

Signs of the Times - Tribulation

Hello Dear Listeners;

Last week on this program we dealt with what may be called “The Signs of God’s Grace”, They are part of a widespread phenomenon called “The Signs of the Times”. Signs of God’s grace include the preaching of the gospel and the turning of people formerly in chains to unbelief and evil spirits *to the Lord*.

It is true, many people are oblivious to these indicators that Jesus Christ is making progress toward the day of his return. But then people by nature are blind and are known often not to wake up to either the victory or fatality that awaits them until it is too late.

There are those who are duped into thinking history is on an evolutionary track, that despite occasional setbacks nevertheless will result only in bigger, and better things for all of mankind. Yet with the advent of the nuclear age and man’s capacity for wiping out the world’s population many times over such blind optimism has given way. Given way not necessarily to a more sober analysis of the course history. Rather to a mindset that refuses to “read the signs’ of the times according to God’s Word altogether.

Besides the signs of God’s grace that certainly give hope and confidence that the Lord God has not given up on this world there are other signs. Signs that indicate that there is an intensified conflict between the truth and the lie, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. These signs include the suffering and tribulation

experienced by many. The falling away from God and the increase in atheism . Besides there are the wars and rumours of wars of which Jesus himself spoke (for example in Matthew 24. There are the tell-tale signs of famines, floods and the terror that threatens to engulf and invade many parts of the world.

It is of course true that many of these tragic events have been part history and the human landscape for centuries. That's no wonder for so many of these horrible, life-threatening things are the direct result of man's fall into sin. Man's nature became corrupt and violent, with the consequence of small and large-scale wars erupting everywhere.

Struggles and difficulties, pain and suffering are the common circumstance of believers in this present period of history. ¹ On more than one occasion Jesus taught his followers they should expect suffering and hardship, including great distress as a result of their faithfulness in following Him. We may think of Christ's teaching in what is commonly called "The Sermon on the Mount" and what are called The Beatitudes in Matthew 5: 10-12. Though Jesus' teaching there is clear that his followers will experience persecution and all kinds of evil will come their way he did not leave them in despair. He spoke even of their reason to rejoice "For", said he, "*Your reward is great in heaven.*"

Christians have noted that many of the things foretold by Jesus in what is called "The Olivet Discourse" in Matthew 24, were fulfilled in the terror experienced by the Jews at the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

¹ C. P. Venema The Promise of the Future p. 141

Yet there are things in that chapter which can only be understood in the light of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. For example, the disciples asked Jesus not only when the destruction of the temple would take place but also “ *What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age*”? (Matthew 24: 3)

So the sign of the preaching of the gospel to all the nations can't really be said to have been fulfilled prior to 70 AD. In vv 29-31 where we read Jesus' words concerning the sun that “will be darkened” the moon not giving “ its light” and heavenly bodies” that “will be shaken.” we need to think of those things that elsewhere in the bible speak of the return of our Lord and the things that will increasingly mark that time.

We need to think as well about the tribulation that will very much be a part of these signs. “Signs of Resistance by the evil one and his minions as well as the Judgement that is to come. Frequently the bible mentions tribulation that will be experienced by believers as the result of their commitment to Christ and his Word.

This tribulation can take many forms the most frequent being open persecution. Numerous scripture passages testify to this. A few examples: 1 Thess. 1:6; 2 Tim. 3:12-13; Acts 14:22. Read through the New Testament and you come across the imprisonment of believers (Acts 20:23) Sometimes their tribulation involves ridicule (Heb. 10:33) as well as poverty, (2 Cor. 2:4) illness (Rev. 2:22) distress and sorrow (Phil. 1:17; 2 Cor. 2:4).

Though those things can cause Christians much pain and anguish yet you do not read of their widespread complaints and rebellion. Instead,

even when they're jailed for their faithful testimony concerning Jesus Christ you find them singing! (Acts 16: 25). The apostle Paul, in Colossians 1:24 goes so far as to say, he *rejoiced in what he suffered for his brothers and sisters in Christ*. In suffering for the sake of Christ he said, “ *I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body which is the church.*”

What he meant is not that there is somehow a deficiency in Christ's saving work. It actually speaks about that fellowship of communion the church has with Christ when it suffers for his name's sake. In no way, says Paul is this something of which to be ashamed.

Christians know that ultimately Satan will go down to a final defeat. Yet Christ's victory is already sure for he won that victory on Calvary's cross. And his church, now often suffering trials and tribulation will be victorious. For, as Paul said in Romans 8: 37-39, absolutely nothing will be able to separate God's faithful children from His love, “ *which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

It is true, the bible speaks not only of a general tribulation, experienced by many before Christ returns. It also testifies to what the bible calls The Great Tribulation. ²Though this is not the place to get into the various views concerning this Tribulation it is clear that it will be *intensified* the closer we come to the return of the Lord and the Last Judgement. This is very clear, for example in Matthew 24 where Jesus told his disciples that “ *If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.*” (Matt. 24: 22) This cannot be restricted to some past

² Matthew 24:21

events. Just as the letter to “ the angel (or messenger), of the church in Thyatira (recorded in Revelation 2) refers to Christ’s warning that he will punish those who commit sexual immorality. A warning not just to the church *then* (in the first century CE) but for all, today and right up to Christ’s return.

The Book of Revelation in ch. 20 tells us of what has been called “ *Satan’s little season*” at the end of that period of a thousand years during which he is bound so as not to be able to deceive the nations. We hope at some future date, DV to give closer attention to what the bible says about that period on this program. Suffice it to say that “little season” will surely be one of increasing hostility towards God’s people.

It could be that we are already in that “season’ . I think not only of the barbarity practiced by violent people such as those militant IS in Syria and Iraq and the terrible persecution of Christians in North Korea, for example.

There is increasing pressure, and tribulation right in the midst of churches that formerly were faithful and didn’t deviate from God’s Word. Yet who today more and more adopt the false and misleading slogans and teachings of those who are opposed the Christ and His Word. I think of the growing acceptance of evolution, the promotion of homosexuality and the turning of a blind eye to the horrors of abortion. And this not from without, but from within churches.

All the more reason for faithful Christians and churches to pray, “ Maranatha, come Lord Jesus”. “Give courage, perseverance, staying power to those who confess Your Name. Build you people up

in faith and godliness and cause others to see the light, before it is to
late. For Christ's sake, Amen" And thank you very much
for listening