception reigns over entire cities and regions. Fanatics and radicals openly advance vile and despicable agendas. False messiahs, preachers, and teachers can be found in abundance. Pretty much anyone with a pretty face, a charismatic personality, a compelling presentation, and/or a fat wallet can garner a following of enchanted disciples. Humanity has very little appetite for the truth.

If spiritual delusion is a sign of the end times - and it is - then it seems pretty obvious to me that we are living in them right now. Are you a victim of the Devil's lies and trickery? If so, I urge you to come to Jesus today. He is the Truth, and the truth will set you free.

Worldwide Conflict

Originally Preached 1/26/2020

“When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; those things must take place; but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom;”
- Mark 13:7-8a

This morning we resume our series on the “Signs of the Ends Times” with a message called “Worldwide Conflict”. Jesus told the disciples that prior to His return there would be “wars and rumors of wars”. These conflicts would be another of the “birth pangs” leading up to the last days. Warfare between rivaling kingdoms and nations is nothing new, yet it will become increasingly severe and more common as the end times draw near.

Before we explore today’s topic, let’s take a moment to briefly review the 2 end times signs that we’ve already discussed.

Most reputable Bible scholars agree that all of the prophecies related to events preceding the return of Christ have already been fulfilled. In other words, there is nothing else that must take place prior to His coming. All of the prerequisites have been met and the proper pieces are in place, notably the rebirth of the nation Israel. Historical evidence bears this out, and suggests that the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Spiritual delusion is pervasive in the world today. People readily exchange the truth for lies. They do not want to hear about or be challenged by God’s absolute moral standards, but rather delight in their own self-righteousness and smugness. False messiahs, false prophets, and false teachers abound promoting Satan’s deceit and heresy. Multitudes of naive, gullible, and easily persuaded people are being led astray. Again, this is a fitting description of the last days.

With these in mind, we now turn our attention to a 3rd end time sign - warfare.

I. WARS

The dictionary defines war as “a state of armed conflict between different nations or states or different groups within a nation or state.” Groups of people have fought against each other since ancient times, “kingdom against kingdom and nation against nation”. Armies of warriors have been trained and equipped to overcome their adversaries in battle, to kill and destroy, and to protect and defend their homeland. Since the fall of man, war has played a prominent role in human history.

The Bible doesn’t shy away from the topic of war. It focuses primarily on those wars that involved Israel, though history records many other conflicts elsewhere. The first appearance of the word “war” is found in Genesis 14 when opposing alliances came together to battle during the days of Abraham. War continued regularly throughout the Old Testament, involving nations

and kingdoms such as Moab, Ammon, Edom, Midian, Phillistia, Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, and Persia - among others. Hostilities were commonplace during the period of the patriarchs, the judges, and the kings. Many of the stories found in the Bible are either about war or set in the backdrop of war. Men like Gideon, Sampson, Saul, and David were all known for their military prowess and skill.

Perhaps the most notable war detailed in the Old Testament is the conquest of Canaan. God instructed the Hebrew children to invade the Holy Land and to kill all of its inhabitants (Deut. 20:16-28). This was to be God's judgment upon the Canaanite people for centuries of sin and wickedness. Several of the battles that took place during this war are recorded in the book of Joshua, including the miraculous taking of Jericho. God Himself commanded, sanctioned, and participated in this conflict which reveals that He uses war as a means to bring about His will.

Wars between individual nations and empires have raged throughout history, but in modern times they have involved greater numbers of participants. Though it was fought primarily in western Europe, there were over 100 nations involved to varying degrees in World War I. Some actually sent troops into battle while others provided support and/or armaments. Nearly every nation on earth was entangled in World War II. Fighting to place on multiple continents around the globe and an estimated 300 million soldiers saw combat. Millions of people were killed as a result of these world-wide conflicts.

War isn't new, but the ability to wage war on such a global scale is. Soldiers can be deployed from almost any nation in the world to engage in battle thousands of miles away. The weapons used have become more lethal and effective, dramatically increasing the number of casualties that occur such conflicts. Weapons of mass destruction are now capable of destroying millions of lives in an instant. The capabilities of modern warfare seem eerily similar to those described by the Bible during the end times.

II. RUMORS OF WARS

Jesus stated that in addition to actual wars there would be "rumors of war". This phrase can be understood, at least in part, to mean war propaganda. This occurs when information is used in manipulative ways to sway people's opinions toward a particular conflict or the idea of war in general. Some people are very hawkish and pro-war, especially those who profit financially as a by-product of it. Others are very dovish and anti-war, seemingly willing to sacrifice anything in order to keep the peace. Fierce debate between these 2 opposing camps leads to biased discussions, agendas, misinformation, and elevated hype about possible wars and conflict.

Just as literal warfare is nothing new, so also rumors of wars have been spread throughout history. These have been used for centuries to stoke the fires of aggression and distrust. Much of it is merely gossip or innuendo, yet it often leads to physical violence. The fear and hysteria caused by reports of warfare, whether true or false, have been used to advance particular ideas and worldviews while achieving certain nefarious causes.

Whereas in the past information moved slowly, present-day media sources can reach almost anyone in seconds. War propaganda is spread continuously on the internet, television, and radio. People are whipped into a frenzy based on live images and reports of conflict and strife all around the globe. Just a few weeks ago reporters spoke as though America was on the brink of World War III after an Iranian missile strike on 2 military bases in Iraq. While these grandiose statements of impending doom were over-the-top and misleading, they and others like them are indicative of the “rumors of wars” that will be told in the last days.

III. GLOBALISM

Perpetual warfare and conflict between peoples and nations is one of the leading justifications for globalism. Proponents of a one world government argue that the elimination of independent nation-states would foster an atmosphere of peace and tranquility. As a precursor to this Utopian ideal, multilateral treaties and alliances such as NATO and the UN have been created. Though these types of agreements have not yet led to the dissolving of member nations, they have eroded and cast dispersion on the concept of nationalism.

The EU provides a modern example of what a globalized society might look like - open borders, a shared currency, common economic and environmental standards, and a single governing body to administer it all. This may sound ideal in theory, and there are certainly aspects of the EU that have been beneficial to Europe. However, this is exactly the type of environment in which the Antichrist can quickly ascend to power. The impact of a vast, corrupt, far-reaching global government is daunting to think about. Christians should be leery of such an idea.

CONCLUSION

The last days will be characterized by catastrophic warfare. The Antichrist will ascend to prominence and then wage war against all who refuse to acknowledge him. The scourge of war will be loosed over the entire earth. This conventional warfare will inevitably morph into a nuclear holocaust. According to Revelation 6:8 and 9:15 over half of the population living on earth at that time will be killed, many as a direct or indirect result of war.

Finally, the nations of the world will gather under the banner of the Antichrist to wage a final war against Jesus and his saints. The conquering Christ will return again, engage in the battle, and come out as the overwhelming victor. The enemies of God will be defeated and forever vanquished and Christ will set up His kingdom on earth. The Prince of Peace will reign eternally and war among men will finally cease to exist (Isaiah 2:4).

The frequency and intensity of contemporary wars and rumors of wars provides further evidence that we may well be living in the end times. Collectively, these warning signs are beginning to add up. What do you think? Do you agree that Jesus' return is near?

Natural Disasters

Originally Preached 2/2/2020

"...there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines;" - Luke 21:11a

Good morning. Today's message is the 4th in our current series called "Signs of the End Times". In this study, we are listing and discussing some of the warnings that Jesus identified as markers of the last days. Thus far we have talked about historical patterns and precedent, spiritual delusion, and worldwide conflict. This morning's sermon is titled, "Natural Disasters".

In Genesis 3 we read about the fall of mankind. Adam and Eve sinned against God by eating the forbidden fruit. As a result of their sin, they were expelled from the Garden of Eden. They and their posterity would now age and suffer physical death. They would be estranged from God apart from a saving faith in Him. At that time all of creation was placed under a curse - not just mankind, but also the earth itself. It too would painstakingly endure the torment and corruption brought about by man's sin.

"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." - Romans 1:20-22

Paul described the fallen condition of the earth in his letter to the Romans. Notice that he used the imagery of childbirth to depict the groanings of creation. This parallels the teachings of Christ, who spoke of "birth pangs" that would precede the end days. Natural disasters are yet another of these laborious signs, which persist regularly over time but will become more pronounced as Jesus' second coming draws near.

The perfection of God's creation has been marred and tainted by sin. The earth itself suffers from violent thunderstorms, hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, floods, tsunamis, mudslides, volcanic eruptions, and so on. These and other types of natural disasters cause countless deaths and display the ravished condition of our planet. In this morning's message, we will limit our discussion of natural disasters to 3 specific calamities named by Jesus which He related to the end times.

I. EARTHQUAKES

Basic geology explains that the upper layer of the earth's surface (called the crust) actually rests on numerous tectonic plates. These plates fit together like large puzzle pieces. Lines are formed between adjoining plates, called fault lines. When either 1 or more of these plates move or shift, due to pressures in the lower mantle or core of the earth, earthquakes occur. The type and severity of earthquake is dependent upon the movement of the plates below. In each case, the

surface of the earth shakes - sometimes quite violently - which can produce significant structural damage, injury, and even death.

While there are several different types of natural disasters, the Bible seems to place a special emphasis on earthquakes. It is likely that earthquakes and seismic shifts took place during the creation when God separated the land from the sea. Earthquakes certainly contributed to Noah's flood, as the fountains of the deep were suddenly released all at once (Genesis 7:11). Others took place at Mt. Sinai (Moses), in the wilderness (Korah's Rebellion), at Mt. Horeb (Elijah), during both the crucifixion and resurrection (Jesus), and at Philippi (Paul). These are just a few of the many earthquakes mentioned in Scripture.

Most scientists agree that there has been no significant increase in the frequency or degree of seismic activity in modern times. That said, the ability to detect and measure it has improved dramatically. Thus, the number of recorded earthquakes is substantially higher today. In addition, larger populations of people - especially living along fault lines and in quake prone regions - have resulted in higher casualties than in previous generations. These facts are consistent with Jesus' comparison of earthquakes to labor pains.

II. PLAGUES

The word plague can actually refer to any type of "disastrous evil or affliction". There are numerous examples of plagues in the Bible. Perhaps the most well-known of these were the 10 Plagues of Egypt that served as a catalyst for the exodus. During this time hoards of frogs, locusts, and other insects covered the land leading to all sorts of problems. While these are certainly valid and vivid examples, usually when the word plague is used it refers to an infectious disease of some sort.

Again, there are several instances documented in scripture of epidemic diseases and pestilence. Following King David's sin related to the taking of a census, the LORD sent a terrible plague upon Israel which killed over 70,000 men in just 3 days (2 Samuel 24:15). Numerous passages suggest that contagious diseases likely contributed to the deaths of many Hebrews during the wilderness wanderings. Plague also broke out among the Israelites due to their sexual immorality with women of Moab, resulting in the death of 24,000 people (Numbers 25:9). These are just 3 of many Biblical examples.

According to recent studies, the number of human infectious disease outbreaks has increased dramatically over the past 50 years. Travel, urbanization, and poverty are all factors in the spreading of such diseases. Fortunately modern vaccines, medicines, and treatments have limited the number of deaths related to these epidemics. Early detection and effective quarantine strategies have helped in many cases to prevent them from getting out of control. Nevertheless, plagues continue to persist around the world and are an ever present danger to humanity - just as Jesus warned.

III. FAMINES

A famine is “an extreme scarcity of food”, usually caused by natural phenomena such as drought or the destruction of crops. The lack of food results in hunger and even starvation among those affected. Prices spike due to the shortage, and violence often breaks between those vying over limited resources. Malnutrition weakens the immune system, making people more susceptible to sickness and disease. This only serves to increase the devastation and severity of famine.

There are multiple occurrences of famine found in the Bible. In the days of Joseph, an extensive 7-year famine broke out in Egypt and the surrounding nations - including Canaan. It was famine that forced Naomi and her family to leave Israel, eventually setting the backdrop for the story of Ruth. There was a 3-year famine during the later years of David’s reign. Drought and famine also ravished Samaria and Israel during the life of Elijah the prophet. These are but a few examples of famine found in Scripture.

Despite modern agricultural advances and techniques, famine still persists in certain places around the globe. According to reports, greater numbers of people have been impacted by hunger in recent years. While there is fierce debate surrounding the issue of climate change, there is no doubt that drought and extreme heat in various locations continue to have a detrimental impact on the environment. This is particularly true in Africa and South America. Such famine, while not necessarily new, is a further sign of the end times.

CONCLUSION

Just this week, while I was preparing this sermon, I both read and heard reports of earthquakes, plagues, and famines that are ongoing right now. A few days ago, an earthquake measuring 7.7 on the Richter scale struck off the coast of Jamaica producing shock waves that were felt as far as Miami. The nightly news continues to address the rapid spread of the Coronavirus which originated in China. The recent outbreak has already resulted in numerous deaths and the numbers continue to rise. It has now been declared a global health emergency. Meanwhile, there are current reports of locust swarms the size of cities devastating produce and vegetation across eastern Africa leaving famine and hunger in their wake. While none of these events definitely declare the Lord’s return, they are indicative of natural disasters that will occur in the last days.

The book of Revelation speaks of earthquakes, plagues, and famines which will take place during God’s judgment of man upon the earth. Millions will be killed as a result of these natural catastrophes. If the earth itself buckles under the heavy weight of sin, what hope does the individual sinner have apart from Jesus Christ? Heed the warning signs and repent today, before it is too late...

Astronomical Events

Originally Preached 2/9/2020

“But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” - Matthew 24:29

God created the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day of creation (Genesis 1:14-19). He placed them in the sky to separate the day from the night. The sun was to govern the day and the moon was to govern the night. They would also mark the passing of seasons, days, and years. The LORD declared that these celestial bodies would have yet another purpose saying, “let them be for signs”. God uses the sun, moon, and stars as a channel through which He speaks to humanity.

This morning we will resume our series titled “Signs of the End Times” with a message called “Astronomical Events”. Astronomy and astrology are similar, but not the same. Astronomy is the scientific study of space, including the position and movement of planets, stars, and so forth. Astrology is the belief that these celestial bodies have influence over human affairs and the natural world. Astronomers are scientists who simply observe, record, and measure heavenly objects, while astrologers are philosophers or mediums who advocate that these have mystical power over the fortune and well-being of people.

Astrology can easily devolve into a form of divination, which is expressly forbidden by God (Deuteronomy 18:10). The heavens are a natural piece of God’s creation - they have no supernatural attributes. Those who turn to the stars in search of answers rather than to the LORD are committing a grave sin. God strongly warns against worshiping or serving “the host of heaven”. Those Israelites who strayed from God and began to worship the sun, moon, and stars, were judged accordingly.

Therefore, when we talk about signs occurring in the celestial bodies it is important to realize that God Himself is speaking through these inanimate objects. They themselves wield no cosmic or mysterious sway over the lives of men. They are powerless to dictate anything, but rather are being used by the LORD as indicators of events. The heavens declare the glory of God and the wonderful work of His hands (Psalm 19:1). Jesus stated that specific astronomical events will take place in the last days.

I. SUN (Isaiah 13:9-11)

There are a few instances recorded in the Bible in which darkness prevailed over the land during the day time. One of the several plagues that God sent upon Egypt prior to the exodus was a heavy darkness that could “be felt”. It continued for 3 full days (Exodus 10:21). While Jesus was being crucified, a foreboding darkness fell over the land in the middle of the day and

persisted from noon until 3pm (Matthew 27:45). These and other Biblical references to literal darkness imply that sunlight was being blocked or shielded from the earth in some way.

While God is certainly able to produce darkness supernaturally, He might also use natural means to do so. Severe dust storms have been known to blacken the skies during the day time, such as during the dust bowl. Heavy clouds and thunderstorms often bring about darkness as they cast shadows on the earth below. Thick smoke, smog, or air pollution can obstruct the light and contribute to darkness as well. One of the more daunting and perhaps prophetic causes of daytime darkness is the solar eclipse.

A solar eclipse takes place when the moon passes directly between the sun and the earth, thereby blocking a portion of its light. Solar eclipses may be considered total, partial, or annular depending upon the amount of the sun being covered. On average, a total solar eclipse can be seen roughly every 18 months from somewhere on the earth. However, these vantage points are relatively small and change from one year to the next. Total solar eclipses that are visible from the same location only occur about once every 360 years.

Whether by an eclipse or by some other means, the Bible repeatedly warns that “the sun will be darkened and not give its light” on the day of Christ’s return...

II. MOON (Joel 2:31; Acts 2:20)

Prophecy also states that the moon will be “turned into blood” before the great and glorious coming of the Lord. While there may be other phenomena that could cause this, the most widely accepted explanation of this looming astronomical sign is a lunar eclipse. A lunar eclipse occurs when the earth passes between the sun and the moon thereby casting an eerie shadow on its surface. During a lunar eclipse, the moon appears to be reddish in color as the only light illuminating it has been refracted through the earth’s atmosphere.

Lunar eclipses are commonly referred to as “blood moons” and seemingly fit the apocalyptic descriptions given in Scripture regarding the last days. They are more common than solar eclipses, and are more visible to larger numbers of people. While it is unsafe to look directly at a solar eclipse, there is no danger in looking at a lunar eclipse. Thus, many more people are able to see and recognize them. On average, 1 total lunar eclipse takes place each year and is visible from almost half of the earth’s surface.

There are no clear references or stories in the Scripture pertaining to past blood moons, though many actually took place. However, the Bible does frequently mention new moons and full moons. The Hebrew calendar was, in fact, structured around the phases of the moon. Thus, the moon had (and still has) an important place in Jewish life. They marked the seasons and passage of time by it. Due to its great significance, it is only logical that God would use the moon as another sign of the end times.

III. STARS (Revelation 6:12-13)

Probably the most well-known example of God using a star as a sign for humanity occurred during the birth of Jesus Christ (Matthew 2:1-2). The magi followed the Star of Bethlehem from Persia eastward to Jerusalem. Eventually they found the baby Jesus, worshiped Him, and presented Him with gifts. On another occasion, God instructed Abraham to look up and count the stars if possible, promising that his descendants would be just as numerous (Genesis 15:5). During their conversation, a mournful Job mentioned several constellations of stars to his discouraging and unhelpful friends (Job 9:9; 38:31). These are just a few of the Biblical references to stars.

At Jesus' second coming, scripture predicts that "the stars will fall from the sky". Modern scholars generally equate this end times sign with a great meteor shower. Simply put, a meteor is a space rock. When a meteor enters the earth's atmosphere, it rapidly falls towards the earth. Intense heat causes the meteor to burn up as it streaks through the air (rarely does any part of it actually reach the ground). This process briefly causes a brilliant light to flash across the sky. People commonly refer to falling meteors as "shooting stars". When a debris field of numerous meteors enters the earth's atmosphere all at once, it appears as though many stars are falling from the sky. Meteor showers are quite common, as several occur each year.

CONCLUSION

The Bible never expressly states that the astronomical wonders of the last days will be the result of a solar eclipse, a lunar eclipse, or a meteor shower. God, in His omnipotence, could cause the sun to be darkened, the moon to be turned to blood, and the stars to fall from the sky using some other means. After all, He was able to make the sun and moon stand still (Joshua 10:12-13). As such, we should be careful not to overemphasize the significance of eclipses, blood moons, and so forth. After all, they have been going on since the heavens and earth were created. That said, these amazing astronomical events provide us with frequent and spectacular reminders of the Lord's soon return.

Let's close today's message with a warning. Using mathematical calculations and formulas, scientists can now accurately pinpoint the dates of future eclipses, meteor showers, and other astronomical events. This has led many people to speculate about and predict the exact day of the Lord's return. Christians should be leery of this practice, as Jesus taught that no one knows that day or hour except God the Father. Rather than trying to guess when Christ will come, we should instead focus on preparing ourselves and others for His arrival.

Rampant Immorality

Originally Preached 2/16/2020

“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these” - 2 Timothy 3:1-5

Earlier in this series, we discussed the spiritual condition of mankind during the last days. They will suffer from a strong delusion and will readily reject the truth in favor of lies. They will lack spiritual discernment and display an aversion to the absolute standards of God. They will chase after empty philosophies and beliefs being promoted by false prophets and teachers. Predictably, their spiritual blindness will become evident by their sinful behaviors. People will act shamelessly and unethically, showing little or no regard at all for doing what is right. Does any of this sound familiar?

The sermon this morning is titled “Rampant Immorality”. Spiritually deluded people are also morally depraved people. What we believe determines what we do. The heart of man is deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). The LORD is patient and longsuffering, but enough is enough. He will not permit wickedness and corruption to continue unchecked forever. A day of reckoning for sinners is coming.

This fact is clear - God judges the wicked. In the days of Noah, God regretted that He had created men and chose to destroy the earth with a flood. This judgment was brought about due to human corruption and evil (Gen. 6:5-8). In the days of Abraham, God rained fire from heaven down on the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Again, this was the just consequence of their exceedingly grave sin (Gen. 18:20). In the last days, God will again judge and subsequently punish those upon the earth for their vile misconduct. Only those who have accepted Christ by faith will be spared.

I. LAWLESSNESS

The last days are depicted as a time of widespread lawlessness (Matt. 24:12). Society at large will not adhere to or abide by commands of God as implemented by its governing authorities. Criminal activity will be pervasive. Violence in the form of murder, assault, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and human trafficking will abound. Shockingly, these alarming acts of immoral behavior will be glorified in the media through the internet, television, and radio. Some, such as abortion, will even be accepted by the culture as morally permissible.

Those who do attempt to enforce the law and maintain the fundamental moral fabric of society will be demonized and despised. Police officers, security guards, border patrol agents, and others who seek to maintain order and implement justice will be treated with increasing malice

and disrespect. In many cases criminals will face little if any accountability for their lawless behavior, and will often garner more sympathy from the population than even the victims of their crimes. Whats more, evil and sinful people will hold positions of power, enjoy elite status, and be held by the masses in high esteem. How detestable!

Lawlessness is the opposite of righteousness. It is contrary to the will of God. People who are prone to sin need laws to govern their actions. Apart from them, darkness and despair reign. Chaos becomes the rule of the day. Unfortunately, such will be the moral state of the world prior to Christ's return. It is noteworthy that the Antichrist who will rise to prominence during the end times is sometimes called the "man of lawlessness".

II. SELF-INTEREST AND MATERIALISM

The moral character of those living in the last days will be deeply troubling. For the most part, people will be preoccupied with themselves and their own interests while showing little concern for others. This is in direct contrast to the behavior God desires of His children (Phil. 2:3-4). Nevertheless, people will arrogantly believe themselves to be inherently superior to others. Such attitudes will lead to self promotion, bragging, and boasting. Furthermore, these haughty and pretentious people will be quick to criticize, castigate, and condemn others.

The strong desire for personal "success" will motivate many people. They will seek to acquire material gain above all else. The "love of money" will draw many people away from God. Dishonesty and treachery will become more commonplace, driven by an underlying greed for temporal wealth. Trustworthiness will be in short supply. The pursuit of fame and fortune will be used to justify all sorts of sinful behavior. Jesus warned His disciples about this and urged them to store up treasures in heaven rather than on earth (Matt 6:19-21).

When a person places themselves and their own desires before God, they are committing a form of idolatry. This naturally leads to misguided priorities. Pride and conceit prevail, while humility and compassion suffer. Egocentric people feel entitled to things, rather than thankful for them. They become bitter and rude instead of being gracious and kind. They often lack basic decency, modesty, and purity. In short, they digress into an unholy and unrighteous state.

III. FAMILIAL STRIFE

One of the major factors leading to the moral depravity of the end times will be the breakdown of the family. Even today, the model ordained by God and laid out in Scripture for the family is being marginalized. Traditional marriage is under assault, as other types of non-Biblical relationships are considered equally viable. Same-sex unions, living together out of wedlock, and other alternative arrangements are increasingly common. While these may be acceptable to some, they are unquestionably inconsistent with God's design.

Many view marriage as a temporary contract between 2 people rather than a lifelong covenant with God. Couples often approach marriage callously and with disdain, without any true commitment for one another. Often times the lack of fidelity results in adultery or unfaithfulness, regularly ending in divorce. The LORD hates divorce because He understands the lasting hurt that it can cause. Separations lead to broken homes, harming both children and adults, and inflicting damage to the society at large.

Fathers and mothers share the joint responsibility of raising their children to love and revere the LORD. Each has an important role in this process. When this takes place as it should, the moral and righteous behavior of the people is sustained from one generation to the next. When it doesn't, all sorts of problems ensue. This societal failure will be clearly seen in the last days. Children will rage and rebel against their parents. Close relatives will betray one another (Luke 21:16). Love between family members will grow cold, resulting in widespread division and strife. Marriages will crumble, families will splinter, and communities will struggle under the weight.

CONCLUSION

Sin has been around since the fall of man. It is certainly not a new phenomenon. People have been rebelling against God and mistreating one another for centuries. This will be especially true during the end times. Though we have barely scratched the surface of this topic in today's message, I trust that you get the point. There will be rampant immorality across the globe immediately prior to the Lord's return, just as there was when God sent judgment in the past.

As dreary as this sounds, I want to close with a cheerful thought. In the end, the moral degradation and darkness of humanity will suddenly give way to the glorious light of Jesus Christ. When He comes to judge this fallen and corrupt world, a new day will break across the horizon. All of the carnal secrets and shadows will disappear. Sin and death will be no more. The glory and splendor of our victorious King and Savior will shine brightly and eternally. Hold fast and remember beloved - it is always darkest right before dawn.

"This is the storm, this is the storm...

The storm before the calm.

This is the pain, the pain before the balm.

This is the cold, the cold...

It's the cold before the warm.

These are the tears, the tears before the song.

This is the darkness...

Sometimes all I see is this darkness.

Well, can't you feel the darkness?

This is the dark before the dawn." - lyrics by Andrew Peterson

Increased Knowledge

Originally Preached 2/23/2020

“But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase.” - Daniel 12:4

Good morning. Today we continue our sermon series dealing with several “Signs of the End Times”. By familiarizing ourselves with these signs, we become more capable of recognizing the season of Christ’s return. This should, in turn, foster an urgency within us to prepare ourselves for His arrival and to tell others the wonderful truth of the gospel. The forthcoming message is titled “Increased Knowledge” and is the 7th installment of this 2-month study.

Jesus stated that the greatest commandment is to “love the LORD with all of your heart, soul, and mind” (Matthew 22:37). In making this declaration, the Lord identified 3 distinct facets of the human condition. Each is important to the makeup of an individual. The Bible describes the state of mankind during the last days in relation to each of these areas.

The “heart” pertains to the emotional and moral nature of man. It speaks to our conscience and inherent ability to differentiate between good and evil. In the last days, people will become angry, cold, bitter, and exceedingly corrupt. We dealt with these issues already in a message called “Rampant Immorality”.

The “soul” refers to the spiritual nature of man. It speaks to our closeness, intimacy, and communication with God (or lack thereof). In the end times, people will be far from Him, groping in spiritual darkness, and will chase after false teachers and empty lies. We dealt with this earlier in a message titled “Spiritual Delusion”.

That leaves the “mind”, which relates to the mental and intellectual capacity of man. The Bible predicts that in the latter days knowledge will increase upon the earth, as evidenced in a multitude of ways. This aspect of humanity will be the focus of today’s discussion...

I. TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENTS

The technological advancements of the past few centuries undeniably reveal an explosion of human knowledge. New discoveries, approaches, and inventions have transformed virtually every aspect of life. The ability to communicate with one another has vastly improved. The ways we produce and construct products has vastly improved. The understanding of science and how things work has vastly improved. In almost every industry and on practically every subject there are massive amounts of knowledge that were completely unknown just a relatively short time ago.

As an example of this remarkable progress, Daniel foresaw that in the end times “many will go back and forth”. This seemingly refers to an advanced means of travel. For most of human

history people moved rather slowly from place to place, either on foot, on horseback, or by carriage. Many people lived their entire lives having never journeyed any significant distance from their home. In modern times however, due to the invention of cars, trains, airplanes, and other modes of travel, people quickly and routinely travel from place to place. Society has become much more mobile than in past generations, in keeping with the Bible's prophecy.

Think about all of the inventions that have come into being since the turn of the century. Kids grow up today with gadgets that their parents thought of as science fiction. Entirely new fields of study are being opened on an ever-increasing basis. The breadth of human knowledge continues to expand and the rate of its acquisition quickens. Sadly, as the world's knowledge has increased so also has its distance from God.

II. GREATER EMPHASIS ON PROPHECY

The increased knowledge of the end times will not be limited only to earthly things. The LORD told Daniel to conceal and seal up his prophetic message "until the end". Some scholars suggest that in the last days these prophecies will be opened and revealed, at least to a greater degree than before. In other words, man's knowledge and understanding of these prophetic passages will improve somewhat - even if still incomplete.

There are many would-be prophets today who make all sorts of predictions regarding the end of the world. Some of these seem plausible and scripturally sound while others are utterly ridiculous. Nevertheless, man's fascination with this topic can be seen almost everywhere. Numerous best-selling books deal with prophecy and/or the end times. Several doomsday movies have been produced for the big screen. Talking about and depicting the apocalypse has become a lucrative undertaking for some.

While many varied interpretations remain, there is little doubt that new technologies and inventions have shed a greater light on the possible meanings of many end time prophecies. There are now realistic explanations of the cryptic imagery that was once almost impossible to comprehend. Though inaccuracies and questions certainly remain, a growing number of people seem drawn to discussions and debates over the end times. This widespread awareness is itself another indication that the Lord's return is near.

III. ABILITY TO ENFORCE THE MARK (Revelation 13:16-17)

Perhaps the most specific end time sign which can be attributed to increased knowledge is the ability to enforce the mark of the beast. The book of Revelation plainly states that in the last days, the Antichrist will rise to power. He will enact a reign of terror over the entire earth, and will forbid anyone who does not receive the mark from buying or selling. Up until recent times, such a restriction would have been impractical and impossible to enforce.

Nowadays, however, this economic prediction seems much more realistic. Cash transactions are increasingly rare, as modern business is largely conducted by digital means through the scanning of credit and debit cards. Even this process is currently in transition, as more and more people are starting to use their smartphones to make purchases. Some have proposed that soon barcodes or QR codes could be tattooed directly on the skin for the same purpose. Others suggest that microchips will be implanted into people, perhaps just under the skin, which will be necessary in order to conduct business. Could any of these possibly be “the mark of the beast” mentioned in Scripture?

No one knows for certain, but the fact that such things are even possible should serve as a wake up call. The increased knowledge and technological advancements of mankind in recent history have enabled things that were once unimaginable. Man’s growing knowledge has, unwittingly, paved the way for Jesus’ return.

CONCLUSION

Though their technology and ingenuity was much more rudimentary than ours, in ancient times the people of earth gathered together on the plains of Shinar to build a tower that would reach into heaven (Genesis 11:1-9). They sought to use their advanced architectural knowledge and skills to make a name for themselves throughout the earth. Their intent was to create a pathway to heaven which would render God obsolete. The LORD recognized their potential and acted to prevent them from achieving their ambitious goal.

Compare this with today. As a people, we are smarter now than we’ve ever been before. Imagine the tower that we could build and are building, figuratively speaking of course. We use our knowledge to marginalize and explain away the truths of God all the time. Yet despite the exponential increase of human knowledge we’ve experienced, our world remains spiritually deceived and morally depraved. Knowledge abounds while wisdom seems increasingly hard to come by...

When we boil it all down, there is really only 1 thing that we need to know. His name is Jesus Christ. Those who come to know Him as their personal Lord and Savior will receive forgiveness of their sins and be given the assurance of eternal life. Everything above and beyond this is just “icing on the cake”. I close today’s message with this verse:

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” - Proverbs 9:10

Enduring Christians

Originally Preached 3/1/2020

"But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved." - Matthew 24:13

Today we will conclude our series on "The Signs of the End Times" with a final message called "Enduring Christians". This sermon will address the state of the church in the last days. The Bible warns that the church will face extreme difficulties, both within and without, as the Lord's return draws near. Despite these challenges, it will ultimately complete its mission.

We have already dealt extensively with the condition of mankind as a whole during the end times. Though human knowledge will increase rapidly, people will suffer from a blinding spiritual delusion and exhibit terrible moral depravity. This will lead to great strife and division between individuals, families, people groups, kingdoms, and nations. Conflicts will arise and violence will erupt. Yet, just as He has in every generation, God will preserve a faithful remnant of believers.

As the chaos of the end times rages, what will be happening within God's church? How will they be treated by society at large? What will the church be doing? These are the questions we will seek to answer this morning. Let's begin...

I. HYPOCRITES & POWERLESS RELIGION

A hypocrite is someone who professes to believe something while acting in a manner contrary to their profession. In other words, they don't practice what they preach. Jesus spoke out strongly against hypocrisy on several different occasions. He referred to the Pharisees as hypocrites for not abiding by the weightier portions of the Law (Matthew 23:23). Unfortunately, in the end times Christian churches will be filled with hypocrites. The Bible pictures this as tares growing among the wheat. The reputation and influence of the church will be hindered as many practice the very sins which they are speaking against.

Even after a truly repentant sinner comes to Christ and receives salvation, they still continue to sin to some degree. Though they are forgiven, they are still human and therefore remain prone to make mistakes and act in disobedience. The Bible urges Christians to regularly confess their sins to God in prayer, despite having already been saved (1 John 1:9). This is because sin continues to have a negative impact on the life of a born-again believer. Sin grieves the Holy Spirit, which in turn quenches His divine power within the Christian life (Ephesians 4:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:19). On a large scale, this results in a weakened and anemic church.

It is important to realize that darkness is powerless over light. In other words, the only way for darkness to increase and prevail is for the light to diminish. Jesus describes his followers - ie, the church - as a city on a hill which is called to shine His light and illuminate this dark world (Matthew 5:14). With this in mind, the bleakness and degradation of the last days is largely, if not wholly, attributed to the failure of the church. What a sobering indictment this is!

II. PERSECUTION OF THE CHURCH

In the end times, Christians will be hated and the church will be fiercely persecuted (Matthew 24:9). True believers who stand boldly for Jesus will be imprisoned, tortured, and even killed. Christians will be maliciously slandered and labeled as racists, bigots, and narrow-minded. The world will strongly contend with the church, seeking to silence her voice by oppressing her members. Many will abandon the church altogether, while others will remain cowardly quiet rather than risk standing up against sin.

Jesus warned that since the world hated Him, it will also hate those who follow Him (John 15:18). This has certainly been the case throughout history. Extreme persecution against the New Testament Christians by both the Jews and Romans during the first century led to the dispersion of believers across the nations. Throughout the Dark Ages, true Christians were oppressed, in many cases, by the apostate church. Muslims have led violent caliphates against both Christians and Jews. Christianity has been under attack for centuries.

According to a recent report, it is currently estimated that more than 260 million Christians worldwide experience high levels of persecution as the result of their faith in Jesus. That equates to roughly 1 of every 8 believers. For the past decade, approximately 90,000 have died as martyrs each year. In many locations Christian churches are being burned, raided, and forced underground. Christians are already the most persecuted religious group in the world, and this mistreatment is accelerating with each passing year.

III. THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO ALL PEOPLE

In spite of the numerous problems and pressures facing Christianity during the last days, it ultimately will endure and the LORD's elect will prevail. When Jesus established the church He gave it one overarching task - to go and make disciples of all the nations. Christians are to carry the gospel message to every person on the face of the earth (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8). This is the primary mission of the church. Over the centuries many obstacles have prevented the church from attaining this lofty goal.

The Joshua Project, a leading group dedicated to this issue, has identified over 17,000 distinct people groups spread out across the world. Of these, more than 7,000 are considered largely unreached by the gospel. Despite the ongoing efforts of thousands of Christian missionaries and evangelists, literally billions of people still have little to no access to the gospel. Many have never heard it at all. As citizens of the United States, this is hard for many to believe - but it is true. That said, the work of the church persists and the gospel continues to advance, albeit slowly. Revival continues to break out in various places around the world, especially in those areas facing the heaviest persecution.

Jesus stated that the gospel would be preached to the whole world and then the end would come (Matthew 24:14). Furthermore, God has preordained that a certain number of Gentiles will accept Christ. Once that number is reached the Church Age will come to an end ushering in Jesus' second coming (Romans 11:25). While no man knows what that number is, each profession of faith brings us a little closer. Therefore, one of the premier signs of the end times is the spreading of the gospel throughout the entire earth. Although much of the world currently remains unreached, it is quite possible that this could occur in our lifetime.

CONCLUSION

In my somewhat informed opinion, the only reason that Jesus has not yet returned to the earth is that there are still more people to be saved before reaching God's preset threshold. But the question is, how many more? Millions? Hundreds? Just a few? I believe we are very close to the second coming of Christ... and honestly, I can't wait!

The signs of the end times given in the Bible paint a picture that looks a lot like our world today. Let's end this series with a review of what we've learned. May we be ever alert because Jesus will be arriving very soon.

1. Historical patterns and precedent, such as the miraculous rebirth of Israel, suggest that we are living in the end times.
2. Spiritual delusion, as evidenced by the rise of false messiahs, false prophets, and false teachers, coupled with a proclivity to abandon truth in exchange for lies all suggest that we are living in the end times.
3. Worldwide conflict, which is seen in wars, rumors of wars, political upheaval, and cries for peace through globalistic governance, all suggest that we are living in the end times.
4. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, famines, and epidemic diseases, all suggest that we are living in the end times.
5. Astronomical signs, which can be seen in the sun, moon, and stars, seem consistent with those which will appear in the end times.
6. Rampant immorality, as displayed by pervasive lawlessness in society, materialism, pride and self-interest, the assault on marriage, and breakdown of the family, all suggest that we are living in the end times.
7. Increased knowledge, revealed through new inventions, discoveries, and techniques, has enabled us to do and understand things that have been reserved especially for the end times.

8. Enduring Christians, though they face hypocrisy inside the church and severe persecution from outside sources, are now within reach of carrying the gospel to the entire world which suggests that we are living in the end times.