

Dear listeners,

During the last two programs we spoke about **The promise of His Return** and **The Longing for His Return**. Today we'll devote some time to the **Signs of His Return**.

Those who have made that blessed hope and expectation their own, those who know themselves rich in God, rich in Jesus Christ, and those who know what kind of world we live in and will be delivered from, will also, without a doubt, have an open eye and ear for the signs that point to our Lord and Saviour's return. Of course, we have to be careful of how to approach them and to draw the right conclusions from them. As you know, there are many who become completely enmeshed, if not obsessed, by this part - by the doctrine on the **end times**, called **eschatology**. It was the reason why Paul had to address the Thessalonians, for this topic was just about all they cared to talk about, just as there are many today, who want to spell out the exact sequence of future events, and in the process run the danger of treating the Bible as a Jigsaw puzzle, and as if the Lord Himself, and via his apostles, had not warned against determining the times and dates of His coming return. For we should know, Paul says, *that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night* (1Thess.5:2). Obviously then, we will have to watch for two extremes with these signs: to leave them be, pay little or no attention to them (perhaps, with an attitude of whatever will be will be) or to let one's whole life, one's whole theology, one's whole relationship to the Lord, to His church, become governed by it.

On the basis of Scripture then we can observe two preliminary signs preceding our Saviour's return. The first sign that tells us of his imminent coming is the moment the gospel of his kingdom has been preached *in the whole world as a testimony to all nations* (Mt. 24:14), and when that countless multitude will have been gathered *from every nation, tribe, people and language* (Rev.7:9) Concurrent with this time to preach the gospel to all nations, is the binding of Satan for a millennium, i.e., for a thousand years (Rev.20). The second sign will be the release of Satan to deceive the nations for a short time, to which sign belong as subheadings: the great Apostasy (the great desertion from Christ and his Church), the great Tribulation (the persecution of true believers), the reign of Antichrist (the man of lawlessness, as mentioned in 2Thess.2), as well as the concurrent signs of wars, rumors of wars, earthquakes, famines and the rise of many false prophets.

Now, as you can understand, I will not be able to give more than an brief outline on this rather broad topic. Hopefully, it will be just enough to whet your appetite to study the doctrine of Eschatology, by reading the relevant Scripture passages, to study a number of Reformed commentaries on them, and then always with that underlying purpose, to strengthen yourself and others to wait patiently, but ardently, for the appearance of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

First then there is spoken of **the preaching of the gospel as a testimony to all nations** (Mt.24) The disciples had drawn the Lord's attention to the temple in Jerusalem, to that impressive building complex of this house of worship. But sobering was our Saviour's response: *I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another . . .* (vs2). And then the disciples ask Him, *"Tell us, when will this happen, and what will be the **sign** of your coming and of the end of the age* (vs3)?

It is obvious that to the disciples, this fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the temple, would mean the end of the world. However, the Lord Jesus corrects them. He tells them that wars, rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes are only *the beginning of birth pains* (vs8). Indeed, they will be signs of the fall of Jerusalem, but that fall itself will not be **the** sign of his coming. The Lord then proceeds to point to two preliminary signs to indicate his return: the preaching of the gospel in *the whole world as a testimony to all nations* (vs14), and a fearful time of *distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again* (vs21). This tells us then that our Saviour will not come back until these two have come to pass.

Four comments: first, with respect to the preaching of the gospel to all the nations, we realize that it does not imply that the Lord will return only after **every** person in the world has heard the gospel, but it will have to have been a testimony to all the **nations**, the acceptance or rejection of which will prove to be decisive, for every day since Pentecost is characterized by: *now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation* (2Cor.6:2). Secondly, this reference by the Lord Jesus *to all nations* is a prelude to what happened after Pentecost: the sending out of the apostles not just to the Jews but also to the gentiles, to all the peoples of the earth, which at the same time is then the fulfillment of this promise given to Abraham: *all peoples on earth will be blessed through you*, i.e., through Abraham's offspring: Isaac, Jacob, Judah, David, **Jesus**. Thirdly, it should be clear that we are rapidly nearing the time that the testimony of Jesus will have reached every nation, and, fourthly, that we, as Christians should be fully involved in bringing this gospel age to a close, by diligently testifying to the Name of Christ at home and abroad. That is also the sole reason why we continue to host this regular broadcast to the nations. To make our listeners aware of what the future of this world will look like and how we are to behave in it. The important question is are we Christ followers or are we not?

Secondly, there will be **the release of Satan to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth**. (Rev.20) This will be the time of **the great Apostasy**. The preaching of the gospel to all nations will be followed by a great apostasy, or falling away from the truth of Scripture. It will be a time during which the faith of the fathers, of former generations, will be abandoned on a large scale. It will be an apostasy of great proportion, for, *many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many*

*people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold (Mt.24:10-12). It will be a time of false security and a time of materialism. It will be as in the days of Noah and Lot, and Lot's wife, with an over emphasis on eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage, i.e., used as ends in themselves, used without any reference to God and his Christ. During this time a sharp demarcation line will also be drawn between those who fall away and those who stand firm to the end, and who will be saved (Mt.24:13).*

As a result there will also be **the great Tribulation**. This gospel age, which age is at the same time the millennium, the thousand years during which Satan was to be bound, is also to be followed by a period of great tribulation, a period of unparalleled distress. The believers will be grievously persecuted because of that widespread apostasy in those days, because of the very many that will fall away. In fact, if those days would not be *cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened (Mt.24:22)*. How good it is to know then that in the end the wicked will go away to eternal punishment, and the righteous to eternal life (Mt.25:46).

*Listeners, these passages of the Bible call for an urgent return to the Gospel: it urges all of us to a life of obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ, by grace through faith. Yes, without Him in our daily lives we have no hope, no comfort! Without this there will be no eternal life awaiting us after Jesus returns for the last time. It is our mandate to broadcast this truth to our listeners far and near. Our father in heaven will hear the prayers of those who truly seek Him. Only then will you have peace in your lives and only then will you have a future after this world and all its glory has passed away. An eternal future awaits all those who have placed their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. To Him be all honour and glory - now and forever...*

The next time we'll continue and finish this part on the **Signs** of our Saviour's Return and then we'll share some closing remarks on what will take place on the actual **Day** of His return.  
*thanks again for listening!*