Introduction:

Jesus spoke about the future as the One who knows the end from the beginning, as the Wisdom of God. He is the only trustworthy futurist that has ever lived. The predictions of others are at best educated guesses based on the study of trends, and knowledge of what has happened in the past. Jesus spoke what was given to Him by the God of history, the Lord of history. We must give attention to what He said, especially as it relates to your lives as His faithful followers.

We must not treat His words about the future like those of the weatherman who is basing his predictions on observation of what has happened in the past. Rather the predictions of Jesus are based on knowledge of the future that is as sure as His knowledge of the present and the past. He knows all things. He knows all things perfectly.

Jesus warned His faithful followers of trials ahead, and since we are following in their footsteps, the words apply to us. One of the trials that His people would face would be living in a world where lawlessness is multiplying. “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will
grow cold.” This text has been a thorn in my spirit for a couple of months. As I was reading through Matthew a couple of months ago, it stuck in my soul and I have not been able to shake loose from it. The version I was reading at the time appropriately translated the word “lawlessness”. Wickedness is not a bad translation, but lawlessness is better. The old version translates it as “iniquity”. John revealed that, “Sin is lawlessness.” So the very essence of sin is lawlessness.

Lawlessness is better because it lets us look behind the deed to the attitude that prompts the deed. Lawlessness is first an attitude of rebellion, and then it is a rebellious deed. It is an attitude that says, “I want to do things my way. I will make a god out of my own conscience. I will determine what is right for me. I don’t care what God says, I will do it my way.”

While Jesus makes this statement in the context of prophecy about the latter days, the thing stated has been true throughout the age. When lawlessness multiplies, the saints of God will be put to the test.

How do we know when lawlessness is multiplying? It is multiplying when there is a decrease in the fear of the Lord. It is multiplying where there is an increase in deeds that violate God’s eternal will for man. I do not have scientific evidence of the multiplication of lawlessness in our day, but I do
have a pile of experimental and observational evidence. I have had the opportunity to observe things in our country for more than sixty years, and I am here to report to you that lawlessness has been multiplying. The implication of the word “multiply” is that after a while it increases in a measure that will almost seem to be out of control.

However, my burden is not the society at large. These words were spoken to the loyal followers of Jesus—to me and to you. What do they say to us?

I. WHEN LAWLESSNESS MULTIPLIES, THE FAITHFUL FIND THEMSELVES IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT.

The multiplication of lawless negatively and strongly impacts the world in which the righteous live and serve.

1. The lawless despise godliness.

This has been true since the beginning when Cain hated his brother Abel. Jesus warns that in this lawless society “you will be hated by all nations because of me.”

Paul warns of this in 2 Timothy 3. “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.” He then proceeds to explain why times will be terrible for the people of faith—lawlessness will be multiplying. “People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money—not lovers of good—lovers of pleasure rather than loves of God---having a form of godliness but
denying its power.” Is this not the essence of lawlessness? When men begin to put self above everything and everyone else, you have lawlessness. You were created to love God and your fellowman.

2. The lawless persecute the godly.

The lawless will do more than take offence at the godly. According to Jesus they will make life tough for the godly.

“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you be hated by all nations because of me.” (v. 9) The risk for being identified with Jesus is going up all around the world, including our own culture. Being identified as an evangelical Christian in our society has its price. They do not mind you being religious, but they do not want you to take your faith too seriously.

Multiplying lawlessness creates a hostile environment! Have you begun to experience the hostility?

II. WHEN LAWLESSNESS MULTIPLIES, THE FAITHFUL ARE TEMPTED TO COOL THEIR DEVOTION.

This is the part of the statement that stuck in my soul, and I have not been able to shake free from it. I was made to ask myself about myself, “How much has the multiplication of lawlessness impacted your love?” I was not real comfortable with the answer I came up with.
1. They are tempted to cool their devotion to the Lord.

The Greek word is “agape”. This is the highest expression of loyalty and devotion to the Lord. It is preferring the other person, making their pleasure more important than your own. Did you notice that the Lord said “most” would cool their devotion? This is the part that has stuck in my soul. Have I allowed the spirit of the age to cool my devotion to the Lord? Have the people that I serve allowed the lawlessness of the age to cool their devotion?

The pressure will be felt from the society in which you live to cut the sharp edges off of your faith; to water it down so that it will be less offensive to the world. Have we been guilty of this?

The pressure can sometimes come in deceptive ways. I received an invitation to pray at a graduation event at Texas Tech University, but they included the stipulation that I must not pray in the name of Jesus. We must not use His name in a society in which someone might be offended. What do we do? Will we deny our Lord in the name of political correctness? Or do we maintain our religious life, but carefully avoid any public identification with the Lord Jesus?

2. They are tempted to cool in their loyalty to each other.

Since Jesus did not specify the object of the love, I agree with those who understand it to include both the Savior and the saved. When our love for the
Lord is cooled, it will not be long until our love for the people of the Lord will also be cooled.

Is there any evidence of a cooling love for the brethren? Does this not explain some of the conflicts in our denomination? I have never known a time when there are more congregations struggling with internal division than today. Have we allowed our delight in and love for the people of God to cool even as our love for Him is cooling off?

You will notice that it does not say that their love dies: rather it just cools.

III. WHEN LAWLESSNESS MULTIPLIES, THE FAITHFUL WILL PERSEVERE.

Not everyone cools in his or her devotion. There is a godly, faithful remnant that steadfastly perseveres with the Lord.

1. They will persevere in their walk.

“But he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” These stand in contrast to those who “turn away from the faith and betray and hate each other.” They also stand in contrast to those who “grow cold” in their faith. They are prepared to pay the price for political incorrectness, to bear the scorn of the world, to be considered out of touch with the times. They keep their witness
strong in the midst of the hostility. They continue to live by the principles of
the Gospel while others look for other standards by which to live.

2. They will persevere in their work.

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a
testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” I had not made the
connection before, but this verse begins with “and”. It is usually a
connective. How do we know they are persevering—they stay at the task of
getting the Gospel to the end of the world!

Do we use the lawlessness of the age to justify a slack in our walk, or in our
work? This is a sign of something bad. The faithful stay at the journey and
the task regardless of the cost.

John Piper makes a ringing call for this generation of Christians to be ready
to suffer for the propagation of the Gospel. Jesus willingly suffered for
propitiation, but we must be ready to suffer for propagation. He loved us
enough to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins, should we not love Him
enough to share His Gospel with the whole world?

So the challenge to my heart is rather clear—I must find a way to maintain
my love for the Lord Jesus in a lawless society. I must understand that the
lawless environment around me is really a sign that my Lord will soon
return. I must resist every impulse to cool my devotion to my Lord and His people.

What will help me maintain this devotion? A consistent quiet time with the Lord through His Word and prayer daily will help. A commitment to prompt obedience to Him will help. Staying close to His church through my participation in the life of the church will help. Whatever it takes, I must determine that my love for the Lord will grow—not cool off. The Holy Spirit is available to enable me to continue to grow in my devotion to the Lord. May the Lord make it so for me and for you.