

LIVING IN A CHANGING WORLD



Paul & Bunty
Collins

Today, we are living in the reality of persecution. TV and social media are giving us a vivid picture of what is happening to believers in Christ in some nations of the world. Christians are being tortured and murdered for their faith. Our hearts are greatly moved as we see and hear of these precious people. Our prayers also go up to the Lord for those yet imprisoned or in hiding. At times, news of supernatural intervention, like that we read of with Peter, is wonderful to hear {Acts 12:1-19}. However, many like James at that same time, are giving up their lives for the Lord, and we remind ourselves of the glory that awaits them, as Stephen saw before they stoned him (Acts 7:54-60).

“I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, ‘How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?’ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been” Revelation 6:9-11.

FACING PERSECUTION

Although martyrdom has not yet reached the Western nations, persecution is beginning here, too. Taking a stand for righteousness and truth is answered with hatred and mockery. This activity is caused by two realities inspired by Satan...

➔ Counterfeit Christianity

In the Western world, Satan has been cleverly at his work to bring disrepute to the Name of Christ. He has done this in two ways...

* **...through church leaders**, who claim the name “Christian”, being exposed in horrific immoral sin. Others, in greed for riches,



have deceived people into giving them money (2 Cor.2:17; 1 Tim.6:10).

“For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness...In fact, you even put up with anyone who enslaves you or exploits you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or slaps you in the face” 2 Corinthians 11:12-15,20.

* ...through many who claim to be “Christian” but are so in name only. Their lives and actions are no different from those outside of Christ. Others are very “religious” and, with it, judgmental of others. But there is no joyous reality of Christ living in them and through them. These two groups cause many to turn away from any desire to know the Lord.

Backlash

In revealing this “counterfeit Christianity”, Satan has brought a backlash reaction from people who are ignorant of the truth of Christ and others, dissolutioned by what they see in the church, has caused them to turn against Him and His true believers.

False Spirit of Tolerance

“Tolerance”, or “political correctness”, has become a key word in our Western societies. This is seen as being loving and kind to people who are different, and has caused standing for the righteousness of Christ to be considered narrow-minded and the enemy of “goodness”.

For the Christian, rather than “tolerance”, “love” is the key word.

Love not Judgment

All Christians must spring into action positively and not allow ourselves to be overtaken by the forces of evil. However, we must never attack in the spirit of “righteous judgment”.

The greatest example given to us of how to handle people of different standards and faith to us, is how the Lord Jesus ministered to the woman of Samaria.

Read John 4:1-42. The Jews hated the Samaritans so, to travel north, would take the long route around rather than go through Samaria. Jesus, however, with his disciples, went directly north to this Samaritan village and stopped at the well outside. The disciples

then went into the village to buy food. This would have been very distasteful to them as Jews but would have been “tolerated” because Jesus had led them there and they were hungry.

When they returned to Jesus, notice the difference between the reactions of the Lord and the disciples to the Samaritan woman at the well.

Different “Eyesight”

- * The disciples saw Jesus breaking Jewish culture - talking to a woman alone

Jesus saw a “thirsty” woman, needing the water of Life.

- * The disciples saw a woman of a different religion.

Jesus saw a woman seeking truth

- * The disciples saw a woman of a different race and culture.

Jesus saw a woman desiring to worship God

- * The disciples saw a sinful woman deserving judgment.

Jesus saw a woman seeking love

- * The disciples saw only their own need for food

Jesus saw a whole “harvest” of souls

Jesus did not condone her sin. He stated it only when she confessed it herself (verses 16-19). He looked beyond the outward to her heart. As followers of Christ we, too, have a different “eyesight” - that of the Spirit of God within us. We see people differently and love them despite their actions. Like the Lord, our desire is to see them come into all the beauty of God’s wonderful plan for them... just as God so loved us He sent Jesus to bring us true Life -- life that is full of joy, peace and purpose. As Jesus said...

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” John 10:10 (NASB).

It is Harvest Time!

Jesus’ ministry to the needy woman at the well resulted in many in the Samaritan village turning to faith in the Lord Jesus.

“‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don’t you have a saying, “It’s still four months until harvest”? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest’” John 4:34-35.

In the same way, it is now “harvest time”! Just as the Lord was led to that needy woman, God has “divine appointments” arranged for us in this day and age. Each day, as we look to the Lord, He will lead us to the ones ready to hear about His love and grace.

LIVING IN THE LAST DAYS

Because of these two realities in our society today - counterfeit Christianity and the false spirit of tolerance - persecution is also becoming a reality and will grow. Our world is becoming intolerant of what Christ stands for. The Lord Jesus prophesied of this...

“You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved” Matthew 10:22.

...and, living in the Last Days before Jesus returns, as we are, it will increase...

“Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me” Matthew 24:9.

Being aware of the realities of these vital times, the Lord gives clear instructions how to live and handle the situations and persecution we face.

THE LORD’S INSTRUCTIONS

‘There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near... ‘Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man’ Luke 21:25-36.

Stand up

To stand is to change from a relaxed attitude to one of readiness. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, also gives this clear instruction...

“...Love does no harm to a neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law. And do this, understanding the present time: the hour has

already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here” Romans 13:9-12 (1 Peter 1:13).

Paul speaks strong words. “Wake up”, he says. Love your neighbour because the “day” (the coming of the Lord) is near.

To “stand” is love ready for action!

Lift up your heads

To lift your heads means a change of focus from the world to our eternal future with the Lord...

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” Colossians 3:1-4 (see also 2 Corinthians 4:17-18).

Be careful

When the Lord says “be careful”, He warns of what we are to be careful. We are not to be “weighed down” with the cares and anxieties of life or try to escape them by drunkenness and wild living (see verse 34). Being careful means a total change of attitudes and life-style so that we are not taken by surprise by His coming.

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming...But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him” 2 Peter 3:10-14.

Living holy and godly lives, is not an instruction we can fulfill in our own self-effort. However, the Lord Himself has made it possible by His finished work on the Cross and Resurrection. On receiving and believing that work for ourselves a miracle takes place. We become a “new creation” - our old life has gone (2 Corinthians 5:17). Not only that, but

at that moment we receive a wonderful gift - the gift of the Holy Spirit. He now dwells within us and, as we walk in step with Him, empowers us to live the godly life the Lord instructs us to live.

“...live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh...Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit” Read through Galatians 5:16-25.

Be always on the watch

To be on the watch is to be constantly aware of all that is happening in the world.

“...keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come” Matthew 24:42-44.

The Old Testament gives us the picture of the “watchmen” who stood on the wall surrounding the city and warned of an enemy approaching or of runners returning with news from the battle etc. (Ezekiel 33:1-5).

Many events are given by the Lord Jesus as signs to prepare us for His coming. These are the “watchmen” for us to take heed of in these days...

- * Geographical (Luke 21:11,25)
- * Astronomical (Matthew 24:29-32)
- * Catastrophical (Luke 21:10-11)
- * Deceiving false christs and prophets (Matt.24:4; 24-29)
- * Gospel reaching the whole world (Matthew 24:14)

Pray

Prayer is our communication with our loving God. It is the privilege we have to express our hearts, our love for Him and thankfulness for all He has done for us. It is also the wonderful privilege of us being involved with Him in His purposes on earth...as we pray for individuals, our leaders and the nations.

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people” Ephesians 6:18.

In summary, the Lord’s word to all of us, living in these vital times is...

BE READY!