

Sermon 01: “The Gathering Clouds: Recognizing the Signs of the End”

By Pastor Ed Anderson

Opening Hymn:

“Watch, Ye Saints” (#598)

Scripture Reading:

Matthew 24:6-8

“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 and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.”

Closing Hymn:

“We Know Not the Hour” (#604)

Introduction: The Calm Before the Storm

Imagine a sailor at sea, seeing dark clouds gathering on the horizon. The wind grows restless, the waves swell, and the air feels heavy with impending danger. The sailor knows a storm is coming. But what if that sailor ignores the warning signs? What if they fail to prepare? Disaster is inevitable.

We are those sailors. The world is our sea, and the storm is gathering. Jesus, in His infinite love, warned us of the signs of the end times in Matthew 24. These are not meant to instill fear but to equip us with clarity and hope. His prophecies are like a lighthouse, guiding us safely through the darkening skies.

Today, we will explore these signs, their prophetic significance, and how God’s character of love is woven through these warnings. We will also consider how we can prepare spiritually for the coming storm.

Photo of Chandler members looking up in the Sky

I. The Signs of the Times

The Signs that Start the Countdown

The Signs that Build to Climax

The Last Signs Three Signs

A. Wars and Rumors of Wars

Jesus said: *"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen."* (Matthew 24:6)

We live in a world increasingly consumed by conflict:

- Global tensions, such as the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and unrest in the Middle East, dominate headlines.
- Nations prepare for nuclear conflict, raising fears of global annihilation.
- These events may seem chaotic, but they are part of God's prophetic timeline.

Jesus assures us: *"Do not be alarmed."*

God's Love in This Warning:

God's warning about wars is not to paralyze us with fear but to remind us that He is in control. He desires that we find peace in Him amid global turmoil:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." (John 14:27)

B. Natural Disasters and Famines

Jesus predicted: *"There will be famines and earthquakes in various places."* (Matthew 24:7)

The increase in natural disasters and food insecurity is undeniable:

- Hurricanes, wildfires, earthquakes, and floods have become more frequent and devastating.
- Famines, exacerbated by war and economic instability, threaten millions.

Ellen White's Insight:

"The tempest is coming, and we must get ready for its fury by having repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." (Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 8, p. 315)

God's Love in This Warning:

God uses these events to awaken us from spiritual complacency. They are reminders of our need for Him:

"The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." (Psalm 34:18)

C. Moral Decay and Societal Collapse

Jesus also warned: *“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.”* (Matthew 24:12)

Evidence of this decay surrounds us:

- Families are fractured, and societal norms are rapidly eroding.
- Violence, corruption, and the rejection of absolute truth are rampant.

Ellen White’s Insight:

“The world is becoming more and more lawless. Soon great trouble will arise among the nations—trouble that will not cease until Jesus comes.” (Maranatha, p. 25)

God’s Love in This Warning:

Even amid moral decay, God calls us to repentance. His patience reflects His desire for all to be saved:

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise... Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish.” (2 Peter 3:9)

II. Understanding God’s Purpose in the Warnings

A. Prophecies as Acts of Love

Why does God warn us of these troubling events? Because He loves us:

- Like a parent warning a child of danger, God’s prophecies guide us to safety.
- *“Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets.”* (Amos 3:7)

God’s love is seen in every warning. He wants us to be prepared, not caught unaware.

B. The Birth Pains Analogy

Jesus likens these signs to birth pains (Matthew 24:8):

- Birth pains increase in frequency and intensity, just as prophetic signs do.
- They are not the end but point toward a glorious new beginning: the return of Jesus.

Ellen White’s Insight:

“The final movements will be rapid ones.” (Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 9, p. 11)

God's Love in This Analogy:

God assures us that the pain and turmoil of the present time will culminate in eternal joy. The birth pains remind us that redemption is near.

III. Practical Application: Preparing for the Storm

A. Spend 10 Minutes Daily in Prayer

- Pray for spiritual discernment and strength.
- Ask God to help you recognize the signs of the times and remain steadfast in faith.

B. Study Bible Prophecy in 2025

- Commit to studying the books of Daniel and Revelation to understand God's plan.
- Use Ellen White's writings as a guide for deeper insights.

C. Focus on Spiritual Readiness

- Examine your heart: Is anything separating you from God? Confess it.
- Share the gospel with urgency, knowing that time is short.

IV. Takeaway: God Warns Us Out of Love

God's warnings are gifts of love. They are not designed to frighten us but to guide us toward repentance and readiness. The signs we see—wars, disasters, and moral decay—are evidence of His care, not abandonment.

Key Lessons:

- **God's Sovereignty:** He is in control even when the world seems chaotic.
- **God's Patience:** His delay in returning reflects His love, giving time for repentance.
- **God's Faithfulness:** He has given us His Word as a lamp to guide us through the darkness.

Conclusion: Will You Heed the Warning?

The storm is not coming—it is already here. The signs Jesus gave in Matthew 24 are unfolding before our eyes. But Jesus tells us: *"Do not be alarmed."* Why? Because He has given us everything we need to prepare.

- Spend time in prayer.
- Study the prophecies.

- Live with urgency and hope.

God's warnings are acts of love, ensuring that His people are not caught unaware. Let us respond with faith, vigilance, and gratitude.

"Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD." (Psalm 27:14)

The Last Three Signs

The Bible outlines various signs that indicate the nearing of Jesus' second coming. Among these, three significant final signs can be identified, often tied to Jesus' words in **Matthew 24**, **Mark 13**, and **Luke 21**, as well as prophecies in **Revelation**. Here are three key signs typically regarded as among the last before His return:

1. The Gospel Preached to the Whole World

- Jesus said:

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." (Matthew 24:14)

Before Jesus returns, the message of salvation must reach every nation, tribe, language, and people (Revelation 14:6). This is often viewed as the final task of the church before His return.

1. 2024 baptisms around the world
2. Play video by Hope Channel

2. A Time of Great Tribulation

- Jesus described a period of unparalleled distress:

"For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be." (Matthew 24:21)

This refers to an intensification of persecution, natural disasters, and societal chaos. Revelation also speaks of the **seven last plagues** (Revelation 16), signaling God's final judgments on a rebellious world.

Biblical References: What God's People Will See and Endure During the Great Tribulation

The Bible describes the Great Tribulation as a time of intense suffering and testing for the entire world, including God's people. Here's a comprehensive list of what Scripture reveals believers will see and endure during this period:

1. Persecution for Faith

- **Severe persecution of believers:**
- *"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake."* (Matthew 24:9)
- *"Indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God."* (John 16:2)
- *"Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."* (Revelation 2:10)

2. Apostasy and Betrayal

- **Falling away from the faith:**
- *"At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other."* (Matthew 24:10)
- *"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons."* (1 Timothy 4:1)
- **Betrayal by loved ones:**
- *"Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death."* (Mark 13:12)

3. Deception by False Prophets and False Christs

- **Rise of deception:**
- *"For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."* (Matthew 24:24)
- *"The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders."* (2 Thessalonians 2:9)

4. Global Chaos and Catastrophes

- **Wars and conflicts:**
- *"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet."* (Matthew 24:6)
- *"Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."* (Matthew 24:7)
- **Famines and pestilences:**
- *"There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains."* (Matthew 24:7-8)
- **Natural disasters:**

- *"There will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences. And there will be terrors and great signs from heaven."* (Luke 21:11)
- *"The sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood."* (Revelation 6:12)

5. Economic Hardship

- **Severe economic distress:**
- *"A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!"* (Revelation 6:6)
- *"They will throw their silver into the streets, and their gold will be treated as a thing unclean."* (Ezekiel 7:19)

6. The Rise of the Antichrist and the Mark of the Beast

- **Worship of the beast enforced:**
- *"The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise its authority for forty-two months."* (Revelation 13:5)
- *"And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain."* (Revelation 13:15)
- **The mark of the beast:**
- *"Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark."* (Revelation 13:16-17)

7. Cosmic Disturbances

- **Signs in the heavens:**
- *"Immediately after the distress of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken."* (Matthew 24:29)
- *"There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea."* (Luke 21:25)

8. Divine Judgments (The Seven Last Plagues)

- **Plagues poured out on the wicked** (God's people are protected):
- *"So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth, and harmful and painful sores came upon the people who bore the mark of the beast and worshiped its image."* (Revelation 16:2)
- *"The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire."* (Revelation 16:8)

- *“The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell.”* (Revelation 16:19)

9. Martyrdom of Saints

- **Faithfulness unto death:**
- *“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”* (Revelation 7:14)
- *“I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.”* (Revelation 6:9)

10. Endurance and Preservation of the Elect

- **God’s protection over His people:**
- *“Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world.”* (Revelation 3:10)
- *“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.”* (Psalm 91:1)
- **A call to patient endurance:**
- *“This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to Jesus.”* (Revelation 14:12)

11. Final Redemption and Deliverance

- **God’s intervention to shorten the days:**
- *“If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”* (Matthew 24:22)
- **The second coming of Christ:**
- *“Then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then all the peoples of the earth will mourn when they see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory.”* (Matthew 24:30)

Summary

God’s people will face intense trials during the Great Tribulation, including persecution, economic hardship, global chaos, and the rise of deception. Yet, God’s Word also promises His presence, protection, and ultimate deliverance for those who remain faithful.

This period is both a test of endurance and an opportunity for God’s people to stand as witnesses to His love and power. The final triumph belongs to the faithful who persevere in Christ.

3. Cosmic Signs and the Final Trumpet

- Jesus pointed to dramatic signs in the heavens:

“Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.” (Matthew 24:29)

These cosmic disturbances will be followed by Jesus’ visible return, as *“they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”* (Matthew 24:30). Revelation 6:12-14 also echoes these signs, describing the sky receding and the earth shaken.

In Summary:

1. The **worldwide preaching** of the gospel.
2. A **great tribulation** with unprecedented global chaos and judgment.
3. **Cosmic disturbances** heralding Jesus’ visible return.

These signs emphasize the urgency of being spiritually prepared for Christ’s return.