

Christ's Greatest Prophetic Discourse Part 5 of 8

Turn in your Bibles to Matthew 24. We have been in the book of Matthew for over two years now. We go through the Word of God verse by verse so that we understand it in all of its fullness. It's an amazing thing to me to realize that through divine revelation, God gives us an opportunity to have access into the very throne room of His sovereignty, so that we can have a glimpse of His plan of redemption, whereby He will glorify Himself and redeem all who trust in Him. This is part five of a series in Matthew 24, which is often called the Olivet Discourse, which I've entitled Christ's Greatest Prophetic Discourse.

Before we look at verses 16-28 I want to look at a number of other verses to give you some context. First of all, think with me, since he was first cast out of the presence of God, Satan's all-consuming passion has been to oppose the plan of God, the plan of redemption, and to somehow steal His glory for himself. We see this all through the Word of God. He was the originator of sin in the garden and throughout redemptive history, Satan along with his minions have used the tactics of lies, deceptions, temptation, guilt, fear, false doctrine, sickness, envy, pride, slander, even murder, to thwart the purposes of God. We see this especially in the history of Israel, God's covenant people.

When we look at the Word of God, we understand that the Jews were meant to be a missionary people. Jesus said in John 4:22 that "salvation is from the Jews," and therefore the Jews are always going to be a target of the one who opposes God and His plan of redemption. Since the call of Abraham, Satan has tried to prevent God's plan of redemption by eliminating the covenant people so that if they weren't there, then the Savior from which He was to arise would never exist. They spent 400 years in oppression in Egypt. They were constantly threatened when they came into the promised land by the overwhelming enemies that were there. As we look at it, nothing has changed to this day. God warned them of the consequences of their disobedience, for example in Deuteronomy 28:63-64 He said, "And it shall be, that just as the **LORD** rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the **LORD** will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess. Then the **LORD** will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other" (NKJV). And indeed that is what has happened. Because of their idolatry, God allowed Satan to unleash his fury upon them and they were either captured or banished by Nebuchadnezzar with the Assyrians, later on, by the Babylonians—the same people that are in Iraq and Iran today.

In fact, if you look in Zechariah 3:1 in the restoration, when they first came back with Zerubbabel we read how Satan, the malicious accuser, stood in the presence of the Lord to malign Israel and demand that God forsake them. But God has remained faithful to them and His covenant. Later on they were enslaved and slaughtered by the Romans. History records an endless battle for their survival. By A.D. 800, the persecution of Jewish immigrants by the medieval church in northern Europe was in full swing. By 1148 the Jews in Spain had to flee to Egypt, Portugal, Greece, Turkey and the Netherlands in order to avoid being burned.

By 1215 the Magna Carta in England legalized injustice toward the Jews and the suffering continued. The French hated them, as did the Germans and the Poles. In fact an entire Jewish community was burned in Strasbourg in 1349. In the Polish regions that were later seized by the Russians, the Russian government would systematically exterminate the Jews. And all through Europe Jews were forced to live in fear, forced to live in the squalor of the ghettos. The great Chmielnicki massacre in Poland and Lithuania between the years of 1648-1656 killed untold thousands of Jews. Historically they have lived under the sword of Gentile domination. As we look through history, we see that they had to flee to

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Africa, China, Mexico, South America and even India. Nothing short of divine judgment and satanic hatred can explain the relentless scourge of anti-Semitism that has plagued these people.

I would hasten to add that nothing short of divine intervention can explain their continued survival and their protection. As the psalmist has said in Psalms 121:4, "He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." We saw Satan vent his hatred of God and God's people in the holocaust. Six million Jews were exterminated in the pogroms of Hitler's Nazi empire between 1933 and 1945. In fact, they have discovered some long-hidden Soviet documents that suggest that the death toll was much higher than that. Right after that, in 1948, Israel became a nation, proving Satan is merely God's ape. He is allowed to act only within the purview of God's will.

The Jewish people have been and remain to this day, as Paul said in Romans 10:21, "a disobedient and obstinate people." Yet for over 4,000 years from Abraham to this very day, God has preserved His chosen people. Think about it. The Amorites, Hittites, Jebusites, Kenites and Canaanites have all disappeared. But not the Israelites. Frederick the Great reputedly asked his chaplain to give him one commanding evidence for the existence of God, and the chaplain replied, "the amazing Jew, your majesty."

To this day they remain a threatened people as I detailed in great length in part four of this series. I was reading this week that there is an anti-Semitic computer game sold in Europe. In that game the player assumes the role of a Nazi commandant in a concentration camp, exerting power over the Jewish people. You gain points for the amount of torture that you can exert over your captives. You gain points for doing things that they did in Nazi Germany. Extracting gold from their teeth, making lamp shades out of their skin, selling their remains for soap and so on.

Dear friends, they are still around, not only in the background, they are at the foreground of music, literature, science and of the world political scene and the world economy. God has not abandoned His people, even though they have forsaken Him. In fact, if we look at Romans 11 it makes this very clear. In verses 1-2 we read how, "God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!...God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew" or who He literally fore loved. In verse eight, "God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not and ears to hear not, down to this very day." In verse 11 we read that "salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous." We're the Gentiles. It's up to us to make the Jews jealous.

In verses 17-24 we read that some of them, not all of them, but some of the branches were broken off of the olive tree, allowing the wild branches of the Gentiles to be grafted in to that root of blessing. Now we too, as Gentiles, can be saved by grace through faith. It's fascinating that in Romans 11:23 we read that God who preserves them will someday graft them back into that olive tree. In verses 25-26 God warns against Gentile pride. He describes a "mystery, lest you be wise in your own estimation, that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in; and thus all Israel will be saved."

Before this occurs, before God's covenant people ultimately look on Him whom they have pierced, Jesus warns that they will experience a time of persecution and tribulation that will exceed anything in history. Satan will be allowed to unleash his full fury against the covenant people and against other believers on the earth during that time in accordance to His divine judgment, both Jew and Gentile.

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By way of review, remember that in Matthew 24:4-14 Jesus is answering His disciples, who are representatives of the Jewish remnant that will be alive during the time of the tribulation. He is answering their questions regarding the nature and the duration of Israel's desolation which Jesus has pronounced. Jesus has described six specific signs that those of that day will need to look for. These signs will occur just before His coming, signs He calls in verse 8 "birth pangs"; that of false messiahs, nations at war, natural disasters of epic proportions, persecution of tribulation saints, defection of and betrayal by false believers and mass evangelism. We will see a few more that He adds today.

As we discovered last week, the greatest calamity, the greatest suffering, will be triggered by what He says in verse 15, "when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand)." "When you see," literally, "the abomination (that causes) desolation," which we studied in part four from Daniel 9:27 and other passages. And there we read of the temple to which the Lord refers in order to understand the sequence and events of prophetic revelation. In Daniel 9:27 we read about this abomination that makes desolate. The Spirit of God speaks through Daniel the prophet and says, "And he," referring to the Antichrist, "will make a firm covenant with the many (the Jews) for one week (seven years), but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate."

So in the middle of the week, in the middle of the *heptad*, or seven years, after three and a half years, the satanically possessed Antichrist will seize the temple that has been restored by the Jews, betray the Jews and demand to be worshiped. He will do this for forty-two months according to Revelation 13:5, which is the last half of the seven years.

If I may digress for a moment, in Revelation 11:1-2 John is given a vision of the temple that will be rebuilt, instructions on the measurements of the temple that will be built during the first half of the tribulation. There's a fascinating omission there that I believe suggests the Church is no longer around. He says there, "Leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it." That's interesting. This refers to the court of the Gentiles that was located outside the courtyard, that's where the brazen altar would have been. This was a place that was forbidden territory for the Gentiles. In fact, if they were to enter that it would defile the temple. The Romans gave the Jews the authority to execute Gentiles who entered into that place.

Although there will be Gentiles who will continue to be saved during the tribulation, most of them during this time will be allied with Satan and the Antichrist in their hatred of the covenant people Israel. I find it interesting that this marked distinction between Gentiles and Jews suggests further that the Church is no longer around. In the Church there is no distinction between Jew or Greek, Jew or Gentile as the New Testament tells us in Colossians 3:11, "there is no distinction between Greek and Jew." Ephesians 2:14-16 tells us the same thing. The unbelieving Jews are apparently alone in their beliefs during this time. They are isolated in their stand against Gentile hatred and persecution. The outer court of the Gentiles will not be allowed to exist in this temple. Why? Well the end of verse two in Revelation 11 tells us because "it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months" (that three and a half year career of the Antichrist).

Now may I note once again, this horrific time of unparalleled oppression against the Jews will ultimately be the culmination of the times of the Gentiles, which is what we're living in now. In Luke

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21:24 Jesus said, describing this time, “they will fall by the edge of the sword, and will be led captive into all the nations; and Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.”

Back to the abomination that causes desolation. That is the event that triggers what Jesus describes in Matthew 24:21 as the “great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.” The first four seal judgments in Revelation parallel this, that of false peace, war, famine and death. All of those take place in the first half of the tribulation, the first three and a half years, what Jesus has called the beginning of birth pangs. This first half was certainly the beginning of severe trials for the people. I believe it's the beginning of God's wrath, for it is God that holds the seven-sealed scroll (the title deed to the universe) and it is the Lamb who unrolls it.

The Holy Spirit steps aside now and He allows Satan and mankind to deceive and kill. Jesus has described the events of this time (that is the first half of the tribulation) in the first seven verses of Matthew 24. You are to look for false messiahs, nations at war, and natural disasters of epic proportions. But now, after the abomination of desolation, in the second half of the tribulation, just like a woman in labor, the frequency and severity of birth pangs will increase as God pours out the full fury of His wrath. There, the other three signs that Jesus mentioned will begin to occur in full force: persecution of tribulation saints, defection of and betrayal by false believers and mass evangelism.

Picture the scene here. The temple is rebuilt, the sacrificial system along with all the Sabbath restrictions, are back in place. The feasts and convocations of Leviticus 23 are back in full swing and being observed. The nation of Israel has negotiated a contract for protection from all of the Gentiles that would seek to destroy them—a contract for protection with the Antichrist. Then the Antichrist betrays them, demands that he be worshiped—that's the abomination that causes desolation—and then he seeks to kill them. Daniel describes his violent career in Daniel 8:24, as the head of a Western Confederacy. He says that “He will destroy to an extraordinary degree and prosper and perform his will; he will destroy mighty men and the holy people,” the people that have been set apart.

Now, consistent with the Savior's infinite compassion for His own, He warns the Jewish remnant, through these disciples He is talking to. He warns the Jewish remnant who will someday trust in Him as their Messiah of what they must do to survive this unparalleled persecution, until He comes. This leads us now to the text in verses 15 through 28.

“Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down to get the things out that are in his house; and let him who is in the field not turn back to get his cloak. But woe to those who are with child and to those who nurse babes in those days! But pray that your flight may not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath; for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him. For false Christ's and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. If therefore they say to you, ‘Behold, He is in the wilderness,’ do not go forth, or, ‘Behold, He is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe them. For just as the lightning comes from the east,

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and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.”

Let's look more closely at what the Lord is telling the folks of this day. In verse 16 He says, “let those in Judea flee to the mountains.” The word flee in Greek is *phuego*. We get our word fugitive from that. Think about this: having been cast down to earth, knowing that his time is short, the satanically possessed Antichrist, desperate for revenge, insane with a jealous rage, is now demanding to be worshiped. And he along with his demonic colleagues seek to destroy this covenant people once and for all. To obliterate them, get rid of them. So they must flee to the safety of the mountains. When you go to that region of the country, you can see very quickly the mountains and the cliff caves, especially east and south of Jerusalem. They are rugged beyond description, virtually inaccessible—an uninhabitable part of the earth apart from divine intervention.

In Revelation 12:14 we have a little more insight about the providential protection that will occur during this time. There the Spirit of God reveals to John in his vision, he says, “The two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman (a reference to Israel), in order that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent (describing that last period of the tribulation.)” Some people say that this might be a reference to Israel's airline, their main airline EL AL. I doubt that very seriously. As you look at the text you see that for one thing, there's no time to do anything except run for your life. Certainly not time to grab your bags, take a bus to the airport and wait for the plane. Beyond that, Antichrist and his cohorts are going to have control over all of that. Then I would have to ask the question, if it was an airplane—I know that region of the country—where are you going to land the plane? Do the people parachute out? It makes no sense to me. We don't know for sure, but certainly as I think about the Bible, and have the Bible interpret itself, in the Old Testament we see that wings are always a picture of divine protection. This is probably a reference to the angel Michael, he is the great protector of Israel who will perhaps supernaturally transport and protect the chosen remnant during this time of unparalleled savagery. We simply don't know.

In verses 17-18 He talks about those relaxing on their housetops, that if you hear of this desolation, of what the Antichrist is doing, you'd better run for your life. Don't even stop to get your provisions, just go. Even to this day that's what they do. They have a law there that you can only build three stories high. They have black plastic canisters of water on the roof and the sun hits them and that's how they get hot water. It's also a really nice place to go to catch a breeze and relax. I've been on top of those roofs with not just the Israeli people but the Bedouin people. That's a place of lounging and He's saying if you are relaxing when you hear this, you'd better run for your life.

In verse 19 we see such deep compassion Jesus has for mothers and infants who will not be able to flee as quickly as others. He even says “pray that your flight may not be in the winter,” the rainy season, a time of cold and snow when it's extremely difficult to survive. And pray that it won't be on the Sabbath. You must understand that Shabbat, even to this day in Israel, is a time when the whole place shuts down. But how much more so when the Old Testament Judaism will be reinstated with all of its legalism back in place? Those orthodox Jews will be convinced that Antichrist is not going to harm them so they don't need to flee. They may be prone to act as they did in the Old Testament, and the New Testament and in some places even to this day, to react in violence for those who would dare defile Shabbat.

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So Jesus is warning the perils of that day are going to be so severe, the danger is going to be so great, “do not risk anything, being caught by trying to gather supplies or possessions. Run for your life. Trust Me, I’ll protect you”. Then we see something interesting. Jesus gives what I would see as maybe four more signs of what will be His soon return. The first one is in verse 21. I would call this the sign of unprecedented death and destruction. He says, “for then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.” This holocaust is described not only by the Lord Jesus in this text, but also by Daniel and John. Daniel 7:25 tells us “And he will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One (Antichrist), and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.” You see the same thing said over and over again in prophecies: a time is one year, times is two years, and half a time is a half year, three and a half years or the last part of the tribulation.

In Revelation 11:2 referring to the temple, it “has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.” Again, three and a half years. If I can give you another footnote, this is obviously not a reference to A.D. 70 when Rome came in and took over Jerusalem. I’ve detailed that in part two of this series. I say this with all due respect, I believe it takes a Herculean effort of tortured exegesis to squeeze these events into A.D. 70. It simply does not fit the facts of Scripture.

In Matthew 24:22 we read more about this time of death and destruction of which the Lord warns, “And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short.” This is a curious statement: “those days shall be cut short.” This could refer to the whole three and a half year or even the seven year period of the tribulation. The word cut short in Greek means to shorten or to stop abruptly, instantly. Frankly, in my mind that interpretation begs for relevance since this is already a predetermined period of time: seven years, especially the last three and a half years. It’s better to understand this in a very literal way. Unless those days, referring to actual twenty-four hour periods of time, daylight hours, unless they are shortened, “no life would have been saved.” Perhaps this is to provide safety under the cover of darkness for the people that are fleeing. He has done this before. He did this with the Egyptian charioteers when the Jews were fleeing in the exodus. The pillar of clouds came up between the Egyptian charioteers and the Jews, and in God’s infinite glory and power, in Exodus 14 we read how it was a cloud that gave them cover of darkness. It was dark to the Egyptians but it was light to the Jews. We see this same concept at this time.

Let me give you three other texts that we find in Revelation that would seem to strengthen this possibility, referring maybe to the literal twenty-four hour days. Remember in the sixth seal judgment in Revelation, when it is unleashed upon the world Revelation 6:12-14 says there will be “a great earthquake; and the sun [will become] like blood; and the stars of the sky [will fall] to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. And the sky [will be] split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up.” Here we see a catastrophic disruption of the normal lights, the light of the sun.

In Revelation 8:12 we see a similar description, describing upheavals in the luminaries. There we read, “a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars [will be] smitten, so that a third of them might be darkened and the day might not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.” Likewise in Revelation 16:10 there’s a description of the fifth bowl judgment. You will recall there are seal judgments, trumpet judgments and bowl judgments. In the fifth bowl judgment we read “And the

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fifth angel poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast; and his kingdom became darkened.” That’s the kingdom of Antichrist, who is the beast.

The bottom line is that I don’t know for sure what that means. Certainly it is tenable to assume that it means that those twenty-four hour periods of time will be shortened, we can’t say for sure but one thing we know for sure is that God will protect His people. Otherwise, as Jesus has said, “no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short.” This is the first time in the New Testament the word elect is used. Elect all through the Word of God refers to all whom God has sovereignly predestined or chosen to be saved, both Jew and Gentile.

Then Jesus goes on to describe yet another sign in Matthew 24. There is not only the sign of death and destruction, but secondly what I would call the sign of demonic deception. Notice beginning in verse 23-27. “Then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ,’ or ‘There He is,’ do not believe him” and so on. It describes those that are coming along and saying that they are the Christ, or there is the Christ over there. This is demonic deception, dear friends. This is a compassionate act of the Lord, once again warning the people of that day.

Think what it would be like during that day. Think if suddenly you understand that Antichrist is out to kill you. You have grabbed your children and your pregnant wife and you are fleeing into the wilderness. And somehow in a way we don’t fully understand, the angel Michael, or God in some way has transported you. We don’t know what will happen there. But certainly we know you would be desperate, right? You would be filled with fear. I would. Desperate people are typically easy prey for those who offer them relief. We see this all the time with faith healers, with other charlatans that are out there offering people promises God never made. Because people are desperate they are running around all the time looking to find out where they can cash in on God and get their diseases healed and all of those things.

By this time, the expectation of the Messiah by the people who are fleeing will be at a fever pitch. There will be those who are coming to grips with the reality of who Messiah really is. Remember, there has been famine, pestilence, earthquakes, disease, millions dying in wars: the world is disintegrating. The human and demonic agents of Antichrist are butchering the Jewish remnant and other Gentile Christians that have come to Christ, and even non-believing Jews. This will continue, according to Revelation 17:6, until they are “drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.” Satan, through Antichrist, wants to exterminate anybody and everybody that has anything to do with the person that he hates with a consuming hatred, and that is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Obviously, if you were in that situation, you would be in what I would call “survival mode”. You have witnessed scenes that beg language. Antichrist is after you. You are trying to survive. You are terrified yet you are excited and looking for the Lord. You are surrounded by people you don’t know, strangers. You are desperate for the Lord to come, and you would be vulnerable. The Lord knows that. Then suddenly some demonic phony stands up and says “I am the Christ.” Or says “He’s over there in a room,” or “He’s on the mountain, come on let’s go see Him.” Jesus, in His infinite love is saying, “Don’t listen to them.” These demonic people are going to have powers and they are going to try to validate their claims with great signs and wonders.

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Satan never changes his tactics. He uses the same old tricks. They are always designed to mislead, always designed to deceive everyone but the elect. Why not the elect? You know why—because those who are truly born again, who have truly been transformed by the power of God, have the indwelling Spirit within them that will never allow a chosen one to be plucked out of the Lord's hand and follow some false Christ. That's not going to happen. Jesus said in John 10:27-28 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand."

Friends, the Jewish fugitives are vulnerable. They need to know how they can discern who the real Christ is, because Jesus is warning them that in the midst of this chaos there are going to be false witnesses that will arise. John MacArthur says something interesting on this point. "...those protected ones will nevertheless be under verbal assault. Satan will vigorously try to use the turmoil of the times to undermine the confidence of the refugees and to persuade them to follow a false Messiah, who would immediately betray them to the Antichrist once they were outside God's sanctuary. With the world falling apart, the stars falling, the sun and moon being radically reduced in light, millions dying from disease and starvation, thousands of their fellow countrymen having been mercilessly slaughtered, the refugees will be emotionally drained and utterly vulnerable to the subterfuge of the false Christ's and prophets, were it not for God's gracious provision."

Had Jesus stopped right here at verse 26, and simply said, "Be careful of these things, don't listen to them." What do you think the people would ask in that day? "If we're not supposed to listen to them, who are we supposed to listen to? What are we supposed to look for?" Naturally that question will arise. "How are we going to discern fact from fiction? How will we be able to recognize You?" I love what He says beginning in verse 25. "Behold, I have told you in advance. If therefore they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go forth, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. For just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be."

Dear friends, this brings us to the third sign that you would see in this passage of Scripture. I would call it the "dazzling display". This is probably a reference to His glorious shining, His Shekinah glory, as He manifested Himself frequently throughout the Word of God, throughout redemptive history. This would be the effulgence of His glory. No one will be able to miss it. Again, "just as the lightning comes from the east, and flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." Let me translate that for you. "Don't worry, you'll know when it's Me. There will be no mistake."

Think about lightning. What great imagery here. Obviously the infinite, omniscient mind of God is using it. What happens when you see lightning? Well, first of all, it comes instantly. It always comes on the heels of thunder, many times deafening thunder. And as I understand it, the closer the lightning is to the thunder, the closer the lightning is to the ground. And when lightning comes, it never goes unnoticed. Everybody sees it. When lightning comes, everything stops. It's an awesome spectacle. A glorious spectacle, even a terrifying spectacle. And He is saying that even if it comes up in the east, the people in the west are able to see it. In other words, it's going to be public. It's going to add new meaning to the grand finale. This is the point.

In Revelation 1:7 we read another description of Christ's appearance, "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him." In Psalm 97:1-19, the Psalmist even describes this scene. The Spirit of God tells us, "The **LORD** reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the many

islands be glad. Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. Fire goes before Him, and burns up His adversaries round about. His lightnings lit up the world; the earth saw and trembled. The mountains melted like wax at the presence of the **LORD** of the whole earth. The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the peoples have seen His glory. Let all those be ashamed who serve graven images, who boast themselves of idols; worship Him, all you gods. Zion heard this and was glad, and the daughters of Judah have rejoiced because of Thy judgments, O **LORD**. For thou art the **LORD** Most High over all the earth; Thou art exalted far above all gods.”

What a glorious spectacle this will be. In the darkness, the physical and spiritual darkness of that time of redemptive history, suddenly the sky will be illumined with the brilliance of His glory. Nobody will miss it. Jesus predicted this before. In Acts 1:11 we read of the flabbergasted and awestruck disciples who are watching Jesus ascend back into heaven. The two angels said to them, “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”

Child of God, this is the Jesus that I love. This is the Jesus that I worship. This is the Jesus that I serve. I know for most of you it's the same. Please hear me, this is not a description of some effeminate peacenik that's walking around extolling the inherent goodness of man, and somehow winking at sin and preaching that we need to consider all other religions and be tolerant of all other faiths, and that tolerance is some great virtue. Indeed, God is a God of mercy and a God of grace. The Lord Jesus, the one that's going to be coming, appeased the very wrath of God. But He is also a holy God. He is the Lord of hosts, He is an avenging God, one that is going to come in mighty power. An awesome God. One who is coming in judgment. We must never forget this. In Revelation 19:12, 15-16 there's a description of His coming. It says, “His eyes are a flame of fire...from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, ‘KING OF KINGS’ and ‘LORD OF LORDS.’”

Friends, I ask you, is this the Jesus that you worship? I'm not talking about this “playing church” thing that is so typical of our culture. If this is the Jesus that you worship, this will be the Jesus that you fear. This will be the Jesus that you serve. This will be the Jesus that will cause you to tremble at His Word. This will be the Jesus that you will love and make the priority of your life, so that nothing else in your life has any significance in comparison to worshiping and glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ who is coming again in power and great glory.

It's tragic. The sentimental, superficial, evangelicalism of our day has utterly eviscerated the very heart of the character of God by cutting out His holiness, His otherness, His utter transcendence. Because friends, if He is holy as He says He is, and I believe He is, then that means that He utterly hates sin with a holy hatred and He will never allow sin to go unpunished. A day is coming when the full fury of His wrath is going to be unleashed. This is very different than the Jesus that is presented in the neo-evangelical circles of our day, the purpose driven life type of Jesus. How sad to think of all those who, according to Romans 2:5 are full of “stubbornness and an unrepentant heart.” Here's what the Spirit of God says, “You are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed.”

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Some will say “Oh, come on Preacher. Stop the hellfire and brimstone.” No friends, I cannot, and I will not, because of my love for you and for the Lord. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:11, “knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men.” Again my friends, a day of judgment is coming—a day of judgment beyond my ability to describe. And the simple fact of the matter is this: those who have refused to trust in Christ as Savior and worship Him as Lord will have nothing to save them when they stand in His holy presence. They will be empty-handed. In fact, the prophet Zephaniah tells us in 1:18, “Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the **LORD**'s wrath; In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for He will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth.”

Jesus reveals the unmistakable sign that will distinguish Him from all the rest, this lightning. But if I can give you a fourth and final sign, He tells of not only the signs of death and destruction, demonic deception and a dazzling display, but fourthly, the sign of disposition of decaying corpses. In verse 28 He says, “Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.” We've all seen vultures circling over dead animals. Those of us that hunt know that many times when you fire a gun it's a trigger that will cause the vultures to come. I've been out target practicing and seen vultures come. They have learned that when they hear that shot there's going to be a carcass around. We don't know for sure and I don't want to force this, but perhaps this is a literal description of vultures hovering—a description of the inevitable carnage of war, disease and disaster.

I know that when you are on the cliffs by the Dead Sea and the hills of Moab and Edom that you can see for miles, probably over one hundred miles. Given the enormous numbers of carrion that frequent that region of the world, combined with the millions of scattered corpses there will be, maybe this is a literal thing that we need to understand. Or perhaps it's a proverb of that day, picturing the carcass of a spiritually dead and decaying people awaiting the final disposition of that corpse—a disposition that would be carried out by the consuming fire of the Lord as He comes in His righteousness, avenging Himself. Perhaps this will be an event that will be made visible like vultures hovering over a corpse. It will certainly be a judgment that is well symbolized by the same. Whatever it is, it's going to be a horrific time for those who have mocked the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 6:16 says they will “say 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.’” Chapter 16:10-11 it says that “unregenerate men will gnaw their tongues because of pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.” But what a merciful God to give such detailed warning to those who will repent in those final hours. I rejoice, and I hope you do as we reflect upon the consummation of man's rule upon the earth.

These events will ultimately end the proud, self-righteous rebellion of God's chosen people. The partial hardening of Romans 11 will cease, their hearts will become soft and tender to the Savior, and as we read in Romans 11:25, that will be the time when the “fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” God's preservation of His chosen people is such a marvelous picture of His longsuffering nature, His merciful character. In Jeremiah 31:34-36, here's what the Lord says through His prophet. “...they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the **LORD**, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.’ Thus says the **LORD**, Who gives the sun for light by day, and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar; The **LORD** of hosts is His name; ‘If this fixed order departs from before Me,’

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declares the **LORD**, 'Then the offspring of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me forever.'" The point is, that won't happen.

Oh what a wonderful Savior we serve, dear friends. Philip Bliss captured it well in the last verse of his great hymn, "Hallelujah, What a Savior."

When He comes, our glorious King,
All His ransomed home to bring.
Then anew this song we'll sing:
Hallelujah, what a Savior!

All Scripture is from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

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