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THE KING IS COMING

Reading: Matthew 24: 1-44

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.

We live in a world that is changing so fast that many people have a struggle keeping up with it. All around us, on a local level, a national level, and on a global level, we are constantly reminded of catastrophe and evil on a daily basis. Picking up our newspaper or turning to radio or television newscasts we discover more and more stories that make many of us long for earlier days when the world seemed to be a much calmer place.

In this country we are beset by the problems of alcohol and drug abuse which create massive increases in the crime-rate. Our nation has become flooded by huge a influx of immigrants, particularly from Eastern Europe and Africa, many of them bringing an even greater problem of criminality, the combined effect of this, together with the localised crime situation, has cause another problem, that of Goals that are in a dangerous overfill situation. In an attempt to address this we read of areas where the police turn a blind eye to certain levels of crime, along with sentences that bare so lenient that they fail to address the crime for which the perpetrators are supposedly being punished. Add all this to a society that is caught up in the mire of political correctness and the problems are of catastrophic proportions.

Globally our senses are constantly being assailed by news of natural disasters and of war. There are famines, earthquakes, tidal waves, floods and the ensuing diseases that are reported on a daily basis. Only this week we have seen news of a cyclone in Bangladesh that was far more powerful than anything previously for decades, bringing with it a dreadful destructive force. Who is there that cannot be aware of the current battlefields that are claiming the lives of so many of the forces involved. We have wars, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and hear rumours of war such as Iran.

Is it possible then that we really are in the end times prophesied in the Bible, and shouted about by many Christians across the globe as they cite all of these matters as definitive proof that we are witnessing the beginning at least of the end of civilisation and the imminent return of our Lord Jesus?

There is no doubt that we live in perilous times from a spiritual standpoint as more and more people, certainly in the western world, turn their back on God and refuse to live by His Laws. For several generations people of all ages have been gradually turning their back on marriage, preferring instead the path of a consumer-led 'throw-away' society which refuses to accept real commitment in favour of a relationship that it's easy to simply walk away from with little or no legal responsibility toward. Illegitimacy, once the scourge of society to the extent that young unmarried girls who found themselves pregnant would be treated as outcasts by the self-righteous society itself, has become so common-place that it is no longer politically correct to refer to a child as



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illegitimate. Certainly, there is no doubt that the castigation of such women as used to take place was not only wrong but downright wicked, yet nevertheless the whole issue places people outside of God's law. Marriage is recognised in the Christian Church as being a bond between a man and a woman for the procreation of children, yet the in so many sections of the church discussions are taking place today relating to the blessing of same-sex unions despite the fact that the Bible specifically teaches that homosexual relationships are wrong. Sadly, even in our own denomination there are many who see nothing wrong in the practise and ministers who are prepared to be involved in the farce of so-called 'marriage' between people of the same sex.

So – the breakdown of Society's morality, crime increased to an unacceptable and unprecedented level, increasing reports of catastrophic natural disasters, wars and rumours of wars, false prophets, many turning from God – surely this is the end-time that has been prophesied in the Bible. Surely these are the things that Jesus spoke of when he prophesied the 'End of the Age'?

To establish an accurate answer to this we need to read the Scripture carefully. What is Jesus actually saying? Sitting with the disciples on the Mount of Olives, they ask Him what the sign will be of the coming of the end of the Age (24:3). The first thing that Jesus tells them is "See to it that no one misleads you." He tells them that even though they will hear of wars and rumours of wars it is not yet the end (24:6). Even though in many places there will be famines and earthquakes that all these things herald only the beginning of birth pains, not the end of the Age in themselves (24:7-8). He speaks of the increase in lawlessness and a turning from God (24:12). Yet none of these things bring about the end.

If the combination of all these things does not herald the end then what does? I think that we can safely interpret that all of these characteristics relate to the first half of the Tribulation period, but in order to find out more we need to turn to verse 14: ***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.***

In Matthew 28:19 we read that Jesus issues what we refer to as the Great Commission; ***"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."*** The end of the Age will come only when the Gospel of Jesus Christ has been shared with every nation in the world, giving every person the opportunity to accept or reject Him.

Jesus prophesies the rising up of false Christs – the Anti-Christ – and of false prophets, creating great signs and wonders in order to mislead Christians and non-Christians alike. This is as much a warning as it is a prophecy!

Of His 'Second Coming' our Lord says that it will be immediately after the tribulation when ***the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the***



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sky with power and great glory (24:29-30).

It is easy to understand how important Jesus' words were when he advised, "***See that no one misleads you.***" (24:4). As we read through this passage then we must heed not only its prophetic nature but also its warning.

Whatever the viewpoint that individual Christians may have regarding the end of the Age and Christ's Second Coming, the most important lesson of all is to ensure that they are ready for His return and that they will not be caught out unprepared. That means that every Christian needs to renew their commitment to Christ, to the Great Commission, and to the Kingdom.

Amen

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