**Title:** What to expect when you’re expecting (Matt. 24:1-14) – Signs of the End

**Introduction:** It’s not hard to know that something big is coming. I remember the day that my wife told me that she was pregnant. At that point, there was no visible evidence of the wonderful changes that were taking place inside of her. I was excited, scared and curious all at the same time. I didn’t know what was coming. Neither did she. That’s when the book, *What to Expect When You’re Expecting* came into our lives. That book lovingly guided us through the next nine months.

It told us what normal things to expect and not be worried about. It told us about warning signs and what to do about them. Knowing what to expect prepared us for the changes that would take place in our lives, both during the pregnancy and after the delivery. It dealt with our fears by alleviating some and increasing others. It generated questions we had not considered and answered the ones we already had. Overall, it was a friend to us during the most life-changing period of our lives.

It’s not hard to know that something big is coming. Jesus and His disciples were in the Temple. It had been an emotional day. Jesus had corrected His disciples’ thinking about true sacrifice when He applauded the “small” gift of a widow (Luke 21:1-4), and Jesus had confronted and berated the Pharisees for their hypocrisy (Matt. 23). It is obvious Jesus poured much passion into this encounter and the subsequent fruitless plea for Jerusalem to listen. Confrontation is an emotionally draining experience.

Encounters like that also tend to put people in a tense mood. No one knows what to say, so they don’t say anything until some brave soul ventures an off-subject statement in an attempt to lighten the mood. That’s what Jesus’ disciples were trying to do when they pointed Jesus’ attention to the buildings (Matt. 24:1; Mk. 13:1; Lk. 21:5). Their attempt backfired. Jesus countered their statement about the building with a statement of His own: the building was coming down…completely! (Matt. 24:2) They were awed by the building. Jesus wanted them to be awed by the events that would happen after its destruction. Something big was coming.

Time and distance, probably silence from the disciples and maybe from Jesus, intervened between two conversations. The first happened in the Temple (Matt. 24:2). The subsequent conversation made up of a series of questions came on the Mt. of Olives (Matt. 24:3). The disciples asked three questions: “When will this (the destruction of the Temple) happen?”, “What will be the sign of your coming?” and “What will be the sign…of the end of the age?” The final question showed they recognized there was a connection between the destruction of the Temple and Jesus’ return - the end of the world/age.

From their perspective, the destruction of the Temple surely must signal the end of all things. The Temple was the center of Jewish life. What could exist beyond its destruction? How could God allow that to happen?

They were nervous. They wanted answers. So they waited to hear what Jesus would say. Here in Matthew 24, Jesus told them what to expect as they anticipated His return.

1. Jesus said that we can expect the world to be off-balance. (vvs. 6-8)
2. Politically off-balance (vvs. 6-7a) *“wars & rumors of wars”*

To suggest wars and the talk of wars as a sign of the immediate return of Jesus is to suggest that stars in the nighttime sky mean that the sky is falling. Wars and the preparation for them have been a consistent part of human existence. The sign is constantly with us, so the sign becomes ineffective and ignored. Or worse, the sign gets pointed to so many times without the prophesied event following that people no longer pay attention and begin to doubt the credibility of the sign giver (Think: Chicken Little).

It is ironic that Paul suggests that it is the talk of peace that actually should get your heart racing. It is then that you need to watch out and prepare for the end (1 Thes. 5:1-3). The Antichrist will ride into town on a white horse offering peace to a world that has never known political peace (Rev. 6:1-2).

So maybe what Jesus was doing was warning them not to get too upset when they heard about these things happening. Wars were a regular occurrence then, and wars were going to continue to happen. At the time of this conversation between Jesus and the disciples, Jerusalem was under Roman occupation. As this resource is being written, 29 countries are involved in armed conflicts with other nations. Simply put, in 2016 there were only 10 out of 195 countries which are not involved in some kind of active armed conflict, either internal or external. War is not a new thing.

Popular opinion was that the Messiah would appear as a conquering hero to throw off Israel’s oppressor and bring about her peace (Matt. 10:34). However, John 6:15 states Jesus had not come for that purpose. Peace and release would come, but not yet. Wars were not the primary sign of His coming. They would be a constant reminder though, that things were not right in the world and that the disciples needed to be anticipating His return. For now, they were going to have to put up with a lot of political upheavals.

1. Geologically off-balance (v. 7b) *“famines & earthquakes”*

Jesus continued the theme of upheaval and disharmony, not just among people groups but now in the Creation itself. Luke adds these events that happen in nature will include widespread diseases and even unexplainable stirrings in the heavens (Luke 21:11). He calls them “miraculous,” not natural, not the way things are supposed to be. When Jesus does not rule, nothing is the way it’s supposed to be. Nothing is going to be stable. It can’t function according to the original design. It is “out of whack.” Paul says God’s Creation is waiting for – groaning for – the day when everything will once again be placed under the authority of Jesus Christ and will, therefore, be fixed (Rom. 8:22). We – humanity – have messed up our own lives and the innocent Creation around us.

C.S. Lewis’ Narnian world would be in awe of the humanity’s stupidity. What creature would rebel against its Creator? (Rom. 1:25) Mrs. Beaver would be wondering, “When will they ever get it right so that their world and ours can be renewed?” It’s no secret. Humanity is searching for something, yearning for something so much so that we quake on the inside and against one another just as the earth and the heavens quake around us. We clearly recognize something is not right, but rather than going to the Creator to find out what it is and ask Him for it, we fight with one another for something we think will meet that deep need (James 4:2). Jesus says that these things will continue all the way up to the End Times… and it will only get worse.

That’s what happens with labor contractions (v. 8) – they get sharper, more frequent, more noticeable, more dangerous and more painful as the delivery comes closer. Paul uses this same birth language to illustrate the approach of the end (1 Thes. 5:3). The arrival of birth pangs lets you know that something else is about to arrive. You don’t have an exact time for when it’s coming – you might even have some false starts – but it’s definitely coming. You need to be prepared at all times (bag packed, destination already set in the GPS, babysitter arranged for the other kids) because it’s probably going to come when you least expect it.

There is at least one substantial difference between pregnancy and the end of the world. When you’re pregnant, everyone seems to be your friend. It draws people together. Even complete strangers want to know your due date which is always a dangerous question to ask unless you know FOR SURE that the woman is pregnant. Some even feel comfortable asking to rub momma’s belly. The ever approaching end of the world will have the opposite effect. It will drive people apart.

1. Jesus said that we can expect the world to oppose us. (vvs. 4-5, 9-12)
2. Through false information (v. 4) *“misleads you”*

The amount of misinformation concerning the future return of Jesus and the end of the world is staggering! This information is proliferated through books, YouTube videos, radio, and the pulpit. It’s easy to be misled. Jesus put the responsibility for not being misled squarely on the shoulders of His disciples. He said, “See to it.” Make it a priority. Establish a plan. Get all the information you can. Don’t *allow* them to mislead you. It’s a command, not a suggestion. When we, the followers of Jesus are misled about anything, future events included, it is our fault. We have all the resources necessary to research information before we accept it as fact.

When I say “resources,” I’m not talking about Google primarily; I’m talking about the Bible, the same resource those original disciples had. We have even more revelation and therefore more responsibility than they had (Luke 12:48). It is the disciples of Jesus, then and now who have the responsibility of knowing the Bible well enough that we can affirm truth and counter lies.

But why would anyone intentionally lead someone else astray? And intent does seem to be Jesus’ insinuation. It’s easy to see why Satan would do that. He doesn’t want people – believers or unbelievers – to live in anticipation of Jesus’ return. He wants them lazy, comfortable, not on active duty. He wants them to either believe that there is no end, that the end is so far off that it doesn’t need to concern us now, or that there’s nothing we can do to affect how things will turn out. As for the motivation for humans to lead others astray about future events, Jesus addresses at least one reason: to profit by gaining a following.

1. Through false direction – *“I am Christ”* (v. 5); *“many false prophets”* (v. 11)

What Jesus had to say here (v. 5) concerned primarily their second question – the sign of His coming. He said many would claim to be Israel’s Messiah. By the time Jesus came, there had already been people that had made this claim to draw a following (Acts 5:36-37). There continued to be people who made that claim about themselves. In his first epistle, John speaks of them when he says,

“*Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this, we know that it is the last hour.” (1 John 2:18)*

A following gives you influence, self-esteem, and potentially money. Thanks to social media, we have more “followers” than ever. Not all of these are following someone because that person claims to be their Messiah in a spiritual sense. They follow because their leaders claim the ability to rescue them from boredom or insignificance or poverty or some other perceived need in their lives. Jesus said that these would be successful drawing “many” away. He wanted to prepare His disciples so that the same would not happen to them.

What’s interesting is, these false Messiahs claim to be coming in the name of Jesus not necessarily claiming to be Jesus…at least not at first. To come “in the name” of someone is to come with their authority, at their command, but fully recognizing that you are not them. These deceivers are clearly not functioning at Jesus’ call. Is it possible they start out acting as the emissary of Jesus? As they get more popular, they start veering off message and direct ever greater attention to themselves. Ultimately, there is very little similarity between the message they bring and the message of Jesus.

The result is that they present themselves as the savior instead of pointing people to the Savior. The task for us then is to identify those who claim to represent Christ but who are not conveying the message or spirit of Christ, so we are not misled by them.

There’s a difference between false Messiahs and false prophets. Jesus spoke of the former in v. 5.

*“And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in My name, saying, “I am the Christ,” and will mislead many.’”*

A Messiah is someone who uses his message to get people to follow him. A prophet is someone who wants people to follow God or at least a god of some sort. A true prophet speaks the words of the true God. A false prophet points people to a false god.

There will be a final false prophet who will direct people to worship the Antichrist as God (Rev. 13:12). Just as there will be one final Antichrist who ends the successive line of present antichrists (1 John 2:18), so there are many false prophets today. A false prophet hides his true intentions claiming to be speaking for God but using words that point people in a different direction than God wants them to go.

A false prophet is someone who claims to be speaking the truth but is speaking lies. The irony is, the deceiver has been deceived by the father of lies (Jn. 8:44). The result is he believes he is leading people in the direction that is pleasing to God. They are blind people leading blind people (Matt. 23:16, 24). The false prophet and those who follow him will fall.

*"Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit."* (Matt. 15:14)

The message of false prophets centers around one of two categories: doctrine or practice. Doctrine is what I believe. Practice is what I do, how I choose to live my life. Many doctrinal issues have come under attack in the last two centuries. The most important and most attacked are:

* The belief that the Bible came directly from God (inspiration) and is without error (inerrancy) (2 Tim. 3:16); this is also known as Verbal Plenary Inspiration.
* The full deity and humanity of Jesus (John 1:1; Col. 1:19; Heb. 1:8).
* The historical reality of miracles including the virgin birth of Jesus (Matt. 1:23).
* The bloody sacrifice of Jesus as our substitute and its sufficiency to pay for our sins (Heb. 10:10, 12).
* The resurrection of Jesus in a physical body (1 Cor. 15:3-4, 14).
* The personal return of Jesus to this earth (Acts 1:11).

You may ask how this could happen. How could the leaders of the church, those who teach and write about God and His Word, fail to believe what they teach? It wasn’t instantaneous. It was gradual. First, pastors began to question whether or not these doctrines were necessary. Then they questioned the truthfulness of these doctrines. And finally, they began to deny them and attack those who held to them.

Downfall begins with a falling away (v. 10) in beliefs. Practice always follows belief with betrayal and hate close behind (v. 10). A person can loudly and fervently *proclaim* his beliefs with his mouth (or his keyboard), but how he lives his life will *prove* what he believes. One obvious indication that there has already been a falling away is the acceptance of lifestyles that God in His Word clearly condemns.

We live in a society that is increasingly divided along the lines of ethnicity, sexuality, and economics. Instead of serving and protecting one another, we demand the rights of our group regardless of what that does to the unity of the Church or humanity in general. Open sin is increasingly excused under the guise of acceptance and love. Jesus’ requirement was repentance and forgiveness.

Some false prophets claim we can follow Christ without pain or repentance. Jesus said both are necessary components of discipleship (Matt. 16:24; Matt. 4:17; Luke 13:3). Do we want unrepentant people who are living in known sin to be the leaders in our churches? No! All of us could agree that the church is a place for sinners to come and experience the love of God and His people. But if that’s all they ever experience, they will never find healing. They also must feel the conviction of God’s Spirit (John 16:8), receive forgiveness for their sin and take steps to change their lifestyle.

Imagine the doctor who refuses to acknowledge the deadly but curable disease of her patient. She sees that the test results indicate the patient has the disease. The journals she consults say there is a known cure for the disease and without treatment, the patient will die a horrible death. Yet she fails to believe what she reads and therefore affirms the patient’s decision to ignore all the symptoms he has been experiencing. Was that doctor expressing *love* to her patient? You tell me. Should that doctor face a jury of her peers for her malpractice? The most loving thing a doctor or a prophet can do for anyone who will listen is to tell them they have a problem, but it’s fixable. It’s not fun to give people news they don’t want to hear, but the job of a prophet was never designed to be fun (Isaiah 6:9-13).

1. Through false affiliation (vvs. 9-10, 12) *“many will fall away”*

It’s interesting that in verse 8, Jesus talks about pregnancy. Here in verse 9, He speaks of a delivery. This delivery, however, brings no joy except for those who are opposed to Christianity. At the beginning of His statements, Jesus spoke of political forces attacking each other – probably for such things as fuel, land, riches and other items of strategic importance. Maybe even for revenge over long-held grudges and hatreds. But eventually, humanity turns from attacking each other and begins attacking Christians. Why? Partly because they blame Christians – or at least religion and those who passionately practice it – for the problems that the world is facing.

Nero tried to blame Rome’s fiery destruction on the Christians though it was not true. In the movie “The Book of Eli,” a post-apocalyptic world is devoid of every Bible except one. All the Bibles had been destroyed after the war because people believed it was faith that caused the war. They thought it best to destroy faith and everything that promoted it. It was the only way to save humanity. One of the most popular John Lennon songs ever written speaks of the “joy” of a world where there is no religion:

*“Imagine there's no heaven, it's easy if you try; No hell below us, above us only sky. Imagine all the people living for today. Imagine there's no countries, it isn't hard to do, nothing to kill or die for and no religion too. Imagine all the people living life in peace…”*

What Lennon really longed for, what we all long for regardless of our awareness of it, is a world where faith leads us to live as true children of God. Apparently, he had only witnessed a false faith, and it repulsed him.

Faith misapplied will lead to hurt, anger and confusion about who God is and what He wants for this world. And it will certainly cause people to see faith adherents as wicked enemies of humanity. In a sense, the song is right. Faith *does* divide. My beliefs divide me from others who believe differently than I do even if that belief is something as mundane and eternally insignificant as my support of my favorite sports team and your support of a different one.

The biggest problem with beliefs though is that beliefs require somebody to be wrong. Or at least they used to. In today’s relativistic society, supposedly two contradictory beliefs can be seen and are supposed to be seen as equally true and believable. You say the balloon is red. I say it’s green. It doesn’t matter that the light wavelength reflected from that balloon is in the blue spectrum. Because you believe it, I’m supposed to accept it.

I don’t have to change my beliefs. Supposedly, we can both believe two separate incorrect facts and neither of us has to be wrong. Paradise! No, it’s anything but paradise. When truth becomes relative, no one knows what to follow. There is no true north, no reliable point on the compass. We have no unwavering path to lead us safely home. We are lost. Lost people look for a light, any light, in the darkness. It’s easy to be misled.

Christianity claims to have that true north. You would think that lost people would be flocking to this Light in the darkness (John 8:12). Jesus had the audacity to claim, “I am *the* Way, *the* Truth and *the* Life. No one can come to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) Only a short time after the discourse on this day, Peter would stand on the steps of the very same Temple and proclaim that salvation was found *only* in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12).

As it relates to religion, pluralism says there are multiple ways to get to God. To believe otherwise is ignorant, prejudicial and well…wrong. And there’s the rub. The person who believes that there is no right or wrong attaches the label “wrong” to those who believe that there is only one way. “I won’t tolerate your intolerance.” Hence, the hatred and the painful attacks that follow begin.

I don’t like pain. Most people – at least those who are thinking clearly and correctly – don’t. Pain serves its purpose – warning of danger, making us aware of problems, producing character – but it’s not something that we seek. In fact, we usually go out of our way to avoid it. Jesus said that identifying with Him (*“because of my name”* [v.9]) was going to create emotional and physical pain. It was His warning ahead of time so that they could make an informed decision about whether or not they wanted to continue in the pathway that they were following. “This is going to hurt …a lot.” He didn’t want them to join in with some false notion of immediate and unhindered success only to throw down their spiritual weapons when they encountered adversity. “I never signed up for this!”

Paul knew something about suffering hardship for bearing the name of Christ. He was warned ahead of time. Jesus said of Paul, “I will show him how much he must suffer for me.” (Acts 9:16) Suffering was at the very core of Paul’s service. He was beaten, shipwrecked (twice); he was flogged and imprisoned repeatedly. Yet Paul called his suffering a “…light and momentary affliction.” (2 Cor. 4:17)

Even with all the warning, Jesus prophesied that there would be people who signed up but then walked away from the faith when persecution came. The only miracle recorded in all four Gospels other than Jesus’ resurrection was the feeding of the 5000. If you give people free food, you can draw a crowd. Ask any youth pastor. This crowd had gathered to experience Jesus’ healing (John 6:2) and to hear His teaching (Mark 6:34; Luke 9:11). Food was just an extra benefit. But the food was what kept them coming. They went searching for Jesus the following day to get another meal. Jesus told them that if they were going to follow Him, they were going to have to “drink his blood” (John 6:53) and “eat [his] flesh” (John 6:54). Jesus was partially talking about letting Him come into them, become a part of them so that their faith was something that was an internal reality rather than an external show. But He was also talking about participating with Him in His suffering (Matt. 20:22-23). This was *not* the meal that they wanted! It turned their stomachs. They walked away (John 6:66).

People have continued to walk away. Judas Iscariot was not the first to betray Jesus, and the spirit of Judas continues to plague those who claim the name of Christ. All around the world, persecution against Jesus and His followers continues to grow. That’s not always bad for the church

1. Persecution purifies (Dan. 11:35).
2. Persecution removes pretenders (1 John 2:19; 2 Tim. 4:10). Persecution has the effect of thinning the rolls. People walk away when there is a cost that has to be paid. Persecution identifies the true followers of Jesus. Ridding the church of the pretenders helps to make us healthier. It’s like ridding the body of an infection.
3. Persecution pulls out the props (2 Cor. 12:10). Persecution also makes us stronger in that it forces us to rely on God instead of relying on ourselves.
4. Persecution focuses our priorities (2 Tim. 2:3-4). It causes us to focus our priorities recognizing that we don’t have the luxury of extra time or extra resources.

Knowing that persecution is good for us still doesn’t make it easy. Some choose to walk away.

Walking away is one thing. Everyone is free to make their own decisions. No one is forced to join or to stay. Betrayal is on a whole other level. In some groups, when a person committed but didn’t follow through on that commitment, he is labeled a traitor. But just because someone who signed with one sports team balks on that contract, it doesn’t make him a traitor. If he chooses instead to play for his former team’s rival and takes all his knowledge of that team with him to use against them, that will make him a traitor.

Jesus predicted that those who the disciples used to consider friends and fellow warriors in the battle against the darkness would turn against them. They would use their knowledge about them to hurt them. Far more hurtful is the betrayal of a friend than the attack of an enemy. Even more hurtful is when those attacks come from trusted family members, but that’s what Jesus said would be the source of this betrayal (Matt. 10:34-39; Mark 13:12).

Where there had once been love, there would now be hate. It’s not that we hate them for leaving, but that they hate us because we don’t come with them. We are told to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44). They feel no compulsion to do the same for us.

1. Jesus said that we can expect the world to create opportunities for us. (vvs. 13-14)
2. Opportunity to testify about your true nature (v. 13) *“endures to the end”*

Falling away…betrayal…hate…murder…lawlessness…lovelessness… false belief. It’s not a pretty list. And what makes it even uglier is that this description is given of those who once claimed to be one of us, even those who claim that *they* have the true faith and that it is *we* who have erred in our faith and practice. No wonder Lennon (the songwriter) and Lenin (the Communist politician) both wanted a world without religion!

The good news is that not everyone will fall away or become snared by the teaching of false Messiahs or false prophets. Some will “endure.” And it is this endurance that gives evidence that a person was actually a child of God, to begin with (Mark 4:17). It is difficult to endure in the environment that Jesus here describes. Most of us depend heavily on the support of family and friends during the tough times of life. They give love, direction, encouragement, and motivation to continue on. But this support group becomes a source of pain and hardship (Mark 13:12).

In many countries around the world, persecution by family members is already the norm. Emotional and physical separation, loss of prestige and position, difficulty providing for yourself, physical torture, no immediate benefit to the pain you endure, loneliness, death … it’s not easy to endure. But there is a reward: salvation. Paul said, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us.” (2 Tim. 2:12) It’s not that endurance is necessary for salvation to happen but that endurance gives evidence that salvation has already happened.

In Jesus’ letters recorded in Revelation to the churches of Asia Minor, He commends almost all of them for their endurance even though they were under intense pressure to give up and give in. Jesus promised the “crown of life” (Rev. 2:10) to those in the city of Smyrna who refused to surrender their faith. Paul praised the Thessalonian Christians for their endurance under persecution and hardships (2 Thes. 1:4) and told them that rest would be provided for them when Jesus appears (2 Thes. 1:7).

1. Opportunity to testify about the true Savior (v. 14; Luke 21:13-15; Mark 13:11) *“this Gospel shall be preached”*

Rest time is not here yet. We have a mission to fulfill. After Jesus had resurrected, He gave His disciples their mission: Tell the world!

*“And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’"* (Matthew 28:18-20)

There is a debate about whether or not the Gospel has reached the “whole world” or “all the nations.” According to Bob Creson, the president of Wycliffe Bible Translators, 57% of the world’s languages still don’t have completed translations of the Bible. But that number is dropping more rapidly now than ever before. He expects that translation work will have at least begun in all the remaining languages of the world within the next ten years.[[1]](#endnote-1) The internet takes all kinds of information including the Gospel to places all over the world, but about half of the planet’s population still does not have access.[[2]](#endnote-2) Some have used the criteria of the Gospel’s world-wide penetration as a limiting factor for the return of Christ. He clearly says that all the world will have access before the end comes.

But we need to ask two questions. First, what do the phrases “the whole world” and “all the nations” mean? “Nations” does not refer to Cuba or France or South Africa. The term that is translated “nations” actually means “people groups.” The Lausanne 1982 people group definition says: "For evangelization purposes, a people group is the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance." Depending on who’s counting, there are between 10 and 25 thousand people groups on the planet.[[3]](#endnote-3) The fact that not all of these have the Bible in their language means that not all of them have been reached.

The other question we must address is this: what is “the end”? Is “the end” the Rapture, the beginning of the Tribulation, the Second Coming, or the destruction of planet earth? Whichever of these we choose as “the end.” the Gospel will reach every place on earth. Near the end of the Tribulation, God sends out one of His angels – His messengers – to deliver to all the world the message of the Gospel (Rev. 14:6).

We can’t afford to wait until then or abdicate our responsibility and let an angel do what we were called to do! Whatever “the end” is, people are reaching their personal end every day. Paul told Timothy the motivation that drove him to endure all the suffering that he faced was so that the elect might gain salvation (2 Tim. 2:10). He refused to retire at a resort on the Mediterranean Sea because he had a message that people needed to hear. And he challenged Timothy to take up that mantle. He warned Timothy of a time when people wouldn’t want to listen to sound doctrine but only fables that tickled their ears (2 Tim. 4:3). It would be comfortable to give people what they want to hear, but it wouldn’t be beneficial. So Paul challenged Timothy to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5).

As we do the work we have been called to, experience the persecution and suffering associated with it and still faithfully endure, we will gain the testimony Jesus spoke of. Timothy could see in Paul’s sufferings the journey wouldn’t be easy, but he could also see by Paul’s example he could reach the end with a good testimony. Isn’t that we all want; to be able to say “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness…” (2 Tim. 4:7-8)

James picks up on this same theme and tells His Jewish readers who were going through suffering to be patient for the approaching coming of the Lord (James 5:7-8). He knew that it was tough, so he gave them examples of those who had to wait but saw positive results to their efforts and thereby gained a good testimony. He spoke of farmers who plant seeds and endure through often dry times to reap a crop. He spoke of Job who did not understand the spiritual battle that was being waged around him and did not know that the testimony he possessed had the power to stop the boasting of Satan.

History tells us of others whose life ended with a similar testimony. As Ignatius, a pupil of John the Apostle was getting ready to be fed to lions, he said these words:

*“I thank thee, O Lord, that thou hast vouchsafed [to allow or permit, as by favor or graciousness] thus to honor me. I am God’s grain, to be ground between the teeth of wild beasts, so that I may become a holy loaf for the Lord.”*

Polycarp, also a pupil of John, died a different kind of death. He was burned at the stake. But rather than give in to the offer of mercy if he would renounce his faith, he spoke these words:

*“Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and He has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my King who has saved me? You threaten the fire that burns for an hour and then is quenched, but you know not of the fire of the judgment to come, and the fire of the eternal punishment. Bring what you will.”*

What a testimony! As Tertullian said, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” It is testimonies like these that have the potential of changing the hardest hearts and bringing the staunchest opponents of the Gospel into the kingdom. That is our task as we wait for the end to come whether that end is our last heartbeat or the final judgment on humanity.

**Conclusion:** It’s not hard to know that something big is coming. All that you have to do is listen to the news. It *can* be hard though to know what you’re supposed to do with that knowledge. Jesus already told us what to do. First, He said that we shouldn’t be frightened (Matt. 24:6). Over the next several weeks, we’re going to be talking about some events that could just as easily come out of a science fiction movie. In some cases, even a horror movie. Prophecy can get intense! Someone has well said – and I don’t know who first said it – prophecy was not given to scare us but to prepare us. Don’t be afraid. Be prepared.

That leads us to the second response. It’s given in the first verse we’re going to look at next time – “let the reader understand” (Matt. 24:15). The more you understand, the more prepared you can be. That’s why my wife read that book about what happens in pregnancy…and then told me what it said. It was so that we could make the birth of our baby girl go as smoothly as possible. We wanted to understand so that we could anticipate with great excitement her arrival in the world rather than fear it.

Jesus drew a clear parallel between pregnancy and His coming for a reason. In both, there is a guarantee that something big is happening, and in both, there is an expectancy both of danger and joy. When people fail to pay attention to the wisdom that they’ve been given and something goes wrong in the pregnancy (i.e., miscarriage), that big thing that’s coming can be very hard. For most, Jesus’ coming is going to be the hardest big thing that they have ever experienced. They refused His counsel. They will be doomed. Death is coming for them.

When you follow the clear direction you’ve been given, and everything goes right, you get the inexpressible joy of holding your newborn child in your arms! New life has come into the world. In both situations, there is pain involved. Neither is easy. If everything goes right, the endured pain is worth it when a healthy child is added to the family (John 16:21). The birth of a child is worth the pain (John 3:3).

After all the human struggles are over, and Jesus stands on the earth, the result will be worth all the struggle and suffering that led up to it. “It will be worth it all when we see Jesus. Life's trials will seem so small when we see Christ. One glimpse of His dear face, all sorrow will erase.” - IT WILL BE WORTH IT ALL (When We See Christ)
Words & Music: Esther K. Rusthoi

1. “Bible not available in 57% of world’s languages; Most Americans believe the Bible is available in every language”; The Christian Post; Samuel Smith, Apr. 14, 2015; retrieved Feb, 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. “Internet Users”; internet live stats; retrieved Feb, 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. “Definitions”; The Joshua Project; retrieved Feb, 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)