

**1 - Signs of the Times**  
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Today we are starting a new sermon series called Signs of the Times. There are many people talking about being in the last days. No one knows the exact date the world will end, but the Bible gives us some signs of what the end times will look like.

In Matthew 16:1-3 Jesus rebuked some people who asked Him for a sign from heaven.

*He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times."*

Basically, Jesus was rebuking them for not knowing the signs of the times. Now, we must be careful in how we read these signs. Correct interpretation of signs is important. By the way – more signs of Christ's return exist today than at any time in history!

One of the most essential passages of Scripture about the end times is Matthew 24 and 25. It is like the clothesline from which all other prophecy should be hung! This passage starts with this in Matthew 24:1-2

*Jesus left the temple and was walking away when His disciples came up to Him to call His attention to its buildings. "Do you see all these things?" He asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."*

Jesus prophesied that the temple would be destroyed and the destruction would be so complete that not 1 stone would be left standing. And our Lord's words were 100% accurate! In AD 70 the Roman army, under the command of Titus, destroyed Jerusalem and the stones of the temple mount were thrown down.

Pastor Deb and I have been there and seen this with our own eyes! We've seen the very stones that Jesus said would be thrown down from the Temple Mount! I'm telling you this to let you know that biblical prophecy is always 100% accurate. If the first part of this chapter came true – the rest of it will come true!

In Matthew 24 Jesus goes on to tell us what the end times will include: The Rapture – the Great Tribulation - The Second Coming of Jesus. All of this will happen – just like the first part of the chapter happened!

After predicting the destruction of the temple - Matthew 24:3-14 says:  
*As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately.*

*"Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?"*

*Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines, pestilences and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.*

*Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of Me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

Jesus gave us signs of when the beginning of the end would be. What are they? Wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines, the increase of wickedness, deception which causes many to turn away from the faith, persecution and the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom to the whole world. I don't know if you pay attention to the news, but all of these things have increased dramatically. Let's look at these signs individually.

### **Sign #1 - Deception will cause many to turn away from the faith**

Deception is the main sign of the last days. Need I say more? Six times in Matthew 24 Jesus warns us about deception. Although deception has always been with us, the coming Antichrist along with the "false prophet" will elevate deception to an art form.

Everywhere you look today you see deception and people falling away from the faith. On a regular basis I see stories of ministers and Christian leaders and artists leaving the faith. It's always surprising, but it shouldn't be. Jesus said this will only increase!

The Pew Research Center did recent research about the religious affiliations of Americans. 71% of Americans claim to be Christian. 6% are of some other faith (Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist). But the fastest growing segment of America is no faith. Nearly 23% of Americans have no faith at all. This is a sign of the times!

### **Sign #2 - Wars and rumors of wars**

There have been about 15,000 recorded wars in human history. You would think that as human civilization grew, the number of wars would decrease. But the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the bloodiest century in history.

More people died in wars in the past 100 years than in all the centuries before!

In the last year in our world there were 10 major wars with over 1,000 deaths per year and 42 smaller conflicts! This increase in warfare is a sign of the times!

Many wars in history, including the Civil War and World War II were ignited by racism. Racism seems to be in the hearts of people everywhere. Why? Because sin is in the heart of people everywhere. And it's only increasing!

One of the signs of the end times is ethnic conflict. Jesus said:

*For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.*

It seems kind of redundant for Jesus to say nations will rise against nations and kingdoms against kingdoms until you realize that the word translated nation is the Greek word ethnos. Does that sound familiar? It's where we get our English word ethnic. The word ethnos is not talking about countries, but it literally means a race of people, a tribe, a people group. The word kingdom is talking about countries. In fact, Dan Boerger's Interpreted New Testament says:

*Ethnic groups will fight against each other, and entire countries will war against each other.*

Jesus declared that one of the prominent signs of the end of time is ethnic conflict. And one of the major issues we face today is racial conflict. And my heart is broken by the increase in racial polarization, hate crimes and racially motivated violence and killings. This is a sad sign of the times.

### **Sign #3 – Earthquakes and Disasters**

The number of earthquakes the earth experiences per year has grown drastically over the years. Not only that – but the magnitude and intensity of earthquakes is growing. The USGS says that 20,000 earthquakes are now happening every year. That's 55 earthquakes a day! This constant rumbling of the earth is a sign of the times!

In addition – natural disasters on earth have doubled in the last 30 years! Hundreds of thousands of people have been killed and displaced by earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, volcanoes and fires!

### **Sign #4 – Famine and Pestilence**

America has the ability to feed the world, yet we pay farmers not to grow certain crops lest they glut the market and drive prices down. And every night on television we see images of starving children.

There are approximately 7.8 billion people on our planet – and 815 million of them are experiencing some sort of malnutrition right now. That's over 10% of the world's population.

In addition to famine, pestilence is growing. Pestilence is defined as disease that spreads fast and kills many people.

Again – you would think with the growth in medical knowledge we would have solved the problem of infectious diseases forever. But pestilence is growing. We are experiencing worldwide pestilence right now! Diseases like HIV/AIDS, Ebola, cholera, bird flu and other killer viruses strike fear in the hearts of people. This is just another sign of the times!

### **Sign #5 - An increase of wickedness**

Jesus said in Matthew 24:32-39

*Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.*

*I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.*

*As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man.*

What characteristics marked the “days of Noah? Genesis 6:5 tells us that in the days of Noah:

*The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*

The headlines every day tell us about murders, rapes, kidnapping, assault, child abuse, robbery. These are commonplace to us now! Listen to 2 Timothy 3:1-5

*But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*

Wow – if that doesn’t describe our society today, I don’t know what does!

The Bible says that in addition to all the wars and disasters and famines, the end times will be characterized by people without character!  
They will have no reverence, respect or restraint!

They will have no character, conscience or conviction!  
They will have no gratefulness, goodness or godliness!

Jesus also said Christians will be persecuted. There is persecution of Christians happening right now all over the world. Don't be surprised when it comes to America!

Evil people have always plagued society, but for most of the last 2,000 years Christian morality has acted as a measure of restraint. But as Christian standards of morality and decency are being swept aside, wickedness unashamedly and boastfully flaunts itself. Our courts, colleges and communication media are showing increasing bias against Christians and any moral code.

Ladies and gentlemen, look at the signs! We have arrived at the last days!

You are probably thinking, "I was feeling pretty good when I came to church, but now I'm afraid from all that I've heard. Thanks a lot for making me feel safe, pastor!" Well – my job is to speak the truth, not make you feel good!

There were a lot of people feeling good and having fun in Atlantic City before Hurricane Sandy hit. But it was the job of weather forecasters and newscasters to break into that fun and inform those people about the signs of the times! A storm was coming and you need to be sure you are ready for it!

I'm here to tell you an even bigger storm is on the horizon! And we must be ready for it! But I want to end on a more positive note, because not all the signs of the times are bad!

### **Sign #6 - The Gospel will be preached to the whole world**

The most exciting sign of the times is that the gospel of Jesus Christ is being preached in every nation on the planet! In Matthew 24:14 Jesus said:

*And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

Remember, when you read "nations" don't think in terms of countries with clear boundaries – think of ethnic groups.

Mission experts tell us there are about 6,000 unique people groups in our world. Great progress has been made over the past decade in identifying these people groups and taking the gospel to them.

Jesus wants every ethnos, every people group in the world to hear the good news. Right now there are more missionaries than any time in the history of the world. They are actively penetrating every area of the globe to reach every last people group with the gospel of the Kingdom of God. There is world-wide spiritual awakening going on right now.

More people are coming to Christ today than at any time in history. Worldwide 82,000 people are placing their faith in Jesus every day.

The sad thing is that this global spiritual awakening isn't happening in North America or Europe. Tens of thousands of people in Africa, Asia and Latin America are coming to Christ every day. But only 6,000 people a day are coming to Christ each day in America and Europe.

We must pray for revival in America as we send out missionaries to the world. Jesus said He's not coming back until every people group has heard the gospel. Could it be that Jesus is waiting for one final people group to hear the gospel? At this very moment there could be some missionaries who have found their village and they are right now in the process of sharing the gospel with this final people group!

These are exciting times to be a part of God's Kingdom. The signs of the times are everywhere! Can you see them? Only someone who is blind or refuses to see the truth could possibly be caught unaware. If you are watching for His coming and ready for His coming, then there's no way that you are going to miss it.

As we see these signs all around us, we should not fear or be discouraged. Jesus told us what to do in Luke 21:28

*When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.*

So, when you see the signs of the times – this is not a time to be down – it's a time to look up!

Jesus said Because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

We see lawlessness in our streets - but it's a sign of the times. But we have the promise that those who endure to the end will be saved! That's why we need tough faith for tough times.

So when you hear of wars and rumors of wars – don't be afraid – it's just another sign that Jesus is coming soon!

When you hear of earthquakes shaking the world – don't let it shake your world – it's just another sign that Jesus is coming soon!

When you hear of kingdom rising against kingdom – don't shrink back in fear – move forward in faith because your redemption is drawing near!

When you see these signs in the heavens – lift up your head and look at Jesus! Jesus is still on the throne!

Jesus is still ruling and reigning!  
 Jesus still has all things under His feet!  
 Stand up and look up!  
 Because Jesus is getting ready to stand up and come down for us!

He's coming back for His children!  
 He's coming back for His church!  
 He is coming for a church that has neither spot nor wrinkle!  
 He is coming for a church that has been washed in the blood of the lamb.  
 He is coming for a church that has their lamps filled with the Holy Ghost.  
 He is coming for a church that has their wedding garments on.  
 He is coming for a church that is looking for His return.

Titus 2:13 says:

*Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.*

The fact that Jesus is about to return is not a scary thing to those who are living for Him, but it is something that brings us great hope!  
 It brings hope because we know that when Jesus takes us home there will be:  
 No more sickness or pain  
 No more sadness or sorrow  
 No more tears or trials  
 No more mountains to climb or valleys to endure  
 No more sin or temptation  
 No road rage or old age.  
 No bad news or sad news.  
 No recession or oppression.  
 There will be absolutely nothing to complain about!  
 You will miss nothing about life on earth because it will be infinitely better there!

And the best part about heaven is that FOREVER AND EVER we will be with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But you know what – we can get in on a little heaven right now!  
 Every glimpse of heaven in the Bible is full of people from every nation, tribe and tongue praising the King of Kings and Lord of Lords!  
 So, let's praise Him!!