

Wars And Rumors Of Wars

Joe Slater

Wars! Russia and Ukraine; Israel and Hamas; the list is virtually endless. Each new conflict brings a new herd of prophecy mongers misapplying Jesus' warning to His disciples in Matthew 24:6 *“And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars.”* Do all these wars mean the second coming of Christ is imminent?

Let's not push the panic button as we look at what the disciples asked, and the answer Jesus gave. The disciples had been showing Jesus the beautiful buildings of the temple (24:1). He told them, *“Not one stone shall be left here upon another that shall not be thrown down”* (24:2). Like any loyal Jews, they were horrified at the thought of the temple being destroyed. Naturally they wanted to know, *“When shall these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”* (24:3). “These things” must refer to the events surrounding the destruction of the temple. This would signal not the end of the created universe, but the end of an age.

Jesus' answer likewise pertained not to the end of time, but to the destruction of the temple. Signs of that impending disaster would include wars and rumors of war. Once the Roman army surrounded Jerusalem, the end was imminent (Luke 21:10). The *“abomination of desolation . . . standing in the holy place”* (Matthew 24:15) clearly refers to the Roman army destroying the temple. As the Lord had “come” in judgment against cities and nations many previous times, this coming was against Jerusalem.

Unlike the destruction of Jerusalem, no signs will indicate the imminent return of Christ in final judgment. He will come *“as a thief in the night”* (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10). How many thieves give signs of their coming?

The second verse of the song, “Jesus is Coming Soon,” errs in saying “when these signs come to pass, nearing the end at last.” The signs heralded Jerusalem's destruction, not the return of Christ.

Snakes in the Church!

Last week I saw a meme on social media that said, “Not all snakes crawl – Some sit in church.” I must admit it set me back a bit that someone might make such a statement about church folks. But after some thought I had to admit that it is most likely a true statement.

Indeed, there can be Christians who are not honest, nor do they have pure motives. There are New Testament examples of such people. For instance, Paul said, *“Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world”* (2 Tim. 4:10). Then there was Diotrophes, who loved to have superiority among the brethren and throw people out of the church (3 John 9-10). Timothy was warned of liars and hypocrites that would be in the church (1 Tim. 4:1-3). With these examples there is no doubt that there are “snakes” in the church.

But you may be surprised that the church is exactly where the snakes need to be. In Mark 2:15-17 we read about Jesus going to Levi's house for a meal where tax collectors (thieves) and sinners were present. The religious elite accused Jesus of socializing with the less desirable crowd. He answered their accusations by saying, *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance”* (v. 17).

There is a misconception among folks that the church is to be filled with perfect people, and before one can be a part of the church they must be perfect. Only by God's grace and our obedience to Him do we find ourselves in His family. Yes, there are imperfect people in His church, and that's right where they need to be.

--Jay Launius (Maud, TX)

“I don't need the church; I study the Bible for myself.”
Actually, that proves you don't study the Bible at all.

Good Thoughts

Our grandson thoughtfully informed his mother that she did not know what he was thinking. The scary thing about that is that he was right. Parents don't know what their children are thinking. So, we ask questions. “What were you thinking?” usually follows a child's misdeeds. “What are you thinking?” is our attempt to open lines of communication at a deeper level. But the fact remains: we cannot know what another person is thinking. No one *“knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him”* (1 Corinthians 2:11). No one, that is, except God who knows both the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12-13). God knows us at the deepest level – even better than we know ourselves.

We are obliged to take care of the heart, *“for from it flow the springs of life”* (Proverbs 4:23). God will hold us accountable for the thoughts we permit to lodge in our hearts (Romans 2:16). All sin begins in the heart (Matthew 12:35). Many sins condemned in Scripture are merely sins of the heart (Galatians 5:19-21). But, like every other sin, these can keep us from inheriting the kingdom of God. As Christians, we are in a battle for the hearts and minds of those around us. Paul says, *“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ...”* (2 Corinthians 10:5).

The first mind we must win is our own. Every thought must be taken captive to the obedience of Christ. How is that even possible? Certainly, not by our own strength! But God *“is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us”* (Ephesians 3:20). Input determines output. *“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things”* (Philippians 4:8). Others may not be able to read our thoughts, but they should be able to see by our actions that our minds are *“set on things above, not on things that are on earth”* (Colossians 3:2). What predominant thoughts occupy your mind? Choose good ones.

--Glen Elliott (Greenbriar, AR)