

### **Understanding the Day of the Lord, Part 3**

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

Code: 81-31

Now we have been talking not about our Lord's first coming, but about His second coming. The first coming of our Lord is historic, it took place two thousand years ago. The calendar of the world marks His arrival. Everything before that is B.C., everything after that is *anno Domini*, the year of our Lord. That is the great high point of all of human history, the arrival of the Savior, the incarnate Son of God. But He came first time to provide sacrifice for our sins so that He could redeem His people. He comes the second time to punish the wicked and to establish His kingdom with His saints.

He promised that He would come again. He promised that explicitly and repeatedly. The Old Testament promises that the Messiah will come and judge the ungodly and establish His kingdom. The New Testament reiterates that. The book of Revelation describes the events surrounding His coming in great detail.

But the return of our Lord Jesus Christ in judgment is an Old Testament reality. I want to begin by reading some passages from the Old Testament. But before I do that, I want to remind you that we're in 1 Thessalonians 5, just the first few verses, and we're taking a look at the future return of Christ through the eyes of the apostle Paul as he wrote these letters to the Thessalonians. Let me take you back to 1 Thessalonians 5 just to read the opening few verses before we look at the Old Testament.

First Thessalonians 5:1, "Now as to the time and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying, 'Peace and safety!' then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness."

We're focusing in on the term "day of the Lord" there in verse 2. The day of the Lord is a technical term, it's used a number of times in the New Testament; used many, many times in the Old Testament; and it describes two very critical events. It describes, first of all, our Lord coming to execute final judgment on all unbelieving, wicked people, and then to gather His saints into His earthly kingdom we call the millennium because of the language of Revelation 20. So our Lord in His second coming comes to judge the wicked and to gather His saints, dead and alive, into His earthly kingdom.

The day of the Lord describes all of that. The day of the Lord sweeps across history from the time our Lord takes the church out, as we saw in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 to 18; the church will be snatched away. From the time the church is snatched away things begin to change on the earth, and the day of the Lord begins to rumble. It's like the war machine of Revelation starting to move as we see it in chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation. It's like the war machine in Ezekiel chapter 1 beginning to move as judgment is on the horizon. So we're considering the coming of the day of the Lord. We're looking at the coming of the day of the Lord, the character of the day of the Lord, and the completeness of the

day of the Lord.

But let me give you some Old Testament insight into this event. I'm just going to read it to you, so listen. This is from Isaiah chapter 13, verse 6: "Wail, for the day of the Lord is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will fall limp, and every man's heart will melt. They will be terrified, pains and anguish will take hold of them; they will writhe like a woman in labor, they will look at one another in astonishment, their faces aflame. Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light. Thus I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold and mankind scarcer than the gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the Lord of hosts in the day of His burning anger." Graphic, severe language, as the prophet Isaiah looks to the future day of the Lord.

In Joel chapter 2, we have a brief passage that kind of builds on this and reiterates some of the characteristics of this day. It says, "I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved," or will be delivered, though there will be judgment on all who have not called upon the name of the Lord to be delivered.

In the fourteenth chapter of Zechariah, as he draws his prophecy to its conclusion, Zechariah looks ahead to the day of the Lord as well, and he writes, starting in verse 1, "Behold, a day is coming for the Lord when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. And I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations, as he fights in a day of battle. In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in the middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquakes in the day of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the Lord, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him!

"In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. It will be a unique day which is known to the Lord, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light. And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter." Verse 9, "And the Lord will be king over all the earth; in that day the Lord will be the only one, and His name the only one." This again is the Lord coming in His day, in judgment, and then establishing His own kingdom over which He rules completely and exclusively.

The day of the Lord was such an important part of divine truth that the first Christian sermon ever preached on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, Peter preaches this great sermon. The church has just been born that day by the coming of the Holy Spirit. Peter stands up and preaches. And what is it that Peter says? He says, starting in verse 17, "It shall be in the last days," God says, "that I

will pour forth My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men dream dreams; even on My bondslaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy. And I will grant wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come. And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Drawing language, Peter did, from the Old Testament day of the Lord.

It is a two-fold event, the day of the Lord. It is a time of the judgment of all the wicked, dead and alive; and all the righteous, dead and alive, will be gathered into our Lord’s kingdom. And I want to take you all the way to the book of Revelation and read the very description of our Lord’s return in detail, that was given to the apostle John in the Revelation.

Revelation 19, verse 11. This is the very event of Christ’s return on the day of the Lord at its culminating point. “And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems;” – or crowns – “and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down 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.

“Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, ‘Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.

“And I saw the beast” – or the Antichrist – “and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.” That is a dramatic scene, to say the least, of the coming day of the Lord.

The prophets wrote about it. The apostles on the very first day of the church in the first sermon preached spoke of it. The book of Revelation concludes with it in a lot more detail than what I just read. That’s just the moment when the Son of Man sets His feet on the Mount of Olives and splits it, as Zechariah says. This is the coming day of the Lord. He will not come in a manger, He will not come as a baby, He will come as a sovereign, supernatural king. He will not come to die for men’s sins, He will come to take the life of those who have rejected His sacrifice and His lordship. He is coming.

This was not only important to the prophets and the apostles, and not only the way the Bible ends, this was a very critical subject to our Lord, and I want to show you what He said about it. Turn in your Bible to Matthew 24, Matthew 24. We’re just expanding what Paul said a little bit out of 1

Thessalonians when Paul said that He is coming. The day of the Lord is coming. We're looking at that first point, that the day of the Lord is coming, and I want to show you what is basically contained in that reality.

Now in Matthew 24 and 25 we have our Lord giving us a clear, clear revelation of His coming. He promises to return to judge all the living and dead unbelieving wicked and to take all the living and dead believing righteous into His millennial kingdom. This is the separation, if you will, of the sheep and the goats in the parable that our Lord gives. He comes to judge the ungodly and to gather the godly into His kingdom. Some of the godly will come back with Him, namely the church that's already been raptured. We'll be coming back with Him in fine linen and on those white horses, whatever that means. We're not sure what those vehicles would be, but we are coming back with Him to gather together with the saints on hearth for the kingdom.

So in Matthew 24, the Lord answers the question that His disciples ask about this, and the inevitable is, "When?" We have a lot of detail about the Lord's second coming, it's in the Prophets of the Old Testament, it's in the words of our Lord as we find here in even so much detail that the apostle Paul said to the Thessalonians, "You don't need to know anything more, for you full well know the day of the Lord is coming like a thief in the night." So they had been instructed on the issue of the coming day of the Lord, the return of Christ.

Now the disciples, according to Luke 19:11, believed it was going to happen immediately. They supposed that it was going to happen immediately. They had seen their Lord rejected. They were really on the brink of His crucifixion in Matthew 24, sitting on the Mount of Olives looking back at the temple. Jesus pronounces Judgment and doom on the temple, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the land of Israel. And the disciples are not too sure how fast after all that destruction which actually came in 70 A.D. thirty-some years later.

We're not sure how after that destruction how fast the kingdom would come, but they thought it would be very fast very soon. They wanted to know when. So in verse 3 they ask Him, "When? When will these things happen and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" They knew He was coming back before He even left, and they knew He was coming back to end human history as this earth knows it. They wanted to know when.

That's the inevitable question, and that was certainly the question in the minds of the Thessalonian believers. They wanted to know when, how far away was it, what was going to happen next. They had even been made to believe that some of their suffering indicated they were already in the day of the Lord, and Paul straightens that out and says, "No, you're not going to be in the day of the Lord, you're going to be snatched away when the church is caught up to meet the Lord in the air. You're going to go to the heavens that the Lord has prepared for you, to live with Him, and you're never going to be out of His fellowship again. You're going to come back later when He sets up His kingdom. But you'll be snatched before the day of the Lord starts."

Well, they don't know those nuances, they just want to know when this all begins to happen. And the Lord answers them; and I just would read you a kind of a composite of His answers from Matthew, Mark, and Luke that pull together in *One Perfect Life*. This is our Lord describing the actual return, His actual arrival, taken from Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

This is what the composite of His word says, speaking of His return: “For as the lightening comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For wherever the carcass is, there the vultures will be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. The stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And there will be signs in the sun and the moon, in the stars and on earth, distress of nations with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring, men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and great glory. And He send His angels with the sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of the earth to the farthest part of heaven. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads because your redemption draws near.”

Our Lord says the day of the Lord reaches its pinnacle when the Lord Himself appears, and the whole world will see Him. And He comes like lightening, flashing from one part of the sky to the next. Unmistakable, no one will miss it. But I’m not going to tell you when it’s going to happen. In verse 36 of Matthew 24, our Lord says, “Of the day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” No one knows the exact moment that the Lord is going to return at His second coming.

Now remember, the rapture of the church, that also is an imminent event. We have no timetable for that, we don’t have any precursors to the rapture, it could happen any moment, it could happen immediately. There’s nothing that has to be fulfilled before that happens. But once we’re snatched out, events begin to unfold leading up to and including the day of the Lord. But even in that environment where there are manifest things going that point to the day of the Lord, still people will not know the precise day and the precise hour, and they’re warned to be ready.

So the question is, the critical question is, “When is this going to happen?” They ask the Lord again in Acts chapter 1, “Will You at this time bring the kingdom? When is all this going to happen?” And as Paul said, “The Lord is not going to tell us. The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, unannounced, so you have to be ready at all times.” We have to be ready for the rapture. Those who are alive during the preliminary time to the day of the Lord have to be ready for this judgment.

In His sermon then, our Lord is going to answer their question in remarkable, remarkable ways. He gives them some things to think about. If you look down at verse 8 of Matthew 24, “All these things are merely the beginning of birth pains, the beginning of birth pains.” He describes them another way in verse 6 at the end, “These are the things that must take place, but that is not yet the end.”

This is just the beginning of birth pains. There will be times and epochs, as we read in 1 Thessalonians 5. These are being described here by our Lord. Here are the seasons, the events that are going to be taking place as birth pains leading up to the arrival. Like a woman has birth pains, they start, they continue, they get more intense and more intense, till finally the child arrives. So that is how to look at His second coming – increasing, frequent, painful birth pains. The Lord says, “I will describe to you.”

The first one, the first thing to look for in that age in the future, that time of tribulation that indicates the Lord’s coming is in verses 4 and 5, Matthew 24, “See to it that no one misleads you. For many

will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many." The first birth pain is false teaching, widespread deception.

Remember I told you last time, somebody's going to have to explain what happened to all the believers, what happened to all the churches, why they're all empty, the true churches, why all these millions of people have disappeared in a flash, in a split second, from the world. They're going to have to explain that. You would think that that event itself would drive people to find a Bible and read the New Testament and realize that what it said happened and they need to make sure they accept the veracity of Scripture, and might lead to their salvation.

But that's not what's going to happen. What's going to happen is a perforation of false teachers. And down in verse 11 it says, "Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many." Down in verse 24, "False Christs, false prophets will arise, show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if it were possible," – hypothetically – "even the elect."

So the first thing our Lord says that is going to be a precursor or an initial birth pain, the beginning of sorrow or the beginning of pain is deception, escalated deception, and the world will just be overrun with false prophets, false Christs, and deceivers. There will be many of them. There will be demons let loose on the earth who will basically be the power behind these deceivers. The main one is a figure in Revelation 13 called the false prophet who, as I read from Revelation 19 a few minutes ago, deceives the whole world. He is the arch deceiver. He is the companion to the Antichrist.

In Revelation 13 you have the beast in the opening part of the chapter who is the Antichrist depicted as a beast. And then you have the next beast who is the false prophet who comes alongside the Antichrist and deceives the entire world; comes up with explanations for why the Christians are not here anymore that the world believes. In fact, the world will begin to believe them and they will be so locked in on believing them that the Lord will actually make their unbelief permanent. Listen to 2 Thessalonians 2 which says, verse 9, that the Antichrist will come in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders. He's going to undergird the lies and the deception with false miracles, "with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they didn't receive the love of the truth so as to be saved."

When they have finally rejected the gospel, they have rejected the love of the truth so as to be saved, they are now on the way to perishing, verse 11, 2 Thessalonians 2:11, "For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness," which tells you why they didn't believe the truth. They didn't believe the truth because they were taking pleasure in wickedness, they loved their sin.

So this is a world plunged into sin. The church is gone, and with the church restraint is gone. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians the Restrainer is taken out of the way. So all hell breaks loose in terms of sin in the world, and false teachers rise up to give explanations that suite the sinners who want to fully indulge themselves in ways that perhaps the world has never experience, because the restraint of godly people has been totally removed.

The leader of this world deception is the false prophet. The Antichrist is part of it as well. The false teachers are going to say, as we read in 1 Thessalonians 2, "Peace and safety." Remember that?

When they say, "Peace and safety," that's going to be the message, "Hey, everything is fine, you're safe." The Antichrist is going to make a peace treaty with Israel, it says in Daniel 9. And not only that, according to Revelation 6, the Antichrist is going to basically take over the world. He is going to be a false peacemaker. It shows him in the first seal.

Now just file this in your mind. What our Lord says here about these preliminaries to the day of the Lord parallels chapters 6 of Revelation and even following, they're parallel. Even some of the language is the same. So our Lord says there's going to be deception.

Well, the first seal in Revelation 6:1 and 2 is false peace, basically achieved by the Antichrist who is, of course, in himself the deceiver of all deceivers. He comes with a white horse like a conqueror. He has a bow; interestingly enough, he has no arrows in the picture there in Revelation 6, no arrows, which probably means he doesn't conquer by war, he conquers by ideology, he conquers by craft, he conquers by deception, he conquers in a political way and creates a false global peace. So first thing our Lord says that tells you that the day of the Lord is coming is deception.

The second birth pain is in verse 6 and the beginning of verse 7: "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you're not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."

The next birth pang intensifying as unparalleled global warfare. The issue of war will dominate universal conversation. Wars and rumors of wars will increase. Some of this is laid out in detail in Daniel chapter 11 in his prophecy there. But we also see this is parallel the second seal in Revelation chapter 6, which is massive global slaughter, a war that literally slaughters people all across the globe.

Just to read those couple of verses, Revelation chapter 6, verses 3 and 4: "When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, 'Come.' And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him."

So the picture is of this red horseman of the apocalypse who comes and takes the false peace that the Antichrist has crafted and rips it away; and all of a sudden the whole world goes into a bloodbath. It is a slaughter of proportions like the world has not known. The book of Revelation adds even to that. I might just read you, while I'm in chapter 6, verses 12 and following, and it'll relate to the next one as well.

"I looked and He broke the sixth seal; there was a great earthquake. The sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, the whole moon became like blood; the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it's rolled up, and every mountain and island were removed out of their places. Then the kings of the earth, the great men, the commanders, the rich, the strong, every slave, every free man hid themselves in the caves among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to survive?'"

Peace has been taken from the earth, and there is literally bloodshed globally, and that is followed by

the third. Our Lord says in verse 7, “There will be famines and earthquakes,” and that is what I just read you. And that’s what the third seal in Revelation 6 indicates as well, that there would be famine in the earth, paralleling again the seals of Revelation to the words of our Lord in this sermon. I wish I had time to keep jumping back and forth, but we don’t have the time for that.

So we have then precursors to the arrival of the Lord. The first one is going to be global deception of a high level, and people are going to believe it because they want to plunge themselves into unfettered sin. And there are going to be false teachers who will accommodate that; and they’ll be eager to believe it because they love their sin. That’ll be followed by global wars, and that’ll be followed by massive natural disasters all across the earth, disasters that the world has never experienced.

I can’t resist one other portion of Scripture in the eighth of Revelation and verse 7: “The first trumpet sounds.” Later in the tribulation “there comes hail, fire, mixed with blood, thrown to the earth. A third of the earth is burned up, a third of the trees are burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. A second angel sounded, something like great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea;” – like some kind of body out of the sky – “a third of the sea became blood, a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; a third of the ships were destroyed. Third angel sounded, a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. The name of the star is Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter. A fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.” The whole planet is judged in devastating fashion. That’s kind of where the original earthquakes and famines go. The original wars go to Armageddon.

In the sixteenth chapter of Revelation you have Armageddon, the bloodbath of the world when the Lord comes to destroy them all. So our Lord is saying, “I can’t tell you exactly when, the day or the hour is not known. But prior to the day of the Lord the generation that is alive in that day need to see deception, widespread deception, war, and natural disasters as precursors to the day of the Lord.”

The fourth one is persecution. Now during this time people will be being saved; that’s very clear. People will be being saved. And what will happen to them? Verse 9, “They will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you’ll be hated by all nations because of My name.” They will deliver you to tribulation and trouble, pressure, and kill you, and you’ll be hated. This is the fourth mark of this series of birth pains: persecution of true believers.

Now let me remind you again. There is going to be a great, great revival during the time of the tribulation after the church is taken away. The nation Israel will be saved, and out of Israel, according to Revelation 7, 144,000 Jews will be redeemed and they’ll become preachers of the gospel, and they’ll be protected so they can’t be killed until they preach the gospel everywhere. There’ll be a flying angel in heaven preaching the gospel literally in the sky. There will be two witnesses in the city of Jerusalem who are killed and who rise from the dead who will preach the gospel. There will be widespread salvation.

Our Lord warned in Mark 13:9, “Be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and flog you in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them.” The gospel must first be preached to all the nations – this is looking at the day of the Lord.



“And when they arrest you and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you’re to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; it’s not for you to speak, but it is the Holy Spirit. Brother will betray brother to death, a father his child; children will rise up against parents and put them to death. You’ll be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.” And then he goes right into the abomination of desolation which happens in the middle of that time of tribulation. Persecution will be manifest.

In chapter 6 of the book of Revelation we see that as well. Again, just going back for a moment to chapter 6, verse 9, the Lamb breaks the fifth seal. And what comes out of the fifth seal is, “I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained;” – they were slaughtered by the Antichrist and his forces – “and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’ And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told they should rest for a while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed.” True believers slaughtered in the time of tribulation.

Same thing in chapter 7, verse 9: “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and tribe and people and tongue, standing before the throne before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches in their hands; they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, ‘Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’

“Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?’ And I said to him, ‘My lord, you know.’ And he said to me, ‘These are the ones who came out of the great tribulation, and they’ve washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb is the center of the throne and He will be their shepherd and guide them to the springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.’” Saved people slaughtered in the tribulation, coming into the presence of God in heaven.

Persecution then is the fourth birth pain. Fifth one is defection, defection. Please notice verse 10: “At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another,” just as we read in Mark 13, betraying family members Many will hate one another. Many will betray one another because many will fall away.

There will be people claiming to be Christians in the time of the tribulation, but they will defect. Why will they defect? Because the price is too high. The price is too high. They’ll be delivered to death. The price is too high. Two, they’ll defect because the false teachers are too convincing. Verse 11: “Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many.”

The price is too high, the false teachers are too convincing. Thirdly, sin is too easy, because lawlessness is increased. Again, the restraints are off. Satan is in full power. Demons are running over the world. The restraints are off, the Restrainer is gone, and sin is now full steam ahead. People

may pretend to believe, but they will defect; the price is too high, and the false teachers are too convincing, and sin is too easy. That's what we see in the book of Revelation as well. When the judgments come, they don't repent, they don't repent, they don't repent, they don't repent; they plunge deeper into their sin.

The final, the sixth precursor that our Lord identifies in Matthew 24 is the proclamation of the gospel, verse 14. He says in verse 13, "The one who endures to the end, he will be saved." Not the defector, the one who endures to the end. Not the defector, the one whose faith stands the test of persecution. But the final precursor, "The gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come."

So even in the time of tribulation the gospel is going to be preached to the ends of the earth by the 144,000, by the converts from every tongue and tribe and people, by the two witnesses through media no doubt, because the whole world sees them it says, by the angel in the sky. The globe will be covered with the gospel. Obviously we have the technology to make that happen in a very short period of time today. "Then the end shall come." So our Lord is saying, "I'm not going to tell you when it's going to happen, but I say to the generation that's alive before it happens, 'Here are the things that indicate it is very, very near; then the end will come.'"

The next trigger that He identifies in verse 15 is the abomination of desolation, when the Antichrist – I won't go into detail spoken of by Daniel. The Antichrist goes into the Jewish temple, desecrates it as Antiochus Epiphanes did in Jewish history; and in that desecration of the temple triggers the second half of the great tribulation, the second half called the great tribulation: forty-two months, three-and-a-half years of increased judgment, increased judgment. Now when that happens, you're headed into the worst of it.

So the people are warned, they're warned to flee in verse 16, "Flee to the mountains. If you're on a housetop don't even go down to get what's in the house, just get out of there. If you're in the field, don't go back to get your cloak; run. And woe to those who can't run because they're pregnant or nursing babies! Pray your flight will not be in the winter, the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will." Three-and-a-half years of these preliminaries, escalating, escalating.

And then the abomination of desolation happens in the temple; and that triggers the second half. And now the worst of it is unleashed on the world, verse 22, "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short." There will be living elect believers saved in the first half who will still be there, and for their sake so that there's some of them who don't die. The Lord doesn't want all the elect to die, He has to have some alive to go into His kingdom, His earthly kingdom.

"And the false teachers will be at it. They'll say, 'Here's Christ, there is Christ.' Don't believe them. False Christs, false prophets will arise, show signs, wonders, to mislead, even the elect," hypothetically. "If somebody says, 'He's in the wilderness,' don't go there. If he says, 'He's in this inner room. I have the Messiah, He's here; I want to take you to Him,' no, it's not going to be a secret meeting in the desert, it's not going to be a secret meeting in a private room. When He comes," – verse 27 – "it's going to be lightening flashing from the east to the west." Every single person on the planet is going to see it. It's like corpses; we always know where the corpses are because the vultures are circling over the corpses. It'll be manifest, it'll be visible.

“And then immediately after the tribulation,” – that great tribulation, that final three-and-a-half years, “the sun goes dark, the moon goes out, the stars fall, the heavens collapse, and the Son of Man appears in the sky.” That’s the culmination of the day of the Lord.

Amazingly when He comes, verse 36, “Of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” But we have some signs that it’s near. “But the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. for in those days before the flood” – having been warned about the flood for 120 years – “they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark. They didn’t understand till the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.” Even with all of that, even with all of that – the love of sin, the effectiveness of satanically-inspired false teachers, and the judgement of God on unbelievers – is going to leave people vulnerable to the judgment.

Verse 42, He says to His disciples and to the generation alive at that day, “Be on the alert, you don’t know which day your Lord is coming. You don’t know.” He tells a story about slaves being ready when their master came, because He might come sooner than you think. And then in chapter 25 He tells about some virgins; and that’s a warning that He might come later than you think. You have to be ready all the time.

Now that is exactly what Paul is explaining to us. Let’s go back to 1 Thessalonians and we’ll wrap up quickly. He is saying day of the Lord is coming in an unexpected hour. We will already have been taken to heaven. We’ll come back with Him in His glory. He comes to do two things: He comes to judge the wicked, living and dead; and to take the living and dead saints into His earthly kingdom for a thousand years, followed then by the new heaven and the new earth.

He comes like a thief in the night, and when He arrives the world is going to think they’re in a place of peace and safety. All the birth pains of Matthew 24 line up with the first five seals of Revelation. But even after those preliminary birth pains, it gets so much worse. The trumpet judgments – and I read you some of it – far worse, followed by the bowl judgments rapid fire in the last few days or weeks; far worse. The judgments escalate like birth pains, getting more intense, and more intense, and more intense. The trumpet judgments are described in Revelation 8 and 9, and the bowl judgments in Revelation 16. And with all of this escalating, the false teachers are going to be crying, “Peace and safety!”

So that’s the coming of our Lord. What’s the character of His coming? Verse 3: “Then destruction will come upon them suddenly.” It’s a sudden destruction, *olethros*, disaster, ruin. Used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament to speak of eschatological destruction. Not annihilation, not eternal destruction in the sense as you go out of existence; but it’s ruin, it’s hopeless ruin. It’s not the destruction of being, it’s the destruction of well-being. It’s not the end of existence, it’s the ruination of any reason for existence.

It will come on them – not us, them. Us, He’s been saying, “Comfort one another with these words.” We are going to be caught up together with the Lord in the air, in verse 17. They, they are going to be destroyed suddenly. Peter describes it in 2 Peter chapter 3 in ultimate terms that even include the complete dissolution of the of whole universe. It’s going to happen suddenly, it’s going to happen in a flash, it’s going to be over before anybody knows it even started. They will all be catapulted into

eternal judgment.

So our Lord says in Luke 21:34, “Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that day will not come upon you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth. But keep on the alert at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place and stand before the Son of Man. You want to be sure that you escape that judgment and are standing in the presence of the Son of Man. Devastation and death in a flash.

One final point that the apostle Paul makes is the completeness of this judgment, the completeness of this judgment. He says, “and they will not escape.” “Destruction will come suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.” No way to escape.

Our Lord said this, back in Matthew 13, when He was telling the parables about the kingdom. Listen to what He said in Matthew 13:41, “The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks and all who commit lawlessness, and throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” You’d better listen. When He comes He’s going to be judging all the lawless, sending them to hell; the righteous, He gathers into His kingdom.

Says it again in the same chapter, verse 49: “So will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” That judgment will take place, and there will be a separation eternally between those who have rejected Christ and those who belong to Him.

So what is our response to this? Hear the words of Mark 13:35 to 37, “Watch, therefore; you do not know when the master is coming, in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster,” – or in the morning – “lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping. And what I say to you I say to all, ‘Watch!’”

You might say, “Well, I’m just going to live it up until the rapture, and when all the Christians go away I’ll know what happened, and then I’ll become a Christian.” No, you won’t. Can’t count on that, there’s no guarantee for that, because you will be overrun by liars and deceivers and false teachers, you will sink deeper into the morass of sin and unbelief, and you have no guarantee that you can be rescued from that. That is why the Bible says, “Now is the day of salvation.”

Father, we thank You again for Your Word. So profound are these realities; they overwhelm us. But You’ve been saying this since the Old Testament, that You’re coming in ferocious vengeance and wrath, because that’s how You feel about sin and unbelieving sinners. You are a God of love and a God of mercy and a God of grace – we know that; we have been the recipients of that. But we also know You are holy; and for those who reject Your grace and reject Your mercy and reject Your love and reject the love of the truth, the gospel, Your holiness must act in judgment.

Lord, we pray that no one here would be in the position of the wicked, to be left and caught in this eternal sentence. Lord, help us to understand the realities of the world we live in and the realities of Your world. Help us to interpret everything in our lives from the divine perspective, to look at life and

history and the future, not in a speculative way, not in a sort of science fiction way, but help us to look at realists into the future knowing that this is it, what we've just seen. And knowing this terrible reality, may we be faithful to be sure that we are ready when You come to gather Your church so we're not left for that hour.

Help us to be faithful to warn others. That's why we're here. We're here to warn as well, as to woo, to warn of vengeance and to woo with love. Use us even in these days around the holidays for that, and we'll thank You, in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.

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