

How To Have Hope In A World That Is Falling Apart

‘Just as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be in the time of the Son of Man. People ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, right up to the day when Noah entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all. It was the same as in the days of Lot. People ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built, but on the very day Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. That is the way it will be on the day the Son of Man is revealed’ (Luke 17:26 to 30).

There are six features of the days of Noah and Lot prevalent in the world today. The earth had many evil spirits, every thought of man’s heart was evil, the earth was filled with violence, people were extremely materialistic and there was rampant sexual perversion and blatant aggressive homosexuality (Genesis 6:1 to 8). Just as people are doing today, the people in the days of Noah and Lot were so deeply immersed in every-day life; eating, drinking, marrying, buying, selling, planting, reaping and building etc, they took no notice of what was coming on the earth. Noah was a preacher of righteousness and Lot was a righteous man (2 Peter 2:5 & 7). Noah most certainly preached righteousness to the people living in his day so we know the people in Noah’s day were aware of the coming judgement, but took little notice. Many people are so taken up with the world and materialism, they do not understand the judgements of God that are coming on the whole earth. Jesus listed some of the events we can expect to happen in our future; wars, famines, plagues, earthquakes, severe persecution, some Christians will fall away from the faith and betray genuine believers with hatred and the love of many Christians will grow cold, lawlessness and iniquity will be multiplied, false prophets will arise and only those who endure to the end will be saved (Matthew 24:6 to 13).

If we look around us, we can see this world is falling apart and nobody can control the decline of this earth. Populations keep voting in new governments expecting them to be able to bring peace and stability but the expectation of the people always ends in disappointment and often they turn on their new leaders who are trying to do what is right. No government can end the turmoil. The whole world is in almost total chaos just as Jesus said it would be immediately prior to His second coming, but through all of this chaos, the Lord is purifying for Himself His own special people – people who endure. We are more than encouraged not to be frightened or troubled. In fact Jesus said, “See that you are not frightened.” We are to put our faith and trust in the Lord and He will see us through (Matthew 24:6). Those who give up their faith and turn away from God will not be saved (Matthew 24:13).

When the disciples asked Jesus what the sign of the end of the age would be (Matthew 24:3), they did not mean ‘the new age’ but a new age of peace when the Kingdom of God will be established on earth. Jesus said before that, there will be wars, nation against nation; kingdom against kingdom or ethnic group against ethnic group (Matthew 24:7). The political wars or ethnic conflicts that brings ‘Ethnic cleansing’ are a good example of what Jesus meant. Russia, Africa, China, Thailand and former Yugoslavia all have ethnic groups that have been able to live peacefully side by side for hundreds of years, suddenly are rising up against one another. Young people are walking the streets severely beating complete strangers, random targets for no reason, except that they love violence. Elderly people are being beaten up in their own homes. Violent rapes are occurring everywhere. The courts are overwhelmed with cases and prisons are overflowing. Jesus said lawlessness will be multiplied and it is happening in our day.

Because so many thousands of Christians have been taught to expect a ‘rapture’ to take them out of the troubles that are to come, they will not be able to cope when they realise they have listened to false prophets and they will fall away from the faith, their love will grow cold and they will betray and pursue the genuine Christians who have been wise enough not to accept such erroneous teachings. Only the Christians who have the spiritual strength to endure to the end of the terrible trouble ahead, will be saved. We are saved now, but to remain saved, we have to endure to the end. The word here is endure, not enjoy. This is not a pleasant prospect. In the midst of this list of woes, Jesus does not say people will be ‘raptured’ off. Clearly, we will be on earth during that troublesome time because He said we must endure it. Many false prophets preach lies from the pulpit and one of those dreadful lies is the ‘rapture theory’. It teaches people they will not have to endure for Jesus’ sake, but they will be whisked away to eternal bliss while millions are forced to stay and endure. They use the examples of Enoch and Elijah, which is foolish because Enoch had completed his exceedingly difficult designated ministry of preaching to the wicked generations before Noah’s flood, before he was taken, and the Lord God was very pleased with him (Hebrews 11:5). Elijah had also completed all God had set before him before he was told he was ready to leave the earth. Elijah’s task was just as difficult as Enoch’s task.

Are the ‘rapture’ people ready for heaven? Have they all completed their exceedingly difficult tasks God has given them? Probably not! They have a lot more enduring, self-denial and obedience at all costs to get through yet before they are ready for the Kingdom of God! Many Western Christians are like spoilt children who demand their own way and will stomp their feet and storm out of a room if they are confronted with the

truth about their bad behaviour. Only holy, righteous, obedient, reverent people who have picked up their cross of suffering and self-denial are ready for heaven. We need to set aside human interpretation and opinion and see what God is really saying through His Word, the Bible. In the following verses, Paul is describing what Christians will be like in the last days – not people who hate God, but religious people who have a form of Godliness – and Paul's description of the last-days professing Christians is shocking. 'Understand this, in the last days grievous times will come. People will be lovers of self (selfish, self-centred), lovers of money (prosperity teaching), proud, arrogant, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, without natural affection, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, bad-tempered and violent, haters of good, treacherous, rebellious, conceited, lovers of sensual pleasures more than lovers of God, for although they hold a form of Godliness, they deny the power of it. Avoid all such people – turn away from them' (2 Timothy 3:1 to 5).

We often hear these verses preached from the pulpit as an example of what modern people in the world are like, but Paul says they are religious people. If the modern professing Christians will be like that, imagine how bad the non-believers will be! That is something to think about. The last days are spoken about all through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. This time in history will be the most severe testing the world has ever known (Matthew 24:21). There will be fierce times ahead because of the deterioration of human character, morals and ethics; the corruption of human nature. These moral defects will be conspicuous in the last days. In the last couple of decades, sin has been 'outdated' especially amongst the younger generation, both in and outside the church. The concept of sin has been abolished. Moral absolutes have been rejected. Nothing is black or white but varying shades of grey. People are encouraged to 'be happy, feel free, do what you want, do not deny yourself, there is no right or wrong way, we must not call sin, sin because it might upset somebody and calling an abomination to God what it is must not be spoken – ever'. Many people – even some Christians, believe the Old Testament is outdated and refuse to obey what is written. Many Christians are choosing to have tattoos, but the Bible says they are evil. Many churches allow homosexuality. Many Christians strongly dislike to be reminded they must improve their behaviour.

Sin has almost ceased to exist in people's thinking and behaviour. If we ignore the concept of sin then we ignore a massive part of the Gospel message. Jesus came to deal with sin and if there is no consciousness of sin then the Gospel ceases to make sense and the terrible death of Jesus has little effect on those individuals. People would then wonder why they need repentance and forgiveness. If church leaders want revival, they need to restore the enormity of sin and the enormity of the consequences of it. If people have a concept of sin as being 'just human' then they will have a minimal realisation of their need for the Lord in every area of their lives and the impact of the Gospel is neutralised. As a result, people stop being convicted of sin so they do not respond to the Gospel message and the commandment to repent and be baptised. Being filled with the Holy Spirit is for them, unnecessary. They do not see the need of constant repentance, humility and prayer so they live their lives like people in the world. Preachers need to teach the concept of sin and enforce the consequence of sin which is eternal death. Even in churches we have de facto relationships, teenage illicit sex, smoking, drug taking, pornography, child sex abuse, single mothers, abortions, absent fathers, divorce, adultery, broken families and their lives are a complete mess. Many Christians are lukewarm, they drink alcohol like people in the world, they do little to serve the Lord and are very selfish individuals. To avoid this corruption, Jesus said we need to be born-again to have a new start and become an incorruptible creature (John 3:1 to 21). The lovers of self, money and pleasure describes the western culture in which we live today. There have always been problems in the fallen world, but not on the scale it is now – not since the day of Noah. Because of sin everywhere, even in the churches, God is going to shake everybody and everything – hence the worldwide chaos.

To cleanse this earth from all corruption, the Lord is going to 'shake' everything, and that shaking will take place in the form of severe trouble. 'Everything that can be shaken will be shaken, and whatever cannot be shaken will remain' (Hebrews 12:27). 'The Light might get hold of the corners of the earth and shake the wickedness out of it' (Job 38:13). What can be shaken? Whole nations, governments, financial institutions, church denominations, families and individuals. 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, "Yet once more I will shake the starry heavens, the earth, the sea and the dry land. I (the Lord) will shake all nations' (Haggai 2:6 & 7).

That brings us back to the title. How do we have hope in this world that is falling apart? How can we endure it? Life is tough, but it is going to get tougher and harder to bear, so how do we cope with the difficult circumstances that are coming? Here are some suggestions to help us all prepare for what will become an unbearable situation. We first need to deal with the fear of tribulation and to avoid fearing what is coming, we need to be part of the Kingdom of God. 'I will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains be shaken into the seas' (Psalm 46:2). 'Let us receive a Kingdom that cannot be shaken' (Hebrews 12:28). We need to make the Lord our refuge. 'He alone is my Rock, my Salvation and my Fortress, I will never be greatly shaken ... I will not be shaken' (Psalm 62:2 & 6). We need to build our faith on Jesus. The Kingdom of God will pass through the shaking unmoved and those who have built their faith

on the Rock (Jesus) will not fall (Matthew 7:24 & 25). 'Be strong and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in God' (Psalm 31:24). During the terrible trials we endure on earth, only the Lord can give us His peace that passes all human understanding (Philippians 4:7).

There is only one kind of person who cannot be shaken by circumstances; the person who does not love the world and does not give in to the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life; the person who understands this world will burn up with a thunderous roar; the person who does the will of God and carries out His purposes; that is the person who will abide forever. 'Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world the Father's love is not in them. All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not from the Father and is not His, but belongs to the world. The world is going to be destroyed along with its lusts, but they who do the will God will remain forever' (1 John 2:15 to 17). The earth and all that is in it will be burned up, but the things of heaven will last forever (2 Peter 3:10 & 12). Every child of God is born-again and should be able to overcome challenges of life, and to bring to heaven eternal rewards that will not be burned up (1 Corinthians 3:15). We need to focus, not on the things of earth, but on things of heaven, because where our hearts desire lies, is where our treasures are (Matthew 6:20 & 21).

To endure and overcome, we all need to follow the counsel of the Word of God, not the flawed 'wisdom' of the ungodly (Psalm 1:1). We need to build our 'house' on the Rock (Jesus), not on the 'sand' of this world. Christians will be shaken, that is a certainty, but the result will be different if we are built on the Rock. We need to be prepared to endure the tribulations that are coming, and not believe there is an easy way out, because there is not. There will not be a 'rapture' to take us out of it. The people who are hoping to be taken out of the tribulation are considered cowards by God Himself and there is no place in heaven for them (Revelation 21:8). God is calling for steadfastness of the believers, the endurance of the people of God, those who habitually keep God's commandments and their faith in Jesus (Revelation 14:12).

The only hope we have is eternity with our God. We need to set our hearts on enduring right to the very end. Our first priority should be waiting for the Kingdom of God to be established on earth, and we need to do His will on earth just as His will is always done in heaven (Matthew 6:10). If we want to have a successful eternal future, we cannot love the world and we must be wholly committed to the will of God. We need to have right priorities because they decide our lives. The things that are the top priorities in our lives are the things we find time for, so we need to find time to spend with God in prayer. Whatever we give our time to determines our priority. If we put anything before the Lord, then that thing is our god. We need to make God our priority and make Him our God. We need to seek first the Kingdom of God – that is to make the Kingdom of God our first and main priority (Matthew 6:33). God is faithful and will provide everything we need, provided we seek Him first.

We need to realise Jesus is not coming for church members, He is coming for those who are eagerly waiting for Him (Hebrews 9:28). He will not return until the whole Gospel has been preached to the entire world, to all nations – then the end will come and not before (Matthew 24:14). The scriptures give us requirements in the life of a Christian who is truly looking forward to the second coming of our Messiah. We have read the heavens and earth will burn up in a thunderous roar, then Peter writes more on Christian conduct. What manner of persons ought we to be? We must behave with holy conduct and Godly qualities. We need to be earnestly looking for Him. We need to hasten the coming of the Lord by preaching this Gospel to the entire world. We need to be without sin and at peace, and blameless in His sight (2 Peter 3:10 to 14). In this world of strife and sin, we really do not have anything else to look forward to, except eternal life with our Lord in the Kingdom but we have to make a conscious effort to walk so close to Him we constantly 'touch' as we walk. We 'touch' as we pray, worship, wait on Him, live without hypocrisy, hold closely to that which is good and avoid everything that is evil (Romans 12:9). 'Everyone who has this hope (of the Kingdom of God) resting on him, cleanses himself just as He (Jesus) is pure' (1 John 3:3). The mark of all those who are truly waiting for the coming of the Lord, is they are purifying themselves just as He is pure. God has only one standard of purity, and that is Jesus our Messiah, the Son of God.

What attributes in Christians and Christianity is Jesus looking for before He returns? Faith, love, obedience, joy, peace, endurance, grace, kindness, patience, sincerity, goodness, gentleness, good behaviour, truth, righteousness, holiness, forgiveness, purity, reverence, humility, a lack of self-righteousness, doing what pleases the Lord and a heart-felt love for Israel and the Jewish people. The 'Replacement Theology' is not from God. God is seeking people who are not materialistic, who do not support the 'Prosperity Teaching'. Prosperity is the outcome of serving God. It is not material gain or financial wealth. God is seeking out people who are wholly committed to serving the Lord right up to the last day. Jesus said, "When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" He spoke to certain people who were convinced of their own righteousness, and who despised all others' (Luke 18:8 & 9). Jesus is looking for people who endure regardless of circumstances. People who are not looking for the 'rapture' to give them an easy way out.

'They did not love their life, even when facing death' (Revelation 12:11). Jesus is looking for people who are excited about, and who are focussed on His second appearing on earth. 'There is stored up for us the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, will give to us on that day ... to all those who have loved His (second) appearing' (2 Timothy 4:8).

Jesus is looking for Christians who love their fellow man so much they will go out of their way for them. 'By this everyone will know you are My disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:35). We must love our neighbour as ourselves and treat others as we desire to be treated. 'Jesus said, "A certain man ... fell among robbers who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. A priest (religious man) saw him but he passed by on the other side of the road. A Levite (another religious person) saw him but he passed on the other side. A Samaritan (a lowly humble person) came where he was and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion. He bound up his wounds pouring on oil and wine (symbolising Jesus' blood and the Holy Spirit). He set him on his own donkey, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day when he departed, he took out two denarii and gave them to the host and said to him, 'Take care of him. Whatever you spend beyond that, I will repay you when I return'. Which of these three was a neighbour to him who fell among the robbers? He who showed mercy on him. Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:30 to 37).

The only way we can have any hope in this world that is falling apart so rapidly is to love Jesus with all our heart, all our mind, all our soul and all our strength. Christians are God's ambassadors here on earth so it is up to us to show the world the character of God. It is up to us to show the world the only hope they have is Jesus. There is no other hope for mankind. Sometimes Christians are the only aspect of God people will ever see so we must fulfil that role. By the grace of God we have been able to find the hope of salvation and it is our task as believers to pass that hope of salvation on to the unsaved in this world. 'By the awesome deeds of righteousness, You answer us God of our salvation. You are the hope of all the ends of the earth, of those who are far away on the sea' (Psalm 65:5). 'It is good for us to hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord' (Lamentations 3:26). 'Let us be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love and for a helmet, the hope of salvation' (1 Thessalonians 5:8). 'The mystery of salvation has been hidden for ages and generations, but now it has been revealed to God's people to whom God was pleased to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Jesus in you, the Hope of glory' (Colossians 1:26 & 27). 'We are looking for the blessed hope and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus our Messiah' (Titus 2:13). 'Jesus is faithful as a Son over His house, Whose house we are if we hold fast our confidence and the glorying of our hope, firm to the end' (Hebrews 3:6).

Amen and God bless you.

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