

Sermon to the Saints which are at Topeka, Kansas -- Sunday, April 4, 2021

I began in December working to open the words of Christ in his sermon on Mt. Olivet – across from the east temple gate where He and those with Him had a clear view of the magnificent buildings of the temple on Mt. Zion. There he was first inquired of – by those following Him – about whether that temple would be where He would set up His reign as King and Messiah. When He told them that the temple would be utterly destroyed and unrecognizable, they then asked Him when His kingdom would be brought forward and when the end of the world would be brought to pass.

Beginning with the millennia of the New Testament church period, He warned of how false doctrine would make it a perpetual fight for His elect people to distinguish themselves from the endless array man-made religions. Then, He described the approaching of that last day being defined by the capacity of mankind to make war and to hear of war – resulting in a world distempered by conflict and readied for the traumas that will unfold when Christ’s day arrives. We’ve examined those verses at some length, and are prepared now to turn to what I believe articulates the point when humankind is introduced to the Day of the Lord.

It is particularly important, I believe, to again point out that what we are doing here is searching scripture to know what the Lord will show us there. We are not about driving a social, political, or even eschatological outcome. That is not our prerogative. If our Father has set forth for the Lord’s day to unfold in our lifetime then that will be our happy lot and we may, with clear and scripture-based eyes make supplication for it. If our Father has set forth for it to occur in a coming generation, then our work here is to help edify and build up that generation in preparation. From what we read from other expositors it is true that they at times seem to have themselves convinced that Christ’s return was near in their generation. What we learn from the hastiness is that we should strain to look for objective information ... we should consider the question being addressed in the passages so that we will be “**rightly dividing [that] word of truth**” (**2 Timothy 2:15**). Most importantly, we absolutely must wait on the Lord in these matters and see where He leads our work for clarity.

With those introductory thoughts, we are prepared now to look at the next verse in Christ’s sermon, as articulated by our three apostles who made a record. As John Trapp intimates in discussing a corollary passage; “*This dissipation and perversion of order and manners is the forerunner of utter desolation and subversion.*”

“For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.”

(Matthew 24:7-8)

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"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be earthquakes in divers places, and there shall be famines and troubles: these are the beginnings of sorrows." (Mark 13:8)

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"Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven." (Luke 21:10)

These three passages are the reports of apostles Matthew, Mark, and Luke regarding the communications that Christ had with them privily after a shorter exchange he had with the larger group of disciples about the temple. I briefly spoke to two aspects of the Matthew rendition of these words from Christ in a previous sermon¹, but intend to examine it in more detail here. One thing is clear about this portion of Christ's words ... it is a description of a condition in the earth. Trapp colorfully articulates what he perceives in these words as follows:

"For nation shall rise, etc.; ... As they heap up sin, so they treasure up wrath; as there hath been a conjecture [i.e., crisis] of offences, so there shall be of their miseries. The black horse is at the heels of the red, and the pale of the black, []. God left not Pharaoh, that sturdy rebel, till he had beaten the breath out of his body, nor will he cease pursuing men with his plagues, one in the neck of another, till they throw the traitor's head over the wall."

This language, though creative, is a vague treatment of the passage. It does show the sense that these things that begin unfolding are not just another surge in crises for the earth's inhabitants ... but rather a rapid-fire accumulation that is unlike anything that has come before. We will get to

¹ In sermon on February 5, 2017 I identified the following with regard to "nation" meaning "culture" and the concept of "divers places":

"The second point deserving some fleshing out is to understand what is meant in this passage by use of the word "nation". Since we all have been born and raised in political frameworks referred to as "nations", we use that word as we were taught to use it. We live in a "nation" called the United States of America. Our dear friend Matthias came from a "nation" called United Kingdom or Britain. We read and hear of the United Nations, understanding that it is an accumulation of cooperative countries or "nations" that work toward their mutual interests. But that is not the full import of the word in this passage. The word goes beyond national borders. It includes cultural differences. The Greek word is "ethnos", from which we get our English word "ethnic" or "ethnicity". The conflicts, to be more clear about my point, arise not simply between sovereign entities -- like the perpetual boiling and roiling between China, Russia, North Korea, European Union, South America, "Muslim-dominant nations" (that Trump issued his Executive Order about), etc. -- it also includes the culture wars that boil over within the nations. Cultural fault lines run across families, communities, cities, states, and nations! When peace is taken -- like is referenced by Christ in this passage, and by John in Revelation chapter six -- it is peace at every level of society that is affected. Civil war ... on steroids! [The third point] is a discussion about the term in this passage "divers places". This word translated "divers" is understood by those who read its usage to intimate things taking place throughout the earth or, as it relates to diseases (Luke 4:40), they run throughout the body. When it's divers tongues, it means multiple languages. But, in addition to expressing multiplicity of places and points of impact, this Greek word "kata" (kat-ah') includes the notion of frequency. So, in any place you see the term "divers" being used, you should understand it to include both expansiveness and frequency! To apply it more specifically, the unleashing of events as spoken of by Christ is going to not only be that it is erupting in strange and various locations -- but that it seems to happen as a near daily occurrence!"

that component here shortly, but first some more analysis of what these introductory terms – “nation” and “kingdom” – mean.

“Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?” (John 18:33-35)

Here we find Pilate referring to the Jews as a “nation”, though they clearly were then not a sovereign state, but a culture within the governing influence of the Roman sovereign state. In another passage using this same Greek word the elect of God are called “**a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people**” (**1 Peter 2:9**), clearly not intending a sovereign socio-political grouping but those who share in a common system of guiding principles regardless the legal entity in which they were born. So we do not need to be uncertain that the condition being described by Christ in identifying how “**nation shall rise against nation**” is cultural conflict.

“¶ For, behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, doth take away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stay and the staff, the whole stay of bread, and the whole stay of water, The mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, The captain of fifty, and the honourable man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator. And I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. And the people shall be oppressed, every one by another, and every one by his neighbour: the child shall behave himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honourable.” (Isaiah 3:1-5)

In this passage out of Isaiah, we have a double application of history and eschatology. The words follow hard on one of the most profound eschatological sermons of Isaiah in chapter two where he declares of the last days to the elect; “**cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils**” (**Isaiah 2:22**)². The words are also a plain prophecy of how the ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah will be undone by rot from within. More relevantly, though, is the declaration of how the strength of the city, state, nation, even the world will be undone. What will be the condition that will facilitate the utter collapse? Cultural dissolution.

I hope you all here understand that the specific structure that is undone by God in human affairs is not the focus of my attention ... because it is utterly irrelevant to the governance of providence. Let us take America for a small and relatively recent example of my point here. 245 years ago this fledgling group of humans instituted a government in the northeastern part of North America that eventually expanded across the land that is currently considered the United States of America. In that place, at that time, there were within the society “**the mighty man, and the man of war, the judge, and the prophet, and the prudent, and the ancient, the captain of fifty, and the honourable**

² Sermon preached on June 22, 2014 regarding Isaiah’s prophecy in chapter two: <http://bit.ly/CeaseYeFromMan>

man, and the counsellor, and the cunning artificer, and the eloquent orator.” Eleven distinct offices among groups of humans ... who were granted by God the express capacity to build up the stay and staff – the structural framework – of a nation. Civil intelligence ... military intelligence ... spiritual gravitas ... prudence and wisdom ... discipline and order ... honorable living and articulate about the proper way to lead a life granted generously by the Lord God. It doesn’t mean they were all saints, being blessed with eternal gifts of life. It means they were all granted temporal wisdom and strength and sobriety and for the most part paid close attention to those to whom God had granted His wisdom so that they would have temporal blessings. It was a strong nation. The stay and staff – all of the critical foundations for a nation of people to thrive – was solidly in place.

So also was in place the forms of human interaction that would, at the appointed hour, bring about the undoing of that stay and staff. The “**mighty**” became tyrants, the “**man of war**” became a petty and abusive murderer, the “**judge**” became a political hack, the “**prophet**” turned false and deceitful, the “**prudent**” became a self-aggrandizing fool, the “**ancient**” forfeited the wisdom of his age for pleasure, the “**captain of fifty**” became a disordered and lazy clock-watcher, the “**honourable man**” shamefully forfeited his position out of fleshly desire for filthy living, the “**counsellor**” replaced pure scripture with the shame of psychology, the “**cunning artificer**” was replaced with mass production, and the “**eloquent orator**” makes his money with “alternative facts”, fake news, and the inability to say anything that anyone can trust. **“For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool:” (Isaiah 51:8)**

What is then described in Isaiah chapter three and here in Christ’s words is the result of this rot. The foundation is undone ... the garment is unwearable and shows the holes in the destroyed fabric. Cultural patchwork trying to cover the gaps left by the destruction of the fabric strain and tear. The whole of it cannot cover the body politic and chaos ensues. Culture is at war with culture ... each of these foolish groups imagining that though they have with one voice rejected that God who gave them the stay and the staff, they can still make it work. Each one, at an increasingly visceral level, despises the other. Now if we’re honest, we see indicators of this in the earth today. Not in one or two places, but in nearly every part of the globe the inter-cultural conflict rages. Indeed, in another place describing the conditions of things that will immediately precede His millennial reign, Christ said:

“The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.” (Luke 12:53)

It’s systemic. And to see another degree of this disruption of peace, we should look a bit more fully at the term “**kingdom**” as it is used here and elsewhere in Scripture. In the Hebrew/Chaldee language of the Old Testament we find that in most instances when “kingdom” is used, it is referencing an actual realm of sovereignty or dominion. Sometimes it will identify a king and “his

kingdom” so that it focuses on the root verb tense of a person becoming royalty ... where the name of the great ancient idol “*Malek*” is used.

Similarly, the Greek term that underpins “**kingdom**” in this passage comes from a root that goes beyond the simple notion of a sovereign entity or people. The word here used is “*basileia*” (“*bas-il-i'-ah*”) which references the office of a ruler, not just the kingdom he rules; “*not to be confused with an actual kingdom but rather the right or authority to rule over a kingdom*”. Another definition of the word includes “*a kingdom, the territory subject to the rule of a king*”. The specific word in this passage derives from the Greek “*basileus*” (“*bas-il-yooce*”) which expressly refers to “*leader of the people, prince, commander, lord of the land, king*”. That further supports the use of the term in our passage to refer to the ruler of the kingdom at least as much as the “**kingdom**” being ruled. So, you might find it akin to calling it “Putin’s Russia” or “Erdogan’s Turkey” or “Xi Jinping’s China” ... referring to the leader as an expression of the personality of the kingdom he rules.

But behind the word “*basileus*” is the Greek root word “*basis*” (“*bas'-ece*”), referring to “*that with which one steps; the foot*”. When we walk, we rely on the strength of the foot ... the landing pad, you might call it, for the body. The foundation upon which – the basis for which – a person takes any steps or makes any movement of themselves toward their cause. When we go forward to preach ... upon what foundational doctrines do we walk? For example, when we engage with one another and with those whom our God has placed us in our daily walk, our structural basis is charity. Christ is the basis, upon whom we stand ... His word is the structure upon which we walk. So in the context of this warning from Christ, what do we properly take away from this etymological lesson?

Demagogues. Celebrities. Cults of personality. Conditions where not just structured sovereign entities are leading people to be in perpetual conflict ... human beings fly under flags of personalities to engage in every form of societal disruption. Lines of sovereign governorship are blurred, and humans with outsized influence create philosophical “camps” based upon their personalities. I read a story recently where an unelected activist was declared the *de facto* governor of Texas because his populist momentum seems to be far outshining the official influence of the elected governor. Celebrities speak on political issues and suddenly followers and opponents of their cause ignore government mandates and take up battle camps against each other. This “**kingdom against kingdom**” notion can also include uprisings between subordinate sovereign entities within state or national jurisdictions. Cities against states; states against nations; everyone wants their own show and the notion of obedience to any authority with which they disagree has completely left the conversation. I believe this is the condition of things being described in these words of Christ.

In the prophecy of Isaiah chapter three a passage that has always struck me as discordant is given more depth when we consider these words of Christ in the context of the dismantling of society worldwide. He says:

"When a man shall take hold of his brother of the house of his father, saying, Thou hast clothing, be thou our ruler, and let this ruin be under thy hand: In that day shall he swear, saying, I will not be an healer; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing: make me not a ruler of the people." (Isaiah 3:6-7)

Because the conditions of things brought forth upon the cities and states and nations, the confidence in any official kingdom or king has dwindled to nothing. Trapp says “*this is a further mischief that government shall go a-begging, and scarce one be found that shall hold it worth having.*” It reminds me of the histrionics we observed this past summer where mobs screamed “*defund the police!*” It’s irrelevant what you think of law enforcement, for purposes of this point, but when the governed turn blindly on the government there’s no stability to be found. When stability is lost, systems collapse and cease to have any actual value to the population. Increasingly, nobody wants to be branded with the chaos and fallout, so they refuse to take positions of leadership. It’s a perfect recompense ... and it’s all at the prophesied hand of the Lord!

I think one last scriptural reference will be valuable to solidify this concept for us. When Ezekiel is referencing the rise of Antichrist in chapters 38-39, look at the way this wicked man collects world armies like a vacuum cleaner:

"I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords: Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet: Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee." (Ezekiel 38:4-6)

The language doesn’t depict this Gog conquering those people ... but rather they are “***assembled unto [him]***” (Ezekiel 38:7). By what powerful influence does this happen? You see indicators here that fighters are collected from near and far as both kings and peoples are inexplicably attracted to this great champion. People of society have become accustomed to giving their affiliations to whomever they feel are their champions for the present cause ... today it may be some sodomite cause championed by a governor across the nation, tomorrow it might be Black Lives Matter battle lines being drawn in the U.K. by an activist, and then it’s the most recent climate activist in Norway marching to disrupt an international pipeline. Where my personal interests lie, that is the person or movement I will align with regardless of what nation or state I call home. It’s a condition of disquiet; wholly devoid of structure and discipline across ordinary lines.

As Trapp’s words set out above (about nation rising against nation) hint, it appears strongly to me that this condition has the same earmarks of the opening of the Day of the Lord that the removal of the seals depicts in the 6th chapter of Revelation. The second seal’s removal depicts the collapse of peace across all lines of society, as the rider of the red horse is given to “***take peace from the earth***” (Revelation 6:4). That condition leads to specific conflicts where men “***kill one another***” (*ibid*), but

the collapse of civil governmental structure is a distinct and (I believe) the larger part of the judgment laid on the earth. That is the condition that earmarks the introduction of the Lord's Revelation.

The three apostles sharing the words of Christ, when taken collectively, give a frightful picture of the upheavals in the natural world that go well beyond anything that has been seen in history. Partly because of the severity, partly because of the atypical occurrences, and partly because of the volume at which they are unleashed. Mankind marvels when God has expressed extraordinarily little of His power. When Nebuchadnezzar was given the mind of a beast for seven years – a startling, yet infinitely insignificant expression of God's might and dominion – he said:

"And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" (Daniel 4:34)

What Christ is here describing is the time when not just one man's arrogant impudence is being addressed, but that of a world of men. Mankind has been treasuring up wrath against this "**day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God**" (**Romans 2:5**), and now the time has come for that wrath to begin being displayed like no human or man-conceived superpower can think to display it. This wrath comes in the form of:

- Famines
- Pestilences
- Earthquakes
- Troubles
- Fearful sights
- Great signs from heaven

Famines: The Greek word carries the notion of destitution ... scarcity of harvest ... that the supply is inferior and lacking. When preaching on the third seal of Revelation chapter six, I discussed in some depth the notion of famine³. When identified as a stand-alone condition we can look backward through history to see them overwhelm different nations, with few areas unaffected at some point in time. It is a weapon in God's arsenal to move mankind to action in accordance with His providential governance, including for punishment (Genesis 42, 2 Samuel 21, 2 Kings 8, Jeremiah

³ On November 17, 2019 I preached a sermon on the starvation prophesied at the removal of the third seal:
<https://tinyurl.com/WBC20191117PDF>

27, Ezekiel 5, Luke 15, parabolically, and prophesied of Babylon in Revelation 18). The scope of the famine being here referenced is an aggravation of the other conditions that are described. Like the black horse of Revelation six follows hard upon the red horse of conflict, so too do we find Christ declaring the state of famine He references to follow hard on the conflicts in nations and kingdoms. “All these” He says “***are the beginning of sorrows***”. Cumulatively, these events are expressions of the beginning of many and greater things to then follow shortly. Between 1959 and 1961 China faced what is reputed to be the greatest single famine in history, resulting in 15+ million deaths ... about 2% of that nation’s population at that time. Certainly severe and horrific by ordinary standards, but would that be considered sufficiently significant to be read as a milepost to the return of Christ?

United Nations agencies have very recently declared that 34 million souls in the Middle East and African parts of the world are facing death by famine imminently if buckets of funding don’t get poured onto the problem. Just a few short months ago, that number was only around 22 million. More interesting is the factor that is now emerging as driving the risk up at a steady ... almost irreversible ... rate. Climate change. Increasingly, extreme weather is disrupting the capacity to grow food. In studies of different soils across the globe the effects of moisture, heat, and parasitic micro-organisms are demonstrating the risk of catastrophic impact from these getting severely out of balance. If a sovereign God has brought this condition of earth-wide climate shift to break the ability of humans to sustain crop growth – and consequently to feed all those creatures humans raise and eat by use of crops – the backbone of all human ability to live is going to be crippled. We should be greatly confident of this truth. If God has appointed it to come to pass, it will most assuredly come to pass, and humans will have no strength or wisdom to stop it.

Add to that the pestilences. This word refers to every form of pestilent condition that can be known to man. We are presently living through a pandemic that to date has infected about 125 million worldwide, with a death toll currently clocking in at around 3 million. By comparison, the Spanish Flu of 1918 reportedly infected over 500 million and killed an estimated 50 million. This is a profoundly sober work of our God in the earth today, and we should by all means preach about it with a loud voice. But the word used here by Christ is not restricted in meaning. To grasp this in practice, we don’t have to be searching for a repeat of the economically destructive event of COVID-19 ... or an amplification of it ... or a variant of it. These are certainly possibilities as the scientists are suggesting that time is running out before variants will outpace the vaccination work and it will all become futile and meaningless. But the Greek word here, which is used only three times, is decidedly broader in scope. Any plague or pest is intended. Whether it be a disease of the human body, the presence of some grotesque pest in numbers that overwhelm the human population, or a plague that decimates the animal kingdom upon which humans rely for their ability to live.

When John writes of “***a pale horse***” (**Revelation 6:8**) Death and Hell is said to have power “***over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with ... death***” (*ibid*). Expositors all seem to be in consensus that this word “***death***”, as a mechanism by which men of the earth are killed, references pestilence. Gill

goes a bit more in depth including: “*that is, with the pestilence, which, by the Targumist, and other Jewish writers, is commonly called ‘death,’ because it sweeps away and carries off such large numbers with it*”. This understanding of the intent of the prophet’s words helps to further see the congruity with Christ’s words recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In both places, I believe we are seeing the same period of time. In both places, I believe we are seeing the beginning of the Day of the Lord. And there is much more in common between these two writings, that I believe will become apparent as we continue examining this portion of Christ’s sermon.

The different order in the expressions ... recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke ... I believe helps to see that an epochal series of events are being described. Epochal ... a period of time marked by specific conditions or events. Here’s why I express this. In each of the recordings, the same things are described but they are not in the same order. There are specific categories of events – just like there are in the removal of the seals – but they are not sequentially ordered. In Matthew, the order is conflict, then famine, then pestilence, then earthquakes. Mark has it ordered as conflict, earthquakes, famines, and then “**troubles**”. Luke puts it as conflict, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, “**fearful sights and great signs**”. As though the words of Christ are being paraphrased to describe a period of time during which events are ignited across the whole scope of the globe. The events are all consistent, but since they’re not sequential they are not being recorded as sequential. As we go forward from this part of Christ’s sermon, we will see additional indicators of some fluidity in timing and/or sequence. I don’t take these as proof of invalidity, but rather that our friends are expressing the tenor and import of Christ’s sermon as they received it with the help of the Holy Ghost.

The Greek word for earthquakes is another delightful exploration. “*Seismos*” is a term we’re familiar with. Though we mostly associate it with the study of earthquakes and related phenomenon, the word is actually much more expansive. Coming from the Greek root “*seio*” (“*si-o*”), it expresses simply “*to shake, agitate, cause to tremble; of men, to be thrown into a tremor, to quake for fear*”. So as we consider what is being expressed by Christ, we are not to be limited to only the massive numbers of earthquakes that are now being recorded. An interesting video on YouTube shows the rate of earthquakes in the 20th century that were equal to or greater than 6.0 on the Richter scale. In the associated writing it explains that the explosion or recorded earthquakes at about 1970 is due to the significant increase in the ability to measure and record the strength and location of earthquakes. Earthquakes are the first term thought of when “*Seismos*” is used, but it includes every type of event that is of such significance and moment that it shakes the earth and the men in it. This includes great storms, great changes in the ebb and flow of water, great destructions by men ... whether through their endless lust to mine deeper and deeper into the crust or their bloodlust for detonation of nuclear devices and other warheads. What is being expressed is the outcome of great shakings, not a restricted view of the nature of those appointed events.

As discussed under our examination of the sixth seal of Revelation, the opening salvo is “**a great earthquake**” (**Revelation 6:12**), making use of this same Greek word which includes “*a commotion,*

i.e., (of the air) a gale, (of the ground) an earthquake). This is another commonality between Christ and John in describing this period's events. In both of these prophetic descriptions, we could accurately see the word used as describing an actual cracking open and physical upheavals in the earth's crust – or a blasting about in the air contained within the earth's atmosphere (or first heaven) – or both breaking forth simultaneously.

When Mark adds to the list of conditions “**troubles**”, and Luke adds “**fearful sights and great signs ... from heaven**”, we have described an almost perfect symmetry with John’s words – albeit in much, much more detail – in the Revelation. The Greek word “**troubles**” intimates taking away a man’s “*calmness of mind*” or “*to strike one’s spirit with fear and dread*” ... a generic expression of a profoundly agitated state being brought upon mankind. Luke’s “**fearful sights**” comes from a similar expression, including an inexplicable phobia or condition of being overtaken by the fear without even a rational explanation for it. Added to the fearful and troubling sights in the earth, Luke also articulates such commotions coming forth from the heavens. It is a perplexing thing that nearly every expositor is left to either ignore this unmistakable component of Christ’s words ... or to give it bizarre and indefinite treatment, for example:

Matthew Henry: “*uncommon appearances in the clouds, comets and blazing stars, which frighten the ordinary sort of beholders, and have always been looked upon as ominous, and portending something bad.*”

Calvin: “*Luke adds likewise earthquakes, and signs from heaven, with respect to which, though we have no authentic history of them, yet it is enough that they were predicted by Christ.*”

But John describes these signs from heaven!

“the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” (Revelation 6:12-14)

These are expansively detailed signs from heaven ... and except that those expositors had locked themselves into an indefensible examination of Christ’s words on Mt. Olivet – that His focus was the impending destruction of the temple in 70 AD – they would not have had to cram their analysis into an unaccommodating sock! Of course Christ was telling those sweet friends of ours about the same vision that John was granted on Patmos ... though in much more cryptic language. The promised earth conditions are identical ... conflict, starvation, pestilence, widespread death, and then the sore eruption of chaos in earth and heaven as the combatants over the eternal covenant of grace move from one jurisdiction to another. I’ve covered this series of events in great detail in a previous

sermon⁴, so it would be an unnecessary repetition to bring them all forth here. But I am wholly convinced that the scriptures evidence the common thread between how Christ describes this period of time in His sermon and how John's vision on Patmos depicted the earth's condition at the opening of the Day of the Lord.

Which structurally, then, leads us to an examination of how Matthew and Mark record Christ closing this descriptive period of time in His prophecy to His apostles. Matthew says "**[a]ll these are the beginning of sorrows**" ... whereas Mark slightly alters it – though communicates the EXACT SAME THING with "**these are the beginnings of sorrows**". Both are indicating that there are multiple things kicking off at the same time ... either by making the plural at the beginning with the expression "all" or by expressing multiple "beginnings". It comports with the collective and coordinating nature of the events ... conflict, starvation, pestilence, disturbances in the earth and heavens, death. When they all erupt in the earth ... it displays the starting point of the tremendous and seemingly endless stream of sorrows.

The "sorrows" being begun with these events is the Greek word "*odin*" ("o-deen") and it has two definitions:

- “1) *the pain of childbirth, travail pain, birth pangs*
- 2) *intolerable anguish, in reference to the dire calamities preced[ing] the advent of the Messiah”*

That's the Greek/English dictionary definition. Two unavoidable outcomes that bring with it guaranteed suffering in the process of fulfillment. I cannot presume to know how much pain and anguish of body and mind comes upon the human mother when her hour is come which is made expressly part of the curse from Adam's sin: "**in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children**" (**Genesis 3:16**) But there is a parallel between that sorrow for her in nature and the sorrow that will come when "**the earth [will] be made to bring forth in one day [for] as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.**" (**Isaiah 66:8**). It is when that awful (for the earth dweller) and glorious (for the new nation) matter comes to term that it will be time for the unflinching suffering to gallop across this globe and set her inhabitants to trembling in fear and disquiet.

Luke does not expressly record these words from Christ, though I would not have you to think that his leaving it out makes it of less import in how he continues with what he heard. Luke spends about eight verses describing another phenomenon associated with this initial crisis period, where Matthew and Mark spend four or five verses. We're not going to go into detail on that phenomenon today, but it has to do with what is unfolding against the saints in the earth during this period. There is a nexus between the matters we've examined today and what is going on with the elect in the earth during the same period. There's still a good bit of work to do on this period that Christ is describing.

⁴ On March 29, 2020 I did a sermon on the sixth seal of Revelation chapter six: <https://tinyurl.com/WBC20200329PDF>

In closing this sermon, though, I want to reiterate that the Christ is here sharing with His apostles what has been established in God's providence from before the world began. We know that the Covenant of Grace requires that Christ experiences both cross and crown ... "***the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.***" (**1 Peter 1:11**). Certainly, the pre-crucified Christ knew (and knows) well the exact detail of how both will unfold. It would utterly be farcical to pretend that when the question is put before Him by those for whom His suffering is appointed ... that he would speak inconsistently with what He reveals to all his servants the prophets. It is one matter. It is one cause. It is one resolution. We should, therefore, be able to see – when He is determined to reveal it – perfect symmetry between His words to every prophet, every apostle, every servant.

I will do more when I'm granted further opportunity, Lord willing. I love you all. Amen.