

## The Conditions in the World and in the Church in the Last Days

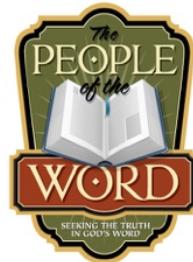
2 Peter 3:3-13; Matthew 24

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Hollywood just loves a good disaster movie, doesn't it? After all, who doesn't love good pick-me-up, feel-good movie about the end of the world?!

Hollywood has enormous imagination about ways the world could possibly come to a devastating and final end:

- a meteor about to hit the planet;
- an alien invasion of hostiles from outer space;
- an all-out nuclear war;
- a global climate freeze;
- the mother of all tsunamis;
- a cataclysmic earthquake...you name it.



Dallas Willard in his book, "The Divine Conspiracy" writes,

Our culture holds tenaciously to a future for the cosmos. Even those who say it "popped" into existence out of nothing do not think it will "pop" into nothing out of existence. And they dream of humanity's securing its future by moving on to other planets in other systems. Endlessly. "We" will go on."

He continues, "All of this touches upon a general human need, built into our nature as intelligent, active beings. What will become of our universe? What will become of the human race, and of each of us individually? We ask these questions as naturally as we breathe. Human life and consciousness requires, by its very nature, a projected future. And everyone is deeply concerned to know what that future is."

### What Does the Word of God Say?

2 Peter 3:10 (NIV) ...*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.*

...*and the earth and everything on it will be found to deserve judgment* (NLT)  
...*and the earth and everything in it will be exposed* (NCV)

I believe Peter's words echo Paul's...

*(Each person's) work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*

- 1 Cor. 3:13-15

*Jesus asked, "Who then is the faithful and wise servant...? Someone the Master can drop in on unannounced and always find him doing his job. A God-blessed man or woman, I tell you. It won't be long before the Master will put this person in charge of the whole operation – Matthew 24:45-46.*

I'll return to this thought at the close of our time together.

**Today, I want to ask and respond to three Questions:**

1. What does the Bible say about the end of the world?
2. When will this happen?
3. What is God waiting for?

**What Does The Bible Say About The End Of The World?**

Now there's 2 things about the end of the world that I want you to notice about the 2 Peter 3 passage. The first is that it will happen...**UNEXPECTEDLY**

Verse 10 says, "The day of the Lord will come like a **thief**."

Peter is echoing Jesus's teaching in Matthew 24

Matthew 24:42-43 (TNIV), "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into."

Now a thief never calls you ahead of time and says, "Hey get ready. I'm going to be over this Friday night about midnight. Please have your doors unlocked and your money and jewelry and your laptop and smartphone on the table."

No. A thief thrives on surprise; on the unexpected.

September 11, 2001 began like any other day. People got up, ate breakfast, drove cars and took public transportation to work; went into offices, boarded airplanes. But like an unexpected thief, when the first airplane in the world trade center, our world changed.

Nobody was looking for it. It came suddenly and unexpectedly. And for so many, it was tragic.

That's how the world as we know it will end. And it will not only end suddenly, but it will end...**DESTRUCTIVELY**.

Notice vv. 10 and 12 say, "The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare... (v. 12) That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat."

Now in Noah's day the world was completely destroyed by a flood, but this says the next time God's going to destroy it by fire.

The Greek word for "melt" is a word that means to untie, loosen, or dissolve. Paul wrote in Romans chapter 8 (vv. 19-24) that...

*The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time...*

Just as the flood destroyed all plant, animal, and human life so that Noah could begin all over again, so fire will melt down this earth and wipe it clean so that it can be purified and start new.

Verse 13 states, "*We are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth.*" We look forward to a new earth that is liberated from its bondage to decay. A new earth that is **born again** if you will.

John writes in Revelation 21:1-3, "*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.'*"

Paradise lost – in Genesis 3:23, paradise found in Revelation 21.

### **The 64,000 Question, When will this happen?**

According to my calculations, Jesus will return on Sunday, April 17, 2033 on the 2,000 anniversary of the resurrection. HA! Just kidding. Way above my paygrade to even speculate.

A few years ago when we did a series on the 2nd coming of Jesus, someone dropped this anonymous note in the offering box. Perhaps it might clear up this question for you: It read: "*The end won't come until the Cleveland Browns win a Superbowl.*" -- If that's true I think it's pretty safe to say the end won't happen in any of our lifetimes.

For a better answer, we need to turn to Matthew 24 and what is commonly known as The Olivet Discourse.

### **The Importance of the Olivet Discourse**

From Steve Gregg's Revelation Four Views,

"The Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 (and parallels) is often called the "little apocalypse" (apocalypse meaning disclosure, alt. - total devastation), because many believe that the discourse covers more succinctly the same information as does Revelation. In fact, since the discourse in

included in Mark 13 and Luke 21, but not in John, some have suggested that Revelation might be regarded as John's expanded version of the Olivet Discourse (e.g. wars, famines, the darkening of the sun and moon; the stars falling from heaven; angels and trumpets, great tribulation, the treading down of Jerusalem; the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, the gathering of the elect; the reward of the faithful; the judgment of the wicked.)"

### **Overview of the Discourse (Matthew 24; see 23:29-39)**

#### **Jesus' initial prophecy (24:1-2)**

At this point the disciples are on their way out of the temple complex heading toward the Mount of Olives on the other side of the valley.

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

At the time of the prophecy, the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple was unthinkable. William Hendriksen writes in his commentary, "In AD 70 Jesus' tragic prophecy was fulfilled when the Roman emperor Vespasian sent his son Titus to crush a Jewish rebellion and destroy Jerusalem. He besieged the city for five months, beginning in April when Jerusalem was filled with Passover pilgrims. The starving inhabitants were reduced to cannibalism to survive. Eventually, the Roman army breached the walls, slaughtered men, women, and children, razed the city, and demolished the temple. According to Josephus (a 1st century Jewish historian), over a million Jews perished in the war, and 97,000 were taken as slaves."

#### **The Disciples ask two questions (24:3)**

- "...when will this happen?..." (not where, what, how, but WHEN! The Disciples want to know when)
- "...what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?"

#### **Signs of the times (24:4-8)**

- Deception through false messiahs
- Wars and rumors of wars
- Nation against nation
- Famines
- Earthquakes

*Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.<sup>7</sup> Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains."*

In 24:11, "...many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

In 24:24, "...false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive."

In 1 John 2:18, John warns that "*the antichrist is coming, and even now many antichrists have come.*" He goes onto to say that "*the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ is the antichrist.*"

Luke records Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian elders by adding, "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard...!" (Acts 20:29-31).

**NOTE:** A characteristic of the antichrist is a false Christology i.e. 1) a denial of the need for substitutionary atonement - God in our place. Romans 5:17-18; Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15. 2) The denial that Jesus was fully God (Homousia with the Father – John 10:30,38; 8:53-59) and 3) fully man (consubstantial with us – Phil. 2:6-8).

**Additional Signs** (24:9-13; see Luke 21:12-19; Matthew 10:18-23)

1. Persecution. Hatred. Abandonment. Betrayal. False Prophets. Increase of wickedness.

<sup>9</sup> "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. <sup>10</sup> At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, <sup>11</sup> and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. <sup>12</sup> Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, <sup>13</sup> but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

In the midst those threats, Jesus exhorts his flowerers to STAND FIRM.

2. The Gospel to the **whole** world (24:14; cf. Acts 1:8; Rom 10:18; 16:26; Col. 1:6,23)

Question - Was this to mean that each and every individual is to be preached the Gospel? Not necessarily. We could interpret this as a general reference to encompass the Roman empire and her principal cities. There are some six billion people on the earth. Two billion claiming Christ. Another billion or so having heard. Two billion have yet to hear. If the Gospel has not reached every single individual, does this mean that Christ will not return?

Acts 1:8, *But **YOU** (those present) will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"

Col. 1:6, ...**All over the world** this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

Col. 1:23, ...*This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to **every creature** under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*

3. The necessity of being **ready** in view of the unknown day and hour of Christ's coming (24:36-44).

*"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. <sup>37</sup> As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; <sup>39</sup> and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup> Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.*

*<sup>42</sup> "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.*

### **While We Wait**

So what are we to do? As we've seen, Jesus summed it up in Matthew 24. He gave us five encouragements:

1. Do not be **deceived** (4,11) -- We have the Word of God to enlighten us and the Holy Spirit to teach us. Let's be great students.
2. Do not be **discouraged** (6) -- Political and natural disturbances have always been a part of world history. *Rom. 8:22-23, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption..."*
3. Do not be **defeated** (13) – Let's not allow the lawlessness around us rob you of our passion to pursue God, build community, and unleash compassion. The world needs the message of amazing grace. So let's stay busy!
4. Do not be **doubtful** (34,35) – *2 Pet. 3:9, The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness...* Between the promise and the performance is the parenthesis which requires patience and persistence.
5. Do not be **distracted** (42) -- We are to keep watch . . . the Lord may come at any time.

### **CONCLUSION**

Final question, **what is God waiting for?**

The answer to that one is very simple....He's waiting for us, for our loved ones, neighbors, co-workers and friends.

*2 Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."*

He says, "Okay, I'm going to spin the earth one more time, to give them one more day."

He's so patient...He doesn't want anyone to perish. For me personally, I'm glad He didn't return in 1980. At that time, I had not heard the Good News. I had not been given the opportunity to surrender my life to Jesus.

He spun the earth one more time, and He continues to do so for our families, neighbors, co-workers and friends.

In 1980, before Mt. St. Helens exploded the geologists we're watching what was happening and reading their seismographs and they knew something cataclysmic was about to happen. And so they sent out warnings to everyone to evacuate the area. Loudspeakers on patrol cars and helicopters blared warnings. Blinking signs at major cross-roads warned people to get ready. Television and radio stations pleaded. And up and down the mountain in lakeside villages, tourist camps, and hiking trails people listened to the warnings and fled for their lives.

Everybody evacuated **except one man**. His name oddly enough was Harry Truman. He scoffed and grinned on national television and said, "Nobody knows more about this mountain than Harry and it don't dare blow up on him!"

And on the morning of May 18, 1980 Harry got up, fixed himself some bacon and eggs; fed his 16 cats; and he began to plant petunias in his front yard. But at 8:31 a.m the mountain erupted with a force 500 times greater than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima. Rocks and lava disintegrated and bursts 10 miles into the air. In a milli-second everything was flattened for 150 square miles.

Harry Truman and his cabin were buried 50 feet under rock, and mud, and ash.

Today, God is trying to warn us through this scripture, through current events, that there's going to come a day when Jesus said heaven and earth will pass away.

I don't know if the end will come in our lifetime, but I do know this....somewhere out in the future there is an obituary column that contains the name Jeff Swaney.

And the question I have to wrestle with....am I ready?

#### **An "End Times" conversation between Matt and Phil:**

I was planting a tree in the backyard last Saturday when my phone rang. "Phil," Matt said in a rather unsteady voice, "what I am about to tell you is top secret...meant for your ears only...are you sitting down?" "I am now, Matt," I said, "Is this about an investment opportunity?" "NO. NO. NO. That was last month, Phil. Now listen up." Matt's voice was a barely discernible whisper. "Do you believe in the end of the world?"

"Hey," I said, "I live in Canada, I can see it from here." "I am deadly serious," Matt rebuked me. "One hour ago I finished reading the book of Second Peter. Since then things are falling into place. You see, I knew that the book talks about the end of the world. About Christ coming like a thief. About God setting the heavens on fire. About the elements melting with a fervent heat. But I didn't realize until today that if you take a Greek letter from every 666th word of Second Peter, you can spell 'Microsoft' backwards."

"You're kidding," I said. "No I am not. And it gets even better, Phil. You see, the book starts on page 1,960 of The Musicians' Amplified Devotional Bible. And you know what happened in the year 1960, don't you?"

"Um...Chubby Chequer and The twist start a new dance craze?" "No, Phil. Work with me here. The Soviet missile shoots down the US U2 spy plane!" "Where are you going with this?" "Well," said Matt, pausing only momentarily, "Second Peter is the 61st book in the Bible, and if you add 1960 and 61 together you get -" "2021!" I interrupted. "That's right. Clearly it's the beginning of the end. The end of the beginning. The Last Gasp. The Big Kahuna. It'll be chaos, Phil. Sheer chaos. I'm getting out while I can. Would you like to buy my house?" "How much?" I asked. "You fill my camper with canned goods," said Matt, "and you've got yourself a deal." "Wait a minute, Matt. I want to know what else it says in Second Peter." But Matt was gone. Our phone call was cut off. I decided to check out Second Peter for myself then. That's when I found the rest of the story. The verses Matt missed...

"Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him." (2 Peter 3:11-14).

I really hope, I thought to myself, that when Christ returns, He will find me playing catch with my kids. Or kissing my wife. Or having a cup of coffee sharing the good news with someone far from God. May He never find me frightened and shut away, but rather may He find me always, and in every moment, "being about the Lord's business" (Luke 2:49; John 5:19; 17:4).

AMEN!