

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

Luke 12:39 *And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through.*

1Thess 5:2 *For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.*

2Pet 3:10 *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.*

There is no thief who has ever given advance warning of a planned theft. Unless you are watching out for the thief, you will not be able to intercept. In fact, the Lord states that it is possible to avoid one's house being broke into. What does that mean? Simply put, if we are diligently watching all the signs of the last days, as the Lord has revealed them to us, we will be well-prepared for his return. There is a long list in Matthew 24, among others. We know about wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and natural disasters, pestilences (think COVID-19) and the persecution of Christians, for instance. But allow me, especially in light of the false doctrine that we have fought against in the last year or so, to remind you that one of the signs of the return of the Lord is false doctrine and miracles associated with false doctrine. So important was this warning that it is the only one repeated twice in Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:5 *For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many.*

Matthew 24:24 *For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*

What is the use of looking forward to the return of the church if one is deceived by false doctrine? Let me not dedicate too much to this point as we have dealt extensively with this but remain vigilant in these last days. How far or close are we from the return of the Lord? The Lord makes it clear: "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark" (Matthew 24:37, 38). As I have previously preached, and must remind the church, some of the most significant signs are what appear to be every day, mundane ones. It is clear that people will have an abundance of food and drink before the Lord returns. Why is it only in the last 20 years or so that we hear about an epidemic of obesity? Just take a look at our supermarkets and the gross

abundance of food, drink, snacks etc. we have accumulated. Next time you visit your local grocery store or supermarket let it be a reminder that Jesus is returning soon.

Has there ever been a time in world history when there have been so many estate agents and properties on sale on so many websites? An entire industry has sprung up around this activity: estate agents, advertisements, banks, DIY stores etc. What about websites where everyone is selling or buying something? eBay, Gumtree, Amazon Marketplace, Craigslist... the list goes on and on. The Lord also warns that people will be marrying and giving in marriage – there appears to be something sinister or out of the ordinary with this kind of activity. Marriage is blessed by God, but this marriage appears to be a corruption of God-ordained marriage. It carries the sense of a dilution or disregard for the sanctity of marriage. Do we not see this in today's society? Consider our celebrity-venerating culture of our times with multiple marriages and relations, prenuptials etc. because everyone is engaged in these activities, we are unable to analyze these activities carefully in light of the warnings of the Lord Jesus. We need to take a step back and understand how close we are to the return of the Lord. Other signs include the proliferation of knowledge and learning in the world but, ironically, people will not really learn about the truth of salvation.

***Dan 12:4** But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.*

***2Tim 3:1** This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.*

***2Tim 3:7** Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

Just look at the massive libraries we have in every city and town! Consider how quickly the internet has evolved and the almost infinite amount of knowledge stored cyberspace. We are the generation that have experienced one of the greatest, if not the greatest invention of human history. Today every individual consumes way more information than we can ever hope to use. We are admonished to use the world carefully and wisely. “And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away” (I Cor 7:31). We in the richer more affluent countries of the West face the same (even greater) temptation than what the church of Corinth faced. Greece was awash with philosophy and learning, military conquest and other worldly pursuits that often stoke pride and arrogance. The apostle Paul warned them.

***1Cor 6:12** All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.*

***1Cor 10:23** All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.*

The most certain sign of the return of the Lord is the Gospel preached in every nation. Is there a nation that has not heard the Gospel? I doubt it. This is one arena where we can be on the offensive. In all the other signs mentioned so far, there isn't much we can do – the church has to be defensive, but when it comes to spreading the Gospel, we must be on the offensive. Each time you pass out a tract, preach the Gospel or witness to someone, you are part of the greatest project in the history of the world: the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as the Lord could not fill Cornelius and his household with the Holy Spirit until Peter preached the Gospel, the Lord wants us to preach the Gospel before he returns as a thief in the night to rapture the church.

A thief comes to steal something of value. The Lord Jesus will return to steal the most valuable treasure on earth: the church. What a loss to the world! Once the church leaves this earth, complete and utter chaos will break out. “And in the latter time of their kingdom, when the transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up” (Daniel 8:23). “And such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he corrupt by flatteries: but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits” (Daniel 11:32). God came personally and sent two angels to Sodom and Gomorrah because in the wickedness of these cities, he had a treasure – Lot. God always returns personally for his treasure. “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (I Thess 4:16, 17). Once Lot left Sodom and Gomorrah, the cities were burnt to ash. Today, the world speculates about how it will end: nuclear war, meteors, etc., have been named. The truth is that once the church has been taken out of this world, the world is doomed. They will only have seven more years before the Lord returns once again at Armageddon and destroy the armies of the world led by the antichrist. But for us, eternal life, peace and blessings begin with the rapture, the catching away of the church. Let us keep our eyes, ears, heart and spirit focused on this greatest of all events for the church!

Rev 20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.