

Vigilant and Prepared  
August 5, 2018

Have you heard or read of the survivalism movement? Survivalists, also known as preppers, are actively preparing for emergencies, including possible disruptions in the social or political order of America. They are preparing themselves for a time when they might have to survive outside of their home and possibly in the woods. They are purchasing a stash of camp tools, survival equipment, freeze dried foods, and products for filtering water.

They keep a bug-out bag or go-bag ready in their home or vehicle to grab in an emergency. There are lots of lists online about what to put in a bug-out bag. AARP printed a list last September of things to have in such a bag.

It is important to be prepared for the unexpected. As we are now in hurricane season, you should have on hand plenty of working flashlights, lanterns, and batteries. You should have a plan for cooking in case the power goes out for a week, as ours has three times in recent years. You should have canned goods and bottled water on hand for at least three to five days.

I read warnings regularly about being prepared for emergencies. All of these are meant to help you prepare for what could happen. In Matthew 24, Jesus gives us warnings about what WILL happen. And we need to heed his words.

**Matthew 24:1-3 (NIV) 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."**

**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?"**

Let me give you a bit of background on the questions asked by the disciples. First, this temple was being built with approval of the Roman government. King Herod the Great wanted to immortalize himself in buildings. One of the building projects was a huge expansion of the Jewish temple. For that day, in that part of the world, it was a very impressive structure. The disciples were impressed by it and were disturbed at Jesus' prediction that it would be torn down.

In addition they expected Jesus to announce to the nation soon that he was the long expected messiah. This is the "coming" mentioned in their second question. They expected him to take up the throne as the true king of Israel and with God's help drive the Romans from their country. We'll look at his answers today and warnings today.

#### **Question 1: When would the temple be destroyed?**

He did not give them a time or date, but His prediction came true. The Jews rebelled against Rome later that century and the temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans.

The second question concerned Jesus' coming out as Messiah and beginning a new prosperous age for Israel. That has not occurred yet. So the warnings Jesus gives still apply to us.

**Matthew 24:4-5 (NIV) 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.**

Now get this. **Jesus warns us: Don't let yourself be deceived.**

That means it is possible for Christians to be deceived. And likely some will be deceived. But knowing what to look for and having been warned, we should not be among those who are deceived by false prophets and false christs.

While it is possible for a Christian to be deceived, we should not be deceived by anyone claiming the Messiah has come. We have been told by Jesus what it will look like.

**Matthew 24:30-31 (NIV) "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."** (Acts 1:9-11)

We know what the return of Jesus will look like. It will not be seen by just a few. Everyone on the planet will see and hear his return. So since we know what it will be like, we should not be fooled by claims of a Messiah showing up.

**Matthew 24:23-25 (NIV) At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time.**

Jesus warns that there will be come false prophets who will perform miracles. Let me make several points about miracles. This is important and we need to heed this.

- **Miracles do not create believing faith.** Jesus did miracles and it made his enemies even more intent on getting rid of him. (John 11:43-53)

- **Miracles do not prove someone represents God.** (Ex. 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18-19) (Acts 8:9-11; 19:19) (Deut. 13:1-6)

We see miracles all through the Bible. But not all the miracles that are recorded are done by God's people. The witchdoctors of the king of Egypt were able to copy some of the miracles Moses did. And in the book of Acts we read of some who did miracles by witchcraft before their conversion to Christianity. And in the Law of Moses the Israelites were warned that false prophets would appear and make predictions that came true. But if they then said, "Let's follow other gods," then they were not from Yahweh and should be executed.

- **God allows rebellious angels (demons) some freedom to do miracles to fool those who love evil and resist God.** (2 Corinthians 4:4)

God is active in the world today, sometimes using miracles to lead people to the Gospel and to confirm others in their faith. But God also allows our spiritual enemies to do miracles. Doing so serves some of God's purposes.

Jesus has warned us that miracles are real and will occur before he returns. So we must not let miracles so impress us that we desert the Gospel and fail to be ready for Jesus' return.

Now that you know what to look for, don't listen to claims that Jesus has returned even if they are doing miracles. But there is more reason for us to be vigilant.

**Jesus warns us: Expect persecution and immorality to grow.** Do not be surprised by it.

**Matthew 24:9-13 (NIV) "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."**

Note that persecution of Christians will grow. It is growing today around the world. The Christian faith is politically and culturally incorrect in America. And the gap continues to widen year to year. Our faith and teachings stand in opposition to the moral shifts taking place in our culture and government and others around the world. Conservative, evangelical Christianity is a minority religion in the world. We do not well fit in with most people. And we should not try to do so. We must maintain our loyalty to Jesus no matter what the cost. This is the central message of the book of Revelation.

But it is the desire of most people to fit in, not to be different. So Jesus warns that with the growing immorality, some Christians will "turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other." And their love will grow cold. Their love of Jesus, of salvation, and of God's people will grow cold.

Note he predicted that the love of MOST will grow cold. Not a few. Not a minority, but most.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as your pastor I do not want that for me or for you. We must be vigilant of these things and make sure such does not happen to us. As one who has experienced times of his love cooling off, let me share with you how to prevent this.

**How to keep your love from growing cold:**

**> Stay focused, daily, on the good news of Jesus. (John 15:1-8)**

In John 15, Jesus tells his disciples to live in him, abide in him, keep their faith in him. Jesus is the only means of salvation. That truth must be the center of our lives.

**> Live obedient to Jesus. (John 14:15; 15:9-11)**

We sing an old hymn that says, "Trust and obey, trust and obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey." That summarizes well these first two actions.

**> Stay humble in prayer before God. (Eph 2:8; James 4:6-7)**

Seeing improvements in your character, there is the danger of taking credit for it and becoming proud of this. You may think to yourself, "I am a good Christian. I deserve the good things I have in my life."

The truth is that we do not deserve the good things we enjoy. They are gifts of God's grace, not rewards or payment for obedience. God doesn't owe you anything except what He has promised you. He has promised us forgiveness and eternal life. He doesn't owe you a nice house, a long life on earth, a good income, or a nice retirement. Get any such thoughts of God owing you something out of your mind.

You may be better than you were last year, but you still sin against God everyday. We will never be healed of sin before Jesus comes back.

Our prayers must reflect a true humility before God.

**> Practice gratitude in your prayers for the blessings you do have.**

Everything you do have is a gift of God's grace. If you start thinking you deserve it, you will resent God when you lose it. Gratitude helps keep us humble.

**> Serve each other with the love of Christ Jesus. (John 13:1-17, 34-35; Galatians 5:13)**

**Galatians 6:2 (NIV) Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.**

Daily living out these basic Christian beliefs, attitudes, and actions will keep our love from growing cold.

**Question 2: When will Jesus return?**

Jesus told the disciples that he did not know when his return would be. However, he did say that it would occur when most people did not expect it, would not be looking for it.

**Matthew 24:44 (NIV) "So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."**

Jesus is going to come back when we do not expect Him. That means it will be a time of peace and prosperity, a time when most are satisfied with life, a time when the love of some has grown cold. No one speaks of Jesus coming back when things are going good. It is when things are going poorly that we say, "Come Lord Jesus." But here he warns that He will not be coming back at such a time.

I want to end with a story this morning. When I was in college I worked as a clerk in a 7-11 convenience store. One weekday morning, about 8:30 we were very busy as usual. It was the morning coffee rush. There was a line of people waiting to purchase their coffee and donuts. The boss was in the back room. In the midst of this I saw a man pushing a shopping cart full of bundles of magazines toward the front door. He was dressed like the

guys who delivered those bundles. He wasn't in a hurry. He glanced over his shoulder at me and we made eye contact.

I did not think to myself, "He is headed out the door instead of in the door." I did not think to myself, "He is hours earlier than usual." I did not think to myself, "He is stealing the magazines!" I did not think to myself that something was wrong and that I should call the boss out of the backroom. I kept bagging donuts and ringing up purchases at the cash register.

It turns out he was stealing the magazines. The store lost a bundle of money. And I got royally chewed out.

Looking back on that day years later I realized that I was never trained in what to watch out for. No one ever told us to watch for deliverymen making odd deliveries or pickups or trying to steal merchandise.

In many areas of life we need to know what to watch for. We need to be vigilant and prepared.

In addition to being prepared for emergencies we need to be aware of the schemes of con artists. We need to know what behaviors to watch for of abusers of children and how they groom them, groom their parents, and even groom churches.

We need to know how to watch for abusive husbands and boyfriends. We need to be watching out in our neighborhoods for people casing the houses for break-ins. We need to be alert to possible danger at the airport, the mall, and at school for those intent on harming others.

All of these things could occur to us. Jesus has told us what will occur and what to watch for in our future. Let us heed His warnings for our own good. Be vigilant. Be prepared. Keep your love strong.

### Invitation

We preach the good news of Jesus Christ. But the good news is based on the bad news. The bad news is that we are all sinners against God. And sin must be paid for. Either you pay with your life or you let Jesus pay with his life.

God sent Him to die in our place. But we must each choose to receive Him as our Savior and Lord. Today, you can receive Jesus as your savior and turn your life over to Him as lord.

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Warnings: Matthew 25.13; 26.41; Luke 12.37; Acts 20.31; 1 Corinthians 16:13;  
Colossians 4.2; 1 Thessalonians 5.5-6; 1 Peter 5.8