

a sermon from MATTHEW 24:15-27:

ON THE SECOND COMING OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

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I. A PROPOSITION

Let the faithful Christian man ever keep himself ready to stand before our Lord JESUS CHRIST by living daily as a faithful Christian servant!

II. THE TEXT - MATTHEW 24:15,21-27 – THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST¹

¹⁵ When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in The Holy Place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)

²¹ For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

²² And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.

²³ Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is CHRIST, or there; believe it not.

²⁴ For there shall arise false christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

²⁵ Behold, I have told you before.

²⁶ Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, He is in the desert; go not forth: behold, He is in the secret chambers; believe it not.

²⁷ For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also The Coming of The Son of Man be.

III. INTRODUCTION

The Lord in This Scripture in MATTHEW 24 speaks of prophesies of three Divine events, the first now past, the second now present, and the third yet to come: 1) the destruction of earthly Jerusalem by the Roman army in 70 AD; 2) the present age in which The Church on earth faithfully works to bring forth The Kingdom of GOD; 3) The Day of the return of our Lord JESUS CHRIST at His Second Coming, that blessed Day when The Kingdom shall at last come in full on earth as it is in Heaven. And yet, the warnings contained in This Scripture Text speak to faithful Christians in all times. But what is it that we should hear, the signs themselves, or that we should be about The Lord's business daily in this life?

IV. DO WE NOT LIVE IN AMAZING TIMES?

We live today in an age of exceptional events, shocking outrages and great promise. Our times have seen the rise of unspeakably evil men and their bloody rule – Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, Idi Amin and Saddam Hussein. We have seen the horrors of

¹ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 24:15-28

the Nazi death camps, the monstrosities of the communist gulags, the threatening clouds of the Cold War's nuclear holocaust hovering over the world for fifty years. Our times have seen terrible famines, diseases, wars and rumors of wars. We have seen in the prosperous West abominable and outrageous corruption within The Church, the family, the schools, and society in general.

But our times have also seen the return of Israel as a nation in The Holy Land. We see the nations of Europe increasingly coming together as one. We have heard the loud whispers of many to rebuild The Hebrew Temple and resume the Old Testament system of animal sacrifices. We have seen modern technology make The Gospel of CHRIST more accessible to men the world over more than ever before in history. Our times have seen great advancements in science, learning and technology such as our fathers could never have imagined. We have seen the fall of That Evil Empire - the former communist Soviet Union. And while much of The Church in The West founders upon the reefs of lukewarm testimony and even apostasy, the center of gravity of The Body of CHRIST on earth has shifted in explosive emerging growth in still communist, former communist and Third World nations around the globe!

V. THE LONGING OF MEN'S HEARTS FOR THE RETURN OF THE LORD

Since the departure of The Presence of GOD from The Temple in Jerusalem, when has the righteous Jew not sought for signs of the return of That Presence of The LORD, again dwell among Israel? And since The Fall of mankind into sin and separation from The Creator in The Garden, men have been asking when and if GOD will indeed judge the wicked and deliver the righteous. Down through the ages, the upright and the GOD fearing have called out to Heaven as with the prophet Isaiah, praying for deliverance from the hand of the wicked.

O LORD, dost Thou not see how proudly the brazen sinners parade their impious iniquity before Thee and Thy saints? Indeed The Almighty does see, for the prophet declares this warning in ISAIAH 5:18-19, "Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of vanity, And sin as if with a cart rope; That say, Let Him make speed and hasten His

work, That we may see it; And let the counsel of The Holy One of Israel draw near and come, That we may know it!"²

And since the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of The Messiah JESUS CHRIST, when has the faithful Christian not longed to see His Second Coming, that His full justice would rule on earth as in Heaven? Indeed, The Second Coming of CHRIST seems in our understanding to tarry, and men – most especially in dark times – come to question the sacred promises of Scripture. But here Saint Peter records the purpose of The Almighty in II PETER 3:8-9: “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with The Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”³

VI. THE ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION UPON THE ALTAR OF JEHOVAH

Let us then begin by asking what is this “abomination of desolation” of which our Lord speaks of here in MATTHEW 24? From about 171 to 164 BC, history records the arrival upon the stage of human suffering of a bloody pagan Greek king named “Antiochus Epiphanes” – meaning “The Illustrious” – who conquered Egypt and then went up against Jerusalem with a great multitude.⁴ I MACCABEES 1:21 records that this heathen king, a type of the antichrist to come, “...entered proudly into the sanctuary” of The Jerusalem Temple and took away all the holy instruments of ministration to The LORD.⁵ He slaughtered many Jews and held Israel captive in their own land. He ordered all men across his empire to forsake their own religions and to worship as one according to his personal heathen dictates.

We read further of these terrible events in I MACCABEES 1:43-49: “Yea, many also of the Israelites consented to his religion, and sacrificed unto idols, and profaned the Sabbath. ...And forbid burnt offerings, and sacrifice, and drink offerings, in The

² 1, KJV, ISAIAH 5:18-19.

³ 1, KJV, II PETER 3:8-9.

⁴ 2, ISBE Bible Dictionary, entry “573 Antiochus Iv; Antiochus Epiphanes.”

⁵ 3, KJA, I MACCABEES 1:21.

Temple... And polluted the sanctuary... [and] Set up altars, and groves, and chapels of idols, and sacrifice[d] swine's flesh, and unclean beasts: That they should also leave their children uncircumcised, and make their souls abominable with all manner of uncleanness and profanation: To the end they might forget The Law..." of The Most High GOD! ⁶

And those Jews who refused to embrace the apostasy were, on the orders of this bloody heathen tyrant - King Antiochus - put to death by all manner of vile violence! But there was a final outrage yet to come: I MACCABEES 1:54 next records that "...they set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar, and builded idol altars throughout the cities of Juda on every side!" ⁷ What was this "abomination of desolation?" It was a pagan "...altar ...erected on the altar of burnt-offering [of JEHOVAH in The Jerusalem Temple], on which sacrifices were offered to [the pagan deity] Jupiter Olympus!" ⁸

VII. SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE TEXT

Let us set the stage for our Scripture Text. MATTHEW 24:1 records that "...JESUS went out, and departed from The Temple: and His Disciples came to Him for to shew Him the buildings of The Temple." ⁹ The Disciples, being all faithful Jewish men, placed like their fellow Israelites great stock and pride in The Jerusalem Temple. The Temple was, in fact, the very center and core of the nation, the focus of all public religious life, seen as the very dwelling Place of The LORD on earth. Its very being assured The Chosen People that, come what may, The Almighty was their with them. It was the physical assurance before all the world that they were GOD's people, even that The LORD was theirs and theirs alone! But JESUS replies in MATTHEW 24:2, rebuking their misplaced adoration of a mere building and faith in its ceremonial pomp, rather than in The Creator of the universe and in His providential hand, "...See ye not all these things? verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down!" ¹⁰

⁶ 3, KJA, I MACCABEES 1:43-49.

⁷ 3, KJA, I MACCABEES 1:54.

⁸ 4, Easton Bible Dictionary, MATTHEW 24:15, entry for "Abomination," DANIEL 11:31.

⁹ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 24:1.

¹⁰ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 24:2.

Recall that Saint Matthew records in his Gospel in the immediately preceding chapters how that The Lord had just come from The Temple, having confronted and publicly castigated the externally righteous but inwardly corrupted religious leaders of the nation, whose authority over GOD's people was itself wrapped intimately with The Temple itself. So The Disciples were no doubt distraught, for they came to CHRIST privately, as MATTHEW 24:3 records, imploring him for further revelation of his earth shattering statement about The Temple, "...Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy Coming, and of the end of the world?"¹¹

Certainly, the Disciples were still hoping that JESUS would miraculously restore The Kingdom of Israel politically now – before their very eyes – hungering for His Messianic rule to come forth through the nation over all the earth. Their hearts were fixed on a picture of glory and greatness in this world under CHRIST, and they would be His ruling agents of power and pomp. But The Saviour shakes them, as He does us, out of any such false dreams of the world, the flesh and the devil. The Temple would fall, which meant the Jewish nation would be brought to abject destruction and suffering, and therefore The Kingdom was not to come as they had required GOD to deliver it to them! Therefore CHRIST warns in MATTHEW 24:4-5, "...Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My Name, saying, I am CHRIST; and shall deceive many!"¹²

Now begins the terrible litany of the signs of these terrible days of sorrow and destruction to come for the people of GOD. JESUS begins to list them for us in MATTHEW 24:6-8, "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars... nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows." Though these curses have always afflicted man, CHRIST warns that as these days of sorrow approach, their intensity shall become overwhelming upon GOD's saints! And coupled with such calamities, the righteous saints of The LORD shall suffer terrible persecution, for He says further in MATTHEW 24:9-10, "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for My Name's sake.

¹¹ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 24:3.

¹² 1, KJV, MATTHEW 24:4-5.

And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another,” for the very existence of the upright GOD-fearing man shall be as a searing iron thrust into the souls of the ungodly! ¹³

In these coming days of sorrow, false messiahs will beguile men, even the saints of GOD, even the very rulers of the people of The LORD! In that wicked generation to come, the hearts and souls of men shall be unloving and corrupted beyond belief. So The Saviour explains further in MATTHEW 24:11-14, “And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. [And then He adds,] And This Gospel of The Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” ¹⁴

VIII. DEFILEMENT OF A TEMPLE PAST UNDER THE HAND OF THE ROMANS

MATTHEW 24:15, “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in The Holy Place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)” ¹⁵

In DANIEL 11:31, we read of a coming heathen invader and defiler of Israel, future in time to Daniel and the Jewish people enslaved in the Babylonian captivity when foreseen by Daniel. When our Lord spoke These Words of MATTHEW 24, referencing and expanding upon The Words prophesied by the prophet Daniel, these same events were also then as yet also in the future tense from the time of CHRIST’s Incarnation. And yet both Daniel and JESUS Himself refer to the “abomination of desolation” known to the Jewish people in their terrible affliction and exile under the hand of the Babylonians. Daniel prophesied, “And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there [in The Holy of Holies of the Jerusalem Temple] the abomination of desolation.” ¹⁶

¹³ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 24:9-10.

¹⁴ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 24:11-14.

¹⁵ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 24:15.

¹⁶ 1, KJV, DANIEL 11:31.

By the time of CHRIST's First Coming, the Jewish people had already endured defilement of The Jerusalem Temple, first at the hands of the Babylonians, and then again at the hands of the Greeks as well. They well understood the frightful meaning of "the abomination of desolation" within The Holy of Holies of The Temple in Jerusalem! The suffering of The Holy City and defilement of The Temple brought by Antiochus was a foretaste of woes yet to come for the Jewish people! And indeed, "the destruction of Jerusalem took place thirty seven years after our Lord spoke These Words [in] (70 AD), and the circumstances of it were exactly those foretold by Him" as in MATTHEW 24! ¹⁷

For it is here in MATTHEW 24 our Lord reveals that The Temple would again be defiled, exactly the opposite message that CHRIST's Disciples sought from The Master that day in our Text! Indeed, history documents the defilement and destruction of The Jerusalem Temple at the hands of the Roman army within a mere several decades after the Passion, death, resurrection and ascension of CHRIST. ¹⁸ These Words spoken by JESUS were indeed literally fulfilled in all their shocking horror when the Romans destroyed The Temple in 70 AD as they crushed with vicious ruthlessness a revolt of The Jews against their military occupation of Israel. ¹⁹ Extrabiblical sources document the exact fulfillment of CHRIST's Words, such as by the Jewish priest and eyewitness Josephus, who records in his work "The Jewish Wars" the siege, suffering and destruction of Jerusalem and The Temple. ²⁰

In 65 AD, "the Jews in Jerusalem rose up in open rebellion against the Roman government, and put to the sword the Roman garrison." The bloody pagan Emperor Nero sent his able general Vespasian. Having conquered by brute force the entire Jewish homeland except Jerusalem, Vespasian was called to be Emperor at Nero's death, his son Titus then completing the conquest and destruction of The Holy City herself with terrible slaughter. The Christian Apocryphal book, "The Acts of The Apostles," records events

¹⁷ 5, Practical Commentary Holy Scripture, MATTHEW 24:1-31, p 617-618. "COMMENTARY. The Destruction of Jerusalem," paragraph 1

¹⁸ 6, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, MATTHEW 24:15-28, p 972.

¹⁹ 7, Scofield Notes, MATTHEW 24:16.

²⁰ 5, Practical Commentary Holy Scripture, MATTHEW 24:1-31, p 617-618. "COMMENTARY. The Destruction of Jerusalem," paragraph 1.

that preceded the terrible destruction of Jerusalem: there was the appearance on the scene of two false prophets, “Theudas” and “The Egyptian.” Under Nero in 64 AD there was a great and bloody persecution of faithful Christians, which brought the martyrdom also of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Princes and high officials throughout the then known world, the Roman Empire, were slaughtered. The entire “world” became engulfed in endless civil war, plagues, pestilences and earthquakes. ²¹

As the siege of Jerusalem arrived, the city was flooded with pilgrims and refugees, with over a million people trapped within her walls. The surrounding Roman army butchered all that tried to escape, erecting forests of crucified Jews about the city. Civil war erupted between various Jewish factions within The City, destroying stored food supplies, which facilitated terrible famine and starvation among the trapped Jewish defenders and population at large. ²² Before destroying all but a remnant of the Jerusalem Temple, the Romans then brought their own brand of defilement in the form of “...the image-crowned standards which... [they] set up at the east gate of The Temple ... to which they paid idolatrous honours. Almost the entire religion of the Roman [army] camp [then] consisted in worshipping the ensign, swearing by the ensign, and in preferring the ensign before all other gods. These ensigns were an ‘abomination’ to the Jews, ...[yet another] ‘abomination of desolation.’” ²³

And in the end, “over a million people perished during the siege [of Jerusalem], and 97,000 were carried away into captivity and slavery. The ruins of the city and of The Temple were cleared away and the ground leveled. As our Lord foretold [in MATTHEW 24], there did not remain one stone upon another. And the Jews were scattered over the face of the earth.” ²⁴ Recall that the prophet Ezekiel, captive as a prisoner by the river Chebar in Babylon in a previous dark time for the Jewish people, had foreseen the

²¹ 5, Practical Commentary Holy Scripture, MATTHEW 24:1-31, p 618. “COMMENTARY. The Destruction of Jerusalem,” paragraph 2.

²² 5, Practical Commentary Holy Scripture, MATTHEW 24:1-31, p 618-619. “COMMENTARY. The Destruction of Jerusalem,” paragraph 4.

²³ 4, Easton Bible Dictionary, MATTHEW 24:15, entry for “Abomination,” DANIEL 11:31.

²⁴ 5, Practical Commentary Holy Scripture, MATTHEW 24:1-31, p 619. “COMMENTARY. The Destruction of Jerusalem,” paragraph 7.

departure of The Glory of The LORD from The Holy of Holies of The Temple in Jerusalem in his day as Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem. So he had recorded in EZEKIEL 10:18-19, “Then The Glory of The LORD departed from off the threshold of The House, and stood over the cherubims. And the cherubims lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight...”²⁵ After the return from Babylon and the rebuilding of The Temple by the Jewish remnant, The Shekinah Glory – That Divine Pillar of Cloud by day and Pillar of Fire by night of The Presence of The Almighty – had never returned to The Temple. Yet, GOD Incarnate had returned and Himself had come to His people Israel in The Person of JESUS CHRIST, fully GOD and fully man but without sin. But as Saint John reports in JOHN 1:11, “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.”²⁶ Therefore The Glory of GOD was taken from Israel His Old Testament Bride and given to The Church His New Testament Bride.

IX. DEFILEMENT OF A TEMPLE FUTURE UNDER THE HAND OF ANTICHRIST

MATTHEW 24:15, “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in The Holy Place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)”²⁷

And yet, having seen MATTHEW 24:15 literally fulfilled in 70 AD exactly as CHRIST revealed, we must look at this same Verse again with eyes set upon the prophetic future - towards events associated with The Second Coming of our Lord. Many Christian scholars hold that our blessed Saviour here in MATTHEW 24 also reveals to us, in the form of a double prophesy, a yet more distant future and final “abomination of desolation” which is distinct and separate from the defilement of The Jerusalem Temple in 70 AD at the hands of the Romans. If indeed MATTHEW 24:15 is then a double prophesy, fitting into the final times of what Christian Bible scholars generally call “The Great Tribulation” foreseen by the prophet Daniel, then such a final future “abomination of desolation” will be set up in a future and as yet not rebuilt Jerusalem Temple - a sign that many hold will signal The Messiah’s imminent Second Coming.²⁸

²⁵ 1, KJV, EZEKIEL 10:18-19.

²⁶ 1, KJV, JOHN 1:11.

²⁷ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 24:15.

²⁸ 6, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, MATTHEW 24:15-28, p 972.

This final defilement of The LORD's Temple in Jerusalem, occurring during a passing future reign of the devil's antichrist over all the earth, will then be a time of the greatest suffering and persecution of the saints of GOD such as mankind has never yet seen. The Second Coming of CHRIST then comes at the very end of the "seventy weeks" of DANIEL 9:24: "Seventy weeks are determined upon Thy people and upon Thy Holy City, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint The Most Holy."²⁹

From This text in DANIEL 9:27, this final and most horrific "abomination of desolation" at the end of This Age is said to occur "...in the middle of the seventieth week..." foreseen by Daniel. Saint John in The Book of REVELATION foresees This Final Time of This present Age as "42 months"³⁰ and again as "1,260 days."³¹ Both the prophet Daniel and Saint John describe This Final Time – This Great Tribulation - as "time, times, and half a time."³² JESUS Himself places these Last Things of the prophetic history of this world squarely "in the middle of the seventieth week" of Daniel's End Times prophesy.³³ So The Lord's prophesy here focuses on "the tribulation of Israel," which corresponds with REVELATION chapters 6-19, "which will

²⁹ 1, KJV, DANIEL 9:24.

³⁰ 1, KJV, REVELATION 11:2, "But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and The Holy City shall they tread under foot forty and two months." REVELATION 13:5, "And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months."

³¹ 1, KJV, REVELATION 12:6, "And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of GOD, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days."

³² 1, KJV, DANIEL 7:25, "And he shall speak great words against The Most High, and shall wear out the saints of The Most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time." DANIEL 12:7, "And I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by Him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished." REVELATION 12:14, "And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent."

³³ 6, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, MATTHEW 24:15-28, p 972.

culminate in CHRIST's return" and at last the coming of GOD's will on earth fully as it is in Heaven. ³⁴

DANIEL 11:36 tells us of the ultimate nature of this final "abomination of desolation" by the ultimate false messiah, who will "...exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against The GOD of gods..."
³⁵ The fulfillment of all such events, still future to we the saints of GOD living now in The Church Age, obviously requires that a Holy of Holies in a Jerusalem Temple exist once again, upon which Israelite sacrifices to JEHOVAH are again taking place. Since the Temple was destroyed by the Roman army in 70 AD, many have therefore looked as a sign of the coming of the antichrist – and thus The Second Coming of JESUS CHRIST shortly thereafter – the rebuilding of the Hebrew Temple in Jerusalem and resumption of the Old Testament system of animal sacrifice. ³⁶

X. THE COMING OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION

MATTHEW 24:21-22, "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." ³⁷

We are told that the days preceding CHRIST's Second Coming will be times of great suffering and woe, such as has never been! And but for the mercy of GOD, all men would perish, even the saved in The Blood and Body of The Lord! But has not the world of men, since our First Parents' expulsion from The Garden, been filled with suffering and woe? Indeed it has. And it is undeniable that our own times have seen, by the perversions of man's creative mind and the twisting of his ingenious works, a terrible rise in the tides of human suffering and woe. But until The Kingdom of GOD comes in full to the world of men, shall the tears of men not continue to be shed? Indeed they shall. And while The Church on earth awaits for her Bridegroom JESUS CHRIST to Come

³⁴ 6, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, MATTHEW 24:1-25:46, p 972. 7) "Olivet Discourse."

³⁵ 1, KJV, DANIEL 11:36.

³⁶ 6, Wycliffe Bible Commentary, MATTHEW 24:15-28, p 972.

³⁷ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 24:21-22.

Again, is it not we who are called in CHRIST as His instruments to minister to men in the midst of their suffering and woe in this world here and now? Indeed we are!

XI. HEED NOT THE FALSE MESSIAHS TO COME

MATTHEW 24:23-26, “Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is CHRIST, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, He is in the desert; go not forth: behold, He is in the secret chambers; believe it not.”³⁸

As men wax worse and worse in their brazen sin, apostasy and idolatry, The Lord warns us to beware of running after reports and rumors of false christs. This even though they may show forth great signs and wonders, deceiving even the most enlightened minds both within and outside The Church. The Savior warns us His saints to be on their guard, for the idolatrous heart of man is forever seeking to lift itself up to run after false gods, ever ready to fall down at the feet of false shepherds! And be assured, the devil is forever happy to supply all such false gods and false shepherds, evil men who would exalt themselves to be worshiped in men’s souls in the place of The LORD! Indeed, the stage of human history is full of such wicked ones.

And what is the purpose of false messiahs and false prophets? Why does the devil anoint them with signs and wonders? Consider this: Does not the devil seek to divert us from how we are to live in The Only True Messiah by luring us to false messiahs, that we might be tempted to forget to walk daily in CHRIST? Does not the devil take solace, in that if he can not prevent a man from confessing JESUS CHRIST as Lord in this life, he might at least neutralize him in his Christian walk by having him forever running after signs of his Lord’s Second Coming? Note with care, O Christian man, that “...the devil and his instruments may prevail far in deceiving poor souls; few find the strait gate, but many are drawn into the broad way; many will be imposed upon by their signs and wonders, and many drawn in by the hopes of deliverance from their oppressions. ...[But] Neither miracles nor multitudes are certain signs of a true Church”

³⁸ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 24:23-26.

or of The True CHRIST! ³⁹ For as Saint John warns in REVELATION 13:3, "...all the world wondered after the beast" and his master the antichrist! ⁴⁰

O foolish Christian man who, instead of employing the gifts which his Lord has bestowed upon him as a faithful servant, wastes them away in gazing upon the signs of his times, of which every generation has plenty! Saint Paul tells us that, upon CHRIST's Return, there shall be no need to seek after signs and wonders! So we read in I THESSALONIANS 4:16-17, "For The Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of GOD: and the dead in CHRIST shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet The Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with The Lord!" ⁴¹ Why then should we look for signs? Could such a thing be missed?

Why should the good Christian man run after signs and wonders, when he has so much placed before him to work now in this life by The Savior? Why should the faithful man of GOD be consumed with discerning the signs of The Return of The Lord, when no mere man can possibly know the day and time of His Coming Again? For when CHRIST returns at His Second Coming, there will be no doubt! And until He comes, as it is commonly said, our eyes should not be so fixed continually upon the heavens that we the saints of GOD are of no earthly good! What does it matter if we shall face The Savior to account for our lives on our Day of Judgment either in Heaven before His Throne Above, or caught up in the air, or on earth before His coming Throne in this world? Rather, ought we not to be about our Lord's work every day that He grants us the breath of life, being a light to the unsaved, an encouragement to the saved and a glory to The One Who redeemed us by His very Body and Blood on The blessed Cross?

Does the Christian man fear that The Lord is not with him, that he needs to run after rumors of The Savior's Return? GOD forbid! What does Saint Paul tell us? That CHRIST JESUS is present with us even now in The Great Sacrament of Thanksgiving,

³⁹ 8, Matthew Henry, MATTHEW 24:4-31, Now concerning these deceivers, (3.), [1.].

⁴⁰ 1, KJV, REVELATION 13:3.

⁴¹ 1, KJV, I THESSALONIANS 4:16-17.

The Eucharist! Do we not read in I CORINTHIANS 11:23-26, "...That the Lord JESUS... took bread: And when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is My Body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, ...saying, This cup is the New Testament in My Blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew The Lord's death till He come?"⁴²

And does not the risen CHRIST assure us with His certain Words at the end of The Great Commission in MATTHEW 28:20, "lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen?"⁴³ And does not Saint Paul tell us that The HOLY SPIRIT is not now only with us, but in us, who are saved in CHRIST? For we read in I CORINTHIANS 6:19, "What? Know ye not that your body is The Temple of The Holy Ghost Which is in you, which ye have of GOD, and ye are not your own?"⁴⁴ And do we not have His Holy Word, which stands forever? PSALM 33:4, "For The Word of The LORD is right; and all His works are done in truth."⁴⁵ And again, I PETER 1:25, "...The Word of The Lord endureth for ever...!"⁴⁶

And do we not have The faithful Church, His very Body, of which we are a part? Are we not surrounded by our brothers and sisters in The Lord? EPHESIANS 5:21-30, "Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of GOD... [For] CHRIST is the head of The Church: and He is The Saviour of The Body... For we are members of His Body..." which is The Church!⁴⁷ Why then should we fear and doubt? Or do we doubt and fear because we lack faith? Or do we gaze upon the signs of the times, and turn from the realities of The Faith here and now always before us, because our faith is only an intellectual ascent, and lacking good works in daily practice, is a dead faith?

⁴² 1, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 11:23-26.

⁴³ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 28:20.

⁴⁴ 1, KJV, I CORINTHIANS 6:19.

⁴⁵ 1, KJV, PSALM 33:4.

⁴⁶ 1, KJV, I PETER 1:25.

⁴⁷ 1, KJV, EPHESIANS 5:21-30.

XII. CHRIST'S RETURN WILL BE SUDDEN, SURE AND WITHOUT QUESTION

MATTHEW 24:27, "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also The Coming of The Son of Man be."⁴⁸

So we are warned: the return of The Lord JESUS CHRIST will not be a gradual process, but will be as a sudden splitting of the sky as with lightning and the terrible rattle of thunder in a twinkling of the eye! He will not be found wandering about in a desert, that we would need to run after rumors to discern Who He is. Nor will He be found occupying the pulpits of a worldwide religious movement, nor a sleepy country Church parish, that we would need to dig for His Identify by matching His pontifications with Holy Scripture prophesies. When The Lord's Second Coming arrives, there will be no doubt or question of the matter. For does not Saint Peter tell us in II PETER 3:10, "...The Day of The Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat, both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up?"

XIII. THE REAL ISSUE - HOW THEN SHALL WE AS CHRISTIANS LIVE?

But here I intend to play a cruel trick on you, ladies and gentlemen, for I have so far today played you falsely! If you have not detected the constant shift in my message today so far, I will not confess it plainly to you! All that I have said to this point serves only as background for the true intent of my message, but is not the message itself! My purpose here is not to expound further on the Biblical prophesy of The Last Things of this so-called "Church Age" which shall take place before, during and after The Second Coming of our Lord JESUS CHRIST! My purpose is something else more practical to our everyday lives as Christians, which is this: Knowing that we and all men shall indeed stand before The Lord on our Day of Judgment – whether it should be because we die from this world and stand before His Judgment Seat Above, or are caught up in the air to meet Him, or if it should be that we live to see the Coming Again of our blessed Saviour with these our mortal eyes – how should we then live?

⁴⁸ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 24:27.

Now you may ask, “Sir, why do you not attempt here to delve deeper into the prophetic mysteries of The Last Days of This Age in MATTHEW, DANIEL, REVELATION and elsewhere in Scripture, that you may enlighten us further?” Do I thus know if The Church on earth will be “raptured” before, during or after The Great Tribulation? I know not, nor am I concerned to know! Does my meager understanding of These Last Things make me a pre-tribulationist, a mid-tribulationist, or a post-tribulationist? They make me none of these, but only a more faithful Christian! Have I calculated for you the exact chain of prophetic events that must come to pass, in order that our Lord’s Second Coming may proceed? I have not! Nor do I think our Lord JESUS CHRIST - The Word of GOD Incarnate by Whom and through Whom all things were made - requires any such efforts on my part to secure His plans for His Second Coming to the world of mere men!

My answer is this: The issue is not that we be able to precisely discern the signs of our Age, that we might calculate the exact moment of CHRIST’s Second Coming. Rather, the issue is that when we stand before our Lord on our Day of Judgment, that He finds us to have been faithful servants about His work which He has appointed to us in this life! Most of us, probably all of us, will suffer physical death and stand before The Lamb of GOD in Heaven. Maybe some of us might even come before The Lamb of GOD in this earthly life as we are caught up in the air to meet Him at His Second Coming. Perhaps a few of us may live to stand before The Lamb of GOD in our own earthly flesh in this life. But no matter in what way, we shall all stand before Him on our Day of Judgment!

For every day that we have the breath of life in our bodies is a gift from The LORD – a gift which we are called to employ as faithful servants of The Cross. Only The Almighty knows the exact day and moment of The Return of CHRIST as The reigning King on earth as in Heaven. It is not for us to know. Nor is it profitable for us to be consumed by speculation on when That Day shall be. Nor does the fulfillment of the final prophet purposes of GOD for Heaven and earth depend upon our being able to discern the how and when The Arm of The LORD will bring all these things to pass!

Our task on this earth, as faithful soldiers of The Cross, is to serve and love The Lord by serving and loving our fellow man. Do we not hear the voice of The Almighty calling to us as in ISAIAH 6:8, "...saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us" to the suffering and the lost? Let us answer with the prophet Isaiah, O LORD, "...Here am I; send me!"⁴⁹ What does Saint James declare? He says in JAMES 2:20, "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"⁵⁰ Let us not dare on our Day of Judgement go to stand before CHRIST our Saviour, expecting that we will be declared a good and faithful servant, if during our passing earthly life our Christian faith was mere intellectual ascent but devoid of the good works which The Maker had every day set before us to do! GOD forbid! O let us then heed the battle cry calling us to the fray each day, and seize every opportunity to minister to others as CHRIST does daily minister to us! Such is the prescription prescribed for us by The Reverend John Wesley in his "Rule for Christian Living:"

"Do All the Good You Can,
By All the Means You Can,
In All the Ways You Can,
In All the Places You Can,
At All the Times You Can,
To All the People You Can,
As long as Ever... You Can!"⁵¹

XIV. LET US THEREFORE LIVE DAILY FOR CHRIST AND NOT FOR SIGNS

Does this mean that we are to be oblivious to the events and conditions around us in this fallen world of men? GOD forbid! We are daily to be about our Master's business! As Saint Paul counsels us in ROMANS 13:11-12, we are to keep daily The Commandments of The Creator in love for Him and our fellow man, "...knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light!"⁵² This, so that when we

⁴⁹ 1, KJV, ISAIAH 6:8.

⁵⁰ 1, KJV, JAMES 2:20.

⁵¹ 9, Christianity Today Library, The Reverend John Wesley, "Rule for Christian Living."
<http://ctlibrary.com/3278>.

⁵² 1, KJV, ROMANS 13:11-12.

stand before our Lord JESUS CHRIST – no matter how we come to stand before Him - we shall be found to have been faithful servants of The Cross! The time is short, and CHRIST calls us to awake, that we may be His willing instruments of Truth and Love in this life. Let us then cry out to The Eternal Throne of Grace with Saint Francis of Assisi:

O “Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace,
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy;

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.”⁵³

Let us then not be so focused on combing through the signs of our times, that we might predict the day and hour of The Return of our Lord. For GOD is in charge. He is still sovereign, as He always has been, and always will be! The fulfillment of the prophetic designs of The Creator of The Universe for Heaven and earth do not hang upon our deciphering when and how exactly Messiah should come again to earth! Nor does The Almighty require our counsel in order to bring these events about! Instead, let us take hold with a lively and living faith of These Words in PSALM 96:9-10, “O worship The LORD in the beauty of holiness: fear before Him, all the earth. Say among the heathen that The LORD reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: He shall judge the people righteously!”⁵⁴

⁵³ 10, The Prayer Guide, “Prayer of Saint Francis [of Assisi].”

<http://www.prayerguide.org.uk/stfrancis.htm>.

⁵⁴ 1, KJV, PSALM 96:9-10.

XV. IN CONCLUSION

Yes, let us be mindful of the trials and challenges of our age, that we may better minister to the lost and encourage the saints. And let us live in CHRIST daily as He has called us to live, in a living and lively faith that brings forth the good works He has called us to! Thus did Saint Paul write in TUTUS 2:11-14, “For The Grace of GOD that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great GOD and our Savior JESUS CHRIST; Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”⁵⁵ So we end as we began: Let the faithful Christian man ever keep himself ready to stand before our Lord JESUS CHRIST by living daily as a faithful Christian servant! In The Name of GOD The Father, and The Son and The Holy Ghost. AMEN.

⁵⁵ 1, KJV, TUTUS 2:11-14.

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