

#197 “When Loves Grows Cold”
by Brent Barnett
www.relevantbibleteaching.com

Matthew 24 is full of events that will point to signs of the last days (see also Daniel 12:4). No man knows the exact day or hour of Christ’s return, but there are signposts to catch our attention that time is running short. These include wars and rumors of wars (v. 6), an increase in earthquakes and famines (v. 7), professing Christians falling away from the faith (v. 10), and a rise in false prophets teaching false gospels and leading God’s people astray (v. 11). Verse 12 says, “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.” Many fixate upon the apocalyptic themes that even pop culture picks up on such as the earthquakes and famines, but they forget this very simple yet profound statement that people’s love will grow cold. The word for “love” is *agape*, and it speaks of good will and benevolence toward our fellow man. This does not even necessarily mean Christlike love to the fullest extent of selflessness and being sacrificial. There is a sense in which the world has, at times, understood to some degree what it takes to get along. In the 1950’s, for example, parents who had experienced the Great Depression created a culture of morality that penetrated all aspects of society. It was normal and safe to leave doors unlocked at the time. Now, we worry about perverts snatching our kids while our backs are turned. We are worried we will be wrongfully sued if we just look at somebody the wrong way. We know that our politicians are lying to us all the time, consistently breaking promises and catering to those with means. People are constantly trying to garner an angle on us to get our money, and lawlessness and crime are so widespread that our jails are filled to capacity. We are a fallen, twisted, and broken culture because our love has grown cold. As sin increases, love diminishes. As morality increases, love multiplies. The free love and rebellion of the sixties was not an increase in love but an increase in lawlessness. Thus, the net result is a culture today of passed down lawlessness and nihilism. Few look to God for direction, and even fewer attempt to heed His commands.

We shouldn’t really expect the world to know how to love given that only believers can truly love (1 John 4:7-8). But there is a sense in which unbelievers take care of those who they like because they see the benefit of getting along with others and making friends along the way (Matthew 5:46-47). It is not to say that there is real selflessness present, but the world does have a concept of good will toward others. What is particularly indicting in this passage, however, is that even this secularized getting along with one another vaporizes as the end gets nearer. There are many who would kill to preserve an image, and there are many who use position to exploit. There are constant exposés of various scandals of immorality, lying, deception, corruption, etc. It seems as though all layers of society have been corrupted and compromised. Few things are what they seem, and few people can really be trusted. It is a sad commentary, but it is a reality.

As believers, we have the opportunity to stand out more brightly and boldly than ever before because following Christ and claiming allegiance to Jesus is so extremely countercultural that it is sure to get noticed (Matthew 5:14). Unfortunately, because love

has grown cold and lawlessness abounds, Jesus is not a popular figure because He is convicting. Thus, we can expect persecution. Matthew 24:9 says, "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name." The culmination of this hatred and crusade against Christians will come during the tribulation period. Those who get saved during that time will have it very rough, but praise God that we are promised to be raptured beforehand if we choose Christ now! (1 Thessalonians 1:10, Revelation 3:10) However, there is a sense that even before the tribulation that we can expect persecution to be on the increase (2 Timothy 3:12). The people who call those engaged in corruption to change and who correctly assess the blame usually are made into the scapegoats. This has happened to Christians throughout history, from Nero, to Hitler, to Stalin, to modern day college campuses, to the media, etc. Christians are consistently mocked and degraded as being unloving, intolerant, etc. Yet, rather than strike back in anger, we need to thank God that we can suffer for His sake. As Matthew 5:11-12 says, "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." We need to be compassionate and patient, praying for our enemies and loving those who hate us (Matthew 5:44). If we don't showcase real love, who will?

So as we watch society decay, love grow cold, and persecution increase, may we stand firm, speak boldly, and love truly. Our lives will be a stark contrast, leading some to curse God and others to bless Him. For the sake of our Savior and for the sake of the few who will be saved, let us show the world what it means to love as we walk in purity before our Lord.