

# **FORERUNNER CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP – MIKE BICKLE**

## **KNOWING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES**

*Transcript: 10/10/09*

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## **Session 2 Knowing the Generation, but Not the Day or the Hour**

*Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Tonight we're looking at our second session in an eight-part series on the subject of knowing the signs of the times. The real issue is cultivating a spirit of faith. That's the real issue behind Jesus giving the signs of the times. Because the natural response is apathy—"Who cares?"—or cynicism—"Ah, it's not important!"

So it's either apathy or cynicism. That's the real issue that rises up in our hearts, because we're human beings. Let's look at Matthew 24:33: this is the passage that we're building this series around. Jesus commanded us to know the generation. That is, if you're living in it. He didn't command people generations earlier to know which generation. But if you're living in it, the Bible commands us, Jesus commands us, to know if in fact we're living in it.

### **WHEN YOU SEE THE SIGNS TAKE PLACE, BE CONFIDENT AND BOLD AND RESOLUTE**

In verse 33, He's referring to the sign trends and the sign events that we looked at in the last session. He says, "When you see them all, then know—be certain; don't be vague, don't be passive. Be confident and bold and resolute" (Mt. 24:33, paraphrased).

Now just, for the record, not all the signs are fully happening right now. But most of them are, or the events right before the events are being put into place. So we're not at the hour where we can know that we know, but more and more of these signs are coming into place. So our faith is strengthened and we're alerted; we're alerted that we're entering into a very serious hour of human history.

So He warns us, "So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near" (Mt. 24:33, NKJV). The *it* is the coming of the Lord, or the end of the age; it's at the very doors. Then He gives us a prophetic promise: "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place" (v. 34). He says, "I promise you that all the things I said will come to pass." Not part of them, not most of them; every single one of them will come to a full expression at the same time on a global level. He says, "I promise you that; you can count on it."

Again, that hasn't happened yet. But we're getting closer and closer to this. My point is that we need to be informed as to what all of these things are, so that we can in fact respond in faith when we see them. Most believers I know don't know what all these things are. If you ask them to list them from memory, they would say, "I don't know, I could say wars and rumors of wars. I remember that one. Famine, pestilence..." But there are many more than just the negative trends. There are many things; of course, that's what this course is about.

Then He goes on to say, "But of that day and hour no one knows" (Mt. 24:35).

### **WE WANT TO SEE THE SIGNS WITH FAITH AND CLARITY**

Paragraph B. Here's the premise. As people who love Jesus, you're eager to know what's on His heart. So you want to know what He meant by "all these things." When He says, "When you see all these things," the cry in your spirit is, "What are all these things? If these things begin to emerge, I want to see them. If they appear in my generation, I want to see them with faith and clarity." That's the cry in your spirit if you love Jesus, which

you do. Otherwise, you wouldn't be sitting in these chairs tonight. The Man whom we love has given us so much insight into what He considers to be the most important signs of the generation of His coming.

Now think about that: the Man whom we love. We love Him dearly. He loves us. Just think of it relationally, not even as a theological debate. We say, "We love You, Jesus!"

He says, "Well then let Me tell you with excitement in My heart what I think are the important signs of that generation." Beloved, that's enough to make us want to learn it, right there.

### **IT'S NOT AN ISSUE OF DEBATE, BUT OF KNOWING HIS HEART**

Now He wants us to know these signs. Why? Because they'll make a difference in how we live. They really will. It isn't just that we'll be a little more committed, though we will. The implications are greater than just being a little more on-fire, or more focused in the prayer room. It will change many things about our lives when we see these things.

To some folks, the issue of the end times is a theological debate. In other words, it's kind of fun to spar about. "It's the end of the age"; "No, it's not!" "This verse means this." "No, it means that!" It's more of a big information game; the goal is to see who can outwit who with what verse.

This isn't the issue from Jesus' point of view. It's the issue of life and death, to know if you're in that generation. It isn't an issue of theological sparring and one-upmanship on another person in a spirit of debate. It will be an issue of life and death. We will point that out in just a few moments.

### **"MY PEOPLE ARE DESTROYED FOR LACK OF KNOWLEDGE"**

I don't have this passage on the notes; and by the way, we won't cover all the notes tonight. They're for your personal study. But a passage I don't have on the notes is Hosea 4:6, which is a very well-known passage. It says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). And that passage is describing a great trouble coming to the land of Israel. They would perish if they didn't understand what God was doing in the coming trouble. That's what it means in context. If trouble is coming to a generation and God is orchestrating that trouble, He's overseeing even man's sin and Satan's rage, but He's overseeing it in His sovereignty. He's saying, "If you don't understand what's happening in that day, My people will be destroyed for lack of knowing."

This is an issue of life and death; it's not an issue of theological debate and sparring with one another. That's what it is to many people. It's curiosity, and it's kind of fun. They want to win an argument with their friends. Get out of that spirit, if you're in it, and think about this: the Man you love has given us the information that He considers important.

And it's information that's a matter of life and death to the people who live in that generation, if in fact we're in that generation. I believe that we're at the beginning of it. I believe we have time to get understanding and confidence. I believe we have some decades. But you want to begin to press in now. You don't want to wait until the day before.

That's one of the reasons He doesn't give us the day or the hour. If He gave us the day or the hour, many people would wait until the day before and then get on-fire for God. He says, "I'm not going to tell you the day or the

hour. I'll tell you the generation so that it will create urgency in you, and it will give you discernment to make long-term decisions for decades. But I'm not going to tell you the day or the hour. I will withhold that information on purpose."

And that's a relational statement. The reason the Lord isn't going to tell us the day or the hour is because He wants to cultivate the spirit of faith in our relationship with Him. He says, "No, I will hold that back. I don't care who the prophet is; I'm not going to tell him with certainty the day or the hour."

But if you have a heart to know, you'll recognize the signs in that generation.

### **ASK THESE QUESTIONS OF THE LORD IN A FERVENT, EARNEST WAY**

Paragraph C. Now, if we're living in that last generation of natural history—and it's important to say the last generation of natural history, because it isn't the last generation. You know, the human race is going to go on for ever. We'll have billions of generations ahead of us. If we're in that last generation, then we need to know it. We really do need to know it.

My goal here is not to get you to believe what I say. My goal is to get you to open your Bible to check out what Jesus said, and the apostles, and the Old Testament prophets. And in your own Bible, with your own eyes, in your own relationship with the Holy Spirit, decide if this generation is significant.

I'm not interested in you believing what I believe about this. This is an issue between you and Jesus and your open Bible and the Holy Spirit. But the thing that I've found is that many believers are just not that interested in it. They're so much interested in other things in their life, and even in their ministry. They're not really focused on what's important to Jesus about that generation. So they're not even asking the question in a serious way.

I mean, we see tremendous signs taking place. Trends are happening, events are happening, and the Body of Christ is mostly interested in growing its ministry. That's the big thing on their mind—not discerning the hour in which they're living.

So again, my goal is not to convince you. My goal is to get you to ask the question in a fervent, earnest way to the Lord, with a small amount follow through. I don't mean just one day at a conference: "Hey, Lord, is that true? If it's true, tell me today. If not, I'll check it out in a couple of decades."

No. Actually ask the Man you love, Jesus, fully God and fully Man, "Is this really an important hour to You? If it is, talk to me about it."

My goal is to shepherd the Body of Christ, to get you to ask that question and to give you some information to begin your conversation with the Lord. There are many verses in the Bible, so you can talk to Him about those verses.

### **IF WE'RE LIVING IN THE LAST GENERATION, WE NEED TO KNOW IT**

Paragraph C. If we're living in the last generation, we need to know it. There are two questions that many are asking: "Can we know?" and, "How will we know?" And the answer, is yes, we can know. And how we will know? Jesus gave us the answer in Matthew 24 by understanding the sign trends and the sign events that we

looked at in the last session. We'll break them down throughout this series. The next six sessions, we'll break them down in detail so you have a chance to know them.

### **INFORMATION, THOUGH ESSENTIAL, IS NOT ENOUGH**

But knowing them cognitively, in the brain, is not enough. You can have all the information, but if your spirit is dull, that information will not move you.

This was even true of the apostles. It's amazing; I can't recall the verse at this moment, but when Jesus talked to them after the resurrection, these fiery young apostles, He rebuked them. He said, "Because of your hardness of heart, you did not believe" (Mk. 16:14, paraphrased).

I think, "Man! These guys raised the dead themselves, and performed miracles, but they had hardness of heart."

Here's my point: the information itself, though it's essential, is not enough. We have to have a connection with the Holy Spirit in the information. So as I study the information, I need to be talking to the Spirit. "Talk to me, Holy Spirit. What does this phrase mean for my generation? For now? Is it relevant to Your plan?"

The Holy Spirit may say nothing for a while, but press in; press in. That's what it means to watch and pray, as I said at the very end of the notes, which we might not reach. But the command to watch and pray is talking about talking to God about the information, and staying connected in your relationship with Him; being an anointed observer as to what is unfolding in your generation. It's more than just being an observer. I mean, we have all the news stations; they're observers. They're good observers through the natural eye. We want to be an anointed observer. We want to see with eyes of faith and eyes of living understanding.

### **"LEARN THIS PARABLE FROM THE FIG TREE"**

Paragraph D. As I said in the last session, my opinion is that we're in the early days of that generation. I believe there are people alive today who will see the Lord's return with their own eyes. Maybe it's the twenty-year olds; maybe it's the two-year olds; I don't know. We can't know with certainty. No one knows with certainty. The Lord wants us to know by faith from what the Bible says and how the Holy Spirit speaks to us from the Scriptures. He wants us to move forward in faith by searching the Word and staying connected to His heart. That's why He's not going to tell us the day or the hour.

Learn the parable of the fig tree. It's very important. Of course, I asked you the question, "Have you learned this parable?"

Jesus said, "Learn this parable from the fig tree" (Mt. 24:32). Now Jesus taught many parables. But there's only one parable of which He said, "Learn this one." Now of course, we're supposed to learn the others; He doesn't need to point them out. This is the only one of which He said, "This parable in particular I want My people to learn."

### **"WHEN ITS BRANCH IS ALREADY TENDER . . . YOU KNOW THAT SUMMER IS NEAR"**

Then He gives the parable. It's a very simple parable. Then He gives some very important instructions related to it. He says, "When its branch is already tender and has put forth leaves, you know that summer is near" (Mt. 24:32b). The fig tree loses its leaves in the winter, and puts them forth in springtime. So for a season, it has no

leaves; then the branches become tender, and the leaves begin to sprout. People say, “Wow, it’s springtime; summer is near!” Obviously, everyone could observe that.

In verse 33, Jesus now applies it to the generation of His return. He says, “So you also, when you see all these things. . .” Of course, as we saw a moment ago, “all these things” are the signs throughout Matthew 24. They include the signs the apostles would give later, as well as the signs the Old Testament prophets gave before Jesus. When all these things begin to happen at the same time, on a global level—when they’re making headline news, arresting the attention of the human race—they’re signs, and signs by definition have a message. If they don’t arrest the attention of the human race, they’re not signs.

Say you’re driving down the highway. There are highway exits all converging. There’s a big sign, but it’s empty. You say, “Do I go right or left? I need to know!”

And the man says, “Well, there’s a sign; don’t worry about it.”

The point is, the definition of a sign is that it has a message in it. So these signs in Matthew 24 are big, alarming, and arresting enough; they’re newsworthy enough to grab the attention of the human race, so that people all over the world are talking about it.

But what Jesus is saying is this: because they’re signs, there’s a message from God in those signs. The message of God in the general sense is, “I’m coming! I’m coming!” Undoubtedly there are secondary messages in some of those signs. But the primary sign is, “Lift up your eyes; get ready; become urgent. Understand what’s happening before you. I’m coming!”

Jesus said in verse 34, “Assuredly I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.” Now that’s a prophetic promise. First Jesus gave all of the signs in Matthew 24; now He’s coming to the end of that part of His teaching. Because remember, the teaching is Matthew 24-25: it’s two chapters.

So He’s laid out a number of signs. Now He says, “They will all happen simultaneously.”

I imagine the apostles: their eyes are really big, and they’re thinking, “All of these are going to happen together? In an alarming in an alerting way?” Which means, on a global level—in a manner that arrests the attention of the entire planet. “All of them together in the same time frame?” And it seems like Jesus is really giving a hard prophecy to bring all of these together; and He says, “Yes. I promise you on the authority of who I am. Every one of them will come to pass together, simultaneously on a global level.”

What He’s really saying is this: “You can count on these signs being true. I won’t leave out a single one.”

“Well, Jesus if that means You have the power to direct society, to direct the weather, the economy, the political developments”—I mean, the signs embrace all these subjects—“how could You direct all of these?”

He says, “Trust Me; I’ll direct them in such a way that I will use even the free will of sinful man and the rage of Satan. I’ll direct them in such a way that these signs will emerge together in the way that I said. I have authority in all those realms.” Wow.

## **JESUS HAS AUTHORITY OVER ALL THE SPHERES OF LIFE**

Then He goes on and says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Mt. 24:35). Now He’s talking specifically about the prophecies in Matthew 24. That’s a truth that’s bigger than this prophecy, but in context, when He says, “My words will not pass away,” He’s talking about His prophetic utterances in Matthew 24.

Because in the verse before, He’s just told them, “I have authority over all the spheres of life; over the weather, the economy, the political developments of the nations. I will see to it that they all come to a head at the same time.”

So He’s talking about how much authority He has in verse 34. Then, in verse 35, their eyes are really big; they’re saying, “You can really pull that off?”

He says, “I tell you, heaven and earth will pass away before these prophecies fall to the ground empty. You can count on them.”

## **GOD WANTS TO GIVE US BIG UNDERSTANDING WITH A BURNING HEART**

He says in verse 36, “But of the day and the hour no one knows, not even the angels, but only My Father” (Mt. 24:36). Later He goes on to say, “Therefore, watch. Pay attention” (v. 42, paraphrased).

But it’s more than just getting information; it’s information with a spirit of prayer. You can approach information with a cold heart. There are many theologians throughout history that have Bible knowledge; they had a big head but a cold heart. And God wants us to have a big head, big understanding, but He wants us to have a burning heart. He doesn’t want our understanding to outgrow our heart response, because that’s the definition of a cold spirit.

When our understanding outgrows our heart response, we lack discernment even when we have the understanding. We misapply the information. There have been many people throughout history who had more Bible knowledge than responsive hearts. They actually lose discernment in the process.

## **THE CONTEXT OF JESUS’ TEACHING AND PARABLE**

Paragraph A. Now remember, when Jesus is giving this parable, it’s in the context of a question they asked. The question they asked is this: “What is the sign of Your coming?” The context of Jesus’ teaching and parable is to answer a specific question. Well, it’s actually two specific questions. “When will the temple be destroyed?” Which happened forty years later, in 70 AD. “And when will You return?”

Now the apostles assumed they would happen simultaneously. They didn’t know there would be a 2,000-year gap. Of course, as I said in the last session, the destruction of the temple is a parallel, a prophetic snapshot of the drama and even the difficulty of what would happen at the end of the age but on a global level—rather than just locally, as it did in 70 AD.

Paragraph B. Now Jesus gave three different commands in this portion of Scripture. He said, “Learn the parable. Know with confidence that summer is near. And watch.”

We have to take all three of those. We need to learn the parable. It's quite a simple parable. But I have a feeling there's a reason why Jesus pointed out this parable, even in its simplicity, out of all His other parables. It must have significance. He says, "Don't just learn it cognitively; connect with My heart as I talk to you from this parable. I want you to learn, I want you to know, and I want you to watch."

### **THE MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE OF THE FIG TREE**

Paragraph C. Now the lesson of the parable is very easy. A fig tree loses its leaves in the winter time. I just went through that. The leaves sprout in the spring, so everyone knew the summer was coming in just a few moments, right around the corner.

Jesus is saying that these signs, these events and trends, are the same way. Some of the signs are trends, like wars and rumors of wars. Some of the signs are events, like the abomination of desolation. The Antichrist comes into power on a global scale, on a global stage. There are a number of events that take place, and a number of trends that take place. Again, Jesus didn't say all of them. Some of the apostles added some in the Bible that Jesus didn't mention. So we want to get the whole testimony of Scripture and include it into this, that when those trends and events begin to happen together in a global way, we need to know. We need to know: the coming of the Lord is within that generation.

Now again: not all the signs are happening right now, but many are happening, and they're increasing in an accelerated pace. Many of the other ones, the events that need to happen before they happen, are happening right now. The necessary, foundational events are taking place. So when you understand the Scriptures, when you're connecting with the Holy Spirit, He can talk to you if you're listening as you encounter that information and compare it with the Scriptures.

### **ALL THESE THINGS WILL HAPPEN WITHIN ONE GENERATION**

Paragraph E. Jesus said that all these things would happen within one generation. How long is a biblical generation? Well, if you let Scripture interpret the Scriptures, it can be as short as forty years or as long as 100.

You might think, "I was hoping to nail it down!"

The Lord says, "I don't want you to nail it down."

So people say, "OK, 1948—when Israel became a nation. 100 years... 2048. Hmm."

"OK, what if it's 1967, when Jerusalem came under the control of Israel? Ooh, 2067."

The Lord says, "Gotcha! I don't want you to nail it down to a date. I don't want that. I want you to have urgency grow in you, as confidence grows in you, that you're nearing that time."

Paragraph F. Jesus said, "All these things will happen—all of them." Now, there's only one generation in history in which all of the trends and events that He mentioned will happen at the same time on a global level.

Now, many of these trends and events have never happened in history before—not until the last forty to fifty years. And again, we'll look at those in the next sessions. Now some, like wars and rumors of wars, and pestilence, have been going on for a long time. It's not the fact of wars and rumors of wars; it's the fact that

they're happening at a global level, in conjunction with all the other signs that Jesus talked about. It's the synergy of all these events happening together; that's what makes it unique. There's only one generation in history where all of them will happen together at the same time: not one here, not one there, but *all* of them. That's the key word, *all*.

And I believe that it's in the generation of people alive right now. Again, I may not see it in my lifetime. I might, I might not; I don't care one way or the other. I just want to be with Jesus, here or there. I want to do the will of God. But I believe they're happening, and they're not all in place yet, but many of them are a step away from being in place, if you have knowledge of the whole list. Hopefully by the end of this course, you'll have a lot more knowledge than you started out with.

### **AS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH, SO WILL IT BE AT THE COMING OF THE SON OF MAN**

Roman numeral III. Now Jesus is going to compare the days of Noah to the last generation. Now this is interesting. Because often, when I've heard people comment on this, they interpret this teaching exactly the opposite of how Jesus meant it to be interpreted, from my point of view.

Let's read it. Matthew 24. We're still in the Olivet Discourse; we're still in that's one big chapter where most of the end-time events take place. Actually, it's Matthew 24 and 25; I always need to say both. It's that one big passage, because there were no chapter divisions when Jesus gave it. You know, it's not like He took a team break in the middle and said, "Hey, let's throw in a chapter break right here!" In fact, they didn't include the chapter breaks until a few hundred years later. It was one message.

So Jesus is going on with His lesson. He just spoke to them a moment ago about the fig tree. Now He goes on to the next thing: "Of that day and hour no one knows" (Mt. 24:36). He told them they can know the generation, but they can't know the day and the hour. No one knows the day or the hour, not even the angels, but the Father only.

"But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage"—those are all good things—"until the day that Noah entered the ark" (Mt. 24:37-38). It's not bad that they were eating and drinking and getting married. What Jesus is saying is that they were going about life, doing business as usual as though nothing unique was about to happen. That's the obvious message. He isn't against eating and drinking. He didn't call us to fast until the second coming. He likes marriage.

### **THE PEOPLE WHO SHOULD HAVE BELIEVED REJECTED THE TESTIMONY OF NOAH**

Here's the key phrase, here in verse 39. He said, "These people didn't know that the greatest judgment in human history up to that moment was moments away" (Mt. 24:39, paraphrased). They didn't know it at all! That's the point. The most cataclysmic, history-changing event was happening just a few moments down the road. And they were getting married that afternoon, completely planning their future with no thought that God was saying anything.

That's the point Jesus is making: that the people who should have been informed, who should have believed, rejected the testimony of Noah. And when Noah preached for 120 years, they wagged their heads and said, "The guy is crazy!"

The people who should have believed didn't believe—that's the point. And they died and it was unnecessary that they died. If they had believed and acted differently, they wouldn't have died. That's the point He's making here. They could have known, but they didn't know because of their responses.

### **IN THE MIDST OF THE MUNDANE, WE NEED TO KNOW THE LATENESS OF THE HOUR**

He says, "The flood took them all away" (Mt. 24:39, paraphrased). That means physical death. He says, "So also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (v.39b, NKJV). Let's develop it a little more: so will it be in the generation of the Lord's return. People will be carrying on in everyday life, which is good, but with a complete disconnection from the significance of the hour they're living in. That's bad.

It's good to have normal routines of life. But in the midst of that normal routine of life, we're connected to what God's heart is and what the Bible says, and we have a growing urgency and we have a growing discernment and understanding as we get closer to the Lord's return.

"They didn't know it until the flood came and took them all away." They died. He said, "It will be the same way in the generation of the coming of the Lord." Many, many people will not know it. People who should have known it, will not know it. They'll be shocked. They'll be shocked, and that's bad that they were shocked. It's unnecessary that they were shocked. They should have been aware and prepared, but they were shocked and unaware.

So the exhortation Jesus gives is to *watch*. "Watch therefore" (Mt. 24:42). Again, at the end of the notes I develop three different dimensions of what it means to watch in a practical way. It's very simple, but we have to do all three of them.

### **WE CAN'T KNOW THE DAY OR THE HOUR, BUT WE CAN KNOW THE GENERATION**

Paragraph A. What is going on here? Jesus' main message is that the people who should have known didn't know, and as a consequence they died. That was His message.

Now of course people would love to know the day and the hour. He says, "No, I'm not giving you the day or the hour. I won't give you that. I *will* give you the generation; if you're living in it, you can know the generation." Just as the people in Noah's generation could have known, if they had really wanted.

Now when many people read this passage, all they hear is this: "You can't know the day and hour." And they take it up a notch and say, "Therefore you can't know the generation." Jesus isn't talking about not knowing the generation; just a couple of verses earlier, in verse 34, He essentially said, "You can know the generation" (Mt. 24:34, paraphrased). "But you can't know the specific day, because if you do, you'll wait until the day before to get ready. I'm not going to tell you the day before."

So I've heard people talk about this for years. They read this verse and say, "You can't know the day and hour; therefore you can't know anything! So you're not supposed to know."

And Jesus was saying the opposite; He's saying, "The group that should have known, they cast the knowledge off and they died as a consequence." Because it's an issue of life and death. This isn't an issue of theological debate. In the verse I quoted earlier, the Lord says, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). When there was an impending judgment, a massive judgment coming against Israel, they didn't know that God

was speaking and requiring a response, and they just ignored it. Many of them died unnecessarily, and they suffered great loss because of it.

Now, He did give the qualifier that you can't know the day or the hour. But we're not supposed to use the qualifier, "You can't know the day or the hour," and cancel out the command to know the generation.

It's ironic. This is the very passage where Jesus is warning people that they had better know, and if they don't know, they'll be in peril. And yet it's the very passage people use to say, "You can't know."

### **NOAH WARNED THE WORLD FOR OVER A CENTURY OF IMPENDING JUDGMENT**

Paragraph C. 2 Peter 2:5. Noah was a preacher of righteousness, which tells us this: he was preaching righteousness during the 120 years that it indicates that he was preparing his ark. Can you imagine, 120 years? It doesn't actually say 120 years in the Bible, but most commentators agree that it was 120 years when you add a few things together. But it was at least eighty to 100 years, if not the full 120.

Can you imagine preaching about something that was going to happen, and fifty years later it hasn't happened and you're still seventy years out? But the Lord doesn't have any problem with that. To the Lord, it's a minute away. Well, Noah was preaching throughout that time. He's called a preacher of righteousness, and the people are called ungodly. They were mocking him. They were rolling their eyes, and they said, "Noah, now let's get this straight. It's going to rain, right?"

"Yes. Rain."

"OK, Noah."

Because it has never rained before, ever. The ground was watered from beneath. They said, "Noah, this is simple sixth grade science. The water doesn't come from above; the water comes from below."

Noah says, "I get that, but the water is coming from above."

They looked up and said, "And who is going to hold the water up there?" Noah said, "God is."

"That's good, Noah. Looks like you skipped the sixth grade." Because never had it rained before.

Noah said, "I don't care. It will happen."

For an entire generation, for 120 years, he warned them. He warned them, he warned them, he warned them. Only eight people responded. But he changed human history. Because God's purposes were bound up in this family. I don't want to go into all that right now. That's a bigger subject.

Paragraph D. The majority of the people in Noah's day didn't get it; that was the point. That's what Jesus was warning the people of God. He says, "Don't you get it? The majority didn't get it! Make sure you're not one of them. Make sure you're not a cynic. Make sure you're not disconnected from the information, because they laughed and wrote it off and it didn't go away. My purpose, My purposes came to pass."

There's a mocking, cynical spirit both in and outside the Church about the subject of the Lord's return. Some imagine that if they get together and write it off, somehow God will write it off because they write it off. It doesn't matter if man writes it off. All the men in Noah's day were having their fun, talking about Noah, but the rain came and shifted human history in a very dramatic way.

### **NOAH PREPARED AN ENTIRE GENERATION FOR THE JUDGMENT TO COME**

Paragraph E. Noah prepared an entire generation. He didn't know the day or the hour for an entire generation—for 120 years.

Now the week before it rained, the Lord said, "The rain will begin in a week."

"Thank You!" says Noah. "It's been 120 years and now I know the day and the hour, seven days before."

So he labored 120 years, preparing an ark with no knowledge of the day or the hour. But he knew it was his generation. And the majority mocked it. And they could have been saved if they had responded to it. And Jesus said, "This is the parallel that will be in place in the generation of My return. It will be exactly the same way."

The point isn't that the people will be eating and drinking and marrying. That's not the point. That's a good point, that all throughout history people are involved in real life in practical ways. It's the fact that they were disconnected from the urgency of God's heart when the information was available to them; they wrote it off. And because a whole bunch of others applauded it, they were emboldened that it was OK to just ignore the information.

Again, this information will be, for the generation of the Lord's return, like it was in Noah's day. It will be a matter of life and death. It isn't an issue of theological debate and sparring. It isn't just about curiosity and how does this verse fit there. It's really an issue of the transition of the human race into the age to come. It's a very, very serious point in time.

### **MANY BELIEVERS WILL APPLAUD EVIL BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO INSIGHT**

Paragraph F. Again, it is my strong opinion that we're in the beginning of that generation. But if the people in that generation don't know it, the fear, the offense with God and the ignorance of what is happening will overtake them. And they'll take hold of wrong things. They'll take hold of wrong things. There's a false unity movement emerging in the earth right now. It's a false justice movement; it's a false worship movement. It's the early stages of the harlot Babylon. Everyone is saved, we all do works of justice, and we're all unified. If you don't know what's going on, many believers will say, "Wow, the thing we prayed for! Unity, justice, and salvation going forth."

And the Spirit will say, "It's a false unity, it's a false justice, and it's not salvation."

But many believers will applaud it because they have no insight. And they take hold of the wrong thing and they call it right. And they throw away the right thing, for they have no knowledge. It really matters that we know. There are many developments taking place, and we need to have discernment in the early days, because if not, people will get caught in the spider's web, so to speak. They'll kind of inch towards it, and then they'll get their lives entangled in the systems that will be far more difficult to get out of a decade or two later. If they had discernment, if they had understanding, they would have avoided it.

“But everyone was applauding it!”

It doesn’t matter. You know, the vast majority of Germany was applauding Adolf Hitler as the one who would turn the nation around. Well, he turned the nation upside down. But for a few years he was the one causing the economy to recover, the nation to be unified, and everyone to have a sense of hope and good will and dignity about their life. He led them out of the poverty of the Great Depression. It was a total and complete lie. Many theologians praised him because he unified the nation, restored the economy, and brought all kinds of unity in many ways. But there were witnesses in that hour who were saying, “This is bad. This is really bad.”

And people said, “Well what do you want? Man, I mean the nation is finally turning around and you can’t even enjoy it.” They put these guys in prison and killed them. But they have their testimony before the Lord that they stayed true.

### **“CAN YOU NOT DISCERN THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES?”**

Jesus rebuked His generation for not discerning the signs of the times. The Pharisees came and tested Him. They asked Him that He would show them a sign from heaven. He said, “You hypocrite, you know how to discern the face of the sky”—the weather—“but you can’t discern the signs of the times. You’re a wicked generation. You’re seeking for a sign” (Mt. 16:3, paraphrased).

Now, it wasn’t wrong that they were seeking for a sign. Because the Bible said clearly in the book of Joel, and in other places as well, that when the Messiah came, He would do signs. But they were testing Him. This wasn’t an honest question. Jesus wasn’t rebuking them because they wanted a sign. He was rebuking them because they wanted a sign that went beyond what He was doing, like raising the dead and performing all these great miracles. They said, “We don’t count those. We want one on our terms.” They were trying to trap Him.

Now this is where we get the phrase, “The signs of the times.” Here’s the interesting thing, though. There were very prophecies that gave them insight into that generation—very few. They could read them, and they really studied. But almost no one got it. There were very few hints in the Bible about what it would be like in the generation of Jesus’ first coming. But He rebuked them anyway. He said, “Lay aside even the few hints that I gave you. Here is My presence. If you had an open heart, My presence in Israel, healing the sick, and the glory of God on Me, would have been sign enough.”

And He rebuked them. He said, “You hypocrites! You can’t discern the signs of the times.”

What would Jesus say to a generation that has a multitude of biblical signs if we don’t listen to them? He rebuked his generation, and they had very few biblical signs. And the majority didn’t even know those signs. We have a multitude of biblical signs. I don’t mean just a prophet with a dream and a vision. I’m talking about in-the-Bible signs. How much more responsible will we be to know the signs of the times when so many of them are written in the Scriptures?

### **“IF YOU HAD KNOWN, EVEN YOU . . . THE THINGS THAT MAKE FOR YOUR PEACE”**

Let’s look at paragraph C. Luke 19. Jesus saw the city of Jerusalem. He wept over the city. Now look at what He said here: “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace”

(Lk. 19:42)! He meant peace with God: there would only be peace in society so long as they made peace with God; so long as they agreed with God.

“If only you had known.” Again, this is an issue of knowledge. But it’s knowledge with a responsive heart. It isn’t just academic knowledge; it’s knowledge with a heart response. That’s what He’s talking about. “If you had known and responded,” is what He means: “if you had known the things that make for peace, or agreement with God’s purpose in God’s heart.”

Because it’s peace with God. It’s more than just individual salvation, because some people think of peace with God, and they say, “Well, I made my peace with God, I got saved.” No, it’s talking about a city, a generation, being in unity with God.

As you can read for yourself in verses 43-44, He goes on to describe the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in 70 AD. He describes it in graphic terms. He says the armies are going to surround the city and level them along with their children inside. “And they will not leave in you one stone upon another” (Lk. 19:44).

He’s talking about the Roman siege of Jerusalem that culminated in 70 AD. It went on for four years, from 66–70 AD. Jesus is prophesying forty years ahead of time. He says, “If you had accepted Me, this would have been avoided. But I tell you, they’ll surround you, they’ll level this city, and they’ll bury your children under the rubble with you.”

This is Jesus! They’re thinking, “Whoa!” They’re not happy with what He’s saying.

Look at the end of verse 44. Why is this happening? “Because you did not know the time of your visitation” (Lk. 19:44).

Beloved, the second coming of Christ, the great revival and the great trouble—the combination of the two—is the greatest visitation of power and glory and judgment in human history. The Body of Christ is, for the most part, significantly disconnected from it and unprepared for it. I mean, millions think He’s coming, but they think He’s coming to rapture them any minute and they’ll not be involved in any of the trouble. It’s a complete misapplication of the urgency for preparation. I mean, hundreds of millions are rejoicing in the rapture any minute. So they say, “We think the Lord is coming in our generation, glory to God.”

Well, you shouldn’t say *glory* too quickly, not until you read the whole story line. Because if you respond to the whole story line, then “glory to God.” But you’re not going up any minute; you’ll be a part of the drama on the earth. You need to respond rightly, with living understanding and discernment. If they can say yes to that, then glory to God. But the greatest visitation in human history of God visiting the planet on a human level is, I believe, moments away. Again, I believe it’s some decades from now, but in the big picture it’s moments away.

## **PAUL TAUGHT THE CHURCH TO KNOW THE TIMES AND THE SEASONS**

Paragraph D. Paul taught the Church to know the times and the seasons. In 1 Thessalonians 5, he says, “Concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you” (1 Thess. 5:1). He says, “I already taught you about the times and the seasons.”

Now I don't have this on the notes; but if you read Acts 17, when Paul was at the city of Thessalonica, when he was visiting the Thessalonians, he was only there for three weeks. Can you imagine? He was brand-new to this Greek city; he preached Jesus, and he hadn't even given them Christianity 101, the new believer's class. He was there for three weeks, and in three weeks he taught them on the times and the seasons, the coming of the Lord.

He said, "I was there for three weeks, and I made sure you understood the doctrine of the second coming and the events surrounding it." I mean, imagine putting it in the new believer's class within three weeks!

### **"YOU ARE NOT IN DARKNESS, THAT THAT DAY SHOULD OVERTAKE YOU"**

He says, "And you know this." Verse 4. "You don't have to be in darkness or ignorance. You'll know what is happening, when it happens. The day of the Lord should not overtake you" (1 Thess. 5:4, paraphrased). It shouldn't surprise you to where you make disastrous decisions because you have no discernment. For the day of the Lord to overtake them meant that they would be surprised by it because they didn't know the signs and would therefore make wrong decisions in the light of that lack of discernment.

Paul says what Jesus said in Matthew 24: "Watch therefore" (1 Thess. 5:6, paraphrased).

### **OVERCOMING THE OBSTACLES TO WATCHING AND PREPARING**

V. Overcoming the obstacles. Obstacle number one is the fear of man. We looked at this in the last session, so I'll be really brief. "Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days" (2 Pet. 3:3).

This is remarkable. I encourage you just to read a few of these paragraphs on your own; I don't want to take time on it. But Peter said: "First priority: you must know this first. You must know the obstacle, the resistance you'll have. Scoffers will come. That's what you must know first. If you hold the line on these truths, though you'll be prepared and you'll prepare others, you'll find resistance of scoffers."

They'll say, "Oh the coming of the Lord, He isn't coming. They always said He was coming; every generation said He was coming."

That's the scoffing spirit, and it's all over the Church and outside of it. Peter said, "Know this first: you'll encounter a scoffing, mocking spirit."

Beloved, we don't want to impart that spirit to our children, or to our grandchildren. We want a spirit of faith and living understanding.

### **SEVERAL COMMON LIES ABOUT THE FINAL GENERATION**

Other obstacles. These are really simple. If you would like to hear them developed, go and hear Allen Hood's teaching. I just took these straight from Allen's handout. It was great! I added a phrase or two, but he really develops them and tells great stories and everything.

Common lie number one. "Since we don't know the day or the hour, we shouldn't try to know the generation." People say, "Well Jesus said we can't know the day or the hour. Therefore, we can't know the generation."

It's illogical to bring those two points together. We know the generation, but He will not give us the day or the hour. Why? So that we're pressing in to Him, in that generation.

Common lie number two. “Every generation believed they were the last one.” That’s absolutely not true—not in a universal way, where the majority of God’s people in a sustained way believed it was the last generation. Only in one generation in history did the majority believe in a sustained way, meaning for decades. There was only one generation where the majority of the Body of Christ in the earth believed it. That was the first generation.

So people will kind of write that off: “Every generation thought they were the last!” Yes, there was always that one guy on a hill somewhere with three people in his ministry. But 99 percent of the Body of Christ didn’t buy it. And there was a moment at the turn of the millennium, in the year 999, because of the teaching on the millennium. For a short period people had millennial fever. But it passed; just as, when Y2K came, people said, “Ah, forget it.” They moved on to the next thing. And so for a moment there was a bit of fervor, but it wasn’t sustained at all. So don’t believe that lie.

### **THE PROPHECIES ARE WITHIN REACH OF EVERYONE IN THE BODY OF CHRIST**

Common lie number three. “No one can understand the prophecies anyway. They’re too complicated, so why try?” The prophecies are within the reach of everyone in the Body of Christ. They were made to be understood by everyone.

I like what Allen says. Again, this is straight from his handout. “Any system of theology that takes the end times out of the hands of the people”—in other words, the theologians make it so complicated that the average person in the Body of Christ gives up. Beloved, the verses mean what they say and say what they mean. And there’s a small amount of symbolism here and there, when the Bible makes it clear that it’s symbolism. If not, it’s straightforward. It means what it says. You can understand it.

And Allen says this, which I totally agree with. I liked it. He said, “The truth is, many people just don’t want to take the time and effort to wrestle with the information. And they don’t want to stand before the critics and the cynics.”

So they just write it off and say, “I don’t need to know it anyway; you can’t know it anyway.” And they get happy about it. That’s ostrich theology. Put your head in the ground, thinking the trouble will go away because you can’t see it. It’s what my granddaughter does when I come up to get her. She puts the blanket up, so therefore, I just disappear. She pulls the blanket down—I’m there! Ah! She puts it back up. It’s ostrich theology. A lot of people think if they ignore it, it will just go away.

Beloved, God said these things. They’re not going away. Praise God they’re not; we want them to come. Because He’s going to drive evil off the planet, and He’s going to answer the cry of oppression in the earth.

### **THE PROPER STUDY OF THE END TIMES PROVOKES RADICAL ABANDONMENT**

Common lie number four. “Understanding the end times minimizes our work in the kingdom.” I’ve heard this for decades and I appreciate this. But it’s a misapplication. I’ve heard it for years: that if you emphasize the end times, it will minimize your effectiveness in ministry. And it’s true in only one regard. Some of the people—and I want to emphasize the word *some*—believe in the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine: the Lord is coming any minute. Some of them don’t buy into what I’m about to say, and I want to honor them in that regard. Because they love Jesus and they love truth, and I want to make sure that I honor them in that. But some of them say,

“Well, the rapture is coming any minute, and the Antichrist is getting raised up. He’s going to win anyway. So why not just let the enemy win? Let’s retreat. Let’s just draw back.”

And they draw back into escapism, into a defeatist mentality that Antichrist is going to win. They’re going up in a minute anyway, so let’s just leave the culture to itself! Some who teach the pre-tribulation rapture, they buy that, but that’s a horrible error. But the majority is not even going in that direction. They’re bad, but there are plenty that are not.

So when I talk to people about the end times, they almost always say, “End-times fervor will cause the Church to give up.” And what they mean is, “Pre-tribulation rapture fervor will cause the Church to give up.”

I’ve been in leadership sessions with national leaders, and I love to bring this up. I mean, I go to them on a yearly basis; leaders from around the Body of Christ gather, and almost always the discussion of the end times comes up. And a guy will get up and say, “Yeah, with the end times, everyone gives up and gives in.” And what they mean is the pre-tribulation rapture.

I’m just raising my hand; I’ve done it a few times. I say, “Wait a second. I agree with that, if you’re talking about the pre-tribulation rapture. But if it’s a biblical theology of the end times, it makes you attack with greater zeal.”

No, I mean that sincerely. And most of the people in the room say, “Yeah, I guess we’re talking about the pre-tribulation rapture.”

I say, “Not all end-times theology is pre-tribulation rapture. So don’t broad-stroke it and write it off when you mean one particular expression of end-times theology: the pre-tribulation rapture. Just say it that way.”

And they would say, “Yeah, but that’s the only kind that’s out there.”

I say, “No, there are other kinds of theology out there.”

Again, I’m not trying to be mean about it, but the biblical theology isn’t that we’re escaping any minute. We’re going through with righteousness, resolve, with a spirit of prayer, and we’ll make a difference that matters. And there’s continuity with what we do in this age and in the age to come.

Common lie number five. I love this one. Allen, I’ve never said this one, but I love it. I’ve always wanted to. Allen says, ‘It will all pan out, but the question is, will it pan out well for you?’ I’ve heard Allen say that a dozen times. I’ve always wanted to say that.

People say that all the time: “Well, it’s all going to pan out.” But will it pan out good for you and your loved ones? Not if you’re not well-prepared. Because this will only go well for the prepared. This “panning out” is ostrich theology: you put your head in the ground and you think the trouble will go away. It’s not going away because we don’t look at it.

## **WATCHING AND PREPARING IN THE MIDST OF YOUR BROKENNESS AND WEAKNESS**

VII. We're called to watch and pray. You can read this, but we watch in three ways. We watch what the Spirit is saying in the Scriptures. We watch what the Spirit is saying through circumstances that are unfolding, called the signs of the times. And we watch what the Spirit is saying in our heart. To watch and pray means we have attentiveness at all three levels.

When Jesus tells me in the Scriptures to watch, it means I'm searching the Scriptures; I'm watching what the Spirit is saying as I'm searching the Scriptures. That's part one of watching.

Part two. Because the Scriptures enlighten my understanding, I look at society and I watch trends unfold. And, as an anointed observer, you have a different response to those trends, because you see the hand of God moving in the midst. And you say, "I see! I can see!" That's part of watching.

But a third part of watching, is watching. It isn't enough to just get the cognitive information; you're watching the Spirit's challenges. And you're watching the way that the Spirit's stirring your own heart. In other words, you can have all the right information, but if you have a dull heart, you won't have discernment. So when the Lord says, "Watch," watch the Scriptures, watch what the Spirit is saying and doing in society, and watch what the Spirit is speaking to your heart. If you watch in those three regards, I guarantee you, if you do those three things, you're lined up in a position to be prepared in all of your weakness and brokenness. All of us are weak and broken in many ways. In our weakness, in our brokenness, we will be prepared if we watch in those three ways.

Amen. Let's stand.