

THE CHRISTIAN AND WORLD TERRORISM

Luke 21:5–28

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Our theme for today is “The Christian and World Terrorism.” You see plenty of terror evidenced in the words which the Lord speaks to us on the Tuesday before His death. Reading from verse 5 through 28 of Luke 21:

“Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, ‘As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.’ ‘Teacher,’ they asked, ‘when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?’ He replied: ‘Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, “I am he,” and, “The time is near.” Do not follow them. When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.’ Then he said to them, ‘Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life. When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its

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desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” (Luke 21:5-28, NIV).

We have, in the Scripture that we have read, the beginning of the first and only systematic teaching that Jesus gave on the future. It is called the Olivet Discourse, so named because the setting where Jesus taught it is the Mount of Olives. When you're standing on it, you look toward the west, and there before you is the unforgettable panorama of the city of Jerusalem. This Olivet address by Jesus had a special application for the first generation of believers who were alive when Jesus taught it, for it told them about the coming destruction of Jerusalem (in verses 20–24), an event that happened in their lifetime. An event that occurred within forty years of the time that Jesus gave this teaching. Many believe that there is to be a double fulfillment of verses 20–24. There is not only the destruction of Jerusalem of 70 A.D., which the disciples were warned about and indeed fled, so, by and large believers were not in the city when it was destroyed by the Romans, but there also will be, at the end of time, a second destruction of Jerusalem. A time of desolation.

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There is, in this page of Scripture, also a special application for the very last generation of believers alive at the time when Christ returns. It is in that generation that there will be cosmic signs; the heavens, the sun, the moon and the stars, the very powers of the cosmos, being disturbed. The times of the Gentiles and the control over Jerusalem ending. There are some who hold that the last generation already came to pass either in 1948 or 1967. Because in '48 the Jewish people were regathered and reconstituted as the nation of Israel. And in '67, Israeli troops occupied all of Jerusalem. However, there are others—including myself—who wonder if indeed Jerusalem is not yet trodden down by the Gentiles; it is not a city that is reorganized by the nations of the world as the capital of Israel. And nations such as the United States do not have embassies there. It is also a city in which the very crown of the city, the Temple Mount, is still under the control of non-Jewish people. It is under control of the Gentiles, the Muslims. So I think it may be debated that the times of the Gentiles have indeed been fulfilled. There are some people that are concerned: Is this the last generation? I don't know if this is the last generation. I just know that for me it's the last generation because this is the only generation I've got.

Beyond the first generation and the last generation, there are all the generations in between. The great body of this discourse deals with all those generations and tells those generations what the course of human history is going to be like. "It will be," Jesus is saying, "a time of terror." And to the disciples who will be living through these generations of history, He will tell them again and again, "Do not be frightened. Stand firm."

I want to talk, just for a moment, about how difficult it is to prophesy and be accurate. It is no small task. If I were to ask you to take out a sheet of paper and write down what the world will be like in 1997, what political alliances will prevail and what your personal life will be like in 1997, if you are alive and the Lord has not returned, it would be interesting to see what you

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would write and it would be interesting to see what the envelopes would say in light of the reality of 1997, when you would open them ten years hence. It is difficult to prophesy ten years out, let alone 2000 years out.

On a kind of a light side, I've brought with me today one of my favorite books in my library. It's a favorite because it reminds me of how fallible prophetic predictions are. It's a little book called *I Predict* by Salem Kirban, who has written a lot of prophecy books. It was published in 1969 or 70 and it was a prognosis of what was going to happen during the ten years of the 1970s. The fly of the book says, "The next ten years will witness what may now appear to be unbelievable events, but they are events that will nevertheless occur." There are, page after page, predictions about various areas. There is, to Kirban's credit, a disclaimer in the front of the book after this daring word on the cover that he does not necessarily speak on behalf of the Lord when he makes a prophecy, and that he could be wrong. At the back of the book, there's a little black envelop embossed with a gold seal, making it all the more special, and inside are the real predictions which you pull out and read. Some things he was close to right, and other things, it is really interesting to see how far off the mark they were.

For example, by 1980 he predicted that it would be necessary for the capital of the United States to move from Washington D.C. By 1979, the Israelis would construct the temple on the temple mount. By 1978, all automobiles would have been banned from all major US cities and we would have in their place nuclear powered buses and trains operating before the end of the 1970s. I'm not so sure if some of the bus drivers I've seen lately haven't been operating on nuclear. He said Queen Elizabeth would step down from her throne by 1975 or sooner and then Prince Charles, then king, in following her, would offer to give up his throne before 1980. Poor Charles has not even yet got to sit on the throne.

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So it is difficult to prophesy. I mean no disrespect to Salem Kirban. He just was trying to generate reader interest and anybody that writes wants to sell books. The fact is, he was really off. Not just on some things, but gobs of things.

When you look, therefore, at the teaching of Jesus in respect to the future one of the differences you have prophetically—as opposed to much “Christian end-time literature”—is that Jesus is not concerned at all about “calendarizing.” He is not saying the month or the year. He’s not trying to identify for us who the ten toes are on the beast and all those kinds of things. Prophecy, from the biblical point of view, is designed to make us aware that both wonderful and horrible things are out there in the future. The horrible things happen through the agency of unredeemed humanity and Satan himself. The wonderful things are what God is going to do. And the purpose in knowing the future is to assess what manner of people we ought to be while we live in this very present moment. Prophecy, therefore, is not designed simply to inform us but to reform us. To reconstitute us in the image of Jesus Christ.

This discourse, the Olivet Discourse, had really been kicked off by a statement that Jesus made about the temple. He said, “There will not be one stone left standing on another.” This had brought the disciples to a question as to when this would happen; which gives occasion to the Lord, not only to talk about when it would happen, but to give a whole scenario of what is going to happen in the human race until He returns.

When we hear “not one stone left upon another,” perhaps we think of a kind of masonry construction that is part of our church facility. It may be hard for us to take a hammer and a chisel and knock this building down, but a wrecking ball probably wouldn’t take too long. Reinforced concrete and all.

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When we're talking about the temple building, however, we're talking about stones of a different order. Just a few weeks ago, I was in an area of Jerusalem, beside the Damascus gate, that is misnamed "Solomon's Quarries." They actually weren't Solomon's quarries at all. They were Herod's quarries. It is an area that stretches for hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of yards under the city of Jerusalem, beginning at the Damascus gate, with cavernous rooms far in excess of the size of this auditorium. An area that was not naturally made, but was all man-made by Herod's masons, cutting out the vast stones which weighed tons and that were ingeniously transported down to the Temple Mount to make the incredible beautiful buildings that constituted the temple—the second temple, the temple of Herod—a wonder of construction in the ancient world. These stones weighing tons—massive—Jesus looks at them and says, "There will not be one stone standing on another." When you're on the Temple Mount today, you can see with your own eyes what Jesus said is true. There is not a single stone left on the Temple Mount standing on another. If you see any stones at all, it will be in an area that Jesus did not talk about, which is the retaining wall of the Temple Mount. Simply a wall and no buildings. He's talking about the buildings being torn down. This was done by the Romans. In fact, the Christians, knowing what the Lord had said to them, had gotten out of the city when they saw Titus and the Roman army coming in 68 and 69 A.D., and therefore escaped the destruction of 70 A.D.

I want to focus for a few moments on what Jesus said human history would be like, and on Christians living in the midst of terrorism, which is occurring on a number of levels.

I. Jesus, first of all, indicates—as a part of the course of human history—that following His ascension into heaven and before His coming back to earth, there would be, in that whole period of time—however long that time would be—division in religion.

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“Many,” He said, “will come in My name.” That is, in God’s name, saying, “I am he. Or I speak on behalf of God.” Jesus, therefore, did not see at all any Pollyannaism or idealist idea that, because of His crucifixion and resurrection in Jerusalem, everybody would come to embrace the Christian faith as the one religion. There is no such thinking on Jesus’ part. He not only indicates that there will be a continuing pluralism in religion (that is, many religions), but He sees an increasing growth of religion, new religions coming along. A religion like Islam, for example, that says, “I am He.” That is, they have the authentic Word from God. He not only sees the growth of world religions that are apart and opposed to Him, but He also sees the growth of seductive and heretical movements, within the faith which He Himself brings into the world. So the disciples must be tied to His Word, lest they be seduced by other faiths or by those within the Christian faith who name the name of Christ, yet whose doctrine and life are far from Him. This is an age, likewise, in which we as believers need to be careful that we give earnest heed to those things which we have heard. There are many lying prophets, many seducing ministers, much false teaching in the body of Jesus Christ today, which renders ineffective the faith of the Lord and the witness He bore. We’ve almost had, in my generation, a kind of climate in the church, especially the charismatic wing of the church, that can be best likened to Flip Wilson’s the “Church of What’s Happening Now.” Somehow, if it hasn’t happened in the last three hours or the last three months, it isn’t valid, from God. I had a person ask me, “What has the Lord been saying to you lately?” I knew what they meant by that, what new revelation have you had? My response is, “The thing the Lord has been saying to me lately is ‘Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength and your neighbor as yourself.’” The main things are the plain things. The plain things must always be the main things. If a doctrine is new, you can bank on it—it ain’t true.

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We now have a teaching called “Kingdom Now,” which is sweeping through churches and through the electronic church. It is being magnified, time and again. Those who hold this view appear to be very spiritual and godly people. And well, they might be in their own personal life. I do not know. I just know that what they proclaim is an error. They’re saying that Christians are so much the salt and the light that we are going to, somehow, redeem humanity by infiltrating the political and economic apparatus of this country, and Christians are going to come into control. We are one day going to have a Christian government, and when people see how the Christian government of America operates, that’s going to spread to the whole world. Jesus does not need to come back at all. Christians will usher in the kingdom of God, and when we get it all ushered in, we’re going to present it to the returning Jesus Christ as a gift.

That kind of teaching logically flows, I might suggest, out of the positive confession movement which became the prosperity movement. If everybody is to be happy, if everybody is to be prosperous, if everybody is to have health, wealth, and prosperity, then it only seems natural that we should take over everything as well.

Jesus has a different view of human history. He does not see things getting better and better. He doesn’t see the world unifying under a Christian majority or a Christian front or a Christian religion. He sees division in religion. He sees a retrogression in human history, a worsening of relationships, a worsening between nations and a worsening in climatic conditions, a worsening in national catastrophes and, in the midst of that, He holds out, not a reformed church as the answer to the world, but a returning Christ as the answer to the world’s needs. That is what Christ is calling for. Those who name a doctrine that is different than this are disagreeing with the Lord’s own clear words that are right here in the Olivet Discourse. You can build beautiful buildings that you call churches and you can raise money and be on national Christian television,

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but it doesn't matter one hoot. If it's not in agreement with the written Word of God, it ain't worth nothing.

We as Christians, if there's ever been a time we need to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints it's now—not the faith being continually delivered, not a doctrine today in the 80s that's added to the doctrine somebody discovered in the 70s, but a doctrine that goes back to the 30s, not the 1930s but the 30s when Jesus was alive and gave, once and for all, the faith to the saints. Jesus says there will be division in religion. He warns us.

II. He warns us also that a second indicator of the course of the age will be conflict among nations (verses 9–10).

He does not hold to an era of enlightened peace. By the way, in spite of Jesus' view of human history, we never find Him telling us to simply be passive and to not work for peace and to not work for justice. But He wants us to be aware that, despite all of our works, there's something so rotten in the core of mankind and something so awful in the nature of our supernatural enemy, the devil, that things will never be right until He comes. There will be conflict among nations, wars and rumors of wars.

We look at this now and say, "Of course! Everybody knows that. There are wars and rumors of wars." Did you know that the leading theological magazine of the liberal wing of the Protestant church is called *The Christian Century*? The reason why it was called *The Christian Century* was, at the turn of the last century, when the social gospel was in focus, an individual conversed in salvation was regarded as old style and out to lunch. When that whole view prevailed, there was a group of liberal theologians who said, "The twentieth century is going to be the age in which the church ushers in the kingdom. It is going to be the Christian century. It is going to be the century when wars will end. Disease will be over. Racism will be gone. Poverty will be

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through. Famine will be no more. Therefore, in 1900, let's call our new magazine after what this time is really going to be: *The Christian Century*." If Jesus indeed does tell us that we can judge the truth of a prophet by whether or not his words come to pass, then we have, in the masthead of the leading, liberal, theological journal of this country, an advertisement that says all the way through it, "False prophet!" Missed it by a mile!" This has been the most unchristian century you can imagine.

Jesus says, "Wars and revolutions—ethnic group against ethnic group. Political alliance against political alliance." Political alliances are continually shifting. The *Jerusalem Post*, a year ago, reported that in the eighteen years between 1964 and 1982, there were twenty-five radical changes in alliances occurring in countries regarded by Israeli military planners as confrontation states—Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Algeria, and Sudan moved in and out of alliances with one another, from friendship to enmity, with almost complete unpredictability. The same is going on today. Our friends in World War II are not our friends now. Our enemies then are not our enemies now. Alliances switch.

In an annual report published by the former chief of the economic division of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, there is an analysis of military and social spending in the whole world. This report, which is recognized as a valid secular authority, estimates that today there are in the world one hundred million people engaged, directly or indirectly, in military activities. Twenty-five million of these are in uniform as troops in the armed forces of the world. And seventy-five million more people standing behind those twenty-five million as paramilitary, reserves and civilian support, for the military system. Since 1960, more than ten million people have perished in sixty-five major wars. In the last twenty-five years, we've had sixty-five major wars. A major war being defined as a war in which more than a thousand people are killed.

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Forty-nine countries have been caught up in wars since 1960. A hundred and twelve coups have taken place in developing countries. And the world is spending almost one trillion dollars—that's a thousand billion dollars a year—in military forces and hardware.

Jesus sees the course of the age, in the Gospel of Matthew, as being that which is like a woman in labor. The closer it comes to bringing to birth the child, the more frequent and the deeper are the contractions. He sees human history as heading toward that final denouement, and as one comes closer to the end, the more violent and rapidly paced are the contractions of history.

We have today nuclear submarines, nuclear missiles, silos, nuclear-equipped bombers which can hit a target from thousands of miles away with an accuracy of seven to ten meters, anywhere on earth. The nuclear armaments don't even take into account conventional forces, chemical warfare, biological warfare, satellite warfare. We live in frightening times. And against this backdrop, Jesus simply tells us, "Do not be frightened."

How can we hear that—"Do not be frightened"? I think there has been something that's happened. We have, in this generation (my generation), come into our lifetime in the dawn of the nuclear age. I can remember, in '49 and '50, going through nuclear air raid drills in our public schools in the state of Pennsylvania and being paralyzed with fear that the Russian bombers were going to come and get us. We now pretty much have thrown all this fear out the window and we just know that Russia isn't going to press a button and we're not going to press a button. I'm not, perhaps, so concerned about either of those countries pressing a button. It would seem to me that some terrorist would get a hold of a nuclear weapon and release it in a major populated city, or that some form of chemical or biological instrumentality would be let loose in the Southern California area, which would evacuate us and make life here not go on at all. It is a perilous time

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in which we live. Jesus said that was going to happen. He says, “There are going to be wars and rumors of wars. Nation against nation.”

III. His third major line of approach, in saying what the course of the ages is: There’s going to be catastrophes in nature.

Of these catastrophes, He identifies five.

Great earthworks. We know that. All the scientists tell us that, within the next twenty years, there is going to be a great earthquake in Southern California. Jesus, who created the world, knew that it was built on plates that are sliding against one another, and that that would always continue until the age would end. I think earthquakes are a theological tip-off that the shaking in the ground is meant to warn us of the shaking that is coming when everything will be shaken.

There are famines, Jesus says, which will take place. World Vision estimates that today in the world ten thousand people will die of starvation or malnutrition. The *LA Times*, on December 22, ran a report from the US Census Bureau, just a month ago, that on an average 4.5 people are born in this world every second. (What they do with the half person I haven’t yet discovered). But, 4.5 are born every second! The world population will be 6.2 billion by the year 2000. Twenty-seven more percent of people on the planet earth than there are now and almost 75 percent of this growth will occur in developing or poor countries which already hold three fourths of the world’s population. You can almost with certainty say, on the basis of these population growth estimates, that there is going to be a continued famine. That again does not mean that we sit back with our arms folded and do nothing about it as Christians. We ought to be very deeply involved in giving food and a cup of water. But Jesus simply says, “In spite of our best efforts, the selfishness and the inhumanity of man and the carelessness of man and ravages of the evil one are such that things will even get out of your hands to minister to them.”

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He says there will be pestilence. Pestilence can be anything from a bug plague to a disease. The latest pestilence, of course, is AIDS. Just this last Thursday, January 29th, Dr. Otis Bowen, who is health secretary for the United States government Health and Human Services Secretary, told a national press club audience that fifty to one hundred million people worldwide could have AIDS in the next two decades and at least two hundred and seventy thousand new cases of AIDS are expected in the United States alone within the next five years, with more than 10 percent of these new cases being heterosexuals. Bowen said the worldwide AIDS epidemic will become so serious, it will dwarf such earlier medical disasters as the bubonic plague, small pox and typhoid. “If we can’t make progress, we face the dreadful prospect of a worldwide death toll in the tens of millions a decade.” This, not from a preacher, not from a Christian writer, but from a United States government official at the highest level.

It is one thing to read about AIDS. It’s another to meet it, face-to-face. One of the members of our congregation—in a blood transfusion associated with a surgery a number of years ago—had had, prior to their screening blood for AIDS, contracted the disease and is now lying in a hospital bed in a comatose condition. As I visited her yesterday and prayed with her and she opened only one eye to look at me, I could not tell if she could recognize me or not. We have been friends and she has really cared about me and about this church and about the people of God. It is one thing to talk about AIDS hitting ten million people. It’s a quite another thing when it comes home in the life of a friend. It is a horrible pestilence.

Jesus simply says, again, that the evil in men and our adversary is at work in the microorganism levels of life, sowing disease and pestilence and these are not going to be eradicated. They are going to get worse. Jesus lists fearful events and then great signs from heaven as catastrophes in

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nature. There will be the breaking up, the beginning of the breaking up of the heavens themselves.

IV. Then the fourth thing the Lord sees as happening. It's not only the division in religion, not only the conflict in nations, not only the catastrophe in nature. But the Lord sees persecution of His disciples.

In verses 12 through 19, in fact the most lengthy segment of His teaching, He deals with the persecution of His disciples. He devotes more time to it than any segment. Indeed, there are disciples all over the world today who are facing this. I know a little bit of the terror that can be faced by disciples firsthand, because of what my parents and my older brother and sister faced. In 1936, while living in a town in Northwest China, suddenly the troops revolted, went over to the Marxist side, housed my parents in prison and threatened them for a month, on daily basis, to execute them. One morning, when they went out in the compound to draw water out of the well, first they had to pull a dead body out of the well before they could draw their water for that day. Their guards told them, "It's the body out of the well today. Tomorrow, it will be your body." It was sheer terror and they were terrorized because they were missionaries. There are places in this world today where, if a missionary went, they would be killed. There are places in this world where, if a person becomes a Christian and the state or the religion knows about it, they will be killed. Jesus says that His disciples will undergo religious persecution. "You'll be brought," He says, "before synagogues and religious rulers." Indeed, there are Christians today in Egypt—a moderate Muslim country—who are in prisons, only for the reason that they became Christians. If they tried that in Saudi Arabia, they would have been executed.

Persecution from religion. Persecution from the government. All over the world today in Marxist countries it is against that government's policy for people to be Christian. In various states, there

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are persecutions. There will be trouble for disciples, not only from religion and government, but from family, where betrayal will take place. Then Jesus says, “You will be hated by all for My name’s sake.” Where in the world have the prosperity people been? Did they cut this out of their Bible? Did they fail to read this, that Jesus did not promise us Disneyland, where everything was Pollyannaish? But He said “I’m calling you—not to make life comfortable for you, not because it will make it easier for you—but you may have to lay down your life for Me.” I’m calling you not to be more comfortable. You’re being called because Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life.” We’re called because of Jesus. We’re not called because we’re suddenly going to be wearing five-hundred dollar suits and alligator shoes. We’re called because Jesus is Lord over death, Lord of the grave, Lord God and sovereign ruler of the universe. And it is in Him that we live and have our being. And nothing in this world can shake us, even if it is catastrophe, disaster, and persecution. As American Christians, if we don’t start getting tough, there is going to be a persecution against us that will toughen us and wise us up biblically.

You can already see signs of this persecution in our culture. Sometimes people say to me, “Do you think that the church will be persecuted in America?” I think there are signs today that persecution could be around the corner. And I’ll tell you one sign that I see. It goes back to Nazi Germany in the early 30s, when before the Jews were ever arrested, before they were ever persecuted, before they were ever put in the ovens, they were made objects of ridicule. They were parody. They were the victims of funny cartoons, of the press, disseminating information about them that made them appear to be stupid and useless. The same thing in the secular press is going on today where, if you’re a Christian, if you believe in Jesus Christ as the one hope of the world and as the Savior, you’re a know-nothing, you’re a Neanderthal mind or something like

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that. You're held up as an object to be ridiculed. If you especially have the audacity to suggest that God not only hears prayer, but answers it, you really are crazy.

Jesus calls us, not because He's inviting us to be comfortable. He calls us because He is the Lord. And He tells us that the circumstances are not going to be comfortable. But that He is going to make us powerful in our witness. The course of this age, the conditions of this age, are parallel to the times of the Gentiles, when Jerusalem was trodden down, and to the very end of the age. We have seen this begin to happen. The sun, the moon and the stars will be shaken. The roaring of the sea will occur, which is seeking to go back to its primordial chaos, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. In light of all this, Jesus tells us not to be looking down with pessimism, not to be looking inward with self-introspection, not to be looking outward with fear. But to look up, "For our redemption draweth nigh." The hope of the world is not a revived church, as much as we would like it to be. The hope of the world is the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, who comes in great power and glory. He came to this world once, and He will keep His word. He will come again. So stand firm in the Lord. Let nothing shake you. Be firm in the Lord. Fear not.

You say, what does all this have to do with me? I'm not afraid of terrorism. I'm not afraid of conflict. My fears are: What's going to happen to my family? What's going to happen to my health? What's going to happen to my job? What's going to happen with me? If we can hear Jesus' Word about the great things, about fear, we can hear it about those personal things as well. He assures us, in every moment and season of life, that He is the Lord and we can trust Him with our life. The Lord comes. We can be calm. We can be confident. We can be dynamic, for our help is in Him.

Closing Prayer

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Our Lord, today we come to You with a heart that is stirred by Your teaching and stirred by Your presence. No one has ever spoken to us like You speak to us. All religious teachers can do, apart from You, is to simply talk to us about making life better, which is like trying to fix something that is so broken it can't be repaired. Lord, You've come, not to simply make life better—and You do change the quality of our life, because You teach us to forgive—but You have come to us by saying that our life is not permanent, that our existence on the planet earth is temporary, that the earth is going and dying—even as in our own body we are dying, so the world is dying, the cosmos is dying—the stars are burning out and they will be destroyed and the heavens will be melted with a fervent heat. But when everything that is material has been destroyed, that which is of You, that which is of the Spirit, will never be destroyed. For You, Lord, have come on a rescue mission to save us from this world, to save us out of the clutches and eternal hold of death. If we were terrorized this morning in Lebanon, and someone were to get word to us that our security was guaranteed and that the government of the United States would soon have a rescue mission that would be successful, and if we knew that beyond a shadow of a doubt—we could take the taunts and the terror of guns with some calmness in our spirit, because rescue was at hand. Lord, the United States cannot make such a guarantee, but You can make such a guarantee to us in life. You guarantee us that, no matter what happens to us, You are getting through and You will deliver us and You will bring us into Your presence forever. It is a guarantee we can rely upon. Therefore, we will not fear. Why should we be afraid when we are at peace with You? There is nothing external to us that can paralyze us or immobilize us, for our faith is in You. Lord, let that faith that we have toward the great works that You do within human history be a faith we can apply on a personal level, when things are falling apart in our lives, when we're very afraid about the future and we're literally beside ourselves, wondering

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what is going to happen. Lord, You've sent a word to us: "Fear not. I am with you. I will never leave you nor forsake you. I will uphold you by My right hand." Lord, You will do that for us. You will strengthen us in this age, so that we need not fear. You will fill us, in our adverse circumstances, with power and with wisdom. And best of all, You will, in that great age, lift us up into Your presence, out of the realm of death and decay and sin, into Your glorious presence forevermore. Thank You, Lord, for what we have in You today. Our hearts are full of thanksgiving for what You accomplished on our behalf. And Lord, Your power is not only great, but Your love matches Your power. It's just as great, and just as intense, for You love each of us today with an individual and personal love. And You care for us. You care so much that You, the Lord of glory, laid down Your life for us, that we might escape everlasting separation from the Father. Thank You, Lord, for loving us.

As we come to these moments of communion at Your table, we make real—again, in our hearts—the fellowship we have with You and the bond that transcends time, and that time and death and distance can never break, for You are with us and we praise You, Lord, through Jesus Christ. Hallelujah! We praise You and we thank You. Hallelujah!