

## **Real Christianity: The Sermon on the Mount**

### *#4: Understanding Endtime Christianity Helps Us Appreciate Our Eternal Promises*

There is a characteristic of the Beatitudes that we should not simply ignore. Jesus is honest about the painful difficulties His people will experience on this Earth.

Why is there so much more in Scripture about the suffering of God's people in the Endtimes, then there is about what we will experience for eternity? The answer is in the primary point this morning: **Understanding Endtime Christianity Helps Us Appreciate Our Eternal Promises**

Last week we discussed these challenging NT commands for us to focus our minds and hearts on Heaven, not on Earth. What will help us do that? Losing all hope on this Earth. (1 Pet 1:13). How do we get there? Knowing what the Bible teaches about the end of this world, helps us put our hope in the new world. And this is why Jesus focused so much of His teaching on this, and included it even in the Beatitudes.

In the Beatitudes Jesus describes several painful realities of being a Christian on this Earth. And I believe all of these will be intensified in the lives of Endtime Christians, those who are the last generation of Christians in this world.

How does the Olivet Discourse relate to the Beatitudes? It enhances our understanding of what Jesus meant by the weakness, mourning, meekness, and persecution His people would suffer on this Earth. And it enhances our appreciation of the blessings He promised about the New Earth.

In Matthew 24, Jesus gives us an overall description of the substance and sequence of events leading up to His 2nd coming. And as He does, we gain a better understanding for how the Beatitudes will especially come alive for the last generation of Christians.

In the Endtimes, the wars, the famines, and the plagues all come together to kill 1/4 of the world's population. (Matt 24:3-8; Rev 6:1-8)

I have taught before that I believe these wars will include nuclear warfare. And I believe the United States will be a primary victim of these wars. Revelation chapters 17-18 describe a great economic and military empire that keeps the antichrist subdued. This empire is depicted as a wealthy and powerful prostitute who is riding a beast. The beast is the Antichrist. The prostitute is the military and economic powers that keep the Antichrist from coming to power himself. If these events occur in our lifetime, then surely America is part of this economic and military empire that keeps the Antichrist from coming to power. And so Revelation says the Antichrist will hate this Prostitute empire and destroy it by fire in one hour. What could destroy the most powerful nations in one hour by fire? I believe the best interpretation of Revelation 17-18 includes the surprise destruction of America by nuclear warfare.

This interpretation is supported by the world's foremost experts on the likelihood of nuclear war in our day. In 1947 an international group of atomic scientists started the famous doomsday clock. Midnight symbolizes imminent nuclear war. Over those 73 years, the clock has been adjusted 24 times. The last time was January of this year. The International Board of Atomic Scientists adjusted the Doomsday clock to 100 seconds before midnight. That is the closest it has ever been. It is foolish to think this world will escape nuclear warfare. And I believe the Scriptures even predict it occurring in the Endtimes.

What will be the result of all these world-wide wars, famines, and diseases? What would be the result of the U.S. being wiped out by nuclear warfare? It prepares the world for the Antichrist. (Matt 24:15; 2 Thess 2:1-12)

What will be the result of all that desperation and deception? The world will hate, hunt down, and kill the last generation of Christians (Matt 24:9-12, 21).

It will be the last generation of Christians experiencing this. And therefore, the Beatitudes will be especially meaningful to the Endtime Christians.

The night before Jesus was crucified, He told His disciples something that, again, will be especially appreciated by the last generation of Christians (John 16:20-22).

Our Father in Heaven does not want His children to be wimps. God forbid that the current crisis would overwhelm, discourage, or scare us. Our Father expects more of us (Jer 12:5). If our faith is failing us now, even when the whole world is afraid, what will we do if we are the last generation of Christians who face the Antichrist?

I do not know if we are. But if we are, I can tell you this. God intends this current crisis and all of our difficulties to prepare us for even more demanding tests ahead. The last generation of Christians will need great faith. How does our faith grow? By going through difficult circumstances. The lion and the bear prepared David for the giant. And God may be preparing us as well.

This week our focus was on what happens before Jesus returns and how the painful realities shared in the Beatitudes are especially illustrated in the Endtimes. In my next message, we will discuss what happens after Jesus returns and how the wonderful promises in the Beatitudes will be fulfilled.

### **Discussion ?'s**

1) Jesus mentions several difficult things about the Christian life in the Beatitudes. How will all of these be intensified for the last generation of Christians?

2) Give a brief outline of Endtime events leading to Jesus' return. Use Matthew 24:1-31 as a guide. What are the first things Jesus says will happen? What are the next things, etc?

3) Perhaps the most popular view of Endtime events in America is the "Pre-tribulation" Rapture. It teaches that the Church is raptured before the Antichrist comes and the Great Persecution occurs. It also teaches that the Rapture could happen at any moment. How does 2 Thessalonians 2:1-5 disprove this teaching? How does Matthew 24:29-31 disprove this teaching?

4) How has experiencing difficult times in the past, strengthened your faith in the present? Do you have an example?

5) What was most meaningful to you about the Sunday message?

Extra study: It was claimed in the message that the nuclear destruction of America is a good interpretation of Revelation 17-18. As you read these chapters, what elements would point to this?