

LIKE THE DAYS OF NOAH
Matthew 24:32-39

INTRO: Every year I seek to do at least one message on the soon return of Christ. And since before New Year's day this year I had felt I should speak about Matthew 24:36-39. Here in four brief verses, the Lord's return is likened to the days of Noah and the flood (read). And by way of introduction, I want to address two matters.

First, let me share with you how I view the second coming of Christ. As I view the second coming of Christ, it happens in two phases. Sometimes the return of Christ in Scripture refers to the first phase and sometimes to the second. The first phase is what we know as the rapture and which the Scripture refers to as 'the catching up'. Christ comes down into the air. Believers are caught up to Him, and together they ascend to heaven. Take a look at this in 1 Thessalonians 4 (read 13-18). Verse 17 says that we, that is believers, will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. That is the first phase. The second phase is when Christ comes down to earth and sets up His millennial kingdom. I have spoken to you about that and given you passages where there is clear indication that these two events seemingly cannot refer to the same time. To see this event, look at Matthew 25 (read 31-33). Christ does not come into the air, He comes down to earth and judges the world. This morning I am speaking about the first phase, when He comes for believers and takes them to heaven.

The second matter I want to address is that many prophecy teachers differ with the view I hold on the text we have before us in Matthew 24 this morning. That includes teachers from 'The Friends of Israel' and other prophecy speakers we have had here. And as we will soon have a prophecy conference, you may hear them express a view different from mine on the passage we are considering this morning. They will not be upset with me, nor I with them and your task will be to weigh through the various views and come to your own decision.

So, in the message this morning, our first point will set our passage in its context. I will explain why I believe this passage refers to the first phase of the second coming. Then we want to look at the content of this passage and see how it is a warning to us today.

I. THE CONTEXT OF OUR TEXT

To get the context then, let me take you to the beginning of the chapter. As I see it, the words of our passage are given on the Monday before Jesus is crucified. In my view, He is crucified on Wednesday. And in Matthew 24-25 Jesus will spread out an overview of what will happen before He returns to earth to rule. So look at verses 1-2 (read). What He has just spoken of here is the destruction of Jerusalem which I told you about just a short while ago. This happened in 70 AD, almost 2000 years ago.

Now look at verse 3 (read). In verses 1-2, they were on Mount Moriah, where the temple stood. Now they have passed through the Kidron valley and they are on the Mount of Olives looking back at the temple. This is the place where He was when He wept over the city, just a day earlier, and foretold what would happen to Jerusalem. But notice now that the disciples ask Him three questions. First, "Tell us when these things will be." I have not time to explain, but while they were walking from the temple to the Mount of Olives He foretold what would happen in years to come. And now they are saying, "Tell us when those things You just told us about happen?" The second question they asked is, "And what will be the sign of Your coming?" This I take to refer to the first phase of His coming. I do not have time to explain all this. But, their third question is, "And what will be the sign of the end of the age." The KJV refers to that as the 'end of the world.' The literal word is 'end of the age'. As I understand it that refers to the end of the tribulation, which is the end of this age. After the end of this age comes the age to come. The end of the age is when Jesus returns to rule on earth in the millennial kingdom.

Now I don't like to leave that all unexplained, but that is not the purpose of my message this morning. So let me tell you briefly how I see Jesus answers those three questions. When they said, "When will these things be?" He answered that question in 24:4-31. This passage begins with the beginning of sorrows and ends with Jesus return when He returns to earth to rule.

Now their second question was, "And what will be the sign of Your coming?" Let me tell you what they are asking. You know how it is when you start traveling with your children. It starts off all exciting, and then when the traveling gets just a little monotonous you have your first question of many of the same, "How far is it yet?" They would like to know a sign from you how close we are. And here is the disciples question for Jesus, "What sign will we have that tells us we are close."

As I see this passage, in 24:32-25:30, Jesus tells them what it will be like just before He comes. Jesus says it will be like a tree that is budding. When the tree is budding you know it is only a little while longer and summer will be here. This year we are desperately waiting for the trees to bud. But they refuse. They say it is too cold yet. Normally, at this time of year we should be seeing buds, but not this year. So we know summer will be a while yet. Four feet of snow and minus 10-20 at night is not conducive to buds. But when the buds appear, we will know summer is also near.

Now look at verse 33, "So you also, when you see all these things, know that it near, at the very doors." Now, there is a little problem here. When you see ALL these things, then it is no longer near, it is here. In a Bible study I did a number of years ago I wrote this, "How then is one to understand these words? The word 'to see' in verse 32 is in the Greek aorist tense. Normally it is translated as the past tense but it signifies other things as well. It can indicate the beginning of an action and is quite often used like that. I think, the meaning here is that when you see these things 'begin to come to pass then you know Jesus' return is near.

In Luke's parallel account of 21:28 he uses the very words that the aorist tense here indicates." So, let us look at Luke 21:28 (read). You see, it is not when you see all these things happen, it is when you begin to see them happen. Now let us see how they begin to happen. We go to Matthew 24:4-8 (read). When you see all these things begin to happen, that is like the budding of a tree indicating that summer is near. So, here are the tree buds of this passage. Number 1:

Many will come in My name saying, 'I am Christ,' and will deceive many." Never has that happened more than it is today. Second, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." Third, "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places." These are the buds of the tree, the signs that Christ's coming is near. Certainly we see these things today, so we know we are near.

This is the context of verses 36-39, so let us look at the content of these verses. We now want to look at the content of our text.

II. THE CONTENT OF OUR TEXT

Let us begin by reading verses 36-39 once more. Notice that he has given the signs that would indicate that Christ's coming is near, and that is followed by a 'But' in verse 36. We will have signs, but no one can know the day or the hour of Christ's return. No one knows the day or the hour. Our text says not even the angels know the precise time. Mark 13:32 says not even Jesus knows the precise hour. Only God the Father knows.

One of the reasons that causes me to view this passage as referring to the rapture is that it says no one will know the day or hour of Christ's return. I have not time to deal with this in detail, except to say that when the tribulation begins, from Daniel's 70th week you can also determine the day He will return. So if this passage speaks of Christ's coming at the end of the tribulation, then I think people could know at least the day. So this passage, I think, must refer to the rapture, the first phase of His coming.

Now notice the illustration Jesus uses to tell us what it will be like when Jesus returns. He uses the account of Noah. He says that the coming of the Lord will be like the days of Noah. And what were the days of Noah like? What aspect of Noah's day will the coming of the Lord be like? Well, look at verses 38-39 (read).

The very first thing I want you to notice is the specific aspect of Noah's day that Jesus uses here to illustrate what it will be like when He returns. It says, "They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark." It is my view that what Jesus is pointing out here is that right up until the very day that it began to rain, people were eating and drinking and getting married and giving in marriage.

As I see it, the main thrust of this illustration of the days of Noah to the coming of Christ is that people were totally oblivious to the event that was about to come upon them. Right up to the moment disaster struck, life was going on just as usual. The day before it began to rain people were going on as though nothing out of the ordinary was going to happen. It was life as usual. And then, without warning, judgment struck.

Now I want to make a point here. Many prophecy teachers say that this whole passage refers to the second aspect of Christ's return, that is, it refers to when He comes to set up His kingdom. But I think there is a very huge contrast to what it will be like on earth when the rapture happens and what it will be like on earth when Christ returns to earth at the end of the tribulation. According to our passage, when Christ returns it will be life as usual. They will be eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage until suddenly Christ comes.

Now let me show you what it will be like on earth just before Christ comes at the end of the tribulation. Turn to the book of Revelation (read 6:12-17; 11:14-19; 16:17-21). That is what it will be like just before Christ returns to rule on earth at the second phase of His return. When you look at these passages it is nothing like the days just before the flood.

But I want to point out a few other similarities between Noah's day and the time when Christ comes for His own. We note as well that in the days of Noah judgment was preceded by days of grace. It was life as usual for a long time. Noah preached for 120

years. We too have had many years of grace. But, not only was life, life as usual, wickedness was ever on the increase. And yet they acted as though nothing was wrong. Sin abounded on every hand. 2 Peter 2:4 says that Noah was a preacher of righteousness. One of the things that should have validated Noah's message was that he was a preacher of righteousness. Righteousness is such an incredible thing. It is a breastplate. It will protect you from the wicked one. But the world hates righteousness. Men love darkness rather than light. So the very thing that should have substantiated Noah's message tore it down in the eyes of the world. They hated righteousness. Surely it is like that today.

Now what struck me in a new way a while ago when I thought of this passage is that in Noah's day, black clouds of judgment were hanging over the world and clearly visible to anyone with spiritual eyes, but the world was totally oblivious to it. Daniel 12:10 says with regard to end time matters that the wicked will not understand, but the wise will understand. Those who give themselves to the Scriptures will understand. How can a righteous man look at today's world and not see dark clouds of impending judgment? But the unrighteous did not see it then, nor do they now.

Consider for a moment television; the easily duplicated music and its huge impact on our culture; videos; cd's; dvds; and so on. Then consider the internet. So many of these things that can be used either for vice or virtue, but vice wants to dominate. I did a wedding for a young man recently and he said he showed his wife how to check out his phone to see where he had been on internet. And he said, "I will not erase my history and you can check my out any time." Oh the vice you can get into on the internet. May I ask, would you allow anyone to check your history on internet?

Let me give you another likeness from the days of Noah to the coming of Christ at the rapture. The people were warned over and over again, but they scoffed at him. The apostle Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:3-4, "knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own

lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation.'" Today, the hope of Christ's return is not only mocked in the world, but it is scoffed at among Christians. It seems to me that the Church is no longer interested in the return of Christ. For the most part, those who profess to be Christians are interested in making this world a better, safer place.

Now that is not all bad. But when we want to make this world a better place because our hope is in this world, not in Christ, now, subtly we have been led off of the narrow path. And in this passage Peter says these scoffers walk after their own lusts or desires. It seems to me that many Christians today are not interested in the old rugged cross, the cross that slays self. They are interested in a world of equality where everyone has food to eat and a well to drink from. We are not interested in saving people spiritually, we want to save them physically.

Some years ago, an Old Order Mennonite church in the town where I grew up changed their historical doctrines and accepted charismatic practices. The pastor that led the church in that direction later got involved in helping people in Liberia, Africa. I was sent an article explaining his ministry. He had helped train some 200 teachers and set up an orphanage which at one time had up to 600 children and they started a small university. So let me read part of the article to you: "He works with church leaders in Liberia not to do things for them but to help young men and women to see that they can help their people. They travel to remote areas that have no roads and live there for one or two weeks. There they assist in areas that they are asked to assist in such as kids clubs, clearing land or providing basic medical services. Although they share their faith, their goal is not to convert people but to help them to be what God wants them to be. They provide a holistic message which involves working with the people rather than preaching to them" end quote. When this pastor asked one of the people, "Why do you think that I am qualified to be here?" The reply was, "Because you eat what we eat and you sleep where we

sleep." Now let me reread one sentence out of that: Although they share their faith, their goal is not to convert people but to help them to be what God wants them to be. And I ask you, how can you help people to be what God wants them to be without converting them? This kind of teaching has infected many missions today.

Let me give you another likeness from the days of Noah to the coming of Christ at the rapture. When judgment came in the days of Noah it came suddenly. And then one day they had laughed away their last day of grace. One day they were laughing and the next day they were drowning. How many people do you suppose ran to the ark and begged to be let in? Hundreds of thousands of drowning people. What do you suppose it was like when they had climbed the highest place they could find and even that was not high enough? What do you suppose they thought in their last living moments? But when judgment came, it came quickly and it was irreversible. There was no use begging or pleading. The day of begging and pleading was over. They had sinned away their day of grace. It was too late, forever too late. When the Lord Jesus comes for His own it will be like that. You can read that for yourselves in Matthew 25:1-13.

Let me give you another likeness from the days of Noah to the coming of Christ at the rapture; Noah's message was absolutely ludicrous to the world. First, his preaching was a laugh. Scripture says Noah was a preacher of righteousness. No doubt then he would have reproved unrighteousness. Listen to Genesis 6:5, which tells us what people were like, "Then 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." Now imagine a preacher of righteousness entering a picture like that. It would be like going to a gay pride parade with the Gospel. If one dared touch the gay matter, one would be laughed out of the city. If one touched the pride matter, surely one would fare no better. And Noah was a preacher of righteousness in the midst of a wicked and perverse generation. His preaching must have been the source of many jokes. No doubt many lol messages were sent to one another.

Let us note once more 2 Peter 3:3-4, "knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, 'Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as *they were* from the beginning of creation.'" What makes people scoff at messages like we have this morning? It is precisely this: they are walking according to their own lusts or desires. When one does that one is not interested in the Gospel, to put it mildly.

The second laughing matter was his boat. What a laugh. It is viewed by many that it had not rained up until the time of the flood. It is viewed that the world was covered with a vapor canopy and it watered the earth. Because of this vapor canopy man lived much longer then, than now. If that is so, consider how ridiculous it was to build a ship on dry land. But even if it did rain before that time, Noah building an ark on dry land would be like building a big ship in our town of La Crete, here in northern Alberta, a ship so large it could not be moved. You see, Noah could not move the ark. The water would have to rise high enough to float the ark, and you can imagine the laughs that must have caused.

But our message today is ludicrous too. We say that one day soon the Lord will catch away all Christians. They are going to disappear in a nano second of time. All over the world, wherever a true Christian is, he will be caught up. In the twinkling of an eye, this world will suddenly be minus 690 million people. That is a conservative number. It could be more. Now I ask you, is that a ludicrous message, or what? Well, Noah's message was no less ludicrous but it did happen.

Furthermore, these days in which they were living life as usual, black clouds of judgment were already hanging over their heads and they were totally oblivious to it. Sin and wickedness abounded on every hand, and if God be God, judgment had to come. And almost right overhead, black clouds of judgment hung. But the people were totally oblivious to the clouds.

I ask, is it not like that today? When we look at the skies through the glasses of what is happening, and

with a knowledge of the justice of God, we cannot help but see billowing clouds of judgment building up and ready to break out. Consider the last number of years and the approval homosexuality is receiving. The president of the USA himself endorses it. The increase in the numbers of people who approve that life-style is staggering. The Premier of our own conservative province of Alberta approves. How long can judgment be with-held?

Consider abortions. This legalized form of murder, if God is truly just, and He is, surely this must arouse His righteous wrath. I understand around the world each year 40-50 million babies are aborted! Surely God's justice is straining to break free into vengeance. And I want to remind you that when the Lord returns for the Church, very shortly thereafter will come the tribulation, also known as the time of His wrath. This time will begin peacefully enough but that will soon give way to disaster after disaster and in the last 3 and 1/2 years God Almighty will pour out His wrath on this sin cursed earth in unimaginable ways.

Well, we could give many examples that clearly indicate that judgment must come soon. And if that is true, then remember that the coming of Christ for His Church is a little sooner.

CONCL: So I must conclude. I believe that Matthew 24:36-39 is in a section that deals with the coming of Christ for His Church. It is the catching up, or the rapture that is in view here, as I see it. And when Christ returns to earth, it will be life as usual for most. They will be eating and drinking and going about life, totally oblivious to the fact that dark clouds of judgment have been building up and they are ready to burst.

And then, just before these clouds burst, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, all truly born again believers will vanish from the face of the earth. I know that sounds ludicrous, but Noah's boat and his message was ludicrous too.

And from the two verses immediately following our text, I want you to see what will happen. Look at Matthew 24:41-42. I ask you this morning, are you ready? If you have not

realized how serious your sin is, and you have not repented of them and received Christ as your Savior, you are not ready. If you have heard the Gospel, and you are not ready when Christ comes, your chances of being saved during the tribulation are about zero. Today is the day of salvation. Tomorrow may be too late.