

## **PART ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST**

*“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants --- things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near.”*

*(Revelation 1:1-3)*

## **Chapter 1**

### **Signs of the Times**

*Now as He sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3)*

Ever since Adam yielded to temptation in the Garden of Eden and God was forced to carry out His word and place a curse upon mankind and the entire creation there have been wars, rumors of wars, cataclysmic disasters, sickness and disease. All of these things are a result of the curse on this planet that was brought on by man. We are to blame. We would like to place the blame on Adam but if we had been in his shoes we would have done the same thing. It is our nature to want to know what is unknown. Adam couldn't wait (I believe) to take a bite of the fruit that was forbidden by God.

To illustrate this there's a little story that tells us about Clyde. Clyde worked in a factory. Each and every day of his life (well, at least Monday through Friday) he did his job on the assembly line. But he hated his job. From time to time he would look up at the office on the second floor of the factory. He could see his boss sitting up there through the big picture window. He was sipping coffee and just watching what was going on down below in the factory. What Clyde didn't know was that the boss was watching him too. Every day Clyde would work and mutter to himself, "That old Adam; if he just wouldn't have taken a bite of that fruit I'd probably be living in a paradise today and not having to work!"

One day the boss happened by as Clyde was muttering, stopped and spoke to Clyde, "Clyde, how would you like to sit up there in that office and spend your day sipping coffee and just watching things down here in the factory?" It sounded like a great idea to Clyde so he responded, "Boss, I'd like that a lot!" So the boss took Clyde up to the office, helped him get set up and then told him, "There's just one stipulation; see that box up there on the shelf? Whatever you do don't look inside that box. Don't touch it. Just sit up here and sip on your coffee and forget about that box." So for a couple of days Clyde enjoyed his new job. He clocked in, walked upstairs; poured himself a nice hot cup of coffee and just sat there watching how things were going in the factory.

But one day Clyde began to get bored. When he did his mind went directly to that box. "I wonder what's in that box?" he thought. Needing to stretch a bit he got up and carefully looked around the shop to see if his boss was anywhere in sight. Satisfied that no one was watching him he walked over to the shelf and looked at the box. "Seems harmless enough," he thought. During the course of the day he made a couple more trips over to the shelf and finally reached out and touched the box. "It's just a wooden box," he muttered to himself. After another quick look around the factory through the window Clyde picked the box up. It wasn't locked or anything. "No one will ever know if I steal a quick peek inside," so Clyde opened the

box. Inside was a note and nothing else. Clyde pickup up the note and read, “See Clyde, if you’d been in the Garden of Eden you’d have done the same thing Adam did. NOW GET BACK DOWNSTAIRS AND BACK TO WORK!” We’d like to blame it on Adam but in reality we are all guilty.

I sometimes look at a beautiful scene. It could be majestic mountains, a sparkling waterfall, a seemingly undisturbed forest or a breathtaking skyline; this world has some very wonderful and awesome places. But as I look at them it is always in the back of my mind, “Just imagine what it would look like if it wasn’t cursed.” We would like to blame it on God but we are the cause. We wonder why God doesn’t stop terrible tragedies like earthquakes, typhoons, hurricanes, and devastating tornadoes, but the fact is that these things are not acts of the Almighty God but results of our own human sin. We wonder why God doesn’t stop evil people from raping women, abusing innocent children, stealing, killing and wrecking havoc on others. We ask the question, “Why God?” But the truth of the matter is God doesn’t cause people to do these things but their own sinful nature under the influence of the devil, bears the responsibility. It’s our fault.

In Matthew 24 we see the disciples taking Jesus into the Temple. I’m certain that it was a magnificent site to behold. The disciples began pointing out the different structures and buildings that made up the complex, much like we would give a tour today. As they walked Jesus suddenly told them, “You see all these things? The day is coming when one stone won’t be left on top of another.” In other words He was telling them that it would all be destroyed.

In 70 AD at the command of Titus, the Roman army leveled the Temple and even plowed it up. Not one stone was left upon another just as Jesus had told them. But His prophecy goes further than that. It reached way beyond 70 AD. We read of things that Jesus told of in Matthew and also in Mark 13 and Luke 21, things that still have not happened yet.

As I have already said all through the centuries we have experienced terrible tragedies. But never before are they lining up the way they are today. We have terrible wars going on around the world with weapons of death that were unimaginable to those living in the days of Jesus Christ. We can wipe out entire cities with a single bomb. At the same time we hear almost weekly of another tragedy that has claimed hundreds, thousands even ten-thousands of lives. Our economies are beginning to fail. We have thought that our financial systems could not be harmed ever again but they are falling. Because of rising prices people around the world are being driven into financial famine. We hear about global warming and although that is not specifically mentioned in the Bible I believe that it is a part of the pestilences.

Governments are falling in line and making way without even realizing it, for a world leader to step forward and make some kind of simplistic sense of it all. The stage is even now being set up for the anti-christ to come into power. Because of the economic hardship and the confusion of the world where once people thought that there was no way for a demonic influence like we read about in the anti-christ to take power and ultimate control, we are now even at the doorsteps of needing such an individual to bring an end to the chaos. I believe that the anti-christ is living right now somewhere on the earth waiting for the right time to assume his position.

Jesus predicted that false christs would arise, those who would claim that they are Jesus who has returned to earth. They will deceive many and indeed that has taken place and continues to happen. False prophets will also arise. These will be people who proclaim doctrines and teachings that just are not so. They will tell us that nothing is going to happen and that great prosperity is coming our way. Don't believe them. It is not true. In many ways these false prophets are nearly as destructive to the Gospel as a false christ. True born-again Christians know their Lord and Savior. But these same Christians could be apt to fall prey to the teachings of false prophets if they have not studied and read the Bible as they should. This is why it is so important to know what the Bible says. When we have hidden it in our hearts, not just in memorization but knowing what it teaches and making it a part of our lives, then we will not be so easily deceived.

Persecution will become more and more severe. There has always been persecution of those who believe in Jesus Christ. Since the early days of the Church men and women have died simply because they believed in our Savior. It is a tragedy and we may ask, "Why does the world want to harm the people who only want to bring peace and sense to this tragic life experience?" The answer is simply that the devil doesn't want the Gospel to spread. He wants us out of the picture and he will not stop influencing others but will rather make things worse if and when he can. Jesus said that we would be hated by all nations simply because we claim His Name. Why should we expect different? He was hated. It will be the same for us.

Jesus also said that lawlessness would abound. And so it does. In our cities an alarming number of murders take place each week. The motives range from arguments over drugs to mothers and fathers who simply are sick and tired of their children. But you know what alarms me even more? I am awestruck and amazed at how so many who escape punishment because they claim that they were reacting insanely or that they were distressed in their minds. With a good lawyer these folks are slapped on the wrist and released to do it again. We are entering an age when the law is not interpreted by right or wrong but by the one who can put up the most money and lie with a straight face.

Because of this lawlessness Jesus said that the love of many would grow cold. It's hard to love those who are so lost in sin that they do these detestable, wicked things. It can make our love grow cold much like our supper after an interrupting phone call. We talk while our meal gets colder and colder. By the time we return to it the tempting aroma has disappeared and it just doesn't appeal to us as much as it did before. We have two choices; we can pop it into the microwave and heat it back up or we can become disgusted with it and simply throw it out. These folks may soon find themselves only mouthing their faith with emptiness as their love grows colder and colder. Somehow we must not allow our love to grow calloused and cold. Jesus said that those who endured until the end would be saved. We must endure.

Jesus also said that the Good News of salvation by His grace (the Gospel) would be preached to every nation before the end came. There have been many interpretations of this verse, but it is simply saying that the Good News would reach every person. The literal translation says all the inhabited earth. Whether we reach all the people in the world or not, the Book of Revelation 14:6 tells us that towards the end of the first half of the Tribulation period that an angel will appear in the sky carrying the everlasting Gospel. Read its words: "*Then I*

*saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth to every nation, tribe, tongue and people.”* This verse is very plainly telling us that those we don’t reach will be reached by this angel, giving all one last chance before the terrible second half of the tribulation takes place.

I believe that we are on the brink of the coming of the Lord. I remember listening to my Grandfather preach when I was just a boy. He would often say, “The coming of the Lord is just around the corner.” That was back in the early sixties. Today our Lord has rounded the corner and is standing at the door. His hand is poised in knocking position and He is about to strike the door.

However, according to His Word there are some things that are going to take place prior to His actual appearance. Jesus said that no one knew the set time of His second coming except God the Father only. We would be totally in error to try to predict a date. If Jesus didn’t know then I certainly have no idea. But He did tell us of things that would serve as signs revealing the time period of His coming. It doesn’t mean that we know the day or the hour but we can know that it is rapidly approaching. It is imperative that we be watching and ready.

For many years the Church has been divided into denominations. These are man-made institutions and organizations put together sometimes simply for legal purposes. They also divide the Church into doctrinal teachings about various subjects. This is not the place to get into all of that. However, I firmly believe that in our modern era the Church is very quickly being divided into only two groups. Denominations will fall by the wayside and pale in the shadow of these two divisions. They are the true Church made up of born-again believers. They are found in every Christian denomination including the Catholic Church. They are those who have come to know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. They may differ in certain doctrines and teachings but on one thing they unanimously agree: That we must be saved to see the Kingdom of Heaven. When our Lord does appear to take out His Church they will come from all walks of life, all nations, all races, and from every denomination.

The second group is the world church. This is a false church. Those who are a part of this church also come from every denomination. They are those who are more concerned with appearance, protocol, and order. They are found in nearly every congregation in the world. They have professed Christ with their mouth but He is far from their heart. Many have said that they believe. But have they? I’ve used this illustration in other books the Lord has allowed us to write but we could very simply compare believing to those in a house that has just caught on fire. A group is sitting in the living room watching a show. Suddenly someone rushes into the room and screams, “Quick! Get out! The house is on fire!” They could say, “We believe you but let us finish our program and then we’ll get out.” However if they did I would seriously question their belief. Just saying that we believe doesn’t mean anything. But if they quickly got up when they heard the message that the house was on fire and got out of there then we would know that they believed.

Belief requires action. We can say that we believe in Jesus Christ all we want but if we have not followed through with action then have we really believed? Many today have confessed that they believe but their lives reflect differently. They may go to church every

Sunday (or Saturday depending on your particular denominational belief); they may give generously and be good members in standing, but if they have not acted upon their belief in Christ by allowing Him one hundred percent access into their hearts and lives then we must seriously question their belief.

These folks make up the world church. It is a system that is really not much different than a large club. They meet together, agree on common beliefs, and perhaps are even involved in various charitable activities. But if they have not given their hearts to the Lord then they have never moved into the realm of the one true Church that belongs to Jesus Christ.

In the very next chapter (Matthew 25) Jesus tells the story of the wise and foolish virgins. In this story there are a total of ten virgins who are attending a wedding. The groom didn't show up right away and of course there can be no wedding without a groom so they were forced to wait. In the process of waiting they all fell asleep and were awakened at midnight when the groom finally arrived. Now here's the interesting part of the story; all ten of them had brought their lamps and the original language indicates that they were full of oil. However, while they waited and slept the oil was either running out or beginning to run out. They all trimmed their lamps but only the five designated as the wise virgins had brought containers of extra oil with them. When the five called foolish, asked if they could share their oil with them they told them that they couldn't because they might not have enough for themselves. While the five foolish virgins went to buy oil the groom arrived, all went into the wedding, and the door was shut and locked. When the five foolish virgins showed up with extra oil they were told that they would not be allowed into the wedding. They were too late and the groom told them that He didn't know who they were. They were no longer invited to the wedding.

In examination of this parable we have to look at the different components. Without doubt Christ is the groom and the virgins are those in the Church. That is indicated by the light. Jesus said that we are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14) but only because Jesus, by way of the Holy Spirit, lives within us, because He also said that He was the light of the world (John 8:12). Thus we must have a fuel source for our light which is the Holy Spirit living within us. However there is a spiritual side that is not of Christ. This is a difficult passage because of so many opinions regarding salvation. Some believe that when we come to the Lord in truth that we can never be lost and that we will always be saved. Others believe that we can lose our salvation experience over just about anything. The truth lies somewhere in between. When we come to Christ we are secure in our faith so long as we choose to remain secure. We can't just lose our salvation on a whim. But if we choose to lay our experience down, not maintain it and turn our backs to the Lord then we can backslide.

As we have said there are many in the Church who are not born-again. How often have we heard the famed evangelist, Billy Graham say these words? He was well aware that there were many in the Church some even holding offices as Sunday School teachers and such, who had never had a born-again experience. He would give the invitation and these folks would flock down the aisles to repent of their sin.

In this context we can conclude that there are many who have either never really had a salvation experience, or have fallen by the wayside, yet continue to go through the motions. I

don't believe that we can unconsciously lose our salvation. There are tell-tale signs. There is the prodding of the Holy Spirit who will warn us. But some folks insist on ignoring the warnings and the signs. I believe that these are the foolish virgins and unless they repent and keep themselves in a good supply of oil they will not be recognized by Christ.

The signs of the times are upon us. They are happening every day in almost every place we look. The world would not be duped by someone who just showed up proclaiming to be the anti-christ. Its inhabitants are too smart for that. But when our economy fails, we are plagued by war, disease, famine and disaster, if one steps up to the plate with reasonable answers you can bet the world will be listening. This is how the anti-christ will take power and control. He will appear to be a great peace-maker. He will sound like he has all the right answers and the world will fall in behind him. Even now the world is ripe for such a figure to appear. Unless we know the signs our Lord has given us and we know what the word of God says on this subject we just may not recognize him.

Consider this: When Jesus came into the world no one except Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and later on the Magi, and the two people in the Temple knew that the Messiah had come. They were all looking for a great and powerful king. The baby Jesus came into this world, slipped through the fingers of Herod and no one really knew much about Him until He began His public ministry. If our Lord and Savior, the Son of God and very God Himself can do that then doesn't it stand to reason that when the anti-christ makes his appearance that no one except those looking for the signs will realize just who he is?