

Preparation For The End By Living Faithfully

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This world was created by God (Genesis 1:1; Psalms 33:6-9), it continues to exist because He sustains it (Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:17), and at the time of His choosing He will end it (2 Peter 3:10-12). God does not shield us from the reality of the end of the world, but rather He tells us the fact of this world's end, followed by a question.

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved what manner of person ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness. Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall dissolve, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?” (2 Peter 3:10-12)

Will the earth be destroyed? Yes! ***“And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of the God abideth for ever”*** (1 John 2:17). Will the world end in our lifetime? I do not know, no man does. ***“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is”*** (Mark 13:32-33). ***“Watch therefore: for ye know not the hour your Lord doth come”*** (Matthew 24:42). ***“Therefore be ye also ready for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh”*** (Matthew 24:44).

This lesson deals with the preparation for the end, by living faithful unto death (Revelation 2:10). But, I would be amiss not to address the fact that there are Christians who are failing to live faithful. I wish I knew the right words, and the right way to say them that would make a difference. However, not knowing the cure does not mean that I cannot recognize the disease! There are three reasons why some Christians are not making proper preparation for the end:

1. **A lack of faith:** These Christians want to believe, but doubt plagues the mind. Folks, a lack of faith is not new nor is it acceptable. One Biblical example; delivered from Egyptian bondage (Exodus chapter 12), the children of Israel followed Moses, with God's marvelous help to Kadesh-barnea, and there at the border of the promise land (Numbers 13:26;

Joshua 14:7), the 12 spies [with the exception of Joshua and Caleb] returned and gave an evil report.

The land was indeed flowing with milk and honey, but the inhabitants are giants and we are grasshoppers in their sight. Just imagine, ten plagues upon Egypt (Exodus chapters 7-12), the parting of the Red Sea and the utter destruction of Pharaoh and his army (Exodus 14:10-31), the provision of water and food (Exodus 15:23-27; 16:4-18), the mountain quaking with fire, thunder and lightning (Exodus 19:16-18). A small fraction of God's might (there is nothing that He cannot do--Luke 1:37), and still that nagging doubt; we cannot do it (Numbers 13:33-14:4)! Little wonder God had these words penned, ***"Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, 'They do err in their hearts; and have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, they shall not enter into my rest'"*** (Hebrews 3:10-11).

Brethren, those who lack faith may follow along for a time but they are unprepared to enter heaven (Hebrews 11:6; 4:11). That is such a tragedy because God gave us a book that builds faith; for an example, I am going to take just a small section of time in history that involves prophecy concerning the death of our Lord.

- That His body would not see corruption, nor would His soul be left in Sheol [or Hades Acts 2:27; 31] (Psalms 16:10).
- He would cry "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psalms 22:1)?
- They would pierce His hands and feet (Psalms 22:16).
- They would gamble for His garments (Psalms 22:18).
- He would commend His spirit unto God (Psalms 31:5).
- Not a bone would be broken (Psalms 34:20).
- He would be betrayed by a friend (Psalms 41:9).

Beloved, do you know who penned those verses? A shepherd boy who became a king, a thousand years before the event, before crucifixion was ever practiced as a means of capital punishment so that you and I could know that God is, that Jesus Christ is His Son, that the Bible is the inspired word of God and worthy of our faith and confidence. If we lack faith it is because we have failed to study the source of faith (Romans 10:17).

2. **A lack of commitment:** Too many obey the gospel without counting the cost of discipleship, despite the fact that Jesus states the matter plainly. ***"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me"*** (Matthew 10:34-38). ***"If any man come to me, and hate [hate in the sense Jesus is using it is to love less – see Genesis 29:30-31] not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple"*** (Luke 14:26).

Years ago there were several couples in a congregation who were vocal in their displeasure at the practice of some members who would skip the services of the church to attend their child's ball games. Then, in the course of time, their children reached the age where they were a part of the Wintersville marching band, a band recognized as one of the best bands in the state. Now, the director of the band had a policy that required every member of the band to attend all the practices in order to play, and of course some of those practices fell on Sunday and Wednesday. Well, these parents who criticized others, found themselves attempting to justify the very thing they condemned.

Friends, I have a question for you. On the judgment day, what will it mean to be a member of the Wintersville marching band? I'll tell you what it will mean, about as much as a pimple on a mule's ear, absolutely nothing at all.

There is a reason that Jesus demands that we love Him above all others. If your mate would say, "I am not going to worship today" you would be brokenhearted to be sure, but you would not say, "I'll stay home with you". If your child has a ball game that conflicts with the services of the church, the game is forgotten! Jesus wants us to love Him above all else so that we do not miss out on heaven.

3. **A lack of desire:** There are those who obey the gospel out of fear. To such, heaven is an alternative not a goal. I am not attempting to minimize hell, certainly God does down play eternal punishment. Rather hell is spoken of with such frankness that no sober-minded person can be unaffected. The following is a brief sample:

- "Therefore hell hath enlarged herself, and opened her mouth without measure" (Isaiah 5:14).
- "Hell and destruction are never full" (Proverbs 27:20).
- "Behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven" (Malachi 4:1).
- "... The fire that never shall be quenched" (Mark 9:43; 45; 47).
- "And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they shall have no rest day or night" (Revelation 14:11).

If hell does not frighten us, something is terribly wrong. But when members of the church serve out of fear, the joy of Christianity is lost to them (1 John 1:4). Fear makes a grudging servant, for fear hath torment (1 John 4:18). On the other hand those who genuinely love God are striving to get to heaven because their heart is there. ***"If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory"*** (Colossians 3:1-3).

Now, how do the faithful prepare for eternity? I mention three things that will help to make us more than conquerors through Him that loved us (Romans 8:37).

Faithful Christians Are Different

The Bible uses a word that is very descriptive, “peculiar”, not freakish or odd but different, set apart (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9). Ephesians 4:22-32 addresses how we are different by discussing what we used to be verses what we have become. That difference cannot be overstated; it means the difference between being dead in sin and alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:1). **In Christ**, are the key words. How does one get into Christ? Hearing the gospel (Romans 10:17), believing the gospel (Mark 16:15-16), repenting of past sins (Acts 17:30), confessing Christ before men (Romans 10:10), and being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-5). Then remaining faithful until our time is no more (Revelation 2:10).

Brethren, we are a peculiar people as long as we maintain that difference, we would not be considered faithful if we returned to our former state, we would be losers (2 Peter 2:20-22). Christians can and have fallen (1 Timothy 4:1-3; Revelation 3:1-5); therefore, the Bible tells us to be on guard lest it happen to us (1 Corinthians 10:12; Philippians 2:12).

Now, the differences in Ephesians 4:22-32 that contrast the old person we used to be with the new person that we have become:

- This new person does not lie but speaks the truth, for each of us knows that God hates a liar (Proverbs 6:17; Revelation 22:15).
- Does not allow anger to lead to sin. Anger itself is not the sin (Mark 3:1-5), but rather anger uncontrolled that causes us to act or say things that are inconsistent with Christianity.
- Does not give place to the devil, but faces the enemy fully equipped with God’s armour (Ephesians 6:10-18), refusing to be ignorant of his devices (2 Corinthians 2:11).
- Does not steal what belongs to another, and may I add, does not rob from God either (Malachi 3:8).
- Does not allow corrupt communication to proceed out of his mouth. Foul language is so unbecoming of a child of God. It dims the light that is to shine in us (Matthew 5:14; Philippians 2:15), the language of edification builds the church our Lord died for (Ephesians 4:15-16).
- The new man abandons all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour (controversy), and evil speaking with all malice. What takes its place? Kindness, tenderheartedness and forgiveness, what makes us different helps us to be faithful!

Faithful Christians Are Confident Without Being Arrogant

We know whom we have believed and we are not ashamed (2 Timothy 1:12). Beloved, there is a vast difference between those who faithfully follow the teaching of Christ, and those who claim to follow Christ through the traditions of men. I wrote a three-part series on “The Curse of Denominationalism” for the newspaper, and one evening a man called to express his displeasure. He introduced himself by name and said he was the preacher for the Lutheran church, and that he and those he taught were disturbed by the articles. I kindly informed him that I was trying to present New Testament Christianity

before the terrible confusion of human denominations.

The man listened politely and then asked, "What is the difference between us?" I told him "I am a Christian and you're a Lutheran." He answered, "I'm not a Lutheran, I am a Christian". I reminded him that he introduced himself as a Lutheran preacher, and asked him "What name is on the building?" To which he insisted (a little more loudly) that he was following Christ after the Lutheran tradition. Friends, do you know how Jesus feels about human tradition? He said that they were empty, without meaning (Matthew 15:1-9)! I would be afraid to be guilty of that which Jesus so strongly condemns, wouldn't you?

There is an Old Testament verse that is not only thoughtful it is germane to this point, "**For their rock is not as our rock**" (Deuteronomy 32:31). Two verses earlier there is this; "**O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end**" (Deuteronomy 32:29). Brethren we know the rock upon which we are building our house (Matthew 7:24-27).

The faithful are confident without being arrogant. Folks if you can pick up the book of books and read this about the church you are a part of--the builder (Matthew 16:18), where and when it was established (Acts 2:1-47) and the only doctrine that governs it (Acts 2:42; John 14:26; 16:13), then confidence is the right word. It is not arrogant to say, "I know" when God said that we can. "**These things have I written unto you that ye may know that ye have eternal life**" (1 John 5:13). If that is not the case with you dear reader, then you need to come and build your house upon the same rock that we are, the pure teaching of Jesus Christ (Matthew 7:24-27; John 12:48).

Faithful Christians Are Determined

There is such a beautiful section of scripture where Paul is privileged to write of that which was lost to him, and that which was gained (or won) and his final goal (Philippians 3:6-13). In a condensed form I offer the following:

Paul possessed the very best the Jewish life had to offer: He was circumcised the eighth day (Genesis 17:12) of the tribe of Benjamin (one of only two tribes that remained under the rule of Judah - see 1 Kings 12:19; 21), a true Hebrew, and as touching the law a zealous Pharisee (Philippians 3:6-7). Among the Jews those fleshly distinctions would have been a thing to be coveted, and no doubt, Paul at one time prized his place among the Jewish people, but no longer. He willingly surrendered all to gain just one thing.

"That I may win Christ, and be found in Him"... "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead" (Philippians 3:8; 10-11)

There were many things in Paul's life that caused him regret. His persecution of the church (Acts 8:3; 9:1-2; 26:9-11) brought this personal assessment, "**Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief**" (1 Timothy 1:15). Now, Paul could have lived in yesterday's failures and drowned himself in sorrow, but Paul knew two things: 1. He could not undo the damage he committed against the church; therefore he refused to live in yesterday (Philippians 3:13). 2. The prize

of the high calling of God lay before him, so he pressed on toward the mark, determined to finish the course (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

Christians can prepare for the end by being: Different (peculiar), confident without being arrogant and determined that nothing short of heaven is acceptable. May God bless each of us to that end!