

# READINESS: BE READY

*Matthew 24:4-8*

4 And Jesus answered and said to them,

“See to it that no one deceives you.

5 For many will come in My name,

saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.

6 And you are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars.

See that you are not alarmed,

for those things must take place,

but that is not yet the end.

7 For nation will rise against nation,

and kingdom against kingdom,

and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.

8 But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pains.”

(Matthew 24:4–8, 2022 LSB)

Our world is fascinated by the idea of the end of time. Movies capitalize on the fear of the future. Overpopulation is going to end the world. Climate change is going to end the world. Not too many decades ago, it was the Cold War and nuclear proliferation, and the ozone layer.

History shows us that governments are able to easily control their populations if they can convince them that one enemy or another is out to get them. Hitler frightened the German people and then exploited that fear. Various communist regimes frightened their populations and then exploited that fear. We saw that if a government can frighten enough people, it can literally get away with murder.

Well, the Bible tells us that this present age – this present evil age, as Galatians 1:4 puts it – will come to an end. It won't be the end predicted by secular prophets of doom, with storms and melting ice caps. It is going to be God's specific

judgment against the world.

Matthew 24 opens with Jesus' disciples asking Him what signs they could expect of His second coming and the end of the age. His answers reveal that the end times are going to be filled with spiritual chaos and deception and be marked by violence from men as well as the judgment of God.

Jesus doesn't immediately tell them the signs they ask about. Instead, He begins with an exhortation to be ready. His concern is not ultimately what events will occur but the stability and faith of His people as those events occur. Our faith and stability require our obedience to two specific commands Jesus gives in our passage today.

**4 “See to it that no one deceives you.” (Matthew 24:4, 2022 LSB)**

**6 “See that you are not alarmed” (Matthew 24:6, 2022 LSB)**

Deception and fear often go hand in hand. Fearful people are the most easily deceived because they begin to grasp at straws. And deceived people are the most easily frightened because they have no way to determine what is true and what is false.

Let's look at what Jesus says.

## **SEE TO IT THAT YOU ARE NOT DECEIVED**

*Matthew 24:4-5*

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**5** For many will come in My name,

saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many.”

**(Matthew 24:4–5, 2022 LSB)**

I want you to notice that Jesus doesn't say, "Don't be deceived." He says, "See to it that no one deceives you." The first is passive: "Don't be." The second is active: "See to it."

Oh, I hate to give you hard truths; I really do. But I have to tell you a hard truth right from the pages of Scriptures:

**7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world,**  
 those who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.  
 This is the deceiver and the antichrist.  
**(2 John 7, 2022 LSB)**

John wrote that little letter about 1900 years ago. Just a few decades had passed since Jesus spoke to His disciples on the Mount of Olives. But John, the old apostle, could look around and recognize that "many deceivers" had already arisen. Frankly, it's foolish to ask *if* there are deceivers in our world. The sensible question is to ask *who* are the deceivers in our world.

Now, it's not all that hard to recognize *deception*; all we have to do is compare a teaching or idea with the Scriptures. I don't mean by this that people are *eager* to recognize deception, of course, just that the truth of the Bible is clear and straightforward.

But John doesn't say, "For many *deceptions* have arisen in the world." He says that "many *deceivers* have gone out into the world." That's the trouble many have. Deceivers can be lovely people, nice people, even praiseworthy people. Most deceivers have been deceived on some level. They sincerely believe what they say. That makes it hard to identify and reject them.

What makes it harder is that deceivers can be people that respect, like, and love. They are normal people. Their eyes don't glow red. They don't have horns sticking out of their heads. They don't speak in growly, demonic voices. But all deceivers proclaim the doctrines of demons. And they are far more successful than we want them to be.

**1 But the Spirit explicitly says that  
in later times some will fall away from the faith,  
paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons  
(1 Timothy 4:1, 2022 LSB)**

All deception begins with Satan. It is his primary weapon. Jesus calls him the father of lies (John 8:44). Satan repeatedly lied to Jesus during the Lord's temptation, even using Scripture to lie. What's more, Satan stood in heaven and lied to the face of God the Father about Job in Job 1 & 2. The devil is such an accomplished liar that after the millennium, after 1,000 years of the closest thing to paradise this world will ever know, Satan will be able to convince a vast number of people that the world was a better place with him in it. And sinners will play right into his hands because deception always sounds better than the truth. Our hunger for truth is not natural to us.

The end times are ripe for deception. False christs abound in various religions. False teachers, prophets, and apostles abound in Christianity. They can even be people we know and love. That makes rejecting them and their teachings difficult and painful, but it is still necessary. If it helps, the only hope a false teacher, prophet, or apostle has is that a genuine Christian who loves them will gently and clearly, but forcefully, call them out on their deception in the hope that the Father will grant them repentance that leads to the knowledge of the truth, so that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil who has taken them captive to do his will. (Second Timothy 2:24-26).

So, how do we “see to it” that we are not deceived?

**First, we believe Jesus when He tells us that the end times are going to be spiritually chaotic.** Many will claim to be Christ. Many more will claim to speak for Him but will be false teachers, prophets, and apostles. Their goal will be to deceive, if possible, the very elect (Matthew 24:24). It might be hard to believe, but there are far more false teachers in what is called Christianity than faithful teachers. I’m sorry to say this, but we have to be suspicious of everything. Is that biblical? You tell me:

**21 examine all things; hold fast to that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21, 2022 LSB)**

**Second, we immerse ourselves in the Word of God.** It IS Truth. We need to know it. We need to be willing to test everything, including what I am saying right now, by the Scriptures. When someone says, “Take my word for it,” we need to say, “Um, no; I’ll take GOD’S Word for it. Show the Scripture.” And we need to learn to think biblically, not just citing Bible verses but letting biblical truth control our thinking. “But I have the Spirit!” Yes, if you are in Christ, you do. The Spirit’s job is NOT to reveal new truths to you but to enlighten you regarding the Word of God.

**And third, we stand in the truth.** We must take our stand on what Scripture says and reject everything that contradicts it. Someone else might genuinely see the Scriptures differently. Paul talks about some avoiding meat offered to idols and others not caring whether it was offered to idols. Paul doesn’t weigh in on the meat but on the attitude. Let each one be persuaded by Scripture, and do not judge one another. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Truth by Jesus, and He certainly helps us. It can be painful or uncomfortable to tell someone that they are wrong, especially when they are loved ones. The Holy Spirit will stand with us when we take that stand. He will encourage us. He will strengthen us.

# SEE THAT YOU ARE NOT ALARMED

*Matthew 24:6-8*

**6** “And you are going to hear of wars and rumors of wars.

See that you are not alarmed,  
for those things must take place,  
but that is not yet the end.

**7** For nation will rise against nation,  
and kingdom against kingdom,  
and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.

**8** But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pains.”

**(Matthew 24:6–8, 2022 LSB)**

Here is the second command Jesus gives us. As before, He doesn't simply say, “Do not be afraid,” but “See that you are not alarmed.” That is, we are responsible for our own stability and peace of mind.

Most of you remember the Y2K scare. Early computers used two-digit dates; “23” instead of “2023.” A few years before the turn of the century, someone realized that a major problem was looming. With a single tick of a clock, “00” would become 1900 rather than 2000. It wasn't a big deal for personal computers; a system update took care of the issue. But many corporate and government computer systems were custom programmed and had to be changed by hand. The fear arose that when the clock ticked around, some computer systems would simply go belly up and stop functioning. Some enterprising people used that fear as a means of making money.

Well, in the fall of 1999, a woman in our church began saving plastic milk jugs to hold water in case the water supply went out in our community. I went and spoke to the man in charge of our water system. I learned two things. First, it was gravity fed to our homes. Second, there was enough diesel to run generators to

provide 18 weeks of water. So I went to this woman and told her what I had learned that we had 18 weeks of water, and since it was gravity fed, we didn't have to worry about pumps going out. She said, "Well, I'm saving water just in case." I said, "But Y2K is not going to cancel gravity." She said, and I am not making this up, "*You never know.*" No, I'm pretty sure I do know. Gravity doesn't depend on computers.

One of the hard truths of the Olivet Discourse is that this world is filled with dangers, and those dangers will become greatly magnified as the end draws near. Even now, we face wars and rumors of wars; rumors can be worse than the real thing. Even now, we see conflict between different people groups within countries and wars between countries. Even now, there are famine, earthquakes, and other disturbing events.

And, in these circumstances, Jesus commands us to see to it that we are not alarmed. How do we do that? The Lord tells us in two important phrases in Matthew 24:6.

**First, we trust in the sovereignty of God.** "These things must take place." Jesus does not mean that God is helpless to stop these things from happening. He means that these events are decreed by God for His creation. Do I need to remind you that Yahweh is the Creator of all things? That makes Him the rightful owner of all things. All things are to exist for His glory and purpose. He has the right to do what He pleases with what He has made, whether stars and planets, angels and demons, or human beings. Every unbeliever, and many who claim to be Christians, will say, "God has no right to rule me!" Oh, He has every right to rule you, and He does.

But for our purposes, God's sovereign control over all things means that while we face unpleasant times, we do not face uncertain times. I don't know what the next hour holds for you, but Yahweh does. It will turn out for His good glory. And

if you have trusted in His Son, it will turn out for your eternal good.

**Second, we trust in the power of God.** This is not yet the end. Yahweh is in control and governs every last millisecond. We don't know God's timetable. There may be just minutes before Jesus returns. There may be centuries. Our faith is not in the calendar of the end but in Yahweh, who set that calendar before making anything. Do you know something? I would love to have (well, I *think* I would love to have) full disclosure about the end times. What we have is adequate disclosure, sufficient disclosure. We don't know every last detail, but our God does, and we know Him. Jesus says in Matthew 24:25, "Behold, I have told you in advance." He says in John 14:29, "I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe." He says in John 16:4, "But these things I have spoken to you so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them."

We know enough to trust our God as the future unfolds. As I said a moment ago, we certainly face unpleasant times, but we do not face uncertain times.

## THIS IS NOT THE END

*Matthew 24:6, 8*

**6** "that is not yet the end ... all these things are merely the beginning of birth pains." (**Matthew 24:6–8, 2022 LSB**)

All these difficult things are not the end of the end, just the beginning of the end.

We are tempted to look at the state of our world and think, "This has GOT to be the end times; surely Jesus is coming back today!" I believe He could come back today, but the events of our times are just birth pains. A season of tribulation is coming, which will make today look like heaven on earth. The Lord is going to give the world over to its sin before pouring out His judgments on the Earth.



Is this supposed to make us feel better? Yes.

**First of all, we are assured that when God's judgment falls, it will be unmistakable and not just more of the same.** Jesus says of the great tribulation,

**21** “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred **since the beginning** of the world until now, **nor ever will [after]**.”

**22** And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.”

**(Matthew 24:21–22, 2022 LSB)**

The judgment of the Earth that we see in Revelation 6-19 will not be more of the same. It will be a completely different quality of judgment than anything witnessed on earth before. The only comparison would be to the great flood, and that is just a shadow of what is to come. So, if tomorrow morning Russia has declared war on America, it's not the end, just more of the same.

**And second, the Lord has graciously told us in advance what is going to happen.** We have the opportunity to be prepared for whatever this season brings and also the birth pains that precede the great tribulation. You know, in Genesis 6, God gave sinful mankind 120 years to repent while Noah built the ark and preached repentance. In these last days, God has given mankind a far greater period of time to repent while the church has preached the Gospel. I believe that the events of the great flood foreshadow God's judgment on the earth. That means that Jesus is our ark, and He will remove us at the perfect time before the final storm of judgment falls.

**BRINGING IT HOME**

We have been given the Word of God. If we will trust it, and know it, then deceivers will rarely, if ever, fool us.

The Word tells us what is going to take place in the future. We don't know every last detail, but we know enough to be protected from fear. We don't have full disclosure, but we do have adequate disclosure.

So, we continue each day in faith. We trust that God has protected us from deception by giving us His Word of Truth and filling us with His Spirit of Truth. We trust that God has protected us from fear not by eliminating danger but by telling us ahead of time what sort of things will take place as the end draws near. His Word comforts us in our troubles, and His Spirit keeps our faith active and strong.

As I've already said a couple of times, we face unpleasant times, but not uncertain times. They are certain in the purposes of God. We can trust Him to guide us through them.