

Sermon - November 16, 2014 - Pentecost 23,

End Times Series

But the One Who Endures to the End Will Be Saved

Matthew 24:1–14



Dear Friends in Christ,
Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior
Jesus Christ!

Last week we began a short series on the End of Times. Our first theme focused on the hope that we Christians have in Jesus' second coming, a definite coming, taking His church with Him, without other happenings like the dispensationalism idea of rapture. And we heard also that the dead in Christ will rise and meet Jesus first and then those who are still alive will be lifted up next. That's what's going to happen on the Great Day of the Lord!

Today we shall focus on another item, the signs and what God expects us to be doing when that day comes. And for that purpose we would meditate on chapter 14 verses 1 – 14 of the Gospel of Matthew: "Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. ² But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down." ³ As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" ⁴ And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. ⁵ For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ', and they will lead many astray. ⁶ And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. ⁷ For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. ⁹ "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

Jesus said those words just after he had made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and had driven out all who sold and bought in the temple (Mt 21:1–13). And after one last confrontation with the religious leaders, Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem . . . your house is left to you desolate" (Matthew 23:37–38).

Then he prophesied the destruction of the Temple right after his disciples had admired its magnificent building. He said: "Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down" (24:2).

Having said those words Matthew tells us that Jesus and his disciples went to the Mount of Olives, and from there they could look back at the city with its marvelous

temple, there the disciples asked Jesus two questions: “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (v 3). The disciples had their questions about the end times just like we do have today, either the end of Time or the end of our own time for that matter. What happens when I die? What will heaven be like? Is there really a hell?

Jesus does respond, but his responses are not so much in pointing to the signs but rather to be ready. The first thing he said: “See that no one leads you astray” (v 4). Yes Lord, but the signs, what are the signs? Jesus says “See that no one leads you astray” because many will try to do so.

Then says: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (v 14). The disciples had questions about the end times just as you and me do today. But what Jesus wants is that we would “Keep first things first.” That is, the Gospel will be proclaimed throughout the whole world.

Now it makes a little more sense why Jesus began his reply by giving warnings, the first: “See that no one leads you astray.” Because “...many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray” (v 5). And the second warning is similar to the first: “And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.” v 11, Two warnings about people who will interfere with the work of proclaiming the Gospel; they will try to lead people astray.

A recent example of someone leading people astray as a false prophet is Harold Camping with his false predictions through his “Family Radio Christian Network.” A few years ago he said that the Rapture and Judgment Day would take place on May 21, 2011, and then the end of the world would be five months later on October 21, 2011.

But that date came and went. “Oh, but that was a miscalculation,” he claimed. His microphone on the Family Radio network sure boomed so loud that he led many astray. It is reported that he pocketed over \$80 million (International Business Times) from folks who listened to him and trusted him, buying his books and last day supplies, supposedly to prepare them for the end times.

But there is more. Other preachers, especially those on TV, radio, and internet too, warn their listeners about wars and rumors of wars. They talk about a war in the Middle East, Israel, Iran, Syria, Russia. Then they talk about Gog and Magog at the end of time. And they say it all will end with Armageddon, a big war, an actual war with tanks, bombs and so on, just as Jesus speaks of wars and rumors of wars.

But there is a problem. I read somewhere that according to one calculation, in the last four thousand years—that would go back to the time of Abraham—there have been only about 250 years without a war. I’m not sure that’s accurate, but it does help us see Jesus’ warning, and the purpose of it. Listen to what Jesus said when talking about wars and rumors of wars: “See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet” (v 6). But the end is not yet! In other words, wars and rumors of wars do not indicate the end; it is not yet. Jesus is saying that wars and rumors of wars are happening while the Gospel is being proclaimed throughout the whole world.

Perhaps you’ve heard about the Christmas Truce of 1914. Only five months into World War I, on Christmas Eve and Day, some German troops on the Western Front left their weapons in the trenches and walked out, calling out “Merry Christmas” in their enemies’ language. In disbelief, British soldiers did the same, meeting them in no-

man's-land. There, both groups ended up singing Christmas carols in their own language. That was exactly what Jesus said about wars and rumors of wars: There was a war going on, and at the same time the Gospel of Jesus' birth was being proclaimed.

There was no truce for Jesus in his battle with the religious leaders. After he condemned them, speaking those seven woes, they laid their final plans for him. They had him arrested, tried, and crucified. They thought they had the last word. But the last word, like the Last Day, is when God declares it. God wouldn't give up on saving sinners—they or us. God had another act to carry out for our salvation. Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day.

Yes, but.... Isn't it true that we still want to know when? Back then Jesus' disciples had asked, "When will these things be?" When will there not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down? In the same chapter 24 of the Gospel of Matthew Jesus gives then an answer: "So when you see the abomination of desolation . . ." Jesus said. (Matthew 24:15)

The abomination of desolation was an offense to the people of Jerusalem. In 168 BC, the Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes had set up a statue and an altar to the god Zeus in the temple in Jerusalem. Then he sacrificed pigs on that altar. That obviously desolated, or defiled, the temple.

When the people would see the temple desolated again, Jesus said, "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (v 16). Jesus told the Judeans to escape the coming destruction of the temple and Jerusalem by fleeing to the mountains. That destruction would happen in AD 70, when the Roman army came to destroy the temple and the city. Jesus said when that would happen, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (v 29). So great would be the destruction. And in v 34, Jesus did give a time for that part of his prophecy to happen: "This generation will not pass away until all these things take place." Less than forty years after Jesus spoke those words, not one stone of the temple was left on another; they all were thrown down just as Jesus had said. So Jesus gave his disciples an almost precise time, but the end of times?

Jesus says, just keep preaching the Gospel, the Gospel of Jesus Christ in its true meaning even if we would face difficulties. Jesus said, "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom" (v 7). By one estimate, around the end of the year 2013, there were forty-four wars going on. Wars and rumors of wars are going on almost all the time that the Gospel is proclaimed throughout the whole world. And, Jesus added, "There will be famines and earthquakes in various places." Those two—famines and earthquakes—complete the list Jesus is making here of events that are part of everyday human history. Jesus completed his comment in the next verse: "All these are but the beginning of the birth pains" (v 8). In other words, the birth—the end—does not happen at the beginning of the labor pains; it is still off in the future.

Jesus goes on to explain what will happen to people who are proclaiming the Gospel throughout the whole world and what will happen to people who believe the Gospel. He said, "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead

many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold” (v 9–12). The people who proclaim the Gospel and the people who believe will face severe problems.

Even today, Christians are put to death and hated by nations. Many are falling away from the faith and hating one another. False prophets are leading many astray. And it’s happening; many of us have relatives in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and groups like that. They have some strange beliefs and are always talking about them. And they no longer are very friendly to the rest of us. It seems as if they’ve been led astray by false prophets. Yes, but take heart from what Jesus says about you in situations like that: “But the One Who Endures to the End Will Be Saved.”

This is Jesus’ point in his teaching. Assurance. Comfort. The familiar words of Rev 2:10 encourage: “Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

Jesus taught that the Gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world. And while the Gospel is proclaimed, we believers should not be led astray. Nor should we be alarmed over wars and rumors of wars—the end is not yet. Those wars and the history of famines and earthquakes only show that the end is off in the future. Next Sunday, we’ll hear that we believers are faithful servants, proclaiming the Gospel while we wait for Jesus to come again.

Meanwhile, after Jesus finished all his sayings, he told his disciples, “The Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified” (Mt 26:2). He would face tribulation. On the cross he would be left desolate and put to death. He suffered it all to save all the nations who will hear the Gospel of the kingdom. Jesus said, “But the one who endures to the end will be saved.”