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Matthew 24:23-31
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Turn to Matthew chapter 24 in your Bibles. Christ comes to deal with what is indeed the climax of human history, as we know it--the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to earth. All of history is moving toward that one significant, awesome event. Sometimes as you look around the world, it seems like things are in disarray and disorder, that there is confusion, we're not going in any particular direction. When you come to the Word of God, you find that God is sovereignly overseeing all events and moving them toward the one ultimate climax of the return of Jesus Christ to earth to establish His kingdom. All the material in chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew revolve around that event. The opening part of the chapter has dealt with the period of time known as the Tribulation, a 7-year period of time that is climaxed by the Second Coming of Christ to earth. Now that 7-year period is really closed in on both sides by a coming of Christ. Before the 7-year Tribulation begins, Jesus Christ comes in the air, not to the earth; in the air and calls all true believers on the face of the earth up to meet Him in the sky and then takes us into the presence of His Father in glory. Then begins a period of 7 years of suffering and tribulation and turmoil on the earth, a terrible time during which over one-half of the earth's population will die. In fact we'll see in one of the references we'll be looking at in our study of chapter 24 that God says human beings will be more scarce on the face of the earth than pure gold. That tells you something of the devastation of human life during this 7-year period. The climax of those 7 years is when Jesus Christ personally and visibly before all creation comes back to earth, takes control of the world and establishes an eternal kingdom.

That's what He's going to talk about now and He compresses it in a few short verses. A discussion and a warning about false messiahs precede it. The 7-year Tribulation serves the purpose of preparing the nation Israel to bow the knee and believe in Jesus as their Savior and as their Messiah. Now as Israel is developing a sense of coming Messiah and there is a developing expectation in the nation that the Messiah will come again, there will arise among the Jews many false Messiahs who try to lead the Jews after them. This has happened at other times when Israel has been under intense times of suffering and persecution.

False Messiahs have come and claimed to be the deliverers of the nation. So Christ gives a warning about these false Messiahs, and then He'll talk about His own personal return.

In verse 21 we're told "there will be a great tribulation such as not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall be. And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short." If Jesus Christ did not intervene at the end of seven years, the destruction and devastation is going on at such a rate between the natural catastrophes, famines, earthquakes, volcanoes, and whatever in addition to the persecution of the Antichrist that no one would be left alive.

Then verse 23, "Then if any one says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' (the Messiah) or 'There He is,' do not believe him. For false christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance." So as we've seen, what is going to happen in the Tribulation, there will be a false Messiah called the Antichrist--Revelation 13 talks about him and his false prophet. And they will have the ability to do many mighty miracles, but in the middle of the seven years this false messiah will turn against Israel and will begin persecution. But there will be numerous other mini-messiahs, if you will, arising within Israel from time to time during this period and claiming to be the Deliverer of Israel, and they will validate their ministry by doing miracles and demonstrations of power. And you'll see in verse 24 they will do "great signs and wonders," and what you have here are demonically produced miracles. There is the realm of the supernatural--the realm of the supernatural that comes from God and the realm of the supernatural that comes from Satan. And these false messiahs and false prophets will have the supernatural power from the demonic realm to do mighty miracles so that they can claim, 'I have come to deliver Israel,' and they'll do great works of power and many will be deceived and say, 'They must be the Messiah. Who else but the Messiah could do such a demonstration of power, to perform such a mighty miracle?' What to know whom else could do it? Satan. The demons could do it. We've noted in our study earlier, I think we see a conditioning of the world in many areas in preparation for the Tribulation. We see this with men on earth now claiming and proclaiming them to be gods on earth. We've had recent incidences of this that have made front-page news, of a man who claims to be God Incarnate; and many people have become involved in following and worshiping him. The

preparation for the Tribulation time, when there will be an acceleration of this. I think we have the same thing with the interest and emphasis on the miraculous and supernatural today. All you have to do is turn on the television. I watched a program last night where the focal point was on the power we have to deliver you, the power we have to do the miraculous. The theology was abominable! The use of the Scripture was a total distortion! But there are tremendous sums of money being channeled because there is tremendous interest today in the supernatural and the miraculous. We need to be very careful and very discerning today as believers.

So these ministries will be supported by the miraculous and the supernatural Christ says in verse 25, "Behold, I have told you in advance." I take it what is going to happen is during this 7-year Tribulation, particularly as we get toward the end of that many Jews will have come to believe in Christ. We keep talking about the elect here, and remember; at the beginning of the Tribulation there are no believers alive on the face of the earth. But through that 7-year period through Matthew the testimony of the 144,000 sealed Jews, through the testimony of the 2 witnesses in chapter 11, multitudes of the people will come to believe in Christ. I take it those believers will be studying Matthew chapter 24 with an intensity and a fervor, and they will read "Behold, I have told you in advance," so they can be warned about the false prophets and false christs. Verse 26, "If therefore they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go forth, or 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them." It's a very simple message for them. For these Jews as they study the Scripture and say, 'There is a man who claims to be the Messiah out in the wilderness and he's doing tremendous and mighty miracles,' those true believers as they study Matthew 24 will say, 'Christ told us in advance he's not genuine.' 'But you don't know the works of power that he does.' 'It doesn't matter. Christ said he's not genuine.' See, they'll be driven back to what Christ has said is the standard of evaluation as well. Just like we are today, what are we to do? We have to come back to the Word and sift it through very carefully to test the spirits to see if they were from God. The simple solution? None of them are genuine! So it won't take a lot of discernment from the standpoint of analyzing the details. 'Well let's look at the miracles he's done and see what we think of them.' That won't really matter. Christ says, 'don't believe the message concerning any of them. None of them will be genuine. No matter what miracles they do. You know how you'll know the true One?' Look at verse 27, "For just as the lightning comes from the east, and

flashes even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." Very simple. When the Son of Man, the true Messiah, comes to earth, all creation will behold that event! You won't need someone to come and say, 'He's out in the wilderness doing miracles He's over in this building holding meetings.' All creation will behold that just like the lightning flashing across the sky! God's spectacular display will confront all of creation. So when Christ returns to earth the second time, you won't need anyone to come and tell you. So for the Jews as they study Matthew 24 in the Tribulation, they'll know that everyone who claims to be a messiah is a false one. In spite of the fact that there will be tremendous demonstrations of power. The true elect will have the perception of the Word of God.

Then He says, in verse 28, which is perhaps the most difficult verse here at first reading. "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather." It sounds a little bit like a puzzle, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather." Now He's going to come, there will be false messiahs; the Messiah comes in a great display, and now we're talking about vultures gathering. But that fits very clearly with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to earth, does it not? I take it the event in view in verse 28, and you couldn't summarize it any more briefly, is what we call Armageddon. When all the armies of the earth are gathered together for destruction and become a feast for the birds of the air.

We're not going to go into a great deal of detail. If you're interested in the details of prophecy and the order, you can check out the series of tapes and study it, but let me summarize for you what is going on here and what Christ has condensed.

During the 7-year Tribulation, the Antichrist will rise to power. For the first 3 1/2 years he dominates the 10-nation confederacy of the western world. In the middle of the Tribulation, the Russian armies are destroyed on the mountains around Israel; the Antichrist moves the western armies into the Middle East, and because Russian and her allies have been destroyed the balance of power is tipped in his favor. He now assumes position of World Dictator. In the last 3 1/2 years he dominates the world. He requires the world to worship him as God in the flesh. As the last 3 1/2 years move to their climax, there are rebellions breaking out against his leadership, and the armies of the world--remnants of the Russian armies reassemble in the north and proceed down to Palestine. The armies of the Orient--the Book of the Revelation tells us some 200,000,000 strong--begin a march toward Palestine. Because remember the Antichrist has set himself up in

Jerusalem for his headquarters. For the armies of the world are converging now on Israel for a climatic battle for domination of the world. It's into that scene that Jesus Christ will return.

Turn over to the Book of the Revelation, chapter 16. We don't have time to go into the symbolism here, but we'll read a couple of verses. Verse 12, "The sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, that the way might be prepared for the kings from the east." This is a significant event here. The way is prepared for the kings of the east, the armies of the east --- All directions in the Bible, you're aware, are from Palestine--going to the east, so the armies of the Orient now marching an army 200 million strong to challenge the leadership of the Antichrist. Verse 13, "And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, . . ." What's going on here? You have demonic beings performing supernatural works on the earth. They "go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them together-for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty." Then a word of warning. "(Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame.)" So what is warned here is, as the armies of the world are being gathered together for battle in the Middle East seeming to battle with one another, really God is drawing them together for the ultimate conflict with His Son Jesus Christ. And as they are gathered together Christ gives a word of warning--"I'm going to come unexpectedly, come like a thief. You'd better be ready for Me." Then verse 16, "And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Armageddon." Armageddon, a word that is often used today to speak of something dramatic or climatic, as coming to Armageddon. But Armageddon is the final, climatic battle for the armies of the world in confrontation with Jesus Christ. Armageddon is located in the north of Palestine. It means "the Mount of Mageddo," and the City of Mageddo was located on a strategic mountain location overseeing a vast plain, the Valley of Mageddo. And that will be the focal point for the gathering of the armies of the world for this final conflict. So you see they are gathered to this location to do battle. Now before they can do battle with one another, Jesus Christ will intervene and they will turn their attention against Him to attempt to do battle with Him for sovereignty over the world.

Look over in Revelation 19. This is the fullest description of that Second Coming that we have, and we'll be back here as we progress through our study, but look at verse 17. "And I saw an angel standing in the sun; . . ." This tells you something of the brilliance of this angel, because as you look to the heavens to the sun, this angel is so brilliant that he stands out even with the sun behind him. "And he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in mid-heaven, 'Come, assemble for the great supper of God; in order that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.' And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against Him (Christ) who sat upon the horse, and against His army." Then the beast and the false prophet are seized and cast into the lake of fire. Verse 21, "And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh." This is that conflict which Revelation 14 says that for the length of Palestine, the blood will run to the horses' bridles. You see the picture? The birds assembling to eat the flesh of men? Now come back to Matthew chapter 24.

Matthew 24:28, "Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather." You see the sign of the Son of Man in the heavens, the armies gathered at Armageddon and this overwhelming destruction, and the birds of the air gathered for this awful feast of the flesh of men and beasts from the armies of the world. That's the point of verse 28. Armageddon and its awful destruction.

Now associated with the Second Coming there are several things. Verse 29 will talk about the setting in the heavens; verse 30 will talk about the appearance of the Son of Man in the heavens; and verse 31 will talk about the messengers sent out in the heavens to gather the elect. So the scene is in the heavens. First, some of the signs going on in the heavens, verse 29. "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken . . ." Sun, the moon, and stars--taken together they are the powers of the heavens. They are going to be shaken and darkened in connection with the coming of Jesus Christ in preparation for His return. Now this description is taken from the Old Testament. Jesus is just reminding them, reiterating that what the prophets promised centuries ago will come about in connection with My coming.

Isaiah the prophet, and the 13th chapter. Note verse 6. "Behold, for the day of the Lord is near!" Talking about the Tribulation. "It will come as destruction from the Almighty; therefore all hands will fall limp, and every man's heart will melt. And they will be terrified, pains and anguish will take hold of them; they will writhe like a woman in labor, they will look at one another in astonishment, their faces aflame. Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it." Now note this, "For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed its light. Thus I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud, and abase the haughtiness of the truthless." And verse 12, "I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold." That tells you something of the severity of the judgment of that period of time. People are going to be dying to such an extent, to such a degree, in such numbers, that humanity will become scarce on the face of the earth.

Over in Isaiah chapter 34 and see if we haven't had a mini-glimpse of a description like this with just some of the minor tragedies and catastrophes that have taken place in our day, minor in comparison to what this period of time is going to be like. Verse 3, "So their slain will be thrown out, and their corpses will give off their stench, and the mountains will be drenched with their blood." And you note, "And all the host of heaven will wear away, and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; all their hosts will also wither away as a leaf withers from the vine, or as one withers from the fig tree. For My sword is satiated in heaven, behold it shall descend for judgment upon Edom, and upon the people whom I have devoted to destruction. The sword of the Lord is filled with blood . . ."

Turn over to the Book of Joel. Joel chapter 2. Joel wrote about this event, and Peter repeated it in Acts chapter 2. We'll read it in Joel chapter 2, verse 30. "And I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes, and it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered; . . ." You see the emphasis on these mighty signs in the heavens. Down in chapter 3, verse 15, "The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness. And the Lord roars from Zion . . ." In anticipation of the coming of the Lord, the heavenly bodies go dark! And what a

stupendous preparation for the breaking forth from heaven of Jesus Christ, the Son of Man! Come back to Matthew 24.

So you have the heavens grow dark--sun, moon and stars. "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, . . ." Matthew 24:30. Now we're not told what this sign is, but with the heavens gone black, then we have the appearance in the sky of a sign but it indicates to all mankind that the Son of God is returning to earth. This is when the armies of the earth gather at Armageddon and will now turn their attention from battling with one another to battle the One whom they are all opposed, the Son of God.

Now you stop and think, do you really believe that men could make such a foolish move? To turn their attention to do battle against the Son of God as He proceeds from heaven? Well, let me ask you-- Would you have ever conceived that human beings could take the Creator of heaven and earth and crucify Him on a cross? Absurd to think it could happen, but it did. We are so set in our sin in opposition to God that here mankind is going to take its final opportunity to challenge Jesus Christ to prevent Him from taking authority over the earth. The result will be destruction. Note how it's described here.

"And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory." An awesome scene. It's described as "the heavens will roll back as a scroll," and here in a great display of glory will appear the One who is the Son of Man, the Messiah of Israel, proceeding to earth to destroy His enemies and take sovereign control. What a picture of the heavens going black, and all of a sudden then, the sky parting back as Jesus Christ in glory proceeds to earth.

Two Old Testament passages form the basis for what Christ says in verse 30. Turn back to Zechariah 12. The first part of Zechariah 12 talks about the destruction of Jerusalem, because as the armies of the world move into Palestine to do battle with one another, there is going to be tremendous devastation take place in Jerusalem again. And then we read down in verse 9, "And it will come about in that day that I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him, like the bitter weeping over a first-born. In that day there will be great mourning in

Jerusalem . . ." Then Jerusalem and the Jews will recognize and realize that they crucified their Messiah, the Lord of glory! And they'll be overwhelmed with the recognition of that awful event and their guilt in it. They will mourn as they see Him in His coming.

Look back in Daniel chapter 7 for the other part of the reference that Christ uses. Daniel chapter 7. It's important that we recognize and understand that there is perfect continuity with what God says in the Old Testament, repeats in the Gospels in the New Testament through the ministry of Christ, and is carried out through the rest of the New Testament. God's plan doesn't change, and the prophecies of the Old Testament will be fulfilled even as He gave them.

Daniel chapter 7, verse 13: "I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and men of every language might serve Him." You see that? He comes with the clouds of heaven! Every eye beholds Him! And those who have pierced Him will mourn. You know, Zechariah wrote that in chapter 12, verse 10, centuries before the crucifixion, and yet under the inspiration of the Spirit of God Zechariah said the Jews are going to look on the One they've pierced; the One whose hands and feet were pierced with the nails; the One whose side was pierced with the spear; the One of whom they said 'Let His blood be upon us! We are accountable and guilty.' They'll look on the One they have pierced as He comes on the clouds of heaven in glory to take control of the world.

Come back to Revelation chapter 6. Stop in Revelation chapter 1. In Revelation chapter I John brings together this statement of Christ that we have in Matthew 24, using Daniel 7 and Zechariah 12. The end of verse 5 of chapter I says that Christ "released us from our sins by His blood." He died that we might be redeemed. "He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so. Amen." Look over to Revelation chapter 6.

Revelation chapter 6, verse 12: "And I looked when He broke the sixth sea], and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood;

and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and very slave and free man, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?'" Awesome terror among the inhabitants of the earth as they are confronted by the coming of the One they would not have as their Redeemer, but now He comes as their Judge.

The fullest description of the Second Coming is in Revelation chapter 19. Turn over there. The first 10 verses talk about the preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ to earth. In verse 9 we are told, "'Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.''" And what the earthly kingdom is going to be is the marriage supper of the Lamb. Verse 7 told us the marriage of the Lamb occurred. What happens in the order is, with the Rapture of the Church all believers are caught up to meet Jesus Christ in the air--the Church is the Bride of Christ. We're taken to the glory of His Father's presence for the marriage of the Lamb. Then 7 years later we return to earth for the celebration of the Wedding Feast, in the pattern of the oriental wedding feast. Then in verse 11, "And I saw heaven opened; (just as we read in the description, rolled back as a scroll) and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon Him, which no one knows except Himself. And He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God." Remember how John began his gospel? "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." It was the Word that came and manifested the character and beauty of God to mankind; it was the Word of God that was crucified; now it is the Word of God that is returning in triumph.

Verse 14 is one of the most significant verses for you and I as believers today that there is in the Bible. "And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him, on white horses." You know why it's so important to know who that is? That's you and me as believers in Jesus Christ! The Book of Revelation tells us that the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. We are seen in

chapters 4 and 5 under the description of the 24 elders, clothed in fine linen, crowned with gold crowns! Victors' crowns! We have been caught up to meet Christ! We have stood before Him, at the Bema Seat and been rewarded by Him for faithfulness of service. Now as Christ returns in triumph and victory, we as the Redeemed return with Him in glory! The Second Coming of Christ to earth is of tremendous significance to you and I as believers today. I am looking for the Rapture of the Church when I'll be caught up to meet Christ in the air, but I am eagerly anticipating that event that will occur 7 years after the Rapture when we will return in glory with Christ! We'll talk more about that in a moment.

He goes on in verse 15. "From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty." The description of the Messiah from Isaiah chapter 63, where the picture there is of the wine vat filled with grapes, and as the grapes are trampled, the juice splashes up and splatters the garments. Well here, the Messiah comes and tramples His enemies like grapes and the blood spatters up, running for the length of Palestine Revelation 14 tells us, up to the horses' bridles, in the tremendous devastation and destruction of multiplied millions in the armies that oppose Him.

"On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS'." "And then the portion we have already read, 'Come to the supper the destruction of the enemies of the One who is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.'" Come back to Matthew 24. In connection with the Second Coming, verse 31, "He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET AND THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER HIS elect FROM THE FOUR WINDS, FROM ONE END OF THE SKY TO THE OTHER." So the return of Christ, all the elect, the believers, are gathered now, those who have come to trust Him in this awful time of devastation and have survived to this point, are gathered from around the world to assemble with Him at Jerusalem, because remember Zechariah 14 says that when Christ returns to earth, He will touch down on the Mount of Olives, the very place He departed from in Acts chapter 1, to ascend to the Father. The elect are gathered to join with Him in the establishing of the kingdom. We'll see in the judgments that are laid out in Matthew 25 that the non-elect are also gathered, and they will be judged and executed, so that when the kingdom that Christ establishes begins on earth, there will be no unbelievers alive on the face of the earth. After the Rapture of the Church, there are no believers on the face of the earth!

Seven years later when Christ comes to set up His kingdom and every unbeliever is destroyed, and will go into that kingdom with only believers, the beginning of the kingdom that Christ establishes.

Isaiah 27:13 speaks of God gathering His elect from all over the world for the establishing of the kingdom. Now you ought to note here. They are gathered with a great trumpet, and remember in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4 when the Church is called to Christ at the Rapture, it is at the sound of the trumpet. The Trumpets shall sound, the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up to meet Christ in the air and so shall we ever be with the Lord. God uses a trumpet on both occasions to call His elect together, but it's not the same event. He calls the elect of the Church together at the beginning of the Tribulation. He'll call the elect of the world, and particularly Israel, together at the end of the Tribulation in anticipation of the Millennium.

The Second Coming of Christ. That's where all the events of the world are converging! That's the explanation for all that is going on in the world. God is controlling events and superintending these events to bring about the climax of history when the armies of the world will be gathered at Armageddon, prepared to do battle with the One that they view as their great enemy, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Everything in the world must be seen in that light. Are things out of control? Not at all. Is there a danger that the world will be annihilated in a nuclear catastrophe? Not at all. All things are under control because God is moving them toward this climatic event.

For us as believers, even in the Church today as we anticipate the Rapture, this is an awesome and significant event. Look at Romans chapter 8. Paul says it's the recognition of the Second Coming of Christ and our part in that coming that enables him to face the suffering, the sorrow, the heartache, the burdens and the grief that often comes in this life. He has said, in verse 4, that we have been identified with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, talking about spirit baptism. He talks in chapter 6 about our identification with Christ. Chapter 8, verse 17--didn't think I'd heard that message before--"and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ. And the fact that we've been identified with Christ makes us the children of God and the heirs of Christ with God. Verse 18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." He says, I can't compare the sufferings, the heartache, and the trials of this life with the glory that is going to be ours as the sons of God.

"For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God." Verse 22, "For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now." The picture here, because of the fall and sin all creation is under the curse. And all creation is under the agony of sin, and anticipates the time when the curse will be lifted. You know when that will happen? When you and I are unveiled before all creation as the sons of God. Know when that happens? Revelation 9:14, the heavens part as a scroll, and the Son of Man descends in glory, and the armies of heaven, clothed in fine linen and white and clean, follow Him in glory. That's when you and I will be unveiled before all creation as the sons of God. We've been caught up in His presence at the Rapture, but it's not until we return in glory with Him that all creation will recognize that we are the redeemed sons of God. That's when the curse will be lifted from the creation--the desert will blossom as a rose and the effects of the curse will be removed from the earth and from all of mankind. Isn't that something? All creation is anticipating the time when God chooses to present us before all of His creation as His redeemed sons. Any wonder Paul says, I put all my suffering in that light; that's what enables me to view suffering in proper perspective. It's passing; it's part of the groaning of the creation. But you know what? There's coming a time when I'm going to be unveiled with Jesus Christ as His son.

Where are you in connection with the coming of Jesus Christ? Where will you be in connection with that coming? Does this fill your heart with hope and expectation? Put life in proper perspective? It helps me from getting too absorbed in the things of this life. My home isn't quite as important; or my car or my clothes, my health. All that I could accomplish, the number of people I preach to, fame or power or whatever. They're all put in proper perspective, aren't they? What's really going to matter is where are you in connection with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ? Which side are you on? Are you going to be descending with Him in the air, or will you be the object of destruction? You know the amazing thing in all of this is God has provided the free gift of redemption and salvation to all who will believe. He's laid out for us what is going to transpire in the future. He has specifically told us that we are sinners under condemnation and deserving of His wrath; but because of His great mercy and love and grace, He had His Son, Jesus Christ, die on a cross, be raised from the dead so that He might say to you, If you will place your confidence and trust in My Son and His death for you, I'll forgive you, I'll cleanse you, I'll make you My

child! And in a coming day I will display you in glory as one that I have redeemed by My grace! Doesn't say join a church, doesn't say get baptized, doesn't say give it your best shot. He says, Believe what I have done for you, had My Son pay the penalty for your sin. You know what reveals how awfully sinful and wretched we really are? Men and women reject that free gift.

Let me ask you--If you hear this message of life, if you hear God is offering you a free gift right now, today, if you believe in His Son and you say 'No thanks', is it any wonder God has to destroy you and send you to hell? What else do you deserve? What else do I deserve? The fact that you're arrogant and proud enough to think you can make it on your own, that you don't need this, that it's for someone else, maybe someone weak, to stand against God and say I don't need what You say I need! Is it any wonder He comes in wrath to bring destruction? If Jesus Christ would come today at the Rapture, would you be taken up to be with Him in the air? The Second Coming can't occur today; His coming in glory with the parting of the skies cannot occur this week. It's at least 7 years away. But you know the Rapture of the Church, the Coming of Jesus Christ in the air for His own can occur at any time. It will occur because God says it will. If it would happen today, would you be caught up to meet Jesus Christ in the air? Or would you be left to bear the brunt of His wrath and judgment because of your unbelief? If you are left, you have no one to blame but yourself because you've said 'No' to the free gift of eternal life and redemption. But why? Stop and think about it. Why would you say 'No' to the free gift of eternal life that God offers? You have nothing to gain and everything to lose. You know why? The only explanation is how wretchedly proud and arrogant we are in our sin. 'I will not bow the knee to Jesus Christ. I will not acknowledge my need of Him. I deserve judgment and hell.'