

A few weeks ago we launched our “This is the End” series and discovered that we have been in the end times for over 2000 now. I mentioned that anytime the “end-time” conversion comes up, I hear three questions: (1) “When will Jesus return?” (2) “When does the Rapture occur?” And (3) “When does the Great Tribulation happen?” Today we only have time to grapple with the question of Jesus’ return. Although there are over 250 references in the NT regarding the 2nd Coming, we will focus on what Jesus himself said about it in the “Olivet Discourse” of Mark 13. Beginning with v3-4 we read:

3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John and Andrew asked him privately, 4 “Tell us, when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are all about to be fulfilled?”

Inquiring Minds Want To Know

The core disciples want to know when the long-awaited “Day of the Lord” will occur (fury, wrath, justice, judgement). They sense that Jesus has the necessities to pull off such a “day,” so they pull him aside and ask him for a date and events that lead up to it. Jesus obliges, not with a date (dang it) but with a series of “signs” (not directional but something that points to something of greater significance). Eight, to be exact. So, let’s just call them, “The Great 8 Signs of Jesus’ Return.”

Sign #1: Spiritual Deception (v5, 6, 21, 22)

Sign #1: Spiritual Deception. In v5, 6, 21, 22 Jesus seriously warns his church:

5 “Watch out that no one deceives you. 6 Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many. 21 At that time if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or, ‘Look, there he is!’ do not believe it. 22 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect—if that were possible.

I could regale you with a present-day list of names that could easily be classified as “false Christ and false prophets.” I won’t, for now, but the best defense against spiritual deception is three-fold: (1) be active in a Bible centered church, (2) read your Bible daily, and (3) avoid the internet.

Sign #2 War (v7, 8)

Sign # 2: Continuous War. Jesus says in v7-8:

7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

Roughly, one billion people have died in wars since this prophecy, with 110 million dying in the 20th century alone. These wars, however large or small, are merely precursors to the final one, a.k.a., Armageddon.

Sign #3: Natural Convulsions (v8)

Sign 3: Natural Convulsions. Jesus promises in v8 :

There will be earthquakes in various places, and famines.

The frequency of natural phenomena such as earthquakes, hurricanes, droughts, and famines have been trending lately. Some say it's due to global warming. Perhaps, but Paul had a different take in Romans 8:20-21. He said these convulsions are creation, "recoiling under the decay of sin." In 2020, 155 million people were deemed in a state of "acute hunger." There are about 55 earthquakes every day, a noticeable uptick every year since 2017. The frequency of tremors is 12x higher than when they started to record such incidences in 1889.

Sign #4: Persecution (v9, 11, 13)

Sign 4: Persecution.

9 You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. You will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. 11 Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial... 13 All people will hate you because of me...

Christianity was born out of persecution. Its founder was killed and wasn't kidding when he said, "If they persecuted me, they will persecute you" (John 15:20). There have always been "pockets of persecution" down through history, today most noticeably in places like the Middle East, China, and Malaysia. In the last days however, it will be widespread. By the way, take a guess as to where the PC, Cancel Culture, and "Wokeism" are heading.

Sign #5: Gospel Flourishing (v10, Matthew 24:14)

Although the first four signs seem to mitigate against the spreading of the Gospel, the opposite is true. Listen to the 5th sign in v10 and its companion text, Matthew 24:14.

*10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations.
14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world
as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

Nothing, not even the severity of the end times, will stymie Jesus' mission or message. Can anyone say, "Woohool!"

Sign #6: Family Betrayal (v12)

Sign six is the tragic result of the breakdown of the God designed nuclear family.

*Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child.
Children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.*

Family betrayal and fratricide will be the hallmark of the end times. Think about the "Godfather" movies on steroids and family dysfunction at atmospheric levels!

Sign #7: Grotesque Sacrilege (v14)

When you see 'the abomination that causes desolation' standing where it does not belong.

Historically, Jesus is referring here to the sacrilege of the Greek King, Antiochus Epiphanes IV, when he placed his image in the Jewish temple in 200 BC. The Roman emperor Titus did a similar

grotesquery in AD 70. These blasphemies portend an even greater desecration which the anti-Christ will perform in defiance against God (will see him later in the series).

Sign #8: Cosmic Cataclysm (v24, 25)

Sign 8: Cosmic Cataclysm. Jesus says in v24-25.

24 "In those days, following that distress, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; 25 the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken."

Here, Jesus describes the standard cosmic reaction to God's sheer brilliance, awesomeness, and power. Similar cataclysms happened at Mt Sinai when God issued the 10 Commandments to Moses and then again at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit arrived. Anytime God shows up these cataclysms are the response. The next time they occur, however, get on your rooftop because Jesus is ready to break through the clouds with his angels.

Explanatory Note: Intense, Global, Unrelenting

Some say Jesus' "Great Eight" signs have already "been fulfilled." Others, claim they are being fulfilled, and yet others, "will be fulfilled." I hold to the futurist position. Therefore, I believe they will only intensify, be global in nature, and unrelenting. In a word, unparalleled. In a phrase, "Baby, you ain't seen nothing yet!" This is why, Jesus characterized the end times as, "dreadful," "a distress unequaled in history" and said that if God didn't "cut short" these days no one would survive (v17,19, 20).

Conclusion

Before I supply my answer to the biggest "Wait for it" in history, I have often wondered why the Lord didn't give us a date rather than signs? A good illustration I can think of is that of a back-up QB. He never knows when the "Starter" will be out of the game because of injury. Therefore, he has to be ready. He's got to attend the meetings, study the playbook, and do the reps because he never knows when his time will come.

Jesus said, "No one knows the day, not even himself" (v32), However, I declare that he will return on the "Day" his Daddy tells him so (v32). 3,956,000 days have passed since the promised Return. We are running out of time. Therefore, let's be like the back-up QB, and be ready by doing the "3-Bs" Jesus talked about in the Olivet Discourse:

"Be Alert! Be on Guard! Be Watchful!"