

ENDURING TO THE END

Matthew 24:9-14

9 Then they will deliver you to tribulation,
and will kill you,
and you will be hated by all nations
because of My name.

10 And at that time many will fall away
and will betray one another and hate one another.

11 Many false prophets will arise and will deceive many.

12 And because lawlessness is multiplied,
most people's love will grow cold.

13 But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

14 And this gospel of the kingdom
shall be proclaimed in the whole world
as a witness to all the nations,
and then the end will come.

(Matthew 24:9–14, 2022 LSB)

The disciples wanted signs, but these weren't the signs that they wanted! The first sign of the end of the age is intensified persecution and suffering at the hands of the wicked.

Last week I said that while Jesus doesn't give us full disclosure, He does give us adequate disclosure to prepare us for the end times. Perhaps the fullest disclosure Jesus ever gave regarded the persecution of His own people. From the Beatitudes to the conversion of Paul, Jesus made it clear that His saints would suffer as He did at the hands of the wicked. Nevertheless, "the one who endures to the end will be saved."

THE GLORY OF CHRIST'S NAME

Matthew 24:9

We'll begin with what I believe is the key statement of this passage: These things will happen because of the name of Jesus Christ.

9 “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you,
and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.”
(Matthew 24:9, 2022 LSB)

Let's be sure about the name of Jesus. God has bestowed on Jesus “the name that is above every other name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” In these words from Philippians 2:9-11, Paul quotes from Isaiah 45:23, where Yahweh says,

23 “I have sworn by Myself,
The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness
And will not turn back,
That to **ME** every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance.
(Isaiah 45:23, 2022 LSB)

So, Jesus Christ is Yahweh, and His name is truly the name that is above every name. The angel commanded Mary to name Him “Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The Gospel we preach is the Gospel of Jesus Christ because “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Romans 10:13 says that all who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. This is quoted from Joel 2:32,

32 “And it will be that everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh
Will be delivered ...
For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
There will be those who escape,
As Yahweh has said,
Even among the survivors whom Yahweh calls.”
(Joel 2:32, 2022 LSB)

Again we see an Old Testament reference to Yahweh applied to Jesus Christ. To call Jesus “Lord” is not simply to call Him “sir” or to speak respectfully to Him. It is to recognize Him as God in human flesh.

And because Jesus Christ is God in human flesh, who gave His life for the salvation of sinners, to reject His grace is to trample on His mercy and come under the judgment of God:

18 “He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”
(John 3:18, 2022 LSB)

This is our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who alone saves, who saves all who call upon Him but condemns forever those who refuse to trust Him. To Him, we bow our knees in fidelity and service! Him we confess as Lord and God! We love Him, worship Him, honor Him above all!

SUFFERING FOR CHRIST’S NAME

Matthew 24:9

9 “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. (**Matthew 24:9, 2022 LSB**)

The wicked hate God and everything to do with Him. They hate His very existence. They hate His Word. They hate His Law. They hate His Son. To the wicked, the true God and His Son, Jesus Christ, are literally curse words. They hate the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And they hate those who have called upon Jesus for salvation, received His mercy, and preached His Gospel.

This has always been true. Today, in various places, that hatred simmers; in other places, it boils over.

But as a sign of the end times, that hate will erupt worldwide. The wicked will not just want to marginalize or silence Christians; they will seek to destroy us. That persecution will bring about terrible tribulation for the people of God. Tribulation is not merely physical suffering but emotional and psychological torment. It causes human strength to waver and human courage to fail. But their faith, which is the gift of God, will endure.

In fact, the persecution meant to destroy the saints of God will accomplish two important purposes.

It will confirm the faith of genuine believers. Beloved, real faith is never perfect in this life, but it endures. Genuine believers can be frightened and confused, but their faith endures. The flames of persecution burn away the undergrowth and the weeds of the world and leave behind a strong, vibrant, living, spiritual vineyard.

Persecution will also reveal false converts in the church, those who have only pretended to be Christians, those First John 2:19 describe as being *with* us but not *of* us. That terrible persecution will bring about the fall of many.

THE GREAT APOSTASY

Matthew 24:10

10 “And at that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.”

(Matthew 24:10, 2022 LSB)

False believers claim to know and love Jesus. Many no doubt think they do, but their religion is a self-made thing. They are like the second and third soils in the parable told by Jesus in Matthew 13:5-6, those who heard the Gospel and responded emotionally but were driven away by persecution and suffering.

One of the signs that the end is near is that false believers will abandon the faith in droves when the world pours out its hatred against the church. The word translated “fall away” speaks literally of tripping over something. Figuratively it describes being offended, of figuratively “tripping” over a problem or difficulty, and abandoning a position.

The persecution poured out against the church, which leads to intense tribulation, will confirm the faith of genuine believers but cause false believers to flee.

The saints of God will continue to kneel before Jesus Christ as God, confessing Him as Lord and Savior. No amount of suffering and tribulation will cause them to walk away from Christ. But false believers were never in Christ to begin with and won't be willing to endure what comes.

I think that, for some of them, this will be a welcome change. They will realize that they have far more in common with the world than with the Lord Jesus and His church. There are people today who abandon the faith and say that they are happier for it, and I don't doubt them. A faithful church is a miserable place for a non-Christian to be.

At the same time, I think it will be hard for others. They will wish that their Christian friends would just back down and accommodate the spirit of the age and get along with the world. They might even regret the loss of friendships. But in the end, the fear of tribulation will dominate them.

They will think that they are escaping the "judgment" that is falling on the church but consider the world in which they seek shelter.

A WORLD OF BETRAYAL AND HATRED

Matthew 24:10

10 "And at that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.
(Matthew 24:10, 2022 LSB)

It is a world of betrayal and hatred.

We know that the New Testament describes a long list of "one anothers" that we, as Christians, are to follow. We are to love one another, serve one another, forgive one another, live at peace with one another, and so on. It's just you and me here, right? We aren't always very good at the one anothers, are we? No. But we recognize them, and by God's grace and mercy, we learn more and more how to carry them out.

Well, the world has its own one anothers, and they are exactly the opposite of those given to us. They betray one another, hate one another, rob one another, abuse one another, commit indecency with one another, judge one another, wrong one another, bite and devour one another, and consume one another.

That's the world that exists. That's the world that false Christians return to. No one should envy them.

A WORLD OF FALSE PROPHETS & DECEPTION

Matthew 24:11

11 “Many false prophets will arise and will deceive many.
(Matthew 24:11, 2022 LSB)

A sign of the end times will be a massive increase in false teachers and false prophets, sent forth by the devil to deceive those who lust for deception:

1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times
some will fall away from the faith,
paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons
(1 Timothy 4:1, 2022 LSB)

False teachers, prophets, and apostles will become commonplace in the world and will seek to infiltrate the church. Their aim will be to deceive the elect, if possible. But it won't be possible. True Christians are not just wicked people with a particular religious viewpoint. They are sinners who have been born again in Christ and filled with His Spirit. We can certainly be confused for a time; most of us have experienced that. But the Spirit of God is faithful, and the truth of Scripture burns through the murk and fog, and we find ourselves drawing closer to the Lord as time passes.

The wicked will not only BE deceived; they will actively seek out deception, paying attention to deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons. Paul writes,

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine,
but wanting to have their ears tickled,
they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,
4 and will turn away their ears from the truth
and will turn aside to myths.
(2 Timothy 4:3–4, 2022 LSB)

Paul also writes,

13 But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse,
deceiving and being deceived.

(2 Timothy 3:13, 2022 LSB)

That's not a world to envy, beloved. Those who abandon Christ go out into a world of deception and mythology.

A WORLD OF LAWLESSNESS AND LOVELESSNESS

Matthew 24:12

12 “And because lawlessness is multiplied,
most people’s love will grow cold.”
(Matthew 24:12, 2022 LSB)

The world that rises up against the Lamb and His people will be a world of lawlessness and lovelessness. Lawless here does not mean criminal behavior but sin and unfaithfulness to God and His Law. We can see this in our own time.

God commands, “You shall not murder.” The world is saturated with death. We are fighting an ongoing legal battle against abortion. There have been some legal victories. But the world remains a deadly place for children and the infirm. More and more states are moving toward physician-assisted suicide. And I think we can say that the explosion of transgenderism in sports is nothing less than an attempt to “murder” women by eliminating all distinctions between men and women.

God commands, “You shall not commit adultery.” Sexual sin is so common in our time that no one blinks an eye. It is the constant theme of music, movies, and television. The Bible says that it is disgraceful to even speak of the things that are done in secret (Ephesians 5:12), but the world shouts them out at full volume. Ghislaine Maxwell was convinced and imprisoned for the sex trafficking of underage girls, but not a single man she trafficked these children to has even been named, much less charged, in spite of the fact that she kept a book of clients.

God commands, “You shall not steal.” The founders of BLM used the money they raised to buy million-dollar homes in exclusive white neighborhoods. Federal representatives and senators frequently leave office millions of dollars richer than they were when they entered office. Many liberal cities refuse to prosecute theft with the result that thieves casually walk into stores, fill their arms with goods, and walk out.

That's just today. In the last days, lawlessness will increase to a level that we simply can't comprehend.

At the same time, the love of many will grow cold. First Corinthians 13:4-7 will be turned upside down. There will be no patience, no kindness, but rather intense jealousy, boasting, and pride. Unworthy and selfish acts will be the norm. People will be easily provoked and offended and will never forgive or forget a wrong suffered. The world will rejoice in and celebrate unrighteousness and hate the truth. They will never bear with the weak. They will never believe any good thing. Hope will vanish. No one will endure anything but rather live by personal preference and comfort. Men and women will be driven by a consumer mentality and treat everyone else as commodities and resources to be used.

If you think about it, I've just described our own time. So, either we are very, very close to the end times, or the end times are going to elevate selfishness to a level that we cannot begin to comprehend.

But remember what Jesus says at the end of the passage.

ENDURING TO THE END

Matthew 24:13-14

13 “But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

14 And this gospel of the kingdom shall be proclaimed in the whole world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.”

(Matthew 24:13–14, 2022 LSB)

His saints are going to endure to the end and be saved. His Gospel will not vanish but continue to be proclaimed.

The faith that God gives is an enduring faith.

Enduring faith is unswayed by persecution and tribulation.

Enduring faith doesn't stop because there is hatred or threats of death.

Enduring faith continues when false believers apostatize.

Enduring faith is not restricted by betrayal or hatred.

The course of enduring faith is not changed by false teachers, prophets, and apostles.

Enduring faith can't be eroded by the world's lawlessness or crippled by the world's lovelessness.

Enduring faith is stubborn and resilient, tough and persistent. It continues to trust in Jesus Christ and His Gospel. It continues in discipleship. In fact, not only are hard times and tribulations unable to stop enduring faith, they are the very means by which faith proves its endurance. The same sun that sours milk sweetens apples. The same tribulation that causes false believers to apostatize causes true Christians to grow as never before.

And because true Christians endure in faith, undeterred by the sufferings of this life, the preaching of the Gospel will continue. For two thousand years, the world has tried to stamp out the Gospel but has failed. The harder the world pressed, the more the Gospel spread. Increases in lawlessness and lovelessness have only served to help the church identify where the Gospel is most needed.

BRINGING IT HOME

Oh, this seems like a dark passage until you dive in deep and take it in. No one in their right mind seeks out persecution and tribulation. At the same time, there is no need for us to fear whatever today will bring. If we are truly in Christ, our faith will not fail.

That being said, we can and should follow the Lord's instructions for building ourselves up in our most holy faith. He has instructed us in His Word about corporate and personal discipleship.

Corporate discipleship is what takes place when we gather today. We worship the Lord in holiness. We take in His Word together. We pray and sing together. We share in the Lord's supper together. We serve one another by means of encouragement and fellowship.

Personal discipleship is what happens when we come to the Lord by ourselves or in believing relationships. We come to His Word to be taught, refreshed, and reminded. We lift our hearts to Him in prayer, sometimes giving thanks, sometimes pouring out our griefs and concerns. We confess our sins to Him, thankful for the Savior. And we share in discipleship, as Paul describes in Romans 1:12, being mutually encouraged by one another's faith.

There are some who are inclined to be isolated Christians who avoid corporate worship. Some have become offended and don't have the maturity to forgive and bear with others. Some are proud and believe that they have all they need on their own. Some are arrogant and believe that no church does it the "right" way. You know, studies show that prisoners in solitary confinement suffer physical and mental issues. Christians who live in a sort of spiritual "solitary confinement" will usually suffer as well. They are more prone to adopt strange doctrines and practices. They can become judgmental toward other Christians. Don't be a loner Christian.

On the other hand, there are some who are inclined to be Sunday-morning Christians. They don't crack their Bibles during the week. They don't pray. They avoid fellowship of all sorts. They think they get all they need on Sunday morning. They usually end up spiritually weak and emaciated, just as you and I would be if we only ate food once a week. Some of them become spiritual consumers, looking to the church to meet needs that a single worship service was not meant to meet and judging their church by the same criteria they would use to judge a fast food restaurant. They also tend to blame their spiritual issues on the church not doing its job.