



“Love Grown Cold”

Matthew 24:3-14 (Part 2)

by Pastor Tim Dodson

of JF Believers Church

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Matthew 24:3-14 *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?" 4 And Jesus answered and said to them:*

"Take heed that no one deceives you. 5 "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. 6 "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. 8 "All these are the beginning of sorrows. 9 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. 10 "And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. 11 "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. 12 "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. 13 "But he who endures to the end shall be saved. 14 "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

If you are a movie watcher, it seems that whenever the future is presented on film, it is invariably dreadful and apocalyptic. All of it like a scene from “Road Warrior.” We imagine chaos and anarchy, and the complete breakdown of society and government. It seems that mankind...even in the secular realm, feel that our world doesn't stand a chance and that eventually it is all going to end very badly. In their defense, there are certainly those who in panicked desperation are picketing, blogging, shouting, and boycotting in attempt to force different behaviors from mankind that would change our apparent bleak destiny. However, all of such seems to be having little if any discernable effect.

Often we can become panicked at what seems to be the unraveling of the world around us. As verse 6 says... “wars in every corner of the globe, murder, mayhem, and chaos.” But let us not pass by the next sentence, “*see that you are not troubled!*” The world without Christ has every reason to be concerned, but those of us that are truly His must remember that Matthew 28:20 promises “...*be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*” And Hebrews 13:5 saying “...*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*”

Jesus here and elsewhere is clear that such events will indeed come to pass. Even the *novice* of history can clearly see that such is the case. Wars have come and gone, and more have replaced the previous, yet we are still here. Many before us have packed their bags and moved to some island, remote world corner, or other perceived “safe” location. The irony of such action, is that such a move just proves their lack of knowledge and/or understanding of last days' events. Where could one hide from the wrath of God as detailed in the Book of Revelation?

The world *will indeed* “come apart at the seams.” It will seemingly do so right before our eyes. “*But the end is not yet.*”

24:7-8 *“For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.”*

Can anyone deny that this verse is being manifest in our world even at this very moment? Again, if we simply were to read the papers, or click on the evening news, one would see clearly that the famines, the pestilence, and the earthquakes are out there and seemingly on the increase. All small pieces of the final picture. All precursors to that final shoe that is sure to drop. While it is sometimes hard to believe, all of this is *just the beginning*.

The *beginning* of our sorrow...

Eventually, as verse 9 says *“They will deliver you up to tribulation...and kill you...and you will be hated...”* Perhaps this verse is hard for us to fathom in our pseudo-Christian nation, America. But then, who just a few years ago could have imagined the horror of 9/11, or the anti-Christian rhetoric that has occurred in the past decade? Certainly there are plenty of believers in other countries who know the reality of this verse clearly and firsthand. Maybe we can be lulled to passivity here in America where there is a roof over our heads, food on our tables, and a church on the corner. The mess out there can seem so far away from us if we avoid thinking about it too much.

Verse 10 pulls back the curtain to allow us to see a glimpse of more than just the coming chaos of the corporate world and the seeming unraveling of the natural world. Verse 10 makes it personal and individual, saying *“And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another.”* The word “offended” is misleading in our common day vernacular. It has here the meaning to “turn away” or to “fall away.”

Please note something critical to our grasp of this passage. By the language herein we gather that this is not speaking of the overt blindness of the world...the corporate rejection of a God by humanity at large. This speaks of those who *at one time had the truth and turned away from it*. They betrayed God and one another and began to hate one another. Eventually...because of the free-for-all culture...no rules, no right and wrong, our love of God will “grow cold.” These folks herein spoken of have at one time *“tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come”* but have turned away from God and His ways.

Hebrews 6: 4-8: *For it is impossible to bring back to repentance those who were once enlightened - those who have experienced the good things of heaven and shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the power of the age to come — and who then turn away from God. It is impossible to bring such people back to repentance; by rejecting the Son of God, they themselves are nailing him to the cross once again and holding him up to public shame. When the ground soaks up the falling rain and bears a good crop for the farmer, it has God’s blessing. But if a field bears thorns and thistles, it is useless. The farmer will soon condemn that field and burn it.*

In the last days it is clear herein that lawlessness will abound. Man will become more and more sinful, creative in his inventions, steeped in his flesh. And the flesh is insatiable. There is never enough...the flesh is never satisfied. The world is unrelenting in its call, and we...*as the world so often says*, have “fallen out of love.” Revelation chapter 2 speaks of the church in Ephesus. Even though that passage records a lot of righteous works from this church it also tells of their departure from their “first love,” and everything else is lost in the shadow of that one issue!

This state of being rarely comes upon us like a flip of a light switch. No, it is far more subtle and nefarious. Such a state begins when we begin to allow compromise to enter into our lives. We allow bitterness to invade our soul, and anger and hatred eventually consume us. The display of scathing hatred I have witnessed in those

who claim to be indwelt with a God of love is staggering. We begin to indulge in the flesh, sacrifice the absolute truth for a half truth, and surrender bits and pieces of ourselves and our faith until we are rendered unrecognizable. Finally one day with a flick of his finger, Satan knocks us out altogether.

All because we have allowed our love to grow cold. All because we have allowed our love for something or someone to step ahead of Jesus Christ and ahead of the truth. We have allowed “other god’s before” the true and living God.

Often, there will be those who, in light of verse 12, will point an accusatory finger toward a particular church organization or group, passing judgement as to their “love that has grown cold.” But such a premise is often misplaced because we frankly fail to understand what it means to so love, and thus so we stand in error as to whether it is being fulfilled or abandoned.

Understanding the word translated "love" is a vital element to a correct grasp on this passage. In this case, we find the well-known Greek word *agape*, the love that people have only because God has given it to them. (Romans 5:5; II Timothy 1:7; I John 2:5; 4:7-8). The people whose *agape* love is *growing cold* must have had it in the first place, so it refers to those whom God has called into a relationship with Him (John 6:44) and have at some point walked in His light and presence and experienced that kind of love.

Knowing the difference between this *agape* love and the other types of love mentioned in the Bible, as well as the *world's* very fluid definition, is critical to one's theology as well as our faith practice. *Phileo* love means "to be a friend to" or "to be fond of" a person or object, indicating "having affection for." Coming from that Greek word is our word *Philadelphia*. Philadelphia love means "fraternal affection" or "brotherly love." *Strong's Concordance* notes that *agape* "is wider, embracing especially the judgment and the *deliberate assent of the will* as a matter of *principle, duty and propriety.*" *Agape* love is manifested first and foremost toward God, because it is a dutiful, submissive, and obedient love. It is a love that does what is right regardless of how a person feels about it. In other words, *agape* love has a *moral* core rather than an *emotional* one.

The Bible shows that, in general, we show *agape* love to the Father through our obedience and submission. We show *agape* love to each other through service and sacrifice, just as Jesus' example of love was to those around Him and to us. (John 13:34; 15:12-13; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 5:2, 25; I John 3:16, 18; 4:9-12). This is the love that has so overtly “gone cold.” The great author Fulton J. Sheen once was quoted saying “The sign of the end of the world will be selfishness.” Our love moves away from God and others and becomes wholly a love for self.

While our *agape* love will grow cold because of lawlessness and all that that means, there may still be present a brotherly love, kindness, and human affection. We may still be “nice people” and a “friendly church” and help each other out, all while this love “agape” is wholly absent. We can do that without God. His overt presence and indwelling is not necessary for us to be an active social club. Remember, we show *agape* love to God through obedience. So when disobedience increases, *agape* grows cold. This is not just about the sins of *commission*...that which we do that is wrong and against God. This is also about the sins of *omission*. That which we fail to do that we know we are supposed to do.

This is ultimately about the breakdown in the relationship with God. Since that most important relationship is the **source** of that *agape* love. If it is waning, then it will be evident in other relationships and interactions. A symptom may be that sacrificial love toward other people is decreasing, but the real cause is that the relationship with God is cooling off. When I fall out of love with God, the vacuum that results will suck in a replacement that is far more emotionally and physically titillating; *ME*.

Lawlessness not only describes that which is without the law or absent the presence and existence of law, but also encompasses the disregard for and/or the actual breach of the law of God. It means not having any laws, but also means living as if there were no laws even when there is. A person who rejects God's authority doesn't care what God thinks about his lifestyle, or feels that he or she has a "pass"...an excuse to breach the demands of God to love. Thus lawlessness replaces God's law with my desires and will. With a heart of entitlement, I become the law unto myself. There is rebellion against the right of God to rule and govern His creation.

Pastor and author Stewart Weber says: "*There had been many seasons in history during which lawlessness increased greatly, and there would be many to come (Ge 6:1-7; Book of Judges; Book of 2 Kings; and in the future, 2Th 2:1-17; 2Ti 3:1ff). The United States seems to be on a fast track into just such an era of anarchy. One of the consequences of the abandonment of God's principles is the hardening and deadening of people's love for one another and especially for God. The deadening of people's love for other people manifests itself in the devaluing of life, a greater focus on one's own pleasure and protection, and a decrease in sensitivity to the needs of others. People's hearts for others grow numb when they are battered with injustice and unrighteousness. A person's capacity to love others is damaged by misuse and abuse. The deadening of people's love for God is demonstrated through a loss of conscience. Right becomes wrong, and wrong becomes right (Isa. 5:20) and people lose the capacity to recognize this perversion. Society sees an increase in "senseless" crimes (such as shootings in schools) and wonders how anyone could become so hardened and unfeeling as to lash out in these ways. The cause is society's abandonment of God's values.*" (Holman New Testament Commentary)

Verse 13 says "*But he who endures to the end shall be saved.*" It is easy to see this verse, as many of the cults do today, in the view that a person's ultimate salvation comes through endurance and survival. Surviving the onslaught of the coming tribulation. But in light of the whole of scriptural teaching, we know that *salvation from sin*, in terms of new birth, is a free gift on the basis of *grace through faith*.

Indeed, *physical salvation* from all of these things will only occur for those who endure. But endurance for those who are saved is not the *act* which saves them, rather the proof and the final reward for those who *are indeed born again!*

But let us not write off this verse: *Endurance is indeed critical!* If we are born again we *will endure!* If we do not, we were never truly transformed, never truly empowered by the Spirit of God. The power to endure is not our own, but that of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit *does not fail*, the Holy Spirit *always* endures. If we fail to endure, then we have pushed away the presence of the Holy Spirit.

How do we do this? How do we endure? How do we keep from falling out of love with Christ?

All love is nurtured and strengthened through investment of our time, finances, passions and service. Our marital relationships are strengthened when we spend time with our spouses and where communication is a priority. There is an old story that goes like this:

An old man was teaching his grandson about life: "A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight and it is between two dogs. One is evil—he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego." He continued, "The other is good – he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith. The same fight is going on inside you—and inside every other person, too." The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather: "Which dog will win?" The old man simply replied, "The one you feed."