

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-
Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing
St. Oakleigh, Vic., 3166]

DHW Bible Class

THE LIFE OF CHRIST

LESSON 33 A

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SIGNS OF CHRIST'S COMING

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INTRODUCTION

The Lord Jesus Christ's public ministry ended on a sad note [from a human perspective if numbers is the measure of success] because many Jews did not believe in Him although He had done so many signs and wonders before them.

In addition He did all those miracles out of love, mercy, compassion for them. He walked and worked tirelessly to reveal Himself as the true Son of God and Son of Man to the people. This is a great perplexity. It is a serious thing to reject Jesus Christ, the only saviour of the World. God the Father sent Him into the world that the world might be saved. The world might have their sins forgiven, possess the righteousness of Christ, and experience the gift of eternal life. But the world reject Him and threw all these away!

The young-in-faith disciples of Jesus, while acknowledging that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, still hoped that Jesus might be the Messiah who would set up the earthly kingdom on earth.

After Jesus had demolished the verbal attacks of the religious leaders, the disciples had hoped that Jesus would establish His earthy kingdom immediately. Consequently they spoke so proudly of the magnificent and beautiful Temple which Herod has spent much money to renovated in order to get into the good books of the Jews. But Jesus was not impressed at all by such a "carnal" building. Instead He predicted its destruction. They asked Jesus when and what would be the end of the age. In His response Jesus not only answered them but revealed the global conditions and state of affairs of the world in the last days just before His return. Christ's return is most precious to every believer. It is the blessed hope of the Christian. This lesson takes us through the first part of the Olivet Discourse spoken by Jesus Christ. Many things are revealed to us for the strengthening of our faith in Him.

UNDERSTANDING

The Jews Reject Jesus:
John 12:37-50

IT IS SAD that though Jesus had performed many miracles which were witnessed by the people, "they believed not on Him" (v.37). The verb "believed" is in the imperfect tense, indicating that there was a continuous unwillingness to accept and truly believe in Jesus. Many failed to

see the significance beyond the signs and wonders performed by Jesus. The signs which Jesus performed clearly testified to all that He claimed Himself to be the very Son of God and the Messiah sent by God to be the Saviour of the world.

Although there were some who believed, like His apostles, yet the people in general were spiritually insensitive to His works and words. It is comforting to know that there were those who are called and chosen who believed that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Among them were some of the chief rulers (such men as Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea).

Jesus commented that the people's unbelieving heart was what the prophet Isaiah (circa 740-700 B.C.) predicted (Isaiah 53:1): *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?* Jesus further reiterated what Isaiah, the prophet, said that God had blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart, *that* (result clause) they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and that He should heal them (Isaiah 6:9, 10).

First, we have Jesus' authentication of Isaiah as the author of the book which bears his name. This supports all along the traditional view that the whole book of Isaiah was written by Isaiah, one author not two. Secondly, God requires that people repent of their sins. But if they wilfully harden their heart, they shall be judicially hardened. This is the human responsibility which is present in man's decision making even as it co-exists in parallel fashion with the sovereign

will of God. There is no contradiction at all between these two teachings. This was the case with Pharaoh. When Pharaoh wilfully hardened his heart, God hardened it even more. God hardened his heart in response to his own hardening. God is not at fault. The fault lies in the sinner. Thirdly, the result clause reveals to us that Israel's rejection of Jesus did not frustrate God's plan for mankind. In fact God turned the people's rejection of Jesus, His only begotten Son, to fulfil His plan to save many. For by the rejection of the Jews the gospel was given to the Gentiles [see Rom. 11].

Jesus repeated some of His previous teachings among the people. He was sent by God His Father in Heaven. He is the light of the world and whoever believes in Him will not remain in darkness. Anyone who does not believe in Jesus will be judged one day by his very own words. Jesus reiterated that He came to save the world. Jesus spoke very clearly that He was sent by God the Father, and that He and His Father in heaven are one. In all things they agree. Those who believe in Jesus believe in the Father who sent Him. Those who reject Jesus, reject God the Father.

One cannot be said to believe in God if he rejects the Jesus Christ of the Bible. To believe in God he must believe in Jesus Christ. All the theists in the world today who claim to believe in "god" cannot be considered, from God's perspective as revealed in Holy Scriptures, to have believed because they have rejected the Christ of the Bible. This is how important it is to believe in Christ.

He and the Father are One. To know Jesus is to know the Father. To believe in Jesus is to believe in God.

***The Beginning of Sorrows
before the Destruction of the
Temple:***

Matthew 24:1-13

Jesus proceeded out of the Temple and together with His disciples crossed the Kidron valley and made their way up to the Mount of Olives. At a certain spot on the mount they sat down. Looking westward they could see a magnificent sight of the Temple building. This was the Temple that Herod the Great built. Its construction began around 20-29 B.C. and it was completed in A.D. 64, just six years before the Romans destroyed it. During the time of Jesus' public ministry (A.D. 33) some construction work were still in progress (John 2:20). The disciples exclaimed to Jesus, the beauty of the imposing white Temple building. Some of the foundation stones were as huge as 40 feet by 12 by 12 and weighed up to a hundred tons!

To the Galileans who came from the north, it was a beautiful and breathtaking sight. In response to His disciples admiring remarks, Jesus foretold the destruction of the Temple in which there should not be left "one stone upon another." The disciples were obviously shocked to hear what Jesus had just predicted. Fifty years had already gone in erecting the Temple. They asked Jesus two questions: (1) When would these things be? i.e. the destruction of the Temple (2) What would be the sign of His

coming, and of the end of the world?

The disciples were expecting that Jesus, who had just predicted the destruction of the Temple, would return in glory and smash His enemies, and set up the kingdom of God as predicted in the Old Testament that is what the Messiah would do. They expected a series of events to take place very soon. That was their frame of mind. They used the word "coming" (Greek *parousia*) which has the primary meaning of presence and carries an idea of arrival. It was not in the sense that Jesus used *parousia* later in the chapter (vv. 27, 37, 39) which He is referring to His second coming (a more specific and technical meaning as is in later writings in the New Testament).¹ Even after Jesus' resurrection they were still thinking of the establishment of the kingdom of God. They asked Jesus (Acts 1:6): "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" And the word "end" (Greek *sunteleia*) used by the disciples in the phrase "of the end of the age" means the final end to the present world system of darkness and sin, not only the end of a period of time of man's history. Jesus used the word to mean the ultimate damnation of

¹ 1 Thessalonians 3:13 To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, **at the coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of **his coming**:

1 John 2:28 And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him **at his coming**.

the ungodly and the blessedness of the godly at His *parousia*.

The disciples were expecting Jesus to fulfil His messianic mission and tell them how the restoration of the Davidic kingdom as promised in the Old Testament would take place and the end of the age. But they had missed out that aspect of Jesus' mission to die for the sin of the world first. Hence, Jesus' discourse on the mount made it perfectly clear that the fulfilment of their expectation was in the future. His discourse was not only for them, but for future disciples of Jesus (Matthew 24:15b): *Who so readeth, let him understand.*

Jesus told them about "the beginning of sorrows" before His coming and the end of the age (Matthew 24:14). The word "sorrows" (Greek, *odynon*) means "birth pangs."

Some like Burkitt say that the LORD refused to answer the first question because the disciples asked it out of curiosity. The LORD did not wish to pander to their curiosity so He by passed the first question and answered only the second question. By this interpretation, Burkitt then says that from verse 4 onwards the signs are for the Second Coming of Christ rather than the destruction of the Temple.

My problem with this explanation is that Burkitt arbitrarily surmised that the disciples asked the first question out of curiosity and not the second. This is very subject. Is the Temple not the most important part of the Jewish life? If so, then it would not be mere curiosity that the disciples asked this very pertinent question. As far as they

could remember the Temple was there. It must have been taught to them by their parents since young the importance of the Temple. If they were away from the home, they must pray facing the Temple. It was the central focus of their lives. When the LORD told them that it would be destroyed, they must definitely ask when that would happen.

Barnes on the other hand argued that the disciples asked three instead of two questions. [He divided the second question into two parts.] Then Barnes says that the LORD intermingled his answer to these three questions in the passage.

The problem with Barnes approach is that how does he know which verse answers which question? This arbitrary determination makes it very difficult to be certain that what is meant for question one could very well be for question two or three or vice versa. This interpretation is also too arbitrary.

My personal interpretation is that the LORD answered question one from verses 5-13. Both of these questions asked by the disciples were important to the LORD. The end of the answer to the first question is in verse 13. Verse 13 ends with these words, "But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." From verse 14 onwards, He answered the second question.

He described six birth sufferings that will occur before The Temple is destroyed. They are: deception by false Christs (vv. 4-5), strifes among the nations (v. 6-7a), famines, pestilences and earthquakes (v.7b-8), persecution of the

disciples of Christ (v.9), false prophets will be on the increase (10-11), and the increase of wickedness (v.12-13).

DECEPTION BY FALSE CHRISTS. Prior to the destruction of the Temple, there will be a widespread increase of false Christs, who pose themselves as the saviours of the people. Rumours would abound regarding the impending destruction by the Romans and many false messiahs would come and pronounced all sorts of false hope and prophesies.

Because of this widespread deception, Jesus exhorts Christians to "take heed" (Greek, *blepo*), to keep their eyes open or beware. Jesus warned that many would be deceived. But God's children must not allow this to deceive them. The destruction of the Temple will take place. Believe Him and not these false Messiahs.

STRIVES AMONG THE NATIONS. The next sign of sorrows will involve disputes and warfare among nations and kingdoms. This sort of rumours will abound. But the end is not yet near until it comes.

These will increase in number and intensity as the time approaches towards the second coming of Jesus and the end of the age.

Such global calamities are quite easily made known to us because of modern communications. But in those days it was more rumours than truth that will be brought to the common people. This kind of news would be carried by merchants and travellers. That is why the LORD here talks about rumours of war.

FAMINES, PESTILENCES AND EARTHQUAKES. The next sign of sorrows will be famines, pestilences and earthquakes. Added to the emergence of false Christs and racial conflicts and warring nations, there will be famines, pestilences or plagues, and earthquakes in various places. In some countries the people will be starving from famines. Others will be shattered by earthquakes, and yet others will be killed by diseases and plagues.

Famines, pestilence and earthquakes will bring economic depravation. Cost of living will sky rocket. Food would be scarce and many will die.

PERSECUTION OF THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST. The fourth sign of sorrows will be severe persecutions of Christians by the wicked ungodly world. The word "deliver" (Greek, *paradidomi*) has the basic meaning of giving over. Believers who faithfully bear the name of Jesus Christ will be hated, arrested, and will suffer terrible persecutions. The hatred of the world will be directed against God whom the Christians serve and represent. But sinful men cannot get at God so they will take it out on the followers of God, the believers. 2 Timothy 3:12, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." Christians will suffer as never before.

A FALLING AWAY OF CHRISTIANS. The fifth sign of sorrows is that many believers will defect. This is the consequences of the severe persecutions that are directed against Christians. This is the test of whether a Christian is a true believer or a false one. A true believer will endure until the end,

but a false one will quickly defect, showing that they never belong to Christ in the first place. In the face of severe persecutions, these defectors will be easily convinced by the false prophets.

This theme of persecution can be seen in the writings of the New Testament books for they were written during the same time period. **1 John 2:18-20**, "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things."

False prophets will have a field day with the minds of the people. They will deceive and they will succeed. Many will follow them and be deceived by them. This spiritual confusion is perhaps exacerbated by the rumours of war (which brings uncertainty), famine and pestilence and earthquakes (which bring poverty and death). People will grasp for straws in order to meet their physical needs and hence a strong attraction to these false prophets.

INCREASE OF LAWLESSNESS. The next sign of sorrows is "iniquity shall abound." The word translated "iniquity" is the Greek word "anomia" which means "a condition without law," simply put, lawlessness. There will be widespread lawlessness. Respect for law and order will diminish and a condition of lawlessness prevails. People will be attracted

to acts of violence and aggression. People will become cold and hard-hearted. People's love for righteousness, truth and the things of God will grow cold.

As can be seen in many riots even in the modern world, people check their wicked ways because of the law of the land. Once this law is lifted, and lawlessness abound there will be chaos and destruction. Goods will be taken by force and lives would be threatened and only the strong will survive.

Only true believers of Christ will remain faithful. They may suffer these worldly calamities together with the sinful world but they will remain faithful and true to their Saviour to the very end. The reason is that the believer does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God (cf. Matthew 4:4).

PRACTICAL VALUE

We need to pray for those whom we have so repeatedly shared the gospel with, and they have for the same number of times rejected Jesus Christ. We learn the serious consequences of hardening their hearts in not responding positively to gospel message.

So it is important that we honestly examine ourselves, search our hearts and make sure that we have not deluded ourselves in our profession of faith in Christ.

In addition, let us not be stubborn too in not giving of ourselves to serve Him when the many doors of opportunity are

open to us. Don't ever put off when the Holy Spirit prompts us to serve God.

The LORD keeps His promise according to His Holy and perfect Word. The Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. Christians were greatly persecuted for their faith. They suffered much for the LORD and they did not shun to testify for Him no matter what the cost.

Many of the disciples of Christ except for the apostle John, died a martyr's death. How about us? Are we able to stand for truth and righteousness or will we be deceived by the evil one and his followers in these last days of apostasy and compromise? May God help us to remain faithful till the Lord returns. AMEN.

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THE LIFE OF CHRIST

LESSON 33 A

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

MONDAY: John 12:37-50.

TUESDAY: John 12:37-50.

WEDNESDAY: John 12:37-50.

THURSDAY: Matthew 24:1-13; Mark 13:1-13; Luke 21:5-19.

FRIDAY: Matthew 24:1-13; Mark 13:1-13; Luke 21:5-19.

Discussion Questions

1. Do the use of miracles save souls from their sin and turn them to the Saviour? Give reasons for your answer.

2. Do secret Christians still exist today? Are you a secret Christian? Why do Christians want to be a secret Christian?

3. "If you do not believe in Jesus Christ you will go to Hell?" Is this a right and biblical way to tell someone about Jesus Christ?
