

YOUR PAST IS IN THE FUTURE

Dr. George O. Wood

Our scripture today is in Luke 21. The totality of the scripture extends from verse 5-36. I shall only read the closing exhortation of the Lord in this Olivet discourse, beginning with verse 29 of Luke 21. He told them a parable “Look at the fig tree and all of the trees. As soon as they come out to leaf you see for yourselves and know that the summer is already near. So also when you see these things taking place you know that the kingdom of God is near. Truly I say to you this generation will not pass away until all has taken place. [We’ll spend some special time in that verse tonight.] Heaven and earth will pass away but my words will not pass away. But take heed to yourselves lest your heart be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare. For it will come upon all who dwell upon the face of the earth. But watch at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of man.”

This discourse called the Olivet discourse because it was given on the Mount of Olives, falls from the Lord’s lips about three days before his death. It is paralleled in Matthew 24:25 and Mark 13. It is the only systematic teaching which the Lord gave concerning the events, which will take place at this age and his return to the earth. Because it is the only systematic discourse related to the future to understand it it’s fundamental in getting a grip on the course of the age and knowing the future.

This discourse of the Lord, the totality of it, has pertinence for every generation of believers who has lived from the time of Christ until now. It has a special significance for the first generation of believers and for the last generation of believers. For the first generation of believers were to witness the shaking of Jerusalem. But the last generation of believers are to witness the shaking of the heavens and the earth. The first shaking is a miniature compared to that cosmic shaking which closes the age. There has already been a remarkable fulfillment of this prophecy of our Lord in terms of how the Lord understands the course of human history, what the Lord understands about the environment and nature. And what the Lord also understands about the nature of man.

It is difficult to prophecy – I don’t know of any of you have ever tried. But to prophecy, to look down the course of human history and to forecast accurately that is going to happen is an incredible feat.

To show you the difficulty of prophesying one of my favorite illustrations in regard to this is the story of the *Christian Century*, a magazine, brought into being at the turn of the century by those who did not believe many of the literal things we accept about scripture especially in respect to the virgin birth, the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead, his return and the like. The kingdom of God, they thought would be ushered in by a wave of Christian humanism, an enlightened man who would bring in the kingdom of God. Not from outside but from in through social action and the quest for social justice which by the way is a noble quest and a noble cause. So they said the twentieth century should be this age, the coming of the kingdom, which an enlightened man, an enlightened Christian man brings. In this age we’ll witness the end of war, we’ll witness significant inroads on disease, we’ll witness the end of slums, the end of poverty and the like. This will be the *Christian Century*. So the name was given to the magazine.

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When I see it, it flags to me as a false prophet. It's kind of fun to read at times the most influential and the most widely read liberal Protestant periodical and enjoy the irony of the fact that its title is a masthead of its false prophesying. If you can't believe it in its title it's difficult to believe it elsewhere.

The Lord is under no illusions however about the course of mankind and the course of history. He sees things as winding down, as shaking up, as converging. As recorded in this passage in Luke 21 there are six indicators present prior to the coming of Christ. There are four indicators, which seem to apply to all times, which are true for every generation. There is deception in religion, there is conflict among nations, there are catastrophes in nature, and there is what I would call persecution or seduction of disciples.

We see the persecution element in verses 12 and following where the Lord indicates they'd have trouble from the government, from their family and the like. But it also seems that he may be also talking about those who do not go through persecution, verse 34-36, when he speaks of those who are being weighed down with drunkenness, dissipation, and the cares of this life. It seems to be indicative of a society of disciples who do not have the rigors of persecution.

Persecution and seduction are two sides of the same coin, the enemy's attempt to get the church out of existence or to get it off track. These are four general indicators.

There is another indicator, a fifth indicator which seems to especially apply to the first and the last generation. It has to do with the control of Jerusalem. The first generation of Christians believes is told when they see the armies surrounding Jerusalem they are to flee. That first generation in 70 A.D. saw the fall of the city. Whereas at the end of the age Jesus indicates the time of the control of the Gentiles over Jerusalem will be ended. And he pinpoints this as really a time to watch for. A time of the end. So for the first and the end time generation there is a special relevancy for Jerusalem.

There is another indicator which Jesus gives, which seems to apply only to the last generation. It is the cataclysm in the heavens and in the earth. Where he notes in verse 25, "signs in sun and moon and stars and upon the earth distress of nations and perplexity, the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and foreboding over what is coming on the world."

This is kind of a two-part message. I'm just going to explore the first part this morning. Two of the general indicators. One at the beginning I'll mention lightly; I have it in my heart this morning to take one in detail.

The first general indicator which Jesus gives that will mark the course of human history and the age is deception in religion. He notes in verse 8, "Take heed that you're not led astray. Many will come in my name saying, 'I am he,' or 'The time is at hand.'" Jesus has no notion in his mind that his coming to earth the first time will have brought an amalgamation of world religions so that his religion will emerge as the one world faith. He continues to see a plurality of expressions. And furthermore even see that after his coming there will be religions or cults or sects which arise after him which will proliferate and say they come in his name. Jesus warns his disciples about these. And as a forewarning of course has left us his word by which we can gauge whether any movement or personality is truly from the Lord or not.

But Jesus is not under any illusion about bringing unity in the field of world religion.

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A second thing which Jesus indicates will be a course of the age is conflict among nations. “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. [Or you will hear wars and tumults.] Nation will rise against nation and kingdom will rise against kingdom.”

It is here this morning that I want to spend especially most of my time. I want to do something I don't normally do in a Sunday morning message. That is spend less time on exposition and more time on just talking about the current global situation and how it is a striking fulfillment of what the Lord is saying here about wars and rumors of wars.

In researching for this sermon this week I made a limitation on myself as to what was off limits to read. I decided not to read anything that any Christian had written on the subject of “wars and rumors of wars”. I wouldn't read any prophecy books, listen to any prophecy tapes. Not because what is being said isn't valid. But because sometimes we preachers are great in taking other people's material and covering it with our own peculiar bend of thought. I thought what I need to do is just go read what the non Christians are saying. Read what the secular world is saying.

So I went to the library, got a hold of a Readers Guide to Periodical Literature and looked up the subject “war, armament, weapons, atomic warfare, disarmament,” and a number of other categories like that. And just started reading.

What happened is I became electrified. I want to share with you some of the kind of things that busted into my everyday sense of ease and nonchalance that happened this week as I read what was being said in the secular world regarding the state of the world today. I will not bother, like a term paper, to foot note every thing I say. Let me give you some of the authorities at the beginning that I'm using. If you want footnoting for any particular thing I'll be glad to give it to you.

I'll be quoting Frank Barnaby, a physicist, who's director of the Stockholm international peace research institute. An independent institution financed by the Swedish parliament established on the anniversary of Sweden's 150th year without war. This man, Dr. Barnaby, is the publisher of an annual yearbook called *World Armaments and Disarmament*.

Salam, physicist, director of the international center of theoretical physicist in Italy

Bernard Feld, professor of physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the editor and chief of the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*.

Fred Iclay, the head of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

Drew Middleton, military correspondent for the *New York Times*.

These are some of the kinds of people I'll make reference to.

From 1900-1941 there were 24 wars that are identifiable. But in the last 30 years from 1945-1975 there have been 119 wars, both civil and international. The total duration of these wars has now exceeded 350 years, or in the last 30 years the world if the wars were stacked end on end has fought three and a half centuries. The territory of 69 countries and the armed forces of 81

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States have been involved in war in the last 30 years. Several tens of millions of persons have been killed, more than all of World War II. Since September 1945 there has not been a single day in which one or several wars were not being fought somewhere in the world. On an average day in the last 30 years there were twelve wars being fought. There is general agreement that the frequency of war is increasing. And indeed if you look at 119 wars in the last 30 years, versus 24 wars in the first 41 years of this century, one gains a better perspective on that.

Since World War II six thousand billion dollars has been spent for world military expenditures. That amounts to \$1500 for every man, woman, boy and girl that now live on planet earth. Or the equivalent of 15 years total income for an average citizen of the state of India.

Our military budget in the United States alone for 1978 call for 112 billion dollars. In our congregation that roughly amounts to 550 dollars for every man, woman, boy and girl. More than or total annual church income from all sources.

In 1975 the total world military expenditures were at around 300 billion dollars. It is estimated that 50 million people are now employed for military purposes in armed forces and defense activities around the world. A half million scientists and engineers, about one half of the world's scientific and technological manpower are currently devoted to military research and development. One half of the world's scientific and technological manpower devoted to weapons, wars and armament. If we could just back off war and release some of that energy on the fighting of disease and social engineering and the like it would make perhaps an incredible difference. But there is a propensity in man toward evil and that is why we have this alarming statistic.

Sine 1959 there have been more than a dozen, multi lateral and bi lateral arms control agreements to try to stop the weapons expenditure. But during that time these agreements have been negotiated the military expenses have now tripled. The sum that is now being spent on military defense and governments that are concerned with this is three times what is spent on health, twice what is spent on education and thirty times what is spent on aid to developing countries.

One authority said that since the nuclear age began at Hiroshima thirty years ago the fear of nuclear war has steadily receded while the United States and Russia have been steadily increasing their capacity to obliterate each other. What a strange paradox. I van remember in 1949 in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania hiding out in air raid shelters for practice warning. The weaponry that we have now is nothing compared to 1949 and who ever thinks of an air raid shelter. This is the point the author's making.

He described the current world military policy in an acronym – MAD – Mutually Assured Destruction.

The largest pre nuclear bomb of World War II contained 10,000 tons of TNT enough to blow up a city block. Therefore it was called a blockbuster. The explosion at Hiroshima had an explosive power 1500 times that much – 15,000 tons of TNT. But now according to the former chief economist of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency the United States possesses a nuclear stockpile of eight thousand megatons. That is equivalent in lay language to 615,385 bombs like the one that dropped on Hiroshima killing 78,000 people and injuring 84,000. Using

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the Hiroshima analogy of persons killed versus TNT power exploded, the United States can now kill the present world population twelve times. Not that it will do us any good.

In the United States we are currently producing three nuclear weapons a day as we have done for the last four years. In the 1962 Cuban missile crisis when we looked more seriously than the world has ever looked over the brink of nuclear holocaust, John Fitzgerald Kennedy stated that if war had broken out “the United States and Russia would have suffered a 150 million fatalities in the first eighteen hours. Even the fruits of victory would have been ashes in our mouths.”

Six nations have now publicly demonstrated their capacity to produce nuclear weapons. It is estimated by the year 2000 nuclear power reactors will be producing enough plutonium to permit the fabrication of 200,000 nuclear bombs a year. That is why there is such an emphasis on nonproliferation treaties. A global rush toward nuclear energy has resulted in the fact that today 38 countries are now operating 260 reactors outside the United States, one step along the way to producing nuclear weapons.

The head of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency said, “Now we suspect that the intent to make nuclear weapons exists in several places even though the capability is not there.” The several places were identified as Argentina, Brazil, Israel, Libya, Taiwan, South Korea, Pakistan, South Africa, Iran, Japan and Italy. You think of some of those powers getting hold of nuclear weapons...!

The United States with NATO has 10,000 nuclear weapons deployed along the philosophies of defense based upon the hypothesis that Russia would first seek to eliminate America, American nuclear land based missiles in a preemptive strike on our minute man missile silos and strategic airforce bases. The Pentagon reported to the Senate Foreign Relations committee in 1975 that a missile attack on the minute man missile complex of 150 silos at the airforce base located between Kansas City and St Louis would estimate in two to ten million deaths. And if an attack were made against all thousand plus land based missiles in the continental United States we would lose between 3.5 and 22 million Americans plus one million Canadians. The problem has so alarmed those working with nuclear technology that there has been talks going on between Russia and America, the SALT talks – Soviet America Limitation talks or Strategic Arms Limitation talks in preparation for the SALT II negotiation president Ford with premier Brechnev reached an accord that they would strive in the next treaty to limit the amount of nuclear weaponry each side would have to 2400 strategic delivery vehicles on each side. 1320 of these vehicle would be allowed to be MIRVs – multiple independent and targeted re-entry vehicles. Which simply means that a missile can carry ten to thirteen nuclear warheads. With computer technology in the state that it’s in they can be released at different point as the missile flies in its destination and devastate different cities.

The amount of explosive power with these ceilings would amount to fifteen billion tons of TNT on each side. Thus if were there an exchange of even a fraction of this amount in warfare 75% of the United States would be destroyed, and 60% of Russia. The population that remained 50% of those would be effected by nuclear fall out and would die. If there is a 10,000-megaton war, a fraction on each side being released, there would be a world wide climatological change. There would be a rise in strategic content of nitrogen oxide and a reducing of ozone by 30-70% causing terrible sunburn, skin cancer and various sores. I cross-reference that with Revelation 16, “The fourth angel poured his bowl on the sun and it was allowed to scorch men with fire. Men were

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scorched by the fierce heat and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues and they did not repent.”

A nuclear war of 50,000 to 100,000 megaton would wipe out everything on earth including plant life. But of course we know that's not going to happen because history is in the hands of the Lord who is not going to let him blow himself out of existence without the honor of his presence at the event.

In strategic arms the United States is at work developing sophisticated weaponry to have what is called a balance of terror. In 1978 our first Titan submarine will roll off the assembly line. It will cost one and a half billion dollars and it will be named the Ohio. It will be in length the equivalent of two football fields and in height four stories. It will be able to shoot missiles 4600 miles and is working on an even greater capability. It will be bigger than any submarine that Russia now has. But the Russians are at work building an even bigger one. Before president elect Carter has the decision to proceed on whether or not to precede on the B1 bomber. It is the most controversial and costly plane in United States history. The plan is to build 244 of them at a cost of 21.6 billion. Abandoning the concept of bombers I found out to my surprise would mean that a vital element of the nuclear strategy would be non-effective because bombs in an airplane are the only thing which can be deployed which can be recalled. You can't recall a missile. But you can recall a plane. So if you want to give a nation time to make up its mind to hit it or not, the only way you can do that is to put it in a plane. The B1, those who are for it, argue that it can fly low at near sonic speeds and therefore slip under radar screens. Or fly higher than sonic speeds at a high altitude.

There's a new missile, XM missile, a third part of our new armament, 92 inches in diameter, 66 feet long weighing 150,000 to 175,000 pounds. Placed in underground tunnels. It carries 13 MERVs, which means independently targeted nuclear weapons, which, can be deployed and hit thirteen different targets.

We've got surface to surface, surface to air, air to surface missiles guided by radar, infrared laser and television devices. The *LA Times* this week reported a former defense department official noting that Russia with laser knocked out a couple of US satellites. This last year there's a lot of debate about that. But it does show some of the capability.

The global positioning system at the Pentagon has developed missiles which can arrive on target anywhere on earth whether deployed from submarine or land based position. Can hit a target within 7-10 meters of its goal. It does this by being fitted with terminal guidance systems, which map the terrain. As the missile flies in its computer recognizes the terrain and it deploys the bomb.

This kind of nuclear weaponry does not take into account conventional warfare, chemical warfare, biological warfare and satellite warfare and what else you will. It's estimated that conventional warfare now in Europe Russia has 40,000 Soviet tanks. And NATO has 10,000 tanks. The Soviets are producing tanks at 100 a month and the United States is producing tanks at 10 a month in 1979 and 30 a month by 1980. It is doubtful that Russia is building tanks for their defenses.

One author relates also another danger in warfare, nation against nation, is the potentiality of the terrorism. Terrorists, if they wanted to, could cause incredible havoc in society. All some

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terrorists need to do is release poison gas in ventilation systems of large buildings or fly over a football stadium like the Rose Bowl and disload a load of gasoline or napon and the lighted cigarettes alone would engulf the place. To blast open a large dam. To poison city water supply. To blast a tanker carrying liquefied natural gas as it comes near a port of entry. The aspect of nuclear weapons falling into terrorists has concerned the head of the United States arms control agency. He wrote "Imagine the morning after a nuclear explosion that has destroyed half the American cities. How are we going to apply a series of mutual deterrents first strike and second strike of strategic stability conceived for a two power world if we cannot tell whose nuclear explosive it as. Of even if we could tell but it turned out to be an organization such as might exist in the future, an organization perhaps with dedicated people but no clearly defined national territory. What good then would be our 2000 nuclear missiles and bombers?"

The time is ripe for a man of peace to emerge on the situation. And get a hold of this thing. To put a check on the development of arms. To get some kind of backing off. To get some kind of security in a crazy world. To get some kind of hold on the terrorists organizations which are emerging. To try to beat back the effort of three dozen plus countries in the next few years to develop nuclear weaponry stockpiles. The time is right for a man of peace.

Scriptures indicate that there will be such person come at the end of the age who will bring military and economic control. So significant will his efforts be that Paul writing to the Thessalonians can say "when people say there is peace and security [no one that I read this last week is saying peace and security] then sudden destruction will occur."

This kind of situation globally that we're in makes one realize that sometimes we are living and guiding our lives by incidental issues. And that we've not come up face to face with the most basic issue of all – the issue of our existence. The issue of our future. The issue of the fact that there is a God and that God has been revealed in Jesus the Messiah, the man from Nazareth who will come to earth again in power. And that what he said – wars and rumors of wars and nations against nations – has come to pass in an accelerating way. It's as he said, this present age is like a woman in travail with labor pains. As the moment of delivery comes closer the convulsions within society become more and more intent.

In closing, J. B. Phillips the translator of the New Testament, and an Englishman, shares this story. "Every year in the harvest fields of England there are thousands of little tragedies. The victims are those charming little creatures, the field mice. Earlier in the year the growing corn seems to them to be the ideal place in which to settle and bring up a family. Food, shelter, and building material are there in plenty. Everything seems perfectly adapted for their need. The forest of innumerable corn stalks is their whole world and in it they court and play, mate and bring up their families. Their happiness seems to be complete. Until the harvest. For when the day comes for the owner of the field to reap his harvest tragedy inevitably begins for the harvest mouse. The whole world of waving corn, which seems so snug and secure, so specially designed for his comfort and nourishment, comes crashing about his ears. The field which he thought was his world never really belonged to him at all. And the fact that the growing corn was not meant for his food and shelter has alas not entered his tiny head.

The life of the harvest mouse is not a bad picture of the way some live in this world. They too work and play, court a get married and bring up children in the happy belief that it is their world and that to believe in an eventual harvest is old fashioned and silly. Yet our Lord who claimed to be the Son of God said quite plainly that this world is like a field that belongs to God. That is

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moving inevitably toward a harvest. The field mouse is deceived because for months he is left to his own devices. He never sees the owner of the field and naturally knows nothing of the coming harvest. It is possible that we may allow ourselves to be deceived because God, the owner of the world has not put in an appearance. And for the purposes of the experiment we call life he does not interfere with man's power to choose. We may imagine that the fields belong to man and that there is no such thing as an eventual harvest. But if Christ really was as he claimed to be – God – then his statement about this world being an experimental field with an inevitable harvest should surely be most seriously considered. No one could blame the little harvest mouse for not realizing the true purpose of the cornfield or the certainty of the eventual reaping. But what are we, asked J.B. Phillips, mice or men?"

This evening we'll continue this and come to some of the great positive signs which the Lord gave to his disciples in regard to the approaching end of the age.

As we looked today our heavenly Father, at the world and at the word of our Lord, our hearts are struck with how on target our Lord's words are. We recognize from what men are writing in this world that the world is preparing for war. Preparing armaments for destruction. But at the same time we see that we would recognize that you our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, are preparing for us a safe dwelling place. While men are preparing for war, you are preparing for peace. While men are preparing for destruction, you are preparing for salvation. While men are preparing for time, you are preparing for eternity. While men are struggling for power, you are resting in authority. We see you, Lord Jesus, today afresh. Not only our personal savior but the Lord in general of the hosts of heaven. The greater commander than any commander on earth. The greater ruler than any dictator the world has ever produced. Sovereign Lord. High, exalted and lifted up. We who are your people who like you in this age are now vulnerable subject to the elements. Subject to the decay of being a human being. We see you the strong, resurrected Christ who has redeemed our humanity, forgiven our sins and prepares for us a permanent place. A place that is unshakable from which we shall never depart. As we consider the times we would become otherworldly. We would look to thee, the author and finisher of our faith. While the world fears over the things that come to pass, we would be awake and filled with faith at the prospect of the nearness of your return. While we become other worldly, Father we also would be as you have taught us to be very much in this world, ever so much more alive, ever so much more alert, ever so much more ready to witness, to share, to give, to be dedicated in this world now than we have ever been. Teach us, Lord, to reckon the time, to count the priorities in our life and the things which pull us in various directions the concerns which we have and to take those concerns and weigh them against the real concerns that are upon your heart and the real things that are happening in the world. And cause therefore Lord, our minds to be girded up with seriousness of purpose and dedication of intent. Help us to be alive to you, o living in dissipation or living simply for the cares of this world but living in readiness for your return to this earth. We ask these things in your name, praising you for who you are and who you've made us to be. In Jesus' name. Amen.