

April 10, 2005 by Steve Brandon



Signs of the End

Matthew 24:3-14

1. Deceivers (verses 4-5, 11)
2. Wars (Verses 6-7a)
3. Disasters (Verse 7b)
4. Persecution (Verse 9)
5. Defection (Verses 10, 12-13)
6. Evangelism (Verse 14)

My wife is from California and has graciously adjusted to live here in Illinois. She came to Illinois from the "Golden State," which describes the wonderful weather that they often experience. As such, one of the difficulties that she has faced here in Illinois has been the long stretches in January, February, and March when the shortened days and the weeks of overcast weather bring us little sunshine. Add to that the seasons of cold rain, and she often remembers her days in California with longing. One of the new disorders that have come out in recent days has been called, S. A. D., which stands for Seasonal Affective Disorder. Most of us experience this to some degree or another, as the long winter months can stir a depression in us. My wife can relate to these things very well. Our text this morning is overcast with a slight drizzle. Our text is dark and dreary.

Let's begin reading in verse 3, "And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?'" Jesus and His disciples took this Sabbath's day journey (Acts 1:12) from the temple mount (where they were in verses 1-2) to arrive with His disciples at the Mount of Olives. The journey would have taken about 20-30 minutes as they descended the Kidron Valley and ascended up the other side.

In verse 3, we find Jesus sitting on the Mount of Olives. I suspect that it was a time of rest and retreat for them. Jesus had just cursed the religious leaders of the day in the hot sun of the temple. A wise move would be to retreat for a while, where they might find a shady spot of rest. I suspect that Jesus and His disciples at this point were in the Garden of Gethsemane. For John tells us in His gospel that Jesus "had often met [in the garden of Gethsemane] with His disciples" (John 18:2). It was a place of enjoyment and rest for him. I can envision Jesus resting upon the ground, under the shade of one of the large olive trees that were there. I can imagine some of His disciples doing the same thing, scattered under various other trees in the garden.

We read in verse 3 that "the disciples came to Him privately" to ask Him a question. In Mark (13:3) we read that only four disciples asked this question to Jesus: Peter, James, John and Andrew were present at this time. In this sense, the conversation between Jesus and these four was "private" as Matthew points out. Perhaps the others heard the answer that Jesus gave. Perhaps not. We don't know.

These disciples asked Jesus, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age" (verse 3). There has been much debate about this question. I have heard it debated whether or not these disciples were asking two questions or three questions. In Mark and Luke, the disciples only asked two questions. But here in Matthew, it appears as if three questions were asked:

1. When will these things be. (Of course, they are referring to the destruction of the temple with this question, which Jesus initially brought to their attention in verse 2).
2. What will be the sign of Your coming.
3. What will be the sign of the end of the age.

Some try to lump the second and third parts of this question together to see only two questions that were asked. People often feel that we need to understand the questions that were asked to understand the answer that was given. Furthermore, there is much discussion about how exactly the disciples understood the "end of the age" to be. On the one hand, it makes sense. However, on the other hand, after a bit of reflection, you find out that it doesn't much matter exactly what they asked and understood. But, I ask you, did Jesus always answer the question that was asked of Him? Not all of the time.

When the chief priests and elders questioned Jesus, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?" (Matt. 21:23), Jesus didn't answer the question. Rather, He asked them a question about the baptism of John. When the Herodians questioned Jesus, "Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" (Matt. 22:17), Jesus didn't answer the question. They presented Jesus with an either/or question. Jesus answered it using these words: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21).

I read recently of some of the last words of Jesus to His disciples, which helped me a bit to understand this. At one point, He said, "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; and now is coming when I speak no more to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father" (John 16:25). In other words, Jesus will tell His disciples what He wants to tell them. He will speak to them as plainly as He wants to. Sometimes, He chose to speak using figurative language.

So, it isn't what the disciples asked Jesus that matters. What matters is how Jesus responded to their question. Their question obviously relates to future things. And Jesus speaks about future things. In our text this morning, Jesus gives some signs of the end, and some counsel as to how to deal with these things.

As we begin to unfold these signs a bit, you need to know that they aren't pleasant. This is a dark passage. For the most part, they are terrible signs. My message this morning will be sober. I have little humor in my message to make it easier to hear. The words of Jesus are very somber and I will be as well. You need to feel the weight of these things.

Jesus told His disciples to expect, ...

1. Deceivers (verses 4-5, 11)

He begins in verses 4-5, "See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many" (verses 4-5). In other words, people will rise up and proclaim to others, "I am the Christ! I am the anointed one from the Father!" They don't stop there. They continue on to say, "So, you must follow me. You must do what I tell you to do." Many will be misled by their example. Verse 11 has a similar warning, "And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many."

This is a sad fact of history. Many have come and have claimed that they were the Christ or that they were some anointed prophet. In so doing, they have gotten for themselves a following. The early disciples saw and heard of several of them. Josephus, who was a Jewish historian during the time of the early church, told of how the city of Jerusalem was filled with many deceivers, who persuaded multitudes of people to follow them into the wilderness. Once they were there, they claimed that they would exhibit many signs and wonders, which would be performed by the providence of God. (Josephus, Antiquities 20:8:5).

He told of one such deceiver who came out of Egypt to Jerusalem, claiming to be a prophet. He persuaded some six hundred people to follow him to the mount of Olives, where he would command the walls of Jerusalem to fall down. When Felix, the governor, found out about these things, he killed four hundred of this man's followers and took the other two hundred alive. (Josephus, Antiquities 20:8:5).

Josephus also told of a man named Theuda, who persuaded many people to follow him to the river Jordan, claiming to be a prophet. He claimed that at his own word, the river would be divided and they would cross the river (just as in the days of Moses and Joshua). However, Fadus, procurator of Judea heard about this man's efforts and slew many of them, including Theudas, himself, whom they beheaded. (Josephus, Antiquities, 20:5:1).

We are not immune to this today. Throughout all the ages, there have always been false Christs and false prophets. In recent years, we have witnessed the claims of David Koresh, who believed he was the Lamb of Revelation 5, because he received revelations from God in how to interpret the seven seals in Revelations 6. He had about a hundred followers. On April 19, 1993, during a FBI assault on their compound, he and 73 other members of the Branch Davidians died.

In 1992, a Russian man named Sergei Torop realized his true identity as the son of God. He now calls himself, "Vissarion Christ," and believes that he is Jesus Christ. He lives in a mountain log cabin near the town of Petropavlovka, near the southern border of Siberia. He has thousands of followers who are creating what they call "The Last Testament Church." As far as I know, he is still continuing his ministry.

False Christs and false prophets were experienced in the days of the apostles and they are being experienced in our day as well.

Jesus also told His disciples to expect, ...

2. Wars (Verses 6-7a)

Verses 6 and 7 read, "And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." When we anticipate the end, we ought not anticipate a time of great peace. It is the false prophet who announces "Peace, peace" (Jer. 6:14; Ezek 13:10). Jesus says that there is going to be conflict. This world has never known peace. Not in the times of Jesus. Not in our times. There have always been wars. There have always been rumors of wars. There have always been nations rising against nations. There have always been kingdoms rising against kingdoms.

From cover to cover, the Bible is filled with wars. In Genesis 14, we read of wars in the time of Abraham. In the time of Joshua, there were wars and rumors of wars. In the time of the Judges, there were nations rising against nations. You read through the books of Samuel and Kings and Chronicles, and you are inundated with kingdoms rising against kingdoms.

For the disciples of Jesus' day, it was no different. The historian, Josephus, wrote a book entitled "War of the Jews," in which he traced the history of the many wars fought against the Jews. None was greater than the war launched against them by the Romans, when Titus came and destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A. D. Many Jewish people died in the attack. Since that day, there have always been wars and conflicts in the world. From the crusades of the middle ages to the war in Iraq, there has never been a time of global peace. Conflicts have been world-wide: World War I and World War II. Conflicts have been among nations: North and South Korea fought in the Korean war. There have been civil wars, religious wars, and trade wars.

Wars were experienced in the days of the apostles and they are being experienced in our day as well.

Jesus also told His disciples to expect, ...

3. Disasters (Verse 7b)

By "disasters" I mean disturbances in the physical realm. This comes from the end of verse 7, "... there will be famines and earthquakes."

The Bible records a fulfillment of this. In Acts 11:28, a prophet named Agabus "stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world." Luke adds, "And this took place in the reign of Claudius."

When Josephus described this time, he wrote of how many people in Jerusalem died for lack of food. He then described of how a certain queen, named Helena did great good for the people in Jerusalem. Josephus writes, "Queen Helena sent some of her servants to Alexandria with money to buy a great quantity of corn, and others of them to Cyprus, to bring a cargo of dried figs. And as soon as they were come back, and had brought those provisions, which was done very quickly, she distributed food to those that were in want of it, and left a most excellent memorial behind her of this benefaction, which she bestowed on our whole nation." Josephus also records that Helena's son, Izates, sent great sums of money to the principal men in Jerusalem to help with the famine as well. (Antiquities 20:2:5).

But, famines weren't just a problem with the Jews in Jerusalem at this time. Famines have always take place throughout the world. The Bible records famine in the time of Abraham (Gen. 12:10). There was famine in the time of Isaac (Gen. 26:1). There was famine in the time of Jacob and Joseph (Gen. 42:1-6). Ruth was born in Moab, because her father-in-law went there due to a famine (Ruth 1:1). The history of Israel and Judah is intermingled with famine. Famines have continued throughout all of history up until this day. In recent years there have been famines in Ethiopia, Kenya, Sudan, Mozambique, Zambia, Zimbabwe, ... just to name a few countries.

But famines weren't the only disaster that Jesus mentioned. He also mentioned that earthquakes would come as well. Again, Josephus tells of an earthquake in Judea. He wrote, "there broke out a prodigious storm in the night, with the utmost violence, and very strong winds, with the largest showers of rain, with continued lightnings, terrible thunderings, and amazing concussions and bellowings of the earth, that was in an earthquake." These things were so terrible that Josephus commented that "any one would guess that these wonders foreshowed some grand calamities that were coming" (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 4:4:5). In 109 AD, Cornelius Tacitus, a secular Latin writer, also mentioned earthquakes in Laodicea and Rome during the reign of Nero, who reigned shortly before the fall of Jerusalem (Tacitus, The Annals, Book 12 and 14).

It doesn't take much research to realize that earthquakes have continually shook this globe since the days of Jesus. In 526 A. D. there was an earthquake in Antioch, Syria, where 300,000 people were killed. I read of an earthquake in 1556 that took place in the Senshi Province of China where over 830,000 people were killed. I read of an earthquake in 1755 that took the lives of 60,000 people at Lisbon, Portugal. In the kingdom of Naples in 1857, an earthquake took more than 12,000 lives. In 1783, 30,000 people died in "the great Calabrian earthquake." In the 1900's major earthquakes were recorded in San Francisco, Italy, Turkey, China, Japan, Chile, and Peru (only to name a few cities). In the past few months a Tsunami hit the coasts of south-east Asia, killing more than 200,000 people!

Famines and earthquakes were experienced in the days of the apostles and they are being experienced in our day as well.

Again, Jesus told His disciples to expect, ...

4. Persecution (Verse 9)

In verse 9 we read, "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name." We know that this happened to the very disciples that Jesus was speaking to. All of the apostles (with the exception of John), died a violent death at the hands of those who hated Jesus Christ and the gospel of salvation through faith alone in Christ. Acts 12:2 records the death of James by the hand of Herod Agrippa in 44 A.D. Tradition has it that Peter and Andrew were both crucified. Peter was crucified upside down. Andrew was crucified on a cross that was in the shape of our letter "x." Similar fates occurred to each of the other disciples.

The disciples who heard these words came to experience the things that Jesus was telling them. And so did the early church. For 300 years, the church faced persecutions of all different types. They faced persecution from the Romans. They faced persecution from the Jews. They faced imprisonment. They faced torture. Some were thrown to the lions. Others were burned alive. Stories abound with the persecutions suffered by the early church.

Throughout the centuries, the church has always been persecuted. Certainly, it hasn't been a steady rain of persecution. There have been seasons of relative peace in various locations. But, there has always been a measure of difficulty for the church. Paul considered persecution to be a regular part of the life of every Christian when he said, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12).

Through all of this persecution, the church has always flourished. Last century, it was in Russia that the gospel spread. For 70 years, the people were oppressed under the atheism of communism. And when the Soviet Union dismantled, we found out that the church was very strong. Certainly, they weren't taught well, but they were holding strong in their faith. At the current time, this is taking place in China. Persecution today is very real in China. Christians are being taken away to prison and being tortured for their faith. And yet, the word on the street is that the church is stronger in China than every before. I read this week of the Henan Province in China. In the 1960's, it was declared "an Atheistic Zone." ... But today Communist officials complain of it as a 'Jesus Nest' suffering from 'Christianity fever!' ¹

Why has it flourished? The simple answer is that persecution exposes the reality of Christianity. There is no greater way for people to see the reality of Christianity than for people to suffer rightly. When people see that people are willing to suffer for doing what is right, they come to faith. When it is easy to follow Christ, many will willingly sign up, but will leave when it gets hard. But when it is hard, there are few who follow Christ. But when the few who do follow are firm in their faith, they make a great impact on others as they see the sacrifice they make for their faith. When the church is oppressed, it grows! Tertulian is famous for his statement, "The blood of the martyrs is seed." When the blood of martyrs drips to the ground, somehow it sprouts more Christians. That's the way that God works in this world! A man named Lactantius lived in and around 300 A. D. He understood this well when he wrote, "God permits persecutions to be carried out against us, [so] that the people of God may be increased." ² Persecutions are the means by which God uses to build His church.

Persecutions were experienced in the days of the apostles and they are being experienced in our day as well.

Jesus told His disciples to expect, ...

5. Defection (Verses 10, 12-13)

As much as the church grows under persecution, there are many who leave the church under persecution as well. This is what Jesus says in verse 10, "And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another." There are many who have faced persecution over the years and have buckled under the pressure and fallen away from the faith. This is because persecution is what refines the church.

When people mine gold from the gold mines, it comes with all different types of impurities in it. And so, they heat the gold until it is liquid. The impurities in the gold will float to the top. The refineries will trim the impurities off the top. Finally, you are left with pure gold. This is what happens with the church as well. When the persecutions come, the impure will be exposed and will fall away from the faith.

Back in Matthew 13, Jesus compared the preaching of the gospel to the sowing of seed. The seed fell upon different sorts of soils, which represent different sorts of souls. One soil is hard. Another soil is shallow, without much root. Another soil is crowded, with thorns and thistles surrounding it. Another soil is the good soil, which brings forth much fruit. Concerning the shallow soil, Jesus said, "And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away" (Matt. 13:20-21). It's the persecution that drives this man away. It's the persecution that reveals that this soul is not deep and abiding. But, good soil will endure until the end! That's the point of verse 13, "But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved."

The idea here isn't that you lose your salvation if you don't endure until the end. The idea here is that those who are persecuted and remain faithful are the very ones who demonstrate that they are saved. In other words, enduring Christianity is Christianity. When you endure, you clearly demonstrate the character of your faith. When you fall away, you are exposed for what you are.

Jesus is describing a time of defection. At the end of verse 10, we see that people are delivering up one another. We see that people are hating one another. Josephus described a period of time in which this was the case. During the Romans' siege of Jerusalem, the famine was so bad in the city that many fought each other for the food that they might eat. The strong were able to eat, but the weak couldn't obtain the food to eat. At times, children took food from the mouths of their fathers. Things were so bad that mothers took food from their own infants, allowing them to die, so that they might be able to preserve their own life. He said that such actions would justly bring tears into our eyes. If a house was all locked up, it was a signal to all that they had food inside. Josephus said that when they saw this, the people of the city would break down the doors of the house and take the food, "almost up out of their very throats, and this by force." If women hid their food, their hair was torn for doing so. People were tortured until they revealed whether or not they had even one loaf of bread (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 5:10:3).

In verse 12, we see a few more things, "And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold." Verse 12 is describing the phenomenon of loosened morals leading many into sin. I believe that we have seen this in our country. As our media constantly pushes on the edge, there are many that are drawn after its sin. As God is removed more and more from our social consciousness, people forsake Him and follow after their sin. The sad fact of history is that lawlessness is always increasing. In Romans 1, Paul said that people are "inventors of evil" (Rom. 1:30). We are ever-increasing in our capacities and ways in which to do evil. Think about the numbers of inventions that have made our lives easier. We can travel around the world in an airplane. We can talk to others across the world with our telephones. The information at our fingertips is mind-boggling. And so have we continued to expand in our abilities to sin. As more and more opportunities present themselves, people love sin and will pursue it. As a result, their love for God and their love for others will "grow cold."

Defections were experienced in the days of the apostles and they are being experienced in our day as well.

Jesus told His disciples to expect, ...

6. Evangelism (Verse 14)

This is the only bright light in the entire passage. Up to this point, all has been dark. But verse 14 gives us great encouragement, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come." Jesus said that you can expect world-wide preaching to take place, far beyond the Jewish nation.

The good news of the Messiah coming into the world will spread! The message of the kingdom is about the King who came into this world. His name is Jesus. He is a good King, who will rule with gracious power and with kind laws. Unfortunately, we have not wanted this King to rule our lives. We have established ourselves as king. We have gone our own way, choosing to fulfill the passions of our own heart, rather than subjecting ourselves to the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16). We have dethroned the rightful king and have placed ourselves as king of our world. There will be a clash someday.

The good news of the kingdom is that today is a day of mercy. Today, the King isn't conquering His rebellious subjects. Instead, the King is offering full restoration into His kingdom, if people would simply repent of their sins and cry out to Him for mercy. The message of the gospel is that God is gracious and will save sinners who trust in the sacrifice of Christ to be sufficient for them. This is the message that we preach. We preach the "gospel of the kingdom." Jesus is our King that we love and adore and desire to see exalted and ruling and reigning over us.

Jesus said that "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come" (verse 14). We sit here today because these words have come to be true. From an historical standpoint, we know that the gospel has continued to spread, slowly and surely over the centuries. What began around Jerusalem spread to the Holy Roman Empire shortly after 300 A. D. From there, it spread to western Europe and to Asia and to Africa by the time of the Reformation in the 1500's. With the discovery of new world, the gospel continued to spread westward into North and South America. The gospel has been preached in all continents.

Certainly, there are more people to be reached with the gospel. Wycliffe Bible Translators have done a great job in translating the Bible into other languages. With Bible Translations comes the preaching of the gospel into these languages. In 1800, the Bible was translated into 40

languages. Another 26 languages had a portion of the scripture translated. By 1900, the entire Bible had been translated into 200 languages, with portions of Scripture being translated into some 500 more. By 2000, the entire Bible has been translated into 350 languages. The New Testament has been translated into more than 1000 languages. And more than 2000 languages have a portion of the Scripture translated! [3](#) World-wide evangelism is continuing on with remarkable progress being made. In this we greatly delight!

When Jesus died upon the cross, He "purchased for God with [His] blood, men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). And there will be a day in which His people from distant tribes will hear His message of repentance and forgiveness and will be gathered into His kingdom.

These are the signs that Jesus has given of the end. Jesus told His disciples to expect deceivers (verses 4-5, 11), wars (Verses 6-7a), disasters (Verse 7b), persecution (Verse 9), defection (Verses 10, 12-13), and evangelism (Verse 14). I have spent my entire message this morning expounding upon "what will be the signs." I haven't focused yet upon the "when." The difficult question is, "When will these things be?" The "what" is easy. The "when" is difficult.

Perhaps you noticed something as we went through these things: there is nothing special about any of these signs! When I have heard this passage preached before in the past, I have always heard it in such a way that would lead us to believe that all of these things are still yet to come in the future. I have heard countless preachers refer to these things as huge, escalating problems in the world, which haven't yet been fulfilled. I have heard others describe these things as deceivers who will be on every corner. Others have described wars which will make our World Wars seem small. Earthquakes and famines happening in every nation is the anticipation. Others have described massive persecution on all believers on the planet, with almost everyone falling away from their faith. Then they have said, "as soon as we get the gospel to that one last unreached people group, then finally, Jesus will return.

As I studied these things this week, I was somewhat amazed that Jesus was simply describing what life is like. I have to admit that there is an element of escalation in these events, especially as it relates to the defection that will take place. Jesus said that many will be misled (verse 5 and 11) and that "many will fall away" (verse 10). Jesus also said that "most people's love will grow cold" (verse 12), seemingly affecting the majority of people. Jesus also described these things as "the beginning of birth pangs" as if implying that things will get worse. However, the signs that Jesus gives to us have been witnessed throughout all of history. Deceivers, wars, disasters, persecution, defection, and evangelism is now and has always been. The words of Jesus aren't describing some future, distant, catastrophic world. He is describing our world!

With every single one of these signs, I was careful to explain to you how the disciples experienced these things, how people throughout all of history have experienced these things, and how we experience these things today. Perhaps the only exception was the last one (i.e. evangelism). However, the early disciples experienced a world-wide spread of the gospel. The great apostle Paul wrote in his epistles as if this had already been accomplished in his day. Consider the following verses very carefully:

"The gospel, which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing" (Colossians 1:6).
The gospel "was proclaimed in all creation under heaven" (Colossians 1:23).

From Paul's perspective, the gospel had been preached in "all the whole world" (Col. 1:6). Paul also saw the gospel as having been "proclaimed in all creation under heaven" (Col. 1:23). Now certainly, he didn't preach to every person living. And yet, his words seem to indicate the far-reaching effect that the gospel had in His lifetime, which he could describe as coming "in all the world" (Col. 1:6).

And so, I ask you, did the disciples think that these things were happening in their day? I believe that they did. Ought we to think that these things are happening in our day? We sure ought to. I believe that this is the point of our text this morning. Next week we will get a sense of how bad it will eventually get (i.e. the abomination of desolation is described in verse 15 and the worst tribulation that will ever take place is found in verse 21). In our text this morning, Jesus doesn't paint a glamorous picture of life, one that will be full and happy and colorful. When Jesus returns, things will be just like they have always been. They will be filled with sorrow and difficulty and hardship and trial. Rather, Jesus said that things are going to be dark. Things are going to be dismal. This is life in this present world. Job said, "Life is few of days and full of trouble" (Job 14:1).

At this point, perhaps you are asking yourself, "So what?" If the signs that Jesus gives are filled with the sorrows of life, how am I to respond? What am I to do? As much as my message has been a cold history lesson, Jesus was very pastoral with His words. Intermixed among all these signs are helpful instructions for living. Let's look at them now.

Jesus said, ...

1. Don't be misled (verses 4, 5 11).

Jesus says very clearly, "See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many" (verses 4-5). In verse 11, Jesus said that "many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many."

The way not to be misled is to know which is the correct way. The way not to be misled is to know Christ and follow Him. I exhort you to know what the Bible says about Jesus. I exhort you to know what the Bible says about His return. Don't trust my words. That's the first step in going astray: trusting the words of another. Read the words of Jesus. They are in your lap. As you read them, pray for help in understanding them.

Jesus said, ...

2. Don't be frightened (verses 6).

In verse 6, we read, "And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end." Jesus is instructing His disciples to have a calm resolve. When they see their nations in turmoil and when live in uncertain times and when there is much political unrest, they are to remain firm, undisturbed by the tensions around them.

They know that God is in control. They know that everything is continuing on according to plan. They know that "those things must take place" (verse 6). An understanding of prophecy ought not to frighten us. An understanding of prophecy ought to comfort us, as we see His plan unfold right before our eyes.

Unfortunately, many times those who are studying prophecy are doing so out of a paranoia and fear of the future. Often, those who teach prophecy know full well how to take advantage of people's fears. If people are afraid, there will be a big crowd of people to hear what you will say. The bigger and more sensational that the presentation is, the more fear will be instilled into people, and the greater will be the following.

These things ought not to frighten us. These things ought to comfort us.

Jesus said, ...

3. Live with endurance (verses 12-13).

"And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved" (verses 12-13). Jesus warned us that there will be a time when people are going to grow cold in their love. I presume that this means their love toward God as well as their love toward other people.

Don't let this happen to you. In Matthew 22, Jesus said that the command, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" is the great and foremost commandment. (verses 37-38). He followed that up with the second which is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (verse 39). If "love" is the greatest commandment. Of all the commandments, it is the one that we ought to pay close attention to, lest we fail in obeying it.

You don't want to be told, "your love is growing cold." I exhort you to love others. I exhort you to endure in that love. Don't be like the majority, who will grow cold. Be like the minority, who will continue on! Jude wrote that you should "keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21). How can this be done? Only by the power of God, "who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy." The only way for you to persevere in your love for others is to continually cry for the grace of God to give you the strength to endure.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on April 10, 2005 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, Operation World, p. 172.

[2] Christian History Magazine, Issue 27, p. 11.

[3] See <http://www.wycliffe.org/history/BibleTranslation.htm> for an excellent summary of these things.