

Great Tribulation

Lesson 04 of 04 in the series "The Second Coming"

1. Jesus gave His disciples a few signs to indicate when His second coming is near.

"As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'" Matthew 24:3 (NIV)

a. Wars, famines and natural disasters will occur like birth pains.

Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains." Matthew 24:4-8 (NIV)

Note: Birth pains dramatically increase in frequency and intensity just before a baby is born.

Life Application: We must do all we can to tell others about Jesus while we still have time.

"I want to remind you that in the last days scoffers will come, mocking the truth and following their own desires. They will say, 'What happened to the promise that Jesus is coming again? From before the times of our ancestors, everything has remained the same since the world was first created.' ...But you must not forget this one thing, dear friends: A day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent."

2 Peter 3:3-9 (NLT)

b. Followers of Jesus will be persecuted because of their faith.

"Then you will be arrested, persecuted, and killed. You will be hated all over the world because you are my followers." Matthew 24:9 (NLT)

Note: Suffering for Christ is normal for believers and should be expected.

"...everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." 2 Timothy 3:12 (NLT)

"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in his suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing his glory when it is revealed to all the world. So be happy when you are insulted for being a Christian, for then the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you."

1 Peter 4:12-14 (NLT)

Life Application: God blesses and rewards all who suffer for His sake.

"God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way." Matthew 5:10-12 (NLT)

Life Application: We should pray for Christian brothers and sisters who are suffering for Jesus.

"God will provide rest for you who are being persecuted and also for us when the Lord Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don't know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with eternal destruction, forever separated from the Lord and from his glorious power. When he comes on that day, he will receive glory from his holy people—praise from all who believe. And this includes you, for you believed what we told you about him. So we keep on praying for you, asking our God to enable you to live a life worthy of his call. May he give you the power to accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do. Then the name of our Lord Jesus will be honored because of the way you live, and you will be honored along with him... dear brothers and sisters, we ask you to pray for us. Pray that the Lord's message will spread rapidly and be honored wherever it goes, just as when it came to you. Pray, too, that we will be rescued from wicked and evil people, for not everyone is a believer."

2 Thessalonians 1:7-12, 3:1-2 (NLT)

c. Sin will be rampant everywhere, and many will turn away from God.

“And many will turn away from me and betray and hate each other. And many false prophets will appear and will deceive many people. Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold.”
Matthew 24:10-12 (NLT)

“...in the last days there will be very difficult times. For people will love only themselves and their money. They will be boastful and proud, scoffing at God, disobedient to their parents, and ungrateful. They will consider nothing sacred. They will be unloving and unforgiving; they will slander others and have no self-control. They will be cruel and hate what is good. They will betray their friends, be reckless, be puffed up with pride, and love pleasure rather than God. They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly.” 2 Timothy 3:1-5 (NLT)

- d. God’s wrath will be poured out, and there will be great tribulation.

“For there will be greater anguish (great tribulation) than at any time since the world began. And it will never be so great again. In fact, unless that time of calamity is shortened, not a single person will survive. But it will be shortened for the sake of God’s chosen ones... Immediately after the anguish of those days, the sun will be darkened, the moon will give no light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then at last, the sign that the Son of Man is coming will appear in the heavens, and there will be deep mourning among all the peoples of the earth. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with the mighty blast of a trumpet, and they will gather his chosen ones from all over the world—from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven.” Matthew 24:21-22, 29-31 (NLT)

2. **Jesus expects His disciples (us) to be busy carrying out our mission when He returns.**

“You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected. A faithful, sensible servant is one to whom the master can give the responsibility of managing his other household servants and feeding them. If the master returns and finds that the servant has done a good job, there will be a reward. I tell you the truth, the master will put that servant in charge of all he owns. But what if the servant is evil and thinks, ‘My master won’t be back for a while,’ and he begins beating the other servants, partying, and getting drunk? The master will return unannounced and unexpected, and he will cut the servant to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Matthew 24:44-51 (NLT)

Life Application: The Holy Spirit empowers us to carry out our mission.

“...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
Acts 1:8 (NLT)

“God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.” Philippians 2:13 (NLT)

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“There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies, ‘a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.’” John Wesley

CONNECT GROUP QUESTIONS

1. When was the last time you made fun of someone because his/her team lost an important game?
2. Describe a time in your life when you were mocked or rejected because of your Christian faith?
3. Read Romans 8:14-17 and 2 Timothy 3:12. Why do you think Christians need to share in Christ's suffering?
4. Look up and share one of the stories under "How You Can Pray" at www.persecution.com. Spend some time as a group praying for that need.
5. Read 2 Peter 3:3-9. Based on these verses, why do you believe Jesus hasn't returned yet? (John 3:16-17)
6. What barriers keep you from carrying out your mission?