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Signs, Leaven, Peters Confession (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the topic of signs, leaven, and Peter's confession, drawing from various passages in the Bible. He touches on the importance of compassion as the driving force behind Jesus' miracles, rather than showing off his authority. Gregg also points out the danger of being obsessed with signs and wonders, and the need for being ready for the second coming of Christ. He urges people to have a sincere relationship with God and not to depend on half-heartedness in face of the challenges that may come.

Transcript

Matthew 16. A lot of good stuff here, and actually, it is not according to our regular schedule for us to take more than the first 12 verses in any particular one class. But, see, the first 12 verses were supposed to be covered along with the previous material.

We didn't get around to it. So, I'm hoping to cover those 12 verses and then go on. The problem is the material that comes immediately after those 12 verses.

The beginning, of course, of verse 13 is very, very significant, and there's a great deal that could be said about it. So, I don't know how far we'll get. We'll get through verse 12, certainly, and then if we get into the next portion, I don't think we'll get all the way through it.

So, we're just going to see how we do. Chapter 16, verse 1. Then the Pharisees and the Sadducees came, and testing him, asked that he would show them a sign from heaven. He answered and said to them, When it is evening, you say, it will be fair weather, for the sky is red.

And in the morning, it will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening. Hypocrites, you know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

And he left them and departed. Now, let's talk about that before we read any further.

Jesus, of course, had just fed, most recently, had just fed the 4,000, the multitudes.

And not too long earlier, had fed 5,000. And when we give those numbers, we're simply giving the numbers of the males, of adult males, so we don't know what number those figures might have swelled to, if you included the women and children in the figuring. But, obviously, it was quite large.

The people who were present were duly impressed that a miracle had been performed from clearly inadequate supplies. Jesus had filled everybody's stomachs completely until they were actually full, the Bible says. He had also, not too long earlier, in chapter 15, healed a great number of sick people and maimed people.

And there was a great astonishment on the part of the onlookers. So, it seems really unreasonable for the Pharisees and Sadducees to come and say, show us a sign from heaven. Now, perhaps the operational phrase here is from heaven.

They had seen signs enough, one might think. But when they asked for a sign from heaven, perhaps they were thinking along the lines of what Elijah had done, calling fire out of heaven. Or what Joshua had done in making the sun stand still in the midst of the heavens.

Or even, as they had requested after he fed the five thousand, that he might give them manna from heaven, as Moses had done. You see, the Pharisees and Sadducees felt, or at least the Pharisees did, I don't know about the Sadducees on this, but the Pharisees felt that signs on earth, things like healing and feeding multitudes and things like that, those possibly could be tricks. They could even be counterfeits from the devil.

We know that Jesus was accused of casting out demons by the power of the devil. But it was argued that anything that came down from heaven would clearly be from God. And therefore they were wanting a sign of a different sort than he had given so far.

Jesus had not caused the sun to turn black or the moon to turn to blood or anything like that to happen. And therefore, apparently they were asking him for a sign which they were implying would be indisputably from God. One that came down from heaven, where God was perceived as living.

Now, Jesus called these people hypocrites. He said, you do know how to read signs from heaven, don't you? When you look up into the sky and you see in the evening that the sky is red, you know that that's an indicator that the weather is going to be better the next day. But if the sky is red in the morning, you deduce that the weather is going to be bad that day.

In other words, that's actually quite common knowledge even now. I mean, perhaps not an infallible gauge, but in terms of norms and likelihoods and probabilities, that's still a pretty good way of determining what the weather is going to be like in the immediate

future. And Jesus noticed that even back then, 2,000 years before our own time, people had already observed these patterns.

They had come to know how to look at the sky and make some predictions about the immediate weather that was to be expected that day or the next day. And so they were accustomed to looking at the sky, looking at the heavens for signs. But the trouble is they needed to notice the signs that were going around on earth.

And they were being hypocritical. Jesus said they were hypocrites, which means that they weren't really being honest. It's not as if they needed that kind of a sign from heaven to prove that what he was doing was from God.

They should have been able to tell just by the character of his works that he was from God and that he was doing the very works which the Old Testament prophets said the Messiah would do. This is why he called his works the signs of the times. That is, the things he was doing were not signs from heaven in the sense that they were visibly proceeding from heaven to earth, like fire out of heaven, but they were the very signs that were to be associated with the times of the Messiah.

We know that when John the Baptist had earlier sent messengers from his prison cell to ask Jesus if he was the one who was to come or should they look for another, Jesus sent back this message, Well, you go tell John what you see. The deaf hear, the blind see, the dumb speak, the lame are healed, the Gospels preach to the poor, and blessed is he who is not stumbled by me. Now, what was he saying? He was saying, you decide.

You're asking if I'm the Messiah or not, you decide. Here's the evidence, here's what's happening, here's the signs. Can you read them? Now, how could anyone read them? How could anyone know for sure that these were the signs of the Messianic age? There had been, after all, miracles earlier in Israel's history.

Elijah and Elisha had done miracles. Moses had done miracles. However, there was no one who had done miracles in such a wholesale and widespread manner.

I mean, you have a few miracles in the life of Elijah, notable ones, no doubt, and even some of them were signs from heaven, stopping the rain, starting the rain with prayers, calling fire to heaven. But those miracles were mainly signs to authorize the prophet himself. They were not necessarily signs that were practically beneficial to anybody.

Jesus' miracles were acts of compassion. He didn't do anything just to be on display. He didn't do anything just to prove to people that he was powerful.

He did things because the things he did, people needed to be done. People were sick and they got healed. People were demon-possessed, they got delivered.

People were dead and they were raised. They were hungry and they got fed. Jesus was

not a carnival magician.

He didn't do things just to cause people to marvel. In fact, he did everything he could to keep the astonishment level down. When he saw crowds gathering, he quickly would do a miracle to keep it from being too much of a public spectacle before the crowds all got there.

He'd tell people, don't tell anyone about this. It's clear that Jesus never saw his miracles as first and foremost his way of proving who he was. Although he later, when he was challenged on who he was, he did appeal to his miracles and say, listen, you've seen what I do.

That should tell you something. But his reason for doing miracles that is given again and again in the Bible is he was moved with compassion. He was moved with compassion and he healed them.

He was moved with compassion and he helped them. And even that's why he said, before he fed the multitudes, he said to his disciples, I have compassion on the multitudes. I'm afraid they're going to leave.

They've been around for three days. They'll go and faint for hunger. I mean, when he did miracles, he did things that were practical and useful, not things that were just theatrical and dramatic.

Now, what the scribes and Pharisees or the Pharisees and Sadducees were here asking for was an impractical demonstration of power that would simply validate his claims to be the Messiah. And they thought, you know, that would prove something. I mean, after all, Moses had done some not altogether practical things just for the sake of proving authority.

For instance, taking Aaron's rod along with that of Korah and his companions and seeing which rod would bud. Well, the budding of Aaron's rod didn't really meet any physical, practical needs of anybody, but it did validate Aaron as God's choice. And Elijah's calling fire from heaven did a similar thing.

They came after him and said, man of God, you know, the king commands you to come down. He said, well, if I'm a man of God, let fire come down out of heaven and consume you and your 50 men, and it did. So, I mean, these kinds of things didn't help anybody except the prophet himself to prove who he was.

Jesus wasn't into that kind of showmanship. Not that that was wrong in those cases. There needed to be some kind of validation, and God gave it.

But the point here is, Jesus was simply by doing the works of his father, that is, the kinds of works his compassionate father would do for suffering people. He didn't need

additional demonstrative powers to prove who he was. It should be able to be deduced that a man who does what no human being can do is either acting on authority from God or from the devil.

And since the nature of all the miracles were continuously merciful and benevolent and so forth, and compassionate, it should make it clear whether it's the devil or God that they're coming from. And so, he's basically saying, you're hypocrites, you're sign seekers, but you've seen plenty of signs, and you're not going to get any more signs. In fact, the only sign I'm going to give this generation is the sign of the prophet Jonah.

And he had already explained what that was, so he doesn't explain it here. Back in chapter 12, he had identified the sign of the prophet Jonah when on that occasion, too, they were asking for a sign. In the 12th chapter of Matthew, verse 38, some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.

And he answered and said to them, He who has done an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. Now, that's exactly what he says here, almost verbatim, in chapter 16, verse 4. But there, in Matthew 12, he explains what he means by the prophet Jonah. He says in verse 40, For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Now, that was obviously a reference to his death and resurrection, though that's easier for us to understand in that light, now that we know about his death and resurrection in retrospect, than it would have been evident without people, you know, people who weren't aware that that was going to happen wouldn't necessarily have been altogether clear on what he was saying. Similar to the time in John chapter 2, when he was asked to give some kind of substantiation of his authority and to give some kind of a sign to prove that he had the authority to cleanse the temple. I'm talking about John chapter 2. Right after he cleansed the temple, he was challenged on his authority.

It says in verse 18, The Jews answered and said to him, What sign do you show us, since you do these things? Now, it's to prove that this really is your father's house, as you claim, and that you have the right to drive these people out. What sign can you do to validate yourself? And Jesus answered, John 2, 19, Jesus answered and said to them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. And we know, of course, from the later comment in verse 21, he was speaking of the temple of his body.

So, again, he was talking about his three days being dead and then rising again. So, twice, or three times, actually, when he was asked by the Jews to give a sign, he said, well, this is the sign I'll give you. He phrased it in different ways, but he said that his death and his resurrection three days later was going to be the sign that they would get, and he wasn't going to do any other stupendous signs for them that were not necessarily practically helpful to people.

And so we see that whether he's talking about the sign of Jonah or the sign of destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up, both cases he's talking about his three days in the heart of the earth, the three days of his death followed by his resurrection. Now, both times when Jesus was asked about this, he said a wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign. It is apparently not a matter of pleasure to God when people are obsessed and intrigued with signs and wonders.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to know the supernatural power of God in your life, but to be obsessed with sort of a, you know, a carnal sort of curiosity to be entertained by stupendous things, that is not apparently what God is pleased by in such people. Actually, in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, Paul says in verse 22, For the Jews request a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.

But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Now, he says the Jews are signs seekers. Paul ought to know he was one of them.

He hadn't even been a Pharisee before. He knew the Jewish fascination with signs. If he hadn't known it from his own experience, he would know it from the experience of Jesus, how the Jews were continually asking Jesus, give us a sign, give us a sign.

And in particular here, saying a sign from heaven. But he calls them hypocrites. They'd seen enough if they could put two and two together.

If they were really truth seekers, they wouldn't need additional signs. I mean, what more signs could they reasonably ask for than what they had seen? Now, what I want to point out to you in this passage before we go on to the next is, well, there's two things right here, and they're somewhat related to each other in a somewhat interesting way. He says in verse 3, hypocrites, you know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times.

He indicates that it's been important enough for them to know the weather that they've learned how to put two and two together from the present to discover what the weather will be like tomorrow or later today. We usually think that when people talk about the weather, they're talking about trivial matters that don't matter very much. I mean, how's the weather just a way, or talking about the weather is usually conceived of as a way to just spend time, since, like they say, everybody talks about the weather, but no one does anything about it.

You know, the weather, the weather is one of those things that is almost proverbial, as a totally unimportant thing to sit around talking about, since there's absolutely no control that we have over it, to sit around and moan about it or talk about how lovely it is. I mean, it may be worthy of comment occasionally, but to talk at length about the

weather is to talk about things of no value to talk about in most cases. Now, even so, the Pharisees cared enough about weather, something of relatively inconsequential weight, to learn how to discover what the weather will be like.

No doubt that would have practical value from time to time. But they didn't care enough about the kingdom of God or the messianic age to have acquainted themselves with the signs of its nearness or presence. It's as if, you know, the weather, as inconsequential as that might be, was more important to them than the messianic age was, which is the most consequential thing that God has ever talked about or predicted.

Now, of course, when Jesus sent word back to John the Baptist, you know, the blind see and all this stuff, he was alluding to prophecies of the Old Testament. He alluded to Isaiah 61, where it says, the Lord is anointing me to preach the gospel to the poor. He says, tell John that the poor have the gospel preached to them.

He was alluding to Isaiah 35. It says, the dumb shall speak and the blind shall see and the lame shall leap. Jesus made reference to those things actually taking place.

Tell John that's happening. What was this but saying, these are signs of the times? Do you want to know whether there's another coming or whether I'm he? Just see. Didn't God give you certain signs that the messianic age would be here? Are these not taking place before your eyes? Is it really that hard to see and to deduce what's going on here? Now, the Pharisees were seeing all these same signs too.

They were simply refusing to put two and two together in this case. They were refusing to let the evidence lead to the obvious conclusion that this was the messianic age and Jesus was the Messiah. Why were they so dull of hearing or of seeing? I don't know that we can be sure, but I think it's probably a political thing for them.

If Jesus was the Messiah, they clearly were going to lose power because he would be destined to rule and he wasn't in their circle and they weren't in his. Therefore, his rise to power would be at the expense of their place of power. It would appear that that was what motivated them.

Jesus in one of his parables in Matthew 21 or 22 when he talked about the parable of the vineyard and the owner of the vineyard sending his servants and the tenants of the vineyard beating up the servants. And then finally the owner sent his son to collect the fruit. And he says the tenants of the vineyard said, this is the heir, let us kill him and his inheritance will be ours.

And so they killed the son, obviously corresponding to what the Jewish leadership did to Jesus. I mean, there's no question about what Jesus was talking about in that parable. Therefore, he represented the motivation of those who killed him as saying he's the heir.

Let's kill him and then we can have what would ordinarily be his. Now, what would

normally be the Messiah's? But the kingdom itself, the power, the political authority and so forth. That's what the leaders of the Jews already were enjoying.

But if Jesus was going to inherit such things, they weren't going to have them anymore. And only by killing him did they hope to retain them. And therefore they were not willing to accept a Messiah who had not come up through their ranks and did not affirm their values and did not seem to be the type who'd give them positions of power in his kingdom.

And who selected as his co-workers men that the Pharisees disdained. This simply did not make them want to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, although the signs were all there. And therefore they were not being truly honest.

They had an agenda that prevented them from seeing what should have been obvious to them. That's why Jesus said they were being hypocrites. They weren't really being open and honest and walking in the truth that they could be walking in.

And he says, you know, you act as if you're concerned about heavenly things and yet you're more concerned about the weather in the heavens than you are about the kingdom of the heavens. And if you were as concerned about the kingdom as you are about the weather, you have learned how to discern the signs of the presence of the kingdom just as you've learned how to discern the nearness of certain kinds of weather. So this is how he attacks them.

Now I want to say something about this. The expression signs of the times is an expression that we hear a lot these days. We hear about the signs of the times.

I can remember in my own youth as a dispensationalist quoting this verse with reference to our own times. I thought it was extremely important that we should be able to see that the political climate in the world today was a fulfillment of many prophecies about the end times and that the coming of Christ was near and that anybody who couldn't see this was, like Jesus said, a hypocrite not discerning the signs of the times. Well, as you know, I don't think that way anymore.

You know what I now think. But the point is, still, although I changed my views on this years ago, I still marvel because I hear people saying the very same thing. Only a few years ago I heard an influential local preacher indicate that this verse implicates Christians who are not able to recognize that Jesus' coming is just around the corner because obviously what's happening in Israel, what's happening in Russia, what's happening in China, what's happening in Western Europe, and what's happening in Eastern Europe, all these things are signs of the times.

Anyone who can't see it falls under Jesus' condemnation of a hypocrite because they can see in the natural what the weather is going to be like. In fact, in our day, we have even

more sophisticated means to know what the weather is going to be like tomorrow. And yet, if we can't see that the second coming of Christ is upon us, if we can't see the signs all around us, how hypocritical we are and how much we fall under Jesus' censure in this very matter, in this verse is used.

I have heard, oh, not too long ago, certainly within the last year, radio preachers talking about Bible prophecy, again from a dispensational view, assuming that the coming of the Lord is near and heralded by many current events. I've heard them say, God has commanded us to be aware of the signs of the times and we are required to be alert to the signs of the times and so forth. Well, there was a time in my life I wouldn't have questioned that kind of preaching.

I thought, well, that sounds right. But I remember hearing that about, oh, less than a year ago and thinking, now wait a minute, let's have a scripture on that, please. Where does the Bible say we're supposed to be aware of the signs of the times? No verse but this could be used because this is the only verse in the whole Bible that uses the expression signs of the times.

The term is never used of the last days. Certainly Jesus was not talking about the last days. He was talking about his own days.

The signs of the times were happening at that moment. That's why the Pharisees and Sadducees were so blameworthy. They couldn't see them.

If they weren't happening yet, how could he blame them for not seeing them? It's obvious that when Jesus said you can't discern the signs of the times, he meant his own times. The in-breaking of the new covenant era of the Messianic kingdom. It was there and the signs were there.

The prophets had spoken about them and all those things were happening and they should have seen it. But beyond that particular local and temporal application, that is to his own generation, there is never a time, not even in this passage, that the Bible speaks of signs of the times in any other connection. It doesn't ever speak of signs of the times with reference to the second coming of Christ.

You won't find the expression used in that connection at all. So when somebody says, well, don't you think we should be aware of the signs of the times? I'd have to say, well, what signs of what times? And if I would say, yes, we should be aware of the signs of the times, I guess I'd have to say, but on what biblical basis would I say so? Where does the Bible say we're supposed to be looking for signs of our own times? And the irony is that this very verse that blames these people for not recognizing the signs of the times calls them an evil and adulterous generation because of their fascination with signs. He says, an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign.

Now, I would say that verse certainly applies to our age. Although Jesus wasn't directly applying it, that verse certainly has a transferable truth to any people who are fascinated with signs. I mean, Jesus was making sort of an axiomatic statement that applies across the board.

It certainly applied to those people speaking to him. But if he simply says, an evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, he's speaking a truism that is seemingly applicable in more than one situation. And if we are to use this passage to comment on our own era, it is not the censure of those who don't recognize the signs of the times today that this passage should impact us with, but rather the wickedness of those who are fascinated with little else than finding signs.

You know, when I heard that radio preacher say what I just mentioned a few minutes ago, not very long ago, I began thinking, you know, I've thought this way before, but I began to think more clearly about it. You know, not only does the Bible not say what that preacher is saying, that is, the Bible does not say that God's going to hold us accountable if we don't know the second coming is coming at any moment. The Bible doesn't say we have to know any signs of any times in the end times.

But furthermore, what kind of person would God be, and how would I understand his priorities and his program, if that did matter to him? I mean, even though the Bible doesn't say what these guys said, suppose that in spite of the Bible's silence on the subject, that God really did feel this way, that God really does want us to know that the coming of the Lord is near, that God really does want us not to be ignorant of this fact. What does that tell me about God's program? First of all, I'd have to ask, why would it matter? Why would it matter to God, whether I knew his coming was going to happen today or tomorrow or a thousand years from now? What difference is it supposed to make? Now, most people say, well, you know, if you know the coming of the Lord is near, it motivates you. It motivates you to get your act together.

It motivates you to get prepared for the coming of the Lord. It motivates you to evangelize people. It may even motivate some people to get saved who aren't saved.

I say, excellent, wonderful things, but shouldn't we do all those things, whether Jesus is coming back tomorrow or whether he's coming back a thousand years from now? I mean, how is that different than our general obligation anyway? How would I behave differently if I knew Jesus was coming? And if I could identify what differences there'd be, that condemns the way I'm living now if I'm not living that way now. Shouldn't I live every day as if it could be my last? Whether Jesus comes back today or I get hit by a truck today and go to heaven, what's the difference? It could be my last day. Why should it matter? Is it God's way? Is God the kind of God who says, okay, I want all these half-hearted people who don't really love me to straighten up their act for a few years and pretend to be committed to me because they think the coming of the Lord is near, so I'll

show them a lot of signs to get them aware of my coming.

You know, if people only serve God because they've been told they might miss the rapture in the next couple of years, if they don't get their act together, are these people really getting converted? Now, maybe you haven't lived long enough to know the answer to that. I do, because I was there in the early 70s when this was the message. The Jesus movement raked in hundreds of thousands of young people into a zealous, hardcore kind of discipleship lifestyle, faith lifestyle, zealous evangelism and so forth, and the principal message that was preached in every pulpit almost every night of the week was, Jesus is coming any moment.

It could be today. Everything that's lining up in the political world is a fulfillment of what the Bible said would happen in the last times. We're seeing the signs of the times all around us.

Get ready, because if you don't get converted tonight, the rapture may come before tomorrow morning, and you'll be here to face the Antichrist and 666 and the plagues of Revelation. And, hey, a lot of people came in. They came running in.

But, you know what? All those political things that were happening back in the early 70s, which were supposedly fulfillments of prophecy and signs of the end times, none of those things are happening right now. In fact, at least very few of them. Many of the things that were certainly heralded as signs of the end times are phenomena that passed and have been replaced by the opposite phenomena since then.

I mean, the threat that Russia and the Soviet Union made to Israel. This was considered to be all, you know, Ezekiel 38 and 39 talks about Gog and Magog coming down and sweeping in vast hordes on horseback. And, by the way, the Cossacks in Russia, you know, they're horseback troops, so that's got to be the fulfillment there.

And we're living in the days where Russia's going to do that thing. And then, of course, now, Russia doesn't seem to be anywhere near the kind of threat that she was 20 years ago to Israel or anyone else. Now, one could argue, well, the last chapter hasn't been written yet, and Russia may yet turn around and be a threat again.

Maybe she will, but the fact remains that the fact that she was a threat back then didn't make itself. Because even if someday in the future Russia's going to do those things, it proves that the fact that Russia was there, menacing as she was, was no evidence that the Second Coming was imminent. If there's a dip in Russia's threatening career and then a rise again later, that simply shows that we were premature in identifying Russia's actions 20 years ago as signs that the Second Coming was imminent.

And that's just the point I'm making. There's so many false alarms. First of all, what kind of God would even care to give warning to the half-hearted? He doesn't want the half-

hearted.

I mean, he wants everybody, but he doesn't want people to come on the basis of half-heartedness. He wants people to come wholehearted. And it seems to me when Jesus taught on the subject of signs, well, let's look over, you know, we talked about Matthew 24 in depth, but just those last verses from Matthew 24 seem to indicate a great deal the degree to which God will or will not warn the half-hearted about the imminence of his coming.

Notice verse 36, Matthew 24, 36, But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only, but as the days of Noah were, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in the days of Noah before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. What? They won't know.

There weren't warning shots fired over the heads of the people in Noah's day, just Noah's preaching was all there was, just like the church's preaching is all the world has as warning now. Noah preached, they didn't listen, they didn't know, and it came and took them all away. There was no, you know, there weren't some signs that alerted them that the flood was near.

And that's how it will be in the coming of the Son of Man. Then two men will be in the field, one will be taken to the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken to the other left.

Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. Then he says, but know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you must also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you, he's speaking to his disciples, when you do not expect him.

Now the second coming of Christ is going to catch the world unexpectedly, like the flood caught the world in Noah's day unexpectedly, but the disciples are going to be caught unexpectedly too. The Son of Man is coming, he says to his four disciples who asked him about this subject, he's going to come at a time when you do not expect him. Even the believers will not know that it's coming.

Then he says, who then is a faithful and a wise servant, in verse 45, Matthew 24, 45, who then is a faithful and a wise servant, whom the master made ruler over his household to give them food in due season. Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes finds so doing. Assuredly I say to you he will make him ruler over all his goods.

But if that evil servant says in his heart, my master's delaying his coming, and begins to

beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come in a day when he's not looking for him, no signs, no warnings, and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two. Now, here's several things that Jesus says about his coming. First of all, it's going to be like the days of Noah.

One thing about the days of Noah was, the sinners were caught off guard. They didn't know until the day came that the flood came. They were eating, drinking, getting married, just like life was going to go on forever.

Not a clue that judgment was going to drop on them the next morning. Then, he says it's sort of like a thief coming to a house. The thief doesn't give advance warning.

The thief who's going to come break into your house tomorrow night, he doesn't start sending you notes in the mail, saying, be ready, one of these nights I'm coming. It's really getting a lot closer. It's really getting close, better get ready.

No, he doesn't give that kind of warning. The very reason Jesus chose the imagery of a thief coming is because he's trying to get that very point. You don't know when a thief is coming.

Therefore, you have to be ready all the time. You have to be always ready in case he comes now. But he might not come now, and there's no sign that will let you know that this is the time, and some other time is not the time.

You've got to be ready at all times. And then he talks about two kinds of servants, both of whom are presumably supposedly servants of God. And one servant is diligent, and his master comes back and finds him diligently doing his work.

There's no suggestion that that servant is diligent because he knew his master was about to come back. The servant was diligent because he was faithful. He was a faithful and wise servant, and he knew his master might come back at any time.

So, he always behaved in such a way that would not create embarrassment or condemnation to him if his master happened to appear. The foolish servant, though, got tired of waiting, and he began to go back to his old life again. Now, the suggestion is this is a person who has responded in some sense to the gospel.

This person has become a servant of God in some capacity, but he gets tired of it. He got saved so that he could miss the judgment. The judgment didn't come, so he says, well, hey, this is going to take longer than I thought.

The master is delaying his coming. I can get away with a little bit of having fun. Let's go out and eat and drink and get drunk and abuse our fellow servants and get in brawls and stuff.

He says, and that servant is going to be very surprised when his master comes because he's not going to be looking for him. Now, it seems to me that Jesus indicated his return is not going to be preceded by signs. It's true that the earlier verses of Matthew 24 talk about earthquakes and famines in diverse places, but as you know from our previous coverage of that, I believe that earlier portion is speaking, and I don't see how anyone could see it otherwise if they compare it with parallel passages in Luke and so forth.

That's not talking about the end times. That's talking about the destruction of the temple, which Jesus predicted and the disciples asked him about. Those signs of earthquakes and famines did happen before the destruction of the temple, but as far as his second coming, he says no man knows the day and the hour of that day, and it's going to be like the day of Noah.

It's going to be like a thief coming. It's going to be like a master who returns when the servants don't have a clue that he's coming. Therefore, it seems to me for people to be looking for signs, it does suggest that they are an evil and adulterous generation.

I hate to say that, because that doesn't sound very kind to my friends who are dispensational heaven-gazers, and let me make this clear. To say they're evil and adulterous would be more unkind than I would prefer to be. Actually, a lot of these people no doubt love the Lord, but one has to wonder, what kind of love for the Lord is it that their zeal is based on the assumption that he's going to come back at any moment? What if they decided he wasn't going to come back at any moment? Would they still be zealous for God? Would they still love him? Why is it so all-fired important to them? You know, when I first encountered post-millennialists, now I'm not a post-millennialist, but post-millennialists don't think Jesus will come back anytime soon.

They think the whole world is going to get Christianized first, and then there will be another thousand years before Jesus comes back, and some of them don't even know if that thousand years is symbolic. Some of them don't know if Jesus is ever going to come back. This is strange stuff to me.

Of course, when I first heard it, I thought, well, what in the world? Why would anyone want to believe that? Why would anybody wish to embrace the notion that Jesus isn't even coming back? What a horrible thought that is. And then I thought about my response. Now, I'm not post-millennial, but I realized that my response was coming from kind of a poorly thought-out place in that.

Because the way I was thinking of it, while we're young, we always think we're immortal. We forget we're going to die. And the fact is, if Jesus didn't come back ever, of course, he's going to, because he said he would, and I have no doubt that he will.

But I'm just saying that even if he never came back, that's not going to prevent me from seeing him in the next few decades. If I die, I'm going to go see him. When I first

thought, wow, if Jesus never came back, oh, man, what a horrible life.

I realized that that only makes sense if I expected to stay here forever anyway. If I'm leaving here within a few decades as it is, what does it matter to me if Jesus waits a few more decades or a few more million years? I mean, every generation is just going to live one generation anyway. And everyone is living in the last generation, for themselves, at least.

And his coming will only affect a particular generation in that they won't die. That generation of Christians won't die. No doubt we'd all like to be in that generation.

But anyone who's reasonable realizes we've got to count on dying just in case. Maybe our generation isn't the one. Maybe Jesus will wait another generation.

He's not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He might just wait for them. Who knows? And if that is true, then we've just got to face the fact we're going to die.

But for some people, the second coming of Christ is all there is to keep them going, to keep them happy. And only the suggestion that it's awfully close and everything around us is speaking of it, the signs are all in agreement about this, that Jesus is coming at any moment, it takes that kind of hype, continually pumped into these people, to keep them on the straight and narrow. And without it, they'll go out and beat their fellow servants and eat and drink with the drunken.

Frankly, I'm not sure that keeping those people artificially afloat is a good idea, because if they will, in fact, go out and eat and drink with the drunken, without that artificial hype, maybe that artificial hype is creating an artificial illusion of them being saved. They may have no actual commitment to Christ at all. And I said I lived in the 70s and I know from experience something.

What I do know, I don't think I went so far as to say it, but you probably deduced it, I saw tens of thousands, there were actually hundreds of thousands, I didn't see them all, but I actually saw tens of thousands of people converted during the Jesus movement. But today, although my personal acquaintances among them were only a small cross-section of the whole movement, I would say it was a fair sampling, a random sampling of what you might find if you looked at the Jesus movement anywhere, in any group of them, I would say at least half, at least half of the people that got saved and swept into the Jesus movement, that were my acquaintances, are now back in the world. They're either totally non-Christian or else they're Christians that are out eating and drinking with the drunken.

I mean, when I say Christians, I mean they're still in church, let's put it that way. Some have just renounced the church, several of them are in homosexual lifestyles now, a lot

of them have just been swallowed up by the world entirely. Others are still in church, but very much, you know, sucked in by the world.

I mean, everything about their lifestyle is indistinguishable from the world, except that maybe they don't commit adultery, you know, or murder, but then most worldly people don't either. The point is, a lot of people gave up. They were swept in to the movement because Jesus was supposed to come back any minute, but when he didn't, it says in Proverbs, hope deferred makes the heart sick, and their hope was deferred, it was put off.

It didn't happen as soon as they thought, and so they decided they're tired of waiting. We're tired of this austere, forsake the world, take up your cross kind of business. Let's go back and enjoy some of this world since we're going to be here for a while maybe.

Our Lord delays his coming. And frankly, I never could relate with that because I never was following. I did expect Jesus to come at any minute in the early 70s, but that was never my motivation for being a Christian.

I was going to be a Christian whether he was coming or not. I believed in a pre-trib rapture, but I was determined I'd still be a Christian even if there was no pre-trib rapture. My eschatology was not the basis for my walk with God, and it isn't now either.

But what I'm saying is one might cautiously say, even today, that it's an evil and adulterous generation that's always seeking after signs. Why this obsession with signs? Now you might say, well, they just love the Lord. They're just eager to see him.

Well, so am I. But we're all going to see him. Right now we're not supposed to be stargazing. We're supposed to be putting our hand to the task.

We're supposed to put our hand to the plow and not look back. It's true that we need to... You see, one of the problems is that Jesus used the metaphor of watching. Watch because your Lord's coming.

Watch. You know, if the good men of the house had known what hour the people were coming, they would have watched. Therefore, watch.

Watch, watch. And so, and the modern word watch is what probably throws a lot of people off. Watching means to set your gaze on something today and you know, don't take your eyes off of it.

Watch it. You know, like you watch television or you watch a movie or you watch your kid, you know, play Little League or something. You know, you watch it and your eyes are fixed on it.

The word watch in Old English, and as Jesus used it, was the equivalent of fasting, only

with reference to sleep. Fasting is going without food. Watching was going without sleep.

And you'll often find Paul and others in the Scripture linking the two concepts of fasting and watching. You know, watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. Jesus said to his disciples, what does watch mean there? Stay awake.

When they fell asleep, he said, couldn't you watch with me for one hour? What are you supposed to be watching? You know, I mean, when they pray with their eyes closed, what are they watching? Watching means stay awake. Just like fasting means stay hungry. And you know, both of those things are linked in the Scripture with prayer and so forth.

But when Jesus said if the owner of the house had known when the thief would come, he would have watched, it means he would have stayed awake. And he says, therefore, you don't know when your master is coming, so you watch. He doesn't mean keep your eyes on the clouds.

Whether you're looking at the moment Jesus comes back or not won't make a difference as to whether you're taken up. I realize some people think that's a heresy to say, but if you're living for God, you'll be caught up to meet the Lord in the air when he comes, whether your eyes are set on the clouds that moment or not. In fact, you might even be asleep, who knows, physically.

But to remain spiritually awake is, of course, what we're called to do. To not drift into spiritual slumber and lukewarmness is what he's warning against. And so watch doesn't mean don't take your eyes off the sky.

You'd be better off watching for the needs of the poor and the hungry and the lost and the needy. And they're not up there in the sky. And so what Jesus says about signs, ironically, verse 3 here is sometimes used to impose upon us some kind of phony obligation to be searching the newspapers, combing the newsmagazines, watching every TV broadcast to see if there's any evidence there of a fulfilled prophecy taking place on the planet.

And if we miss it, who knows? Maybe we'll be like that wicked servant who his Lord came and cut him in the center of the earth because we didn't know, we missed one of those signs. There are people, there's whole ministries built, whole media ministries built on nothing other than updating their viewers on what happened this week in the news that it can somehow be construed as a fulfillment of some obscure prophecy. Most of them don't understand the prophecies as is evident by their way of applying them to modern events, but I mean, there literally are, and anyone who's watched Christian TV, as I have done very little, anyone who's done it more than I have would know even better than I do how true that statement is.

Um, and to me I find it silly and sad at the same time. Uh, and Jesus might have even said wicked and adulterous, seeking after signs. You know, he was talking about the need for them to recognize himself and his coming, and not to miss the fact that he was the Messiah that was prophesied and that all the signs the prophet had spoken about as accompanying the advent of the Messiah's age were happening and they were missing it because, or they were they were seeing it, but they were refusing to let the evidence lead to what was the obvious truth.

And that was his criticism of them. And, uh, it's hard to imagine how any such criticism could apply to those of us who are not particularly fascinated with alleged signs of the times happening about us. As far as I'm concerned, I hope the Lord comes back today.

I'd love it if neither I nor my children ever had to die. But, I've known, there's been generations of Christians, about 50 of them so far, since Christ. All of whom kind of would have liked to see Jesus come back in their time and their children and them never have to die.

I'm certainly like-minded with the rest of the church in that respect. But I'm not like-minded with people who say, well, if Jesus doesn't come back soon, all is lost. Well, I'm not.

I'm not lost, and my children aren't lost either. And I'm going to spend my time trying to make sure that fewer people are lost when he comes. But, his second coming is a wonderful thing.

We love his appearing. But we've got no guarantees he's coming in our time. Certainly nothing that's happening in the world today is a sign that was predicted in the Bible.

That's a sweeping statement, I know. But I can make that with a fair degree of certainty. And, so, looking for signs is not encouraged.

Not by Jesus. A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after signs. It's not going to be given any signs except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

We already had that. Jesus died, was three days in the grave, and came out. That's a good enough sign.

We don't need any more. Although, I'm not saying God is not able, or willing at times to give certain signs of various sorts. I think that individuals have sometimes asked God for a sign about this or that thing, and have received such signs.

I'm not, you know, the problem here, these people are wicked and adulterous generation, not so much because they observed and appreciated signs, but because they were demanding signs. They were obsessed with signs. And this fascination with signs had no corresponding obsession with truth.

Had no corresponding obsession with obeying God. It was simply a fascination with the spectacular. Or, in this case, it might even have been challenging Jesus, saying, what you've shown us so far simply isn't enough.

We remain unconvinced. Therefore, you're going to have to do something which they suspected maybe he couldn't do, so that if he couldn't do it, they'd be able to discredit him, and find excuses for disbelieving in him. I don't know all that was going on in their minds, but I know he didn't have much sympathy for their request.

Now, in fact, not only did he not have much sympathy for their request, in verse 2, where it says,