

# The Signs of the Times

## By Paris Reidhead\*

Will you turn please to Matthew, Chapters 23, 24, and 25. Now if I should read this as a Scripture reading, all we would need as a conclusion would be the Benediction; so I shan't do that. Perhaps that might give great profit. Today with all of the events transpiring, and all the pressures that are upon us, God's people have a right to say, "Watchman tell us of the night, what its signs of coming are." (Isa. 21:11) This has been the cry down through the ages, and it is the cry again today when we see the head of one of the largest nations in the world take his shoe and beat the desk in contempt for organized diplomacy. All we can say is, if that same virulent should ever be expressed around the switchboard of intercontinental ballistic missiles, it might be a different matter. And so the question before us tonight is, What Are The Signs of the Times? What does the Word of God have to say regarding the hour in which we live?

When I was a young man in Bible School, beginning my training and first Pastoral ministry, there was a great deal of preaching on prophecy. I remember one dear fellow, in fact my father was saved through his ministry, and he was very dear to the family, but he majored on startling sermon titles and prophetic utterances. And I recall back in 1933 that 43 seemed such a long way off, and using the pyramid in the Scriptures he endeavored to show what was going to transpire in '43 and '47, and '51 and '53, and everything was to have had reached its consummation and all would be over. Well happily the Lord cut short his days and he left and went to be with the Lord long before he had the opportunity of seeing that so many of the utterances he made lacked that quality of authenticity that is demanded of the Prophet. I have no prophecies to utter tonight. I have no schedule to set forth. I am not going to correct the headlines in the paper, nor do I have any intention at all of telling you what Khrushchev is going to do. I was very amused at dear Major Allister Smith who was the means of such blessing, standing out on 47th Street in front of the Salvation Army Citadel there, or the Salvation Army Hall, in the street meeting. And he said, "Now you come on into the Service because I am going to tell you what the Bible has to say about Khrushchev." And quite a company came in. And so he said, "The first thing the Bible says about Khrushchev is that he is a man. The second thing it says is that he is a sinful man, because all have sinned. And the third thing it says is that he is a fool, because a fool has said in his heart there is no God." And then he went ahead and preached the Gospel. Well I am sure that is appropriated right, but it is about all you can find the Bible has to say about Khrushchev I am sure.

But I am concerned that you should understand that the Word of God has not left without guide or light in these days. We do not need to be like that dear man who in 1944, 43 or 4, had an article in one of the national magazines entitled, "Mussolini is the Anti-Christ." But before the article which had been accepted for publication could get actually into type and into press Mussolini was hanging by his heels in a filling station in Milan. And when I saw that I am sure that any incipient desire I had to be a prophetic teacher died the death right there. And I am sure that it has not had a great deal of revival since.

But having said all of that, and all the qualifications that I am prepared to offer, and all the disclaimers that I suggest, I still come back to you and say, "God's Word has something to say about the hour in which we live, and it gives us a guide and a measuring stick of the events that are transpiring before our eyes." And now, if you are open as I have asked to Matthew the 24th Chapter, I am going to ask you to look to the 23rd. There will be just a few things that I will lift out of the 23rd Chapter. Our Lord had now come to that phase in His ministry where He no longer was polite to the Pharisees and the Scribes and the Sadducees and the Lawyers. The virulence of their hatred of God has found in the heart of God that righteous wrath, not such as yours or mine perhaps might be from personality peak and just being disconsolate and irrationally angry, but our Lord with all the wisdom of the Triune God at His disposal says in the 13th verse of the 23rd Chapter, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves. Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor! Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that

sanctifieth the gold?" And verse 23, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cumin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone." Verse 25. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess." Verse 27. "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because ye build the tombs of the prophets and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

No stronger words had ever been addressed by any man to another group than these. And someone speaks of the meek and lowly Nazarene? But they have the opportunity through these words of seeing something of the wrath of the Lamb. For you see how He has perceived into the heart, and judged not the outward actions and the outward appearance, but judged the attitudes and the motives of individuals. And because of this, we find that He has this to say in the 37th verse, 36th verse: "Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord. And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and His disciples came to Him for to shew Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said unto them, 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. And our Lord has indicted the religious leaders of His generation, He has exposed the putrid selfishness of their hearts, He has uncovered the crimes of Israel in its long revolt against God, and He has now pronounced His final sentence and judgment upon the temple which has harbored the vipers of iniquity, and upon the city in which the temple has been built. And judgment now has been pronounced by the Lord Jesus. You must bear this in mind. He is acting in perfect accord with the moral attitude and character of the people of His day, and of His generation. And He has predicted judgment upon the individuals. He has now predicted the destruction of the temple. He has held His hands out in the wail of rejected longing toward the city of Jerusalem, and later we will have more to say concerning its destruction.

The disciples hearing these things, hearing the strong words that He says against the religious leaders of Israel, sensing that there is a complete break with them, knowing that in their own thinking at least the Messiah would be dependent upon the support of these religious leaders, the disciples I say come to Him as He is seated upon the Mount of Olives. They approach Him privately as a group, saying in verse 3, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" Three pertinent questions are addressed by the disciples to the Lord Jesus. Our Lord's collision with arrogant, rebellious Judaism had caused God to pronounce these judgments upon Israel. Our Lord's threatening concerning the temple, and concerning Jerusalem, had stirred within the hearts of the disciple's expectancy, amazement, fear, grief, and they wanted the Lord to explain whether He was speaking in parables or He was actually pronouncing the kind of judgment that His Word seemed to imply. And so the questions that they have are addressed to Him alone as a group for their pleading they are pleading for personal and special information. Tell us, when these things shall be? When is the temple going to be torn down? When are the Pharisees and the scribes, that you have called whited sepulchers and hypocrites, when are they going to be judged? When is Jerusalem going to be destroyed? Tell us when these things shall be.

Then the second thing. "What shall be the sign of Thy coming?" And then, "What shall be the sign of the end of the world?" These three questions are related to three separate items of interest, three separate events in the chronology of God. First, tell us when these things shall be. This concerns the destruction of the temple. This was to transpire during their lifetime. This they were to see and behold. What of the coming of Christ? What shall be the sign of Thy coming? You are coming again, You said. When are you coming? And in what manner are you coming? How will we know that You are coming? And then they separate the coming of Christ with the end of the age. What shall be the sign of the end of the age? The three questions then before us

tonight, as we have it in the Text are, what portion of this Scripture refers to that which did transpire historically in the lifetime of the disciples? What portion of it refers to the return of Christ? And, what portion of it refers to the end of the age? The prophetic replies of the Lord Jesus that we find given in this portion from verse 4 on through verse 13 of the 25th Chapter are the Lord's guide to you and to me for the history, and for the future. For in this our Lord has given to us the yardstick by which we can gauge the day in which we live as well as the future that is before us.

The first thing our Lord Jesus says in verses, beginning with verse 4 is that the entire Church age will be characterized by the appearance of false Christs. "Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in My Name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. This has happened. It happened at the time of our Lord. It happened shortly after His resurrection and ascension that there were pretenders that came and said they were the Christ. It happened previous to the destruction of Jerusalem. There are historical records of those that came saying they were Christ, having returned. It has been happening on down across through the ages, and even to the present you find cults and groups that are preaching Christ, but not the Christ of the Bible. A Christ, but not the Christ of revelation. How many times someone will come to the door with literature that they want to sell. And you say, "Do you believe in Jesus?" "O yes, we believe in Him." "Do you preach Jesus?" "O yes, we preach Him." "Who is Jesus?" And then you begin to listen to their involved explanations as to who, what Jesus they are preaching. And almost invariably it seems, with the cults at least (and there are those who know and love our Lord that knock our doors and do not for a moment think I am criticizing this procedure) but they will –with the cults you can always tell whether they are preaching the Christ of the Bible or another Christ by asking them to identify the Lord Jesus. Who is He? There is only one proper answer. John said, there would be many anti-Christs; many that would come in the Name of Christ but actually would be opposed to Him. And there would be many that would claim to have inspired utterance and power gifts that they had received from Christ, but you could always tell because there was one proper answer. There is only one answer to the question, Who is Jesus. And that is, Jesus is God come in the flesh. The God-Man. He is very God of very God, and very man of very man. God who became flesh and dwelt among us. How involved, how subtle are the attempts to escape this and avoid it, and wriggle out from under it, but you check with so many of the cults and you will find that at this point you will have to conclude that they are preaching another Jesus. And is it not amazing the way they have deceived many. Many of you have seen the book, Watchtower Slaves, written by this dear man that had spent some 30 years. The book is in the Bookstore. But when you let him speak to you concerning the fallacies that are propagated in the Name of Jesus, and the distortions that are presented, you begin to realize that there are people that are being educated in the subtleties of reasoning to deceive the elect, and try to get you involved with one of the cults. You ask someone that comes to your door with literature, stands on the street, "What were you before you joined this group?" And almost invariably they say, "Well I was a Methodist, or I was a Baptist, or I belonged to this Church, or I belonged to that Church." Whether of course I couldn't want to say there are not some that have been born again in the groups that have been deceived, for it is said the very elect should be, but I would say this, that our Lord warned us saying, that there would come and all through the church period, as long as the church was in the earth, there would come those that would preach another Jesus than the one of the Bible.

Then our Lord Jesus also declared that there would be troubles and snares, and wars for the entire Church period. "Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars." This was not to characterize any particular time. It was not to be something that happened at, (Well I have been told. I have not checked it myself. But I have been told that there is - since the time of Christ as far as we can figure out only seven years when there has not been a war going on.) Oh I just think it was lack of communications, or they surely would have found something that was very much of a war with some of the primitive tribes. So I just have a feeling that wars and rumors of wars have characterized the age from the very first. And so this is going to continue. When they say, they tell us that there will come a time through machinery of diplomacy and world government when there will be no more war, there is only one thing I can say to that, it is not what the Lord said. It is not what the Lord said. Until He returns, until He comes back again as the prince of peace, until He Himself shall establish His throne and put down the governments of men and reign in His own splendor, there will be wars and rumors of wars, and certainly that characterizes our lifetime. Many of you were born before or during the First World War; many of you remember with what trepidation and fear, we saw the rise of Hitler. Remember how that Hindenburg of Germany was voted out of office as president, and the chancellor became this former paper hanger, and saw the rise of nationalism and saw its development and it's unfolding, and then saw the world plunged into war. Then remember Pearl Harbor. I was with a group of College students a while ago, and I said, "Now you

remember Pearl Harbor. And you remember...Adolph Hitler." And the youth students looked at me as much as to say, "Remember? No. We have read about it." And then I realized that young people are in College, freshmen and sophomores, that had not even been born by the time of Pearl Harbor, didn't know, have never lived during the lifetime consciously aware of the fact that there were such characters in the earth as Mussolini and Hitler. But for some of us who date ourselves and say, "Yes, we remember this," we realize that our whole lifetime has grown up under this overspreading cloud of a threatening tornado of war. And this has real meaning to us. "Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars," (Matt. 24:6a) but notice what He says: "See that ye be not troubled. 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: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows."(Matt. 24:6b-8)

Now I have some very earnest friends that would like to have me and you believe that this has reference to the Great War, the First World War, which was said to be the first war of world outreach where it did involve the entire western part of the world at least. I do not know that that is the case. I do not suppose that it would be possible for us to prove that there have been more famines at that time than there were before; pestilences. I do not think that I could sustain as a logical argument that there have been more earthquakes since 1914. I do not believe I could. But you know there was something that transpired then when down in Serbia there was an assassination that drew the world into a vortex of carnage, lasted for four years and took so many, well unnumbered thousands of lives. Something happened. There has been a change since then. Pestilence - you realize of course there was one of the outgrowths of that war that led to the invasion of Russia by the Communists. And certainly there has been a Red pestilence that has grown out, that has been like a creeping disease that has just gone from Nation to Nation, and Country to Country, until today one half of the world's people are under the hammer and sickle, under the Red Star of Russia. I do not know that I can find Communism in the Bible from any of the prophetic pictures that we have in Revelation. It would be awfully hard for anyone to prove that and you can see an analogy and from the analogy you can say, "Well this seems to be like that." But when you think of the 2nd World War where there was not a Country that was immune to it, where there was not a Continent that was not involved in it in some way, and the skies themselves rained down hail, and when there were - the eagles of the sky that had stingers in their tail. I remember hearing a very elaborate sermon one time on the fact that these great scorpions that were in the sky were the B26 Bombers, the tail gunners. Well I would not want to argue that that is not the case.

But I do know this, that the world is so small today that it can be encircled in thirty six hours and even faster by some of our supersonic planes, and we are in the place now that when somebody hammers a desk here in New York, people tremble over in Japan. And they are frightened. The world is so small, almost linked by television. Certainly linked by telephone. Reduced down in size until it is here just in the palm of men's hands, and now we are invading outer space. "Wars and rumors of wars."

Then He says that there shall come a great tribulation that will close the end of this age. They shall deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you, and you 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. 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. I think this characterizes our day. Look at it for just a moment. They shall deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you. Ye shall be hated of all nations for My Name's sake, and shall be offended and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. Yes, this is happening. To say that it is happening in some unique sense, more than any other day, I think is perfectly safe. Think of what is happening to the children in China, as we are getting word out now. How little children in schools are being told by their teachers that it is patriotism, it is honor, it is the means of proving their devotion to the State, to report on the religious habits of their parents, Think of what is happening when a little child stands in the presence of the Judge and says, I saw, I saw my mother pray. I saw her read the Bible, and accuses the parent in such a way that the parent is now forced to die, and the child stands by with such distortion of natural affection that he is proud of the fact that he has eliminated from the society this enemy, this follower of the imperialist West; and the child has been the means of causing the parents' death. This is happening. We are told by the Communists in China themselves that 20 million people have been in the nice way it is being phrased deprived of existence. And only the Lord Himself knows how many of these have come about from just such a thing as you have here, being betrayed, being betrayed.

In one case, in one of the tribes in South China, they asked for Bibles. And appeal went into Shanghai. The people brought Bibles, and they said, come and get them. But names were taken of everyone that took a Bible. Within a month or six weeks the Bibles were called in, and the people who had them were brought in. The Bibles were burned. The ashes were mixed with water. And the people then were forced to drink the water in which the burned Bibles, the ashes of the burned Bibles were mixed, to show that they were holding in utter contempt this Book that had been the means of life to them. And great imprisonment. Their ears were cut off for listening to preaching. Their tongues were cut out for speaking of Jesus Christ. Their lives were taken because they refused to recant, and deny the Lord that bought them. Has it been this way in the past? I do not suppose that there has ever been such a time when there has been such terrible hatred, when governments have so systematically committed themselves to atheism as we have now. I think in a sense this is unique. I find nothing like it, though there were periods of intense persecution under the Romans, but these were sporadic and temporary. But here since 1917, 42 or 3 years, there has been this insistence upon atheism as the very foundation of society.

Now young men and women, older men and women as well, this is the kind of an age we live in. The Lord Jesus said it would happen, but here is something else He said: "Because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." (Matt. 24:12)

I was amazed to receive a report over my desk a few weeks ago, a report from a group that had made a study of the un-churched population in America. You know that we have approximately, (these are rough figures), 95 million people identified with some Church, some organization, some religious fellowship, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish or one of the Cults, one or the other groups. Well 90 to 95 million are identified with some religion. But we find that the present, the predictions are, that for the present census our population will approximate 180 million. That leaves very nearly 90 million that are totally un-churched. Now in our well-meaning and sincere desire to think all is well, I would have told you six months or a year ago that that un-churched proportion of our population were just apathetic, and indifferent, and unconcerned. But this report that has been made by qualified observers who are on solid ground in what they have said shows us that this un-churched population in America are not apathetic or indifferent, but for the most part at least the largest half, the largest proportion of that un-churched population showed definite signs and indications of anger and virulence toward religion. And they were particularly angry with fundamental Protestants, and the most virulent and the most vicious were the children that had grown up in fundamental Protestant homes and had renounced their faith and were now engaged in individual, unorganized, not organized, but individual campaigns as it were in opposition to fundamental evangelical Biblical Christianity. And they said, they are obscurantists, they stand in the way of progress, they are creating terrible frustrations by their moral standards, they are intimidating the rest of the population, they ought to be controlled, they ought to be eliminated for the wellbeing of our national culture. And then some of them would cite, "Was it not this group that succeeded in getting the 18th Amendment enacted. Was it not this group that plunged the Nation into the carnage of the prohibition days?" And we thought, I thought, and a year ago I would have affirmed that the un-churched American population were just indifferent to the church. Now, they are not. They are antagonistic. Antagonistic. And this is what we find here. This is what is said. And therefore to this degree we begin to see it take place.

Now I said, beginning with verse 15 we find that He makes it absolutely clear that the great tribulation will close this age. "When therefore, ye shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the Prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth. let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take anything out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day: 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." (Matt. 24:15-22)

Now I personally see that this has a double application. First, in its primary sense it refers to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the tribulation that was there effected, for we are told by Josephus and other historians that when Vespasian and Titus had conquered Jerusalem after the long siege, that they were so angry with the Jews that had held out so long, that at one time around on the hills outside of Jerusalem there was not room to raise another cross. There were so many crosses up that they could not raise one down and nail a person to it and raise it up. There was not room. We know that at that time there were

those that escaped. When these things come to pass, seeing the Roman Armies gather there outside of Jerusalem, they fled into the hills, went to Petra, went into the rocks, went into the caves, and it had, I think this portion had, an initial fulfillment at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem. But you notice He also says this, that there shall be great tribulation such as there 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.

Now there is a great deal of discussion in the church about the great tribulation. Oh how my dear friends, and I love them all, love them both, get all excited. One of them says, "Will the church go through the tribulation? And, Won't." And the other one says, "Will the church go through the tribulation? And, Will." And then they come to me and say, "Take sides." And I cannot take sides because I have to know what they are talking about. Who originates the tribulation? If the tribulation begins with men, and the wicked hearts of men, and the wicked hearts of men, and is poured out by men upon the church, there is no reason to expect God to keep the church out of it. There is nothing in the Scripture that said, that the church will not endure the wrath and anger of men. And so, if my friends that are so enthusiastic on this, will tell me just from whom they believe this tribulation is coming, I can tell them whether or not I believe the church will go through it. I see nothing in the Word of God to indicate that God has ever expected to exempt the church from the wrath of men. But always the church has been hated, persecuted, hounded, and driven even as it is in Russia and China and elsewhere in the world today. And I see no reason to think we will escape it, and I see from what I have just said to you no reason to think that we in America will escape it, that ultimately with the social dangers that are being projected, it may become that we too are involved in persecution by our fellows. But when I say this, then I turn around and say, Well if you mean that this tribulation is God pouring wrath upon wicked men then I have absolutely no reason to think that the church will go through it, because He has no reason to pour out His wrath upon His own beloved, and upon His church. And so, if it can be decided who originates the tribulation, and the source from which it comes, then we can have no difficulty in discovering whether or not the church is going to go through it. But otherwise we are just; we would just be discussing meaningless terms. I believe the church will experience all the tribulation that wicked men can pour out upon it as long as God permits the church to remain in the world. I do not believe that the church will undergo the pouring forth of the wrath of God upon wicked men. So if the tribulation originates with God and is poured out upon men, I do not believe the church will experience it. If it originates with men and is aimed at God, I do not believe the church will escape it. I think this is simple, and will save you from a lot of difficulties if you can consent to that.

Now you say, "But you have not answered the question, as to which it is." I think it is both. I think it is both. You go to the people in China today that are there, and you talk about the great tribulation and they will look at you and say, "Could it be anything more than this? Could it be anything other than this?" And you say, "Well we do not have it here. Well just wait a minute honey, just wait a minute. Things are not finished yet. It is not all over yet. It is coming. Do not get excited. If you are anxious to just live godly in Christ Jesus." God has said, "They that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (II Tim. 3:12) It is not over yet. We have not finished our course in the land in which we are. The erratic behavior that we have had when we have dared to speak out on issues, I am a little concerned. You have not heard me say much about this election. I am going to have some things to say before we come to it, and I am going to say something right now. If I speak my piece regarding the election, I am going to stand on this. If you are going to get excited once every four years, you have got to be responsible all the time. You see what I mean. I do not believe it is right for us to simply say, Well now here. We come up and we are very pious and are very earnest. And we say; Well now an election is coming and this is terribly important to the church. You do not know who your Councilman is. You do not know who represents you on the city. You do not know who your State Legislator is, most of us. We are so busy with our own activities. We have practically lost contact with government. Now I believe that I have a right and a privilege as a citizen, not as a Pastor, but as a citizen to speak concerning the issues that are here. And I have a right as a pastor to speak on the moral issues that are involved. But I believe with all my heart that if you and I are going to have anything other than contempt from our generation we have got to be prepared to accept the responsibility for citizenship as citizens, and not just once every four years, but twelve months out of every year. Now having said that, I would say this, that I am convinced beyond any question or doubt that the ecumenical processes that are in motion are absolutely unstoppable, irresistible. I see nothing on the horizon at the moment that even so much as suggests the possibility of stopping the continuing ecumenizing of the church. I do not know how long it will take, or how fast it will go. I know that the World Council says that in as far as America is concerned, we have conquered far faster than we ever expected,

In fact, we have won the battle so quickly we have not even been able to consolidate our gains. We just - It has been too fast for us. But I was staggered when Mr. Woods told me when he was here last week of attending a Conference in Europe with evangelical leaders, names of men who stood for truth of God, for historic Christianity, and in conference these men said, "We must cooperate with the World Council of Churches." And when he told me some of the men and some of the things they said, my heart absolutely sank and just shrank within me. We are living in dangerous days, and difficult days.

And the Lord Jesus said, when He comes will He find faith on the earth. Will He find faith on the earth? All I know regarding that is that the day in which we live finds a change and a flux. When I began it was so easy. Twenty five years ago they were black and white. You were modernist or you were fundamentalist. And then everything stirred up and it all broke up, and everything came into flux, and it all changed and the colors changed, and the relationships changed, and today it is just like a seething pot. It does not break down that way. It is not that easy any longer. We are living in a changing day.

And thus our Lord plainly tells us that the end of the age is going to be accompanied by a great tribulation.

Now I want to just point out in closing, and I am only going to take a few moments to deal with something that would take as many weeks as there are items, but I shall not extend it. He gives us three parables of prophetic import. In Chapter 24, verses 32 to 41, He gives us the parable of the fig tree. Now learn the parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled (Which have reference to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, and that is exactly what happened.) Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away. But of that day and hour knoweth no man, (that is the coming of Christ) no not the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the Ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. Then shall two be in the field: the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

This first parable is a prophesy that has to do with time. I say that it has reference to the besieging of Jerusalem, as the primary application in its early part of the parable, but then it is extended to the future. And He is saying that the time is going to come; the time is known only by the Father; there will be as it was in that day that people will be going about their business, saying where is the sign of His coming, and is there any reason any longer for us to expect Him to come. There will be eating and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, carrying on their lives saying, "Well it has always been this way. It is always going to be that way." And they are going to be overtaken. Two shall be in the field: the one shall be taken, and the other left. And we are in dangerous ways. Our Dr. Simpson<sup>1</sup> began the ministry here with the fourfold gospel, Christ our Savior, our Sanctifier, our Healer, and our coming King. I do not know this. I have not verified it. But I am told that he was living in the expectancy of the coming of Christ, so much so that when this building was purchased they said, "Well the Lord is coming before it is paid for. We will be careful to keep the interest up, but we are not going to worry too much about paying off the principal anyway." Well here we are, 77 years, and we are here. And some one might say, Well he looked for the Lord to come and the Lord did not come in his lifetime, and our fathers did and He did not come in their lifetime, and now here we are. Yes, that is exactly what is stated in Peter, "They will say, 'Where is the sign of His coming.'" But I submit to you that never has there been such an arrangement of circumstances as we see today, never has the Scripture been so near to kaleidoscopic fulfillment of the pattern as it is today. And never has there been such an approach to His coming as there is today. And the parable of the fig tree is this, He is coming and you will not be prepared because you would not be expecting Him.

Now the next parable that begins with verse 48 has to do with the manner of His coming. Watch therefore for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth His coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunken; The Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Benjamin Simpson (1843-1919) founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance

not for Him, and in an hour that he is not aware of. And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. This parable of the thief is that just as no one expects to have the house broken into and the goods stolen, so you realize that the Lord Jesus is going to come when He is least expected. And He has by means of this parable enjoined watchfulness, watchfulness. Are you looking for Him to come? Do you begin in the morning by saying, "It could be today?" Do you close your eyes at night saying, "It could be before morning breaks that the Lord returns?" Are you living in the moment by moment expectancy of His return? You say, "Well the Gospel has not been preached to all the Nations." How do you know? You only know where missionaries are that we have sent out, but I remember that dear fellow that I met down at Akobo Post, that young man that had been led by an angel of the Lord up from the east side of Lake Rudolf, right into the camp of Dick Lythe the only man that spoke the Murle Language, and an evangelical Christian. And when after 21 days the Murle came and sat down and said, "An angel appeared to me in my hut and told me that I would find a man that looked just like you with white skin, and he would tell me how to take the blood off of my hands, and the black out of my heart." And that night, Dick Lythe led him to the Lord. And when I saw him he was going out on a trip. He had a six foot piece of cord, did this dear Christian, and he would walk out into the uncharted, unmapped area of the salient triangle between Ethiopia, Kenya and the Sudan, in the area where government officials did not go without armed escort, and he went. And he never came back. He started out with just a little bag of grain, and he would not come back, until he could not tie another knot in the string. And I saw one of those strings, all knotted up and tied up, and every knot represented someone who had bowed their knees to the Lord Jesus Christ. He has never been written up in a missionary magazine. He has never had his picture in the papers. He has never received recognition. How do you know how many tribes have heard? How do I know? One day He is going to say, "Come on into the Ark," and the last one will be in, and the Lord will close the door, and then the flood is going to come. We do not know when. We say that two thirds of the world's people have not heard, but we always have to say it in terms of our telling them. But we do not know who is going on with the message.

I think of Dr. Stirret there in Jos, Nigeria, speaking, telling the people about Christ, and a young fellow, only about 17 or 18 listens; he is from the edge of the desert, up in the Fulani country; and years and years and years later, nearly 40 years later, missionaries are up there, and they come to a place and find a group of Christians. And who told you? And they bring him out, and there he is. This man that stood there for a couple of afternoons and listened to Dr. Stirret and took a Bible in the language, and had gone way back in the hinterland where missionaries had never gone and preached Christ, and a little group of believers... We do not know what is going on. We only know what we are doing. We have not seen what God is doing.

And one day, God is going to say, "It is there. It is finished. The last member of the Bride of Christ is in," and then the Lord is going to come. And that is what He is trying to tell us here. It will be as a thief. Will He find you abusing your privilege, and misusing your time, and wasting your strength, and squandering your life, like the unprofitable servant that is beating his brethren? This is the message of the parable of the thief.

And then the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in the 25th Chapter. A plea for preparation. A plea, a prophecy of the time, a plea that you be watchful, and a plea for preparation. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept, but there were some that had their lamps trimmed and filled. And Dr. Simpson believed that these wise virgins who had their lamps trimmed and filled were those that had experienced the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and were occupying, fulfilling that purpose that God had for the midnight while He tarried.

I have no desire to press much further than I have gone, but I would say to you tonight, The signs of the times are these, that the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. It is not profound to say His coming is nearer than it has ever been before in the history of the age. It is not profound for me to say, because you have newspapers and are in contact with your generation, that the situation as such year by year is coming more nearly to the pattern of the Scripture. I do not try to be profound. I am not trying to be profound. I simply want to be direct and simple, and honest. He could come before you get home. I believe that. I believe that. I do not see anything to stand in the way of His coming. I do not see any unfulfilled prophecy. Israel is in the Land. Wars and rumors of wars continue. The faith of many has given way. Persecution has arisen. Darkness covers the land, like the waters do the deep. He could come.

Are you watching? Are you looking for Him to come? Are you prepared? Are you filled with the Spirit? Are you in the place He wants you to be, waiting for Him? Or are you like the servant, abusing your privilege, like the foolish virgins without oil and an untrimmed darkened lamp?

What is the sign of His coming? I think the sign of His coming is that professing Christians grown lackadaisical and careless, and indifferent to the fact of whether He comes or not. You know there was a time in my life when I did not want the Lord Jesus to come. He would have interrupted my plans. Oh I preached on it, but I did not really want Him to come. But you know, tonight I do not have any plans. I do not have any plans. I am only committed, as Major Thomas said, to what the Lord has committed in me. I do not have any plans. I think that the older you go, and the nearer you go on with Him, the more easy it is for you to say, "Even so come, Lord Jesus."

Are you longing for the coming the Lord? If you say, Nave I have to wait to get as old as you are to want Him to come? No. You do not have to do that. You have just got to realize that He and He alone can fulfill the purpose that He has for you. And if He tarries, then He will fill you by His Spirit. And if He comes, He will carry you to be where He is. But your life must be centered in Christ, filled with His presence, filled with His power now by the Holy Ghost, your lamp burning, filled with all the oil, and then when He comes there will be no embarrassment; there will be no loss; there will be no grief; there will be no running around saying, "Oh I never expected You tonight." I think now is the time.

A. J. Gordon<sup>2</sup> told about two young ladies in the Boston area who came to hear him preach one time on the coming of Christ. And he had spoken on the Text, Two Shall Be Taken, sleeping the bed, and one shall be taken, and the other left. And during the night the Christian girl got up and had reason to leave the room; and awakened from a dream or from some, at least from some very sensitive consciousness, the unsaved girl looked over and saw the empty bed. And she began to scream out in immediate reaction that the Lord had come and left her. And from the other part of the house came her family, came her sister and her mother. And she said that she knew that she was not ready, and that if the Lord came she would be left behind. Right there by the bedside, this unsaved sister put her trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

My friend, I do not know when He is coming, but I know that if you are not ready you will be left. And I know that He died for you, and shed His Blood for you, and if you are willing to repent of your sin and receive Him, He will come into your heart, forgive your sins, and give you His own Life. All things are ready. You come to Him. He is coming again. But this is not to frighten you. This is simply to let you know that all of His plans are for His own. Are you included in His plans? Are you one of His own, redeemed by His Blood?

Let us bow our heads in prayer. What are the signs of His coming? They are just as they have ever been. There is nothing greatly new or startling in the newspapers. It is just that we are nearer to the coming of the Lord than we have ever been, and there is not one thing that stands in the way Scripturally, or eschatologically of His coming that I know of. And before we leave the Hall, before you reach your homes, before morning light breaks, and you go to a new day, the Son of God could come, just as He went away. Are you right with God? Are you trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ? Are you resting in His shed Blood? Are you born again? Do you have the witness of the Holy Ghost that you are His, His Spirit bearing witness with your spirit that you are a child of God? Do you? Let me turn for a moment to the Christian. You name the name of Christ. Is there un-confessed, un-forgiven sin in your life? Even if the Lord does not come, He sees it, and knows it, and He must chasten you, and deal with you accordingly. Where are you? He that hath the hope, this hope in him purifieth himself even as He is pure. You say, you are looking for the Lord's coming, and yet you are allowing uncleanness and impurity in your heart and life. That is a complete contradiction. He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself. Child of God, are you willing to break with sin and break with everything that grieves a Holy God, and know the cleansing of the precious Blood? Let me ask you, Are you filled with the Spirit? I do not know what this parable means in its finest details, but I do know this, that there have been a great many of honored servants that have said that it speaks of the fullness of the Holy Ghost. Are you filled with the Spirit of God? Are you walking in that fullness? Or are you like the foolish virgins that have been sleeping when you ought to have been

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<sup>2</sup> Adoniram Judson Gordon (1836-1895) An American Baptist preacher, Writer, Composer and Founder of Gordon College

concerned about the things that God has provided for you in Jesus Christ? I wonder tonight before we close if there are those who would raise their hands and say, Yes God has been speaking to me. He has been showing me my need, and I want prayer. You know I never embarrass you. I never humiliate you, and I never try to play with you. But I want to pray with you. I want to pray for you. Are there those who would say, pray for me? God has spoken to me. Anyone? Anyone in the Church; anyone here. Do not let it be, "Well I am a member. I am an elder or deacon." If God has spoken to your heart, respond, give the Spirit of God a chance to meet you, and by your upraised hand say, "Yes pray for me." It may be that you are unsaved.....

Father, Thou dost know the hands and the hearts behind them, and the need in the lives of these that are here. Thou dost know those, Lord whose hands were not raised, and yet in Thine eyes there is so much that Thou dost want to do, more than Thou hast been allowed to do: Truth that Thou dost want to make real. The fullness of Thy Spirit that Thou dost want to bring. Lives into fruitfulness and power. Grant Lord that we shall not be content just to eat and drink, marry

and give in marriage, buy and sell, and carry on our tasks as in the day of Noah. Grant Lord that we shall realize these are crucial days, that we shall meet Thee, and allow Thee to do for us and in us all that the Lord Jesus died to do. We pray, Lord, for those that have a special problem. We pray especially for those that are not sure they are born again. Father, that this might be the night of repentance and faith, the night when they enter into the sure certain witness of the Spirit that they are born of Thee. We pray for Thy children that have been living compromisingly with the world, that there might be a complete break, a bending before Thee, a confession, an opening, and an ending of every alliance that would hinder Thy working out of Thy plan in their lives. We pray for Thy hungry children, that Thou wouldst meet and bless them. And so, Father, in these few moments now that we sing let there be an atmosphere of real willingness to go all the way with Thee, and an expectancy that Thou wilt meet us, every step we take toward Thee, Thou wilt take two toward us, to meet and to bless and to deliver. And so, Father, guide us now in the closing of this Service. Make this a precious time, a time of victory and a time of blessing, meeting, and fitting blessing to every heart, and especially to those who have indicated their need by their raised hand. In Jesus Name and for His sake we ask it. Amen.

\* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Evening, October 16, 1960 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.

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