

My dear friends,

October 2009

Once again Fall splashes its colors all over Indiana and I am jolted into the realization that Summer is now gone and Winter can hardly wait to rule my little world. While I'm not sure it will happen, I do hope we might have a bit of Indian summer later this month.

One of the things I so enjoyed about Fall in my childhood was the smell of burning leaves. Having two big sycamore trees and a huge oak tree at our family homestead, our chores included raking and burning leaves each Fall. We made piles all around the house and then drug them to a barren spot by the dirt road that went up the hill away from home. Someone tended the fire while the others kept bringing leaves. We would collect bunches of acorns and eventually throw them into the fire, then wait for the pop, pop, pop as they exploded in the heat. And the pungent aroma of those burning leaves, Ahhhhh, Fall.



Though I have spent many years living in various cities and towns, being raised in the country gave me a keen appreciation for the signs of the seasons. Not only were they invariably present to be observed, they were there to be read – and there to be responded to. Have you ever thought about this?

Think about all the signs of Fall: shorter daylight hours, longer nights, cooler temperatures, changing colors of leaves followed by falling leaves. Squirrels scurrying around storing up food; robins and hummingbirds flying South, snow buntings coming North. At the lake where I now live, loons show up twice a year, in the Spring for several days, then again in the Fall as they go wherever they reside in the Winter. And what about the sun in the sky? Have you not noticed the difference in the look of the sun and the sky during various seasons? In the Fall, the color of the sun and the sky is distinctive, as it is in Winter. It looks so differently than it does in summer.

And how do we respond to these signs? Although it sounds simplistic, anyone with any kind of wisdom makes preparation – not for the signs of Fall – but for **WHAT THE SIGNS TELL US**. We put away the cool clothes of Summer and get out those Winter jackets – and boots – and gloves. We store the boat for Winter and get the pier removed from the lake so the Winter ice doesn't crush it. We service the furnace and make sure it can provide heat for the house. We pull out all the summer flowers, put away the rake and lawnmower and get out the snow shovel.

But why spend so much time talking about something so obvious as preparing for winter? Here's why:

Jesus wants us to know the signs of the times – the **signs of the times spoken of in His Word**. In Mark 13:3-4, His disciples asked Him, “**What will be the sign** when all these things be? And **what will be the sign** when all these things will be fulfilled?” (alluding to the time of the Great Tribulation at the end of the age. Matthew also records their even more pointed question when they asked “**What will be the sign of Your coming, and (what will be the sign) of the end of the age?**” (the end of history before He returns to the earth) He then spoke very pointedly about how we could know not the exact day, but **the season and the times** in which He will return. Further, He rebuked the religious leaders of His day because they could read nature’s signals, but not spiritual signs.

Matt 16:1-3 Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. **2** He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; **3** and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' **You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.**"

Luke 19:41-44 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, **because you did not know the time of your visitation.**"

When Jesus was asked in Matthew 24 about what the sign of His return to earth would be, He gave a detailed answer. He explained in chronological order what events would take place on earth, and He also gave several specific charges to those who will be part of this last generation when He returns. Let me try to list them in abbreviated form.

1. Deception will be rampant. **WARNING: Take care that no one deceives you.**
2. Wars and rumors of wars. **WARNING: Don't be troubled, these things must happen.**
3. Nation will rise against nation, kingdom vs kingdom. famines, pestilences, earthquakes.
Warning: **All these are (but) the beginning of sorrows (birth pangs preceding His coming to establish His Kingdom on the earth.)**
4. **THEN** you will be delivered up to tribulation
you will be killed,
you will be hated by all nations.
5. Many (Christians) will be offended,
will betray one another,
will hate one another.
6. False prophets will rise up and deceive many (again obviously refers to many in the church).
7. **Warning:** The love of many will grow cold.

PROMISE: But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

8. The gospel of God's kingdom will be preached all over the world, and then the end (events) will come.
9. You will see the abomination of desolation (**MAKE SURE YOU KNOW HOW TO READ THE SIGN OF THIS EVENT AND WHAT IT PORTENDS!**)
10. There will be great suffering (see verses 16-20)
11. **THEN there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.**
12. **PROMISE: For the sake of the elect, those days (mentioned in #11 above) will be shortened; otherwise everyone would be killed by their severity.**

13. *Now there will be workers of great signs and wonders by false prophets and false Messiahs, such that even the elect will be tempted to be deceived.*

WARNING: “SEE, I HAVE TOLD YOU THIS BEFOREHAND!”

NOTICE: *Jesus is here saying that when you see the signs listed above, YOU CAN KNOW WHAT SEASON YOU ARE IN AND BE VICTORIOUS AND NOT A VICTIM OF UNKNOWING AND THEREFORE OFFENSE AND DESPAIR!!!*

14. *Don't be deceived, no matter what people say.*
15. *Immediately AFTER the tribulation, aberrations in nature will occur.*
In the sun,
the moon
the stars
the powers of the heavens.

16. **THEN THE SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN WILL APPEAR IN HEAVEN.**

THEN ALL THE TRIBES OF THE EARTH WILL MOURN (*because they will grasp it was He whom they rejected who is Messiah and King and Judge over all the earth*).

THEY (EVERY HUMAN BEING ON EARTH) WILL SEE THE SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN WITH POWER AND WITH GREAT GLORY!

17. *And **(then)** He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet. They will gather together His elect from the four winds (saints on earth) from one end of heaven to the other. (saints in heaven)*

Then from verses 32 through 51, Jesus says in several ways to those of us who are His disciples, **KNOW THE SIGN OF THE TIMES! KNOW ME! KNOW MY WORD! BE WATCHFUL!**

Verses 32-35: Learn from this parable of the fig tree: When its branch becomes tender and leaves sprout, (this is a sign to tell you) summer is near.

SO, WHEN YOU SEE ALL THESE THINGS, KNOW THAT IT (MY RETURN) IS NEAR.

Verses 38-41 – He talks about tin Noah's day, people unaware of the signs of the times. He then says,

“Watch, therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.

Finally He tells another story about a faithful and wise servant who anticipates His master's return.

So, my dear friends, how can we make this practical for you and me today? Simply put, the signs of Fall are fully upon us. Nature is shouting its message to us, “Change is coming, prepare for it!”

As you prepare for Winter this year, would you ask the Lord to sensitize you in His Word for the signs pointing to the End of this age? I encourage you to spend some quantity and quality time in Matthew 24 and related verses. They are stunning in their clarity. And as we interpret all Scriptures in their plain and given meaning, let's do the same for this critical and timely passage.

Heart of the message:

1. Signs of the times would seem to indicate that we are well into the beginning of birth pangs (see #3 above, which is verse 8 in Matthew 24)

2. The next thing Jesus describes is being delivered up to tribulation and martyrdom. While many prefer not to meditate on this part of Scripture, it is obvious that He has other ideas about this. While we are not there yet, Christians and lovers of Israel are quite clearly coming into disfavor in our days – and we know where this is headed, thanks to Jesus' words!
3. He tells us again and again in this passage, "Know the sign of the times!" Understand events from His perspective. Live life in Him extravagantly and fervently! Don't lose hope! Don't live to be appreciated and accepted by men (this is enmity with God!)

His warnings to us are:

***Take care that no one deceives you.
Don't be troubled, these things must happen.
You will be delivered up to tribulation
There will be great tribulation
Many of you will become offended (at the fact of persecution)
The love of many will grow cold.***

His promises to us are:

***he who endures to the end shall be saved
For the sake of the elect, those days (tribulation) will be shortened
THE SIGN OF THE SON OF MAN WILL APPEAR IN HEAVEN.
ALL THE TRIBES OF THE EARTH WILL MOURN (but you will rejoice!)
He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet.
They will gather together His elect from the four winds (saints on earth)
WHEN YOU SEE ALL THESE THINGS, KNOW THAT IT (MY RETURN) IS NEAR.
"Watch, therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.
"Blessed is that servant whom His master, when He comes, shall find (watching).
He will make him ruler over all His goods!"***

Let's press into our glorious King! Let's sharpen our spiritual discerning eyes! Let's purchase oil of intimacy now for the days before us – however long or short they may be. Let's make our résumé that of Paul's:

Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended (perfection); but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,

I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
Phil 3;12b-14.

My love to you.



IMPORTANT NOTICE: As of November 30, 2009 please direct all correspondence to

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