

THE PRESENT AGE
Matthew 24:4-14

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. The world is such a mess today that concerned people are crying out. “What on earth is this world coming to?” They want answers to complex problems in a world that is raising only questions to the ultimate end of all things.
- B. Christians have some solid answers in a general way to the direction in which the world is headed. The Christian’s hope is in the prophetic scriptures, for they know that God’s Word is inspired, and they can have confidence in it. The Bible speaks about many things concerning the end times, and Matthew 24 and 25 tells us many truths about God’s plan for Israel and indirectly gives us some hints about the present age in which we live. **NOTE:** When Christ speaks to His disciples these wonderful truths of the Olivet Discourse he is speaking to them as a representative group. At the time He spoke to them they were Jewish believers and they had practically no understanding of Church truth. As such they represented the nation of Israel and the great majority of the Olivet Discourse concerns God’s future for the Jew. However, after the Cross and Pentecost, these same disciples became part of the Church. The Church is a unique body of believers raised up by God to fulfill the task of spreading the gospel message and the kingdom message in the intervening period before the end times and the second advent. Therefore, this discourse includes truth for the Church in relation to this present age, and also truth for Israel in relation to the end time and the second advent of Christ when Israel will have her kingdom.
- C. In verse 3 the disciples asked our Lord two prophetic questions which have never been fulfilled in history. The first question is “What shall be the sign of thy coming,” and He answers this question in verses 27-51. The other question is, “What shall be the sign of the end of the world: (consummation of the age). The Lord answers this question in verses 15-26 when the “abomination of desolation” shall be set up in the Jewish temple. From other scriptures, we conclude that this will be set up in a future rebuilt temple in Israel in the middle of the Tribulation period.

II. DETERMINING THE FACTS ABOUT THE PRESENT AGE (24:4)

“And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you.” -- Our Lord does not answer their two basic questions immediately but he begins to speak about the present age. The present age extends from the first advent of Christ to His second advent, and how long this age will be only God knows but we do know that it has

extended over 1971 years already.

- A. The first key to this section is found in verses 6,8, 14. Christ describes some general characteristics of this present age and says, “the end is not yet” and “these are the beginning of sorrows” and “and then shall the end come.”
- B. Christ is very concerned that His disciples be not deceived (24:4). He implies that the end is a long way off from the time of the Olivet Discourse, and during this intervening period His disciples may be deceived. This will be a time of great uncertainty as to the meaning of events. It will be very easy to be tricked and mislead. The note of uncertainty is repeated twice. In verse 5 He says, “And shall deceive many,” and in verse 11 Christ again repeats, “And shall deceive many.”
- C. **POINT:** We who are true believers in the Church of Jesus Christ must be alert not to be led astray. We must test and try all teaching by the Bible. We must be alert to false teaching, for the dominant note of this present age is one of deceit and confusion.

III. DECEIPHERING THE COURSE OF THE PRESENT AGE (24:5-14)

- A. Introduction: It should be noted that some prophetic scholars feel that verses 4-14 belong totally to the Tribulation period which is yet future in God’s program for the world. However, based on the context of this chapter, it seems much more logical to apply this to the present age. The circumstances mentioned in verses 5-14 are characteristics of entire present age and are therefore not signs of the end of the age. These events precede the sign of the end of the age, but are not signs in themselves of the end time. **NOTE:** However, it seems only logical that these characteristics of the present age will be intensified as we draw near to the end of the age. **NOTE:** The events of the present age are warned against because they can be tremendous perils to a Christian’s faith in Jesus Christ. These happenings are threats to faith that may mislead people into confusion and error.
- B. The Threat Of Counterfeit (24:5): “For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.” -- During the present age there will be many false Christs. These are not open atheists, pagans and agnostics but those who are counterfeits within the body of believers in Jesus Christ. They oppose real Christianity in the name of Christ. **NOTE:** Throughout the history of the Church there have been many false cults who claimed to have the truth within their groups. But within the last one hundred years, there has been a tremendous upsurge of cultists. Groups such as Mormonism, Christian Science, and Jehovah Witnesses are having a “hey-day.” They are outwardly Christian in language and have great zeal but their message is antichristian, rejecting the true Christ of scripture (I John 5:18). These cults are a great threat to genuine faith in Christ, and those who follow them are on the road to destruction.

- C. The Threat Of War (24:6, 7a): “And ye shall hear of wars and rumor of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.” -- Christ is saying that the present age will be filled with wars and rumors of war. He is not talking about any specific war or revolution, but the present age will be a time when there will never be peace on earth and men will be plagued with the fear of the misery of war. **NOTE:** It is pure folly when men seize upon every great war or rumor of war to claim these are signs of the Lord’s return. However, as we go down towards the end time we can expect more devastating wars and rumors about war, but no war is a sign of Christ’s coming.
- D. The Threat Of Natural Calamity (24:7b): “And there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.” -- Since the beginning of this present age natural calamities have been happening all over this world. **NOTE:** However, as we move on towards the end time people have become more aware of natural disaster. An earthquake in California, Peru or Pakistan that kills many thousands is made known in the world today in a matter of minutes. **NOTE:** Certainly natural calamity is a threat to faith, for it is difficult to speak of loving God while men are suffering from starvation, homelessness, disease and death because of some earthquake, flood or famine. Of course, the Biblical answer is that God is a sovereign God and permits things to happen which somehow works for His own glory and the good of His elect. God has control of all things, but He does not always tell His creatures why He does certain things. Genuine faith believes that God has a purpose in all things.
- E. The Threat of Persecution (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. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.” -- Religious persecution has been part and parcel for true Christians for 2000 years. It all began with Stephen and James, and in the first and second century Christians were burned as torches thrown to the lions, mangled by wild beasts and killed by gladiators. In the 16th and 17th centuries where the Reformation was at its peak multiple thousands of Christians were burned at the stake, buried alive, drowned by force, tortured and thrown in prison for their stand for Jesus Christ. **NOTE:** Did you know there are martyrs for the Christian faith even today? Statistics tell us that at least five Christians died last week in Mexico alone for their Christian convictions. Do you realize that more Christians have been martyred for Christ in the 20th century than in any other century in church history, including the first three centuries of the Church? Multitudes of Christians were slaughtered in Europe in World War II. In North and South Korea, Christians have given their lives by the thousands. It is known that at least 3 million Christians have suffered martyrdom in China since the Communist takeover. Some authorities claim that over 12 million Christians have been annihilated in Russia and other Soviet controlled countries in Eastern Europe. Since Christianity began, no generation has seen such worldwide

persecution as is now in progress. **NOTE:** Persecution is always a threat to faith, for when it comes millions are proven to be only churchmen and not Christians. However, martyrdom also has a way of making the Church strong.

- F. Threat Of False Prophets (24:11): “And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.” -- A false prophet does not necessarily have to be a religious man. It could be anyone who speaks with great authority -- philosophers, professors, scientists and statesmen. The true prophet upholds the authority of God and speaks in the name of God. The false prophet upholds the authority of man and speaks only - on a human level. These false prophets are humanists with their self-centered, man-centered philosophies of human works which make man more important than God. **NOTE:** Humanism is a great threat to faith, for it presents lofty ideals about man which are attractive, but ultimately all humanistic philosophy brings man to the point of despair.
- G. Threat Of Lawlessness (24:12, 13): “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax (grow) cold. But he that shall endure to the end shall be saved.” -- The present age is characterized by lawlessness and this lawless spirit will increase as we go on towards the end time. **NOTE:** The new morality or situation ethics has led to an overthrow of all absolutes in morality and now all ethics are relative as to what an individual thinks is right and wrong. God is left completely out of the picture. Lawlessness is always a product of relativism in morality. Lawlessness produces cynics who are hard, indifferent and calloused and life has no real meaning apart from God. **NOTE:** Lawlessness is a threat to real faith, for it makes man think that he is the supreme authority for life and God. The result of relativism is always despair and the death of hope. **NOTE:** The words, “But he that shall endure to the end shall be saved”, are very often misunderstood. He is not talking about enduring to the end of the age, for most believers will have died before the end of the age comes. Jesus is talking about enduring or persevering to the end of one’s life. During this present age, the truly saved people will see through all the threats to one’s faith and stand true for Jesus Christ. **POINT:** This verse does not mean if one hangs on to the end of life and has been moral and good that he will be saved. No! Christ is talking about the perseverance of the saints. In fact it is just the other way around. If he is truly saved, then he will endure to the end and the fact that he so endures makes it obvious to all that he is saved. No! Christ is talking about the perseverance of the saints. In fact it is just the other way around. If he is truly saved, then he will endure to the end and the fact that he so endures makes it obvious to all that he is saved.
- H. The Task Of True Believers (24:14): “And the gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” -- During the present age there is to be world-wide preaching of the gospel. This is the gospel of the kingdom. It includes the forgiveness of sins and eternal life and the right to enter into Christ’s kingdom on earth and this kingdom will extend into eternity when this gospel message is preached as a testimony to

all nations, then shall the end of the age begin. This is in no way a sign for the Rapture of the Church, for we know that the ultimate task of preaching the gospel will not be completed until the Tribulation saints and the 144,000 Jews evangelize the world (Rev. 7). **NOTE:** This verse tells us that the chief business of the Church is the preaching of the gospel to the world. No man can judge when God will count the task completed; but when God sees it completed, “then the end will come.” **NOTE:** It is significant to note that this present generation is the first generation in twenty long centuries of which it may be unreservedly said that the gospel is being preached through out the whole world to all nations. **NOTE:** This verse is a mandate to Christian missions to the whole world. It is obvious that the whole world will not receive Christ but the whole world is to have a testimony. When Christ gave the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19, 20), He promised His disciples (and that includes you and me, Beloved) that He would be with them “even unto the end of the world.” The word “world” should be translated “age”. We have the promise of Christ that He will be with us unto the end of the age. Let us believe Him and taken the good news of the gospel to all men in every nation that we may hasten the return of Christ for His Church.

IV. **CONCLUSION**

- A. For you here this morning without Christ as your Lord and Savior, I want to warn you that Christ is coming back to this earth to judge sinners and establish His kingdom.
- B. If Christ should appear to you today, either in his second advent or through death, I want to ask you one question: “Are you prepared to meet God?”