Sermon Series: Things to Come
Sermon Title: The Signs of Christ's Coming

Read Matthew 24:3-9 -- **As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Jesus privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" 4 And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. 6 And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. 9 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.**

Introduction: A man named Richard left his cat with his brother, John, while he went on vacation for a week. When he returned home, Richard called to see when he could pick up the cat. John hesitated, then said, "**Umm, your cat fell off the roof and died**." His brother said nothing at first having been overcome by his grief. But then his mood turned from sadness to anger and he yelled into the phone, "**You know, you could have broken the news to me better than that." "Really, how?"** asked John "**Well, when I called a few days ago, you could have said my cat was on the roof and wouldn't come down. Then when I called the next day, you could have said that he had fallen off and the vet was working on patching him up. Then when I called this morning, you could have said my cat had passed away. At least that would have prepared me better for the news of his death**." John thought about it and apologized. Soon the conversation turn to family. Richard asked, "**So, how's Mom**?" His brother hesitated another moment and then said, "**Well, she's on the roof and won't come down**." ***Talk about things turning from bad to worse***! THAT'S THE DEFINITION OF A DOWNWARD SPIRAL BY THE WAY. It's a situation which just keeps getting increasingly worse.

This morning, as we launch into a new preaching series I'm calling **THINGS TO COME**, I want you to know that the Bible tells us before the Lord comes back for His people, our world will be in DOWNWARD SPIRAL that will mark the close of this age when everything will go from bad to worse. What will it be like? **Our passage for this morning tells us that we can expect a lot of disruption and pain as various human and natural disasters take place. These events will continue to intensify until they erupt in a time of a full-blown tribulation on the earth**.

There are **TWO PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS** I want to share with you before we begin: (**1**) Christians needn't worry about the tribulation because we will not be HERE TO EXPERIENCE IT. At least that's my belief and here's why. We will already have been raptured to meet up with the Lord in the air to be with Him in heaven. ***In a future message we'll talk a lot more about this***. THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE I WANT YOU TO KNOW. (**2**) Because no one knows when the rapture will occur, we don't know exactly when the tribulation will take place either. The only thing we know for sure is that with each passing day we continue to inch closer to it.

Now let's look to our text in **Matthew 24**, to learn what signs Scripture says we can expect to see leading up to the seven years of tribulation. Don't be surprised to discover that some of the same things that will occur IN THE TRIBULATION have already been happening for some time. The main difference between now and then will be in the ***intensity of the suffering***. In the same way that early labor pains for a woman are nothing compared to those she suffers when she's ready to give birth so the afflictions we suffer now will pale in comparison to what is to come for those unfortunate souls remaining on earth.

Now, here are FOUR SIGNS of the end times according to our Lord:

The Sign of Deception (**Matthew 24:3-5 -- As he sat 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 close of the age?" 4 And Jesus answered them, "See that no one leads you astray. 5 For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray**). As we move ever closer to the last days, Jesus warns that we will find an increasing number of false teachers who will seek to lead us astray. PEOPLE WILL TURN TO THEM FOR ANSWERS AND THEY WILL OFFER THEM. Many of these false teachers will be religious people and even a few will claim to be the Messiah Himself. But of course, those that make this claim are liars born of the devil who is the father of lies (**John 8:44 -- You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies**). Deception may be one of the greatest threats in the end times, but it is certainly nothing new. The priests of Israel were known to set up false idols in the temple for the Israelites to worship Baal and Asherah and all the hosts of heaven. And, of course, the people were all in despite the fact that the law strictly forbid this practice. In **Exodus 20:4-5** it says, "**You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I,**

the Lord your God, am a jealous God." THEY KNEW ENOUGH NOT TO THROW GOD OUT OF THEIR WORSHIP. THEY SIMPLY INCLUDED IDOLS IN IT. It wasn't until King Josiah's reign that they were removed and burned (**See 2 Kings 23:4**).

Today, they call this **SYNCRETISM**. It refers to ***THE FUSION OF TWO OR MORE DIFFERENT FORMS OF BELIEF OR PRACTICE***. This word perhaps characterizes our culture as much as anything else. The key word for many people is TOLERANCE. This appeal is especially helpful for those who claim that there is no such thing as absolute truth. "**Let's just recognize that every religion has some truth and benefits the world in some way**." This approach doesn't works so well for Christians, however. Since we believe that **Jesus is the truth of God come in human flesh** (**John 14:6**), **the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth** (**John 14:17**) and **the Father sanctifies us in the truth** (**John 17:17**), we consider our duty to walk in obedience to God's Word because it is true. THIS MEANS THAT WE MUST REJECT ANY TEACHING THAT IS CONTRARY TO IT, even if no one else agrees.

Sadly, in the twenty-first century, more and more churches and pastors are feeling the freedom to declare their own truth even if it directly contradicts Scripture. THIS IS WHAT JESUS WARNED US ABOUT AND IT'S MORE THAN A TREND. IT'S A SPIRIT OF DECEPTION THAT IS TAKING HOLD OF OUR CULTURE AND LEADING PEOPLE TO HELL. Listen to this:

According to author **Stefani McDade**, American evangelicals' grasp on theology is slipping, and more than half affirmed HERETICAL VIEWS OF GOD in **the 2022 State of Theology survey, released by Ligonier Ministries and Lifeway Research**. Overall, adults in the U.S. are moving away from orthodox understandings of God and his Word year after year. **More than half of the country (53%) now believes Scripture "is not literally true," up from 41 percent when the biannual survey that began in 2014**. Researchers called the rejection of the divine authorship of the Bible the "c**learest and most consistent trend" over the eight years of data**. Researchers wrote, "**This view makes it easy for individuals to accept biblical teaching that they resonate with while simultaneously rejecting any biblical teaching that is out of step with their own personal views or broader cultural values**." Here are 5 OF THE MOST COMMON MISTAKEN BELIEFS *held by evangelicals*: (**1**) ***Jesus isn't the only way to God***. 56% of evangelical respondents affirmed that God accepts the worship of all religions (SYNCRETISM); (**2**) ***Jesus was created by God.*** 73% agreed with the statement that "Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God." This is a form of ARIANISM, a popular heresy that arose in the early fourth century; (**3**) ***Jesus is not God*****.** 43% affirmed that Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God, which is another form of the Arian heresy; (**4**) ***The Holy Spirit is not a personal***

being*.** 60% of the evangelical survey respondents believe that "The Holy Spirit is a force but is not a personal being"; and (**5**) ***Humans aren't sinful by nature. 57% also agreed to the statement that "**Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature**." In other words, humans might be capable of committing individual sins, but we do not have sinful natures. This denies the doctrine of original sin. I DON'T KNOW IF THIS ALARMS YOU, BUT IT SHOULD. IF THESE TRENDS CONTINUE WHAT WE CLAIM AS CHRISTIANITY TWENTY YEARS FROM NOW MAY NOT RESEMBLE IN THE LEAST THE HISTORIC FAITH HANDED DOWN TO US BY THE APOSTLES AND CHURCH FATHERS. (Review: the Sign of Deception)

The Sign of Disputes (**Matthew 24:6-8 -- And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. 8 All these are but the beginning of the birth pains**). Our Lord warned that at the end of the age there would be wars and rumors of wars with nations rising against one another. Today, many countries have taken a position that threatens world peace. **Russia has invaded Ukraine**. **North Korea** has for some time now been testing their weaponry while claiming that are preparing for a war **with South Korea and America**. Only recently, they formed an alliance with China which makes them even more dangerous. **Iran** is always looking for someone to fight. Meanwhile, countries such as **Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Libya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan, Haiti, Pakistan, the Republic of Congo and Syria** are all currently experiencing CIVIL WARS in some form. Then there are other hotbeds of conflict where war may likely break out. The nations of **Azerbaijan and Armenia** seem to be headed for another conflict. And so do **China and Taiwan**. Even here in **America** we have certain people calling for the repression of those who do not agree with their political views! According to **the New York Times**, over the past 3,400 years, humans have been entirely at peace in only 268 of them.

Furthermore, it has been reported that 50% of all research scientists are engaged in making military weapons. Currently, there exists at least **one weapon and four thousand pounds of explosives for every man, woman and child in the world**. NONE OF THIS SHOULD COME AS A SURPRISE, BECAUSE IT'S EXACTLY WHAT THE LORD SAID WOULD HAPPEN AS WE DRAW CLOSER TO THE END TIMES.

The Sign of Devastation (**Matthew 24:7 -- and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places**). It's almost impossible, today, to turn on the television without finding some kind of appeal to help feed starving people around the world. Many of us probably give to a ministry that does this very thing. As a church, we partner with **Feed My Starving Children** to help make nutritious meals

for kids in third-world countries. We do this because the Bible tells us to remember the poor (**Hebrews 13:16 -- And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased**). **The need is indeed great!** in many parts of the world there is not enough food to go around due to drought conditions. **According to the U.N. there are 1/3rd more droughts today than just a generation ago**. The lack of an adequate water supply has accounted for 650,000 deaths in the last fifty years. Today, almost a third of the world's population is facing water stress. And along with this, of course, comes a shortage of food so that **25,000 people a day die of starvation**.

And what about earthquakes? On February 26th of this year an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.8 on the Richter scale killed more than 41,000 people in Turkey and Syria. In 2022 another struck Afghanistan in killing at least 1,100. And just this month, 2,900 people died in Morocco when an earthquake struck them. Put them all together and it's about the number of people to fill a stadium for a college football game here in America. WHILE THESE ARE TRAGIC, THERE IS ONE ENCOURAGING THING TO REMEMBER. THESE DROUGHTS AND EARTHQUAKES POINT TO THE IMMINENT RETURN OF CHRIST. (Review: Deception, Disputes, Devastation)

The Sign of Discrimination (**Matthew 24:9 -- "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake**). During the tribulation, there will be an EXPLOSION OF ANTAGOSIM TOWARD CHRISTIANS ALL OVER THE WORLD. We're beginning to see some of this taking place even now though the tribulation has not yet begun. Headlines carry stories of how Christian businesspeople are expected to compromise their values by supporting secular, progressive ideals. **The Pew Research Center** says In this year's survey, roughly two-thirds of Americans (64%) also say Jews face at least some discrimination in the U.S., up 20 percentage points from the last time this question was asked in 2016.

Half of Americans, meanwhile, say evangelical Christians suffer at least some discrimination. As with Jews, most people who think evangelicals are discriminated against say they suffer some inequity rather than a lot (**32% vs. 18%**). And let's not limit this to just our country. **The 2021 World Watch List** tells us (**1**) more than 340 million Christians live under high levels of persecution and discrimination; (**2**) 4,761 Christians were martyred that year; (**3**) 4,488 churches and other Christian

affiliated buildings were attacked; and (**4**) 4,277 Christians were detained without trial, arrested, sentenced and/or imprisoned.

Where should these signs of DECEPTION, DISPUTES, DEVASTATION AND DISCRIMINATION lead us today? Here are a few concluding thoughts to consider in light of these trends that precede the time of tribulation on earth.

- **Don't worry**. Christians WHO WORRY take their eyes off the Lord and get them on the world around us. Whenever that happens, we are overcome by our trials and tribulations. That's what Peter did when Jesus commanded him to walk on water. He was fine as long as he kept his eyes on Christ. The moment he began to look at the rough seas around him, however, things took a turn for the worse and he started going down. That's when he prayed the right prayer, "**Lord, save me**." And that's exactly what Jesus did. What a story Peter was left to tell of the Lord's mercy and power!
- **Don't forget**. God has got this. You're either going to die before the real trouble begins or you're going to be raptured and escape the wrath of God. Either way, you'll never face the really bad stuff so long as you have put your faith and trust in Jesus Christ.
- **Don't quit.** We have been given a mission from God. Let us remain faithful to it as we share the gospel with the world and live out the testimony of our faith that, in the end, will make it undeniable.

Conclusion: **Teacher and author Paul Borthwick** was on a visit to one of his friends who teaches in Beijing, China. He attended a church with four young men who were new believers thanks to his friend's ministry. The service was in Mandarin, so Paul understood nothing, but he did think the pastor, a very senior man, seemed a little boring. He was soft-spoken, a little stooped over, and preached without any expressions of excitement or emotion. At lunch after the service, Paul asked the four young Christians, "**Is your pastor a good preacher**?" They exclaimed, "**Oh yes! He is a great preacher. He spent many years in prison for Jesus Christ**." Their measurement of the sermon and the pastor's ministry had nothing to do with oratory ability and everything to do with a life faithfully lived in the face of suffering. There's still much good that the Lord wants to do through His faithful servants. As we trust God with everything, He will see us through this any light and momentary affliction that might come our way while bringing many to faith in Christ in the process.