

## When Men Cry Peace and Safety



David Wilkerson December 4, 2006

*“When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief”* (1 Thessalonians 5:3–4).

Right now, the world is in such turmoil that people are asking, “Are we seeing the winding up of history? Could we be headed toward a nuclear holocaust? Is the world spinning out of control?”

Even some world leaders now speak in a tone of fear. Some are saying, “We have witnessed the death of diplomacy.” Negotiations with rogue countries have failed, and mad dictators ignore the warnings of the United Nations.

We could now be facing the awful truth that tensions between nations can no longer be solved.

Indications seem to be that there may be no more diplomatic solutions. Even as America makes bold proclamations and sends warnings, it all seems to fall on deaf ears. For example, the U.S. has pledged to defend Japan if North Korea attacks that nation. Our leaders have threatened to use “all the might and power of the United States to retaliate.” This could mean the nuclear annihilation of North Korea.

We now understand what Jesus meant when he gave this warning: “There shall be...upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken” (Luke 21: 25–26).

When Jesus gave this warning, he added this statement: “Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh” (21:27–28).

I’m convinced that all the fearful things we see coming upon the earth right now — hurricanes, tsunamis, earthquakes, drastic weather changes, terrorism, nuclear threats, wars and rumors of wars — all have to do with the coming of Christ. Beyond all the war clouds gathering, beyond the gross darkness covering the earth, a cloud is being formed in heaven. And one day soon Christ is going to enter that cloud and reveal himself to the whole world. “When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand” (21:31).

The early church asked the apostle Paul to write more about the times.

As Christians in Paul’s day sensed the destruction of Jerusalem drawing near, they wanted to know more about prophetic events. They were fearful over rumors about the ruthlessness of invading armies, who took multitudes captive into slavery. It caused these believers to sense that perilous times were close at hand. So they asked Paul to tell them more about what was to come: “Write to us about how to read the times.”

Paul responded with these words of assurance: *“Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night”* (1 Thessalonians 5:1–2, my italics).

Paul described to them what would take place when Christ returned: “The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (4:16–18).

Paul’s exhortation to them was meant to be encouragement. He was saying, in essence, “There’s no need for you to fret about those things coming upon the earth. You don’t have to be overly concerned about all the fearful signs and calamities. You well know what this is about. It is all signaling the coming of the Lord Jesus, to take away his people.”

The truth is that history is going somewhere.

We can be sure that the swift current of events unfolding today is carrying us toward God’s eternal purpose. This world is not adrift; the Lord hasn’t abandoned the earth, no matter how wicked and faithless humankind has become. Rather, God has simply picked up the pace. And what we’re seeing now is a swift movement of events toward the “one divine event” ahead: the re-creation of a new heaven and earth, where Christ will reign supreme for all eternity.

The ancient stoics believed the world went through fixed periods of time. In their minds, at the end of each period the world was destroyed by a great conflagration. Then the earth was restored precisely as it had been, so that things began all over again and resumed just as they had before.

In other words, history repeated itself over and over. The same stars followed in the same orbits, and the same lives were lived again, with the same friends, the same concerns, the same experiences. Everything was restored each time, not just once but for perpetuity. Human beings were bound to an eternal treadmill from which there was no escape.

The apostle Peter’s words cut directly against this thinking. Peter tells us that, according to God’s promise, Christians are to “look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13). Moreover, he says, if we believe God’s Word, we can know that history is racing toward the day of the Lord’s coming, when “the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat” (3:12).

“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 burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God” (3:10–12).

At that point, Peter says, we can expect to see a new heaven and a new earth. And we are to look with expectancy for these things.

When Jesus said, “In that day, look up” (Luke 21:28), he’s talking about where our focus should be.

As followers of Christ, our focus is not to be on daily news reports. We are not to dwell on wars and rumors of wars, nor on the possibility of a nuclear accident, nor on the other things that are coming upon the earth.

This means that God’s people are not to fear Islam, or any other ism. Right now Islamic jihadists are claiming they’ve received word that their great Imam wants to appear. But, according to them, he has said he will not come until the world is in total chaos.

This explains why so many ayatollahs and mullahs are behind the terrorist acts being planned and carried out. It is all designed to create utter chaos. And it’s meant to destroy Israel as the most provocative act of terror possible, to bring the whole world into the chaos.

Yet, even as we consider these facts, we are to turn to Jesus’ words, and to Paul’s and Peter’s. All Islamic boasts about taking dominion over the world — all their terrible acts of murder and bigotry — are only a blip on God’s eternal screen. His Word says these men are but grains of sand he will blow away: “He shall blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble” (Isaiah 40:24).

Islamic jihadists may hope to bring about chaos, but with a single breath God is able to strip away all their power. The truth is, they are only hastening the day of the coming of the one true Messiah, the creator of this world and all that is in it.

Paul told the saints in Thessalonica he wanted them to know one fact concerning the coming destruction.

We already know that Paul assured the Thessalonians, “Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you” (1 Thessalonians 5:1). Yet, Paul added this: “I do want you to know one proven fact on this subject.” He then told them, “When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” (5:3).

Paul is giving the church in every age a clue here. He’s describing the one thing that happens to every society just prior to sudden destruction and judgment. And this one proven fact is, *humankind gives itself over to security and prosperity*.

Here is the evidence of coming destruction that never misses. And Paul declared it by evidence of the past. Simply put, there is no instance in Scripture when God ever brought destruction upon a society except when they had given themselves over to an obsession with security and prosperity. Paul is saying, “Here is the rule, proven by history, concerning all of God’s destructive actions. It happens in times when men are given over to the pursuit of prosperity and safety, while turning away from the Lord.”

Politicians recently announced that they plan to introduce a bill in Congress to establish a Department of Peace and Safety.

We are to beware any talk of peace and prosperity when a fearful storm is coming into view. It is then — when peace and prosperity become the main pursuit, even as watchmen thunder, and everyone knows only a miracle can save humankind — that we can expect sudden destruction.

Jesus drew an analogy between the days of Noah and Lot, and the day of his own coming. He said that in both instances people are eating, drinking, marrying, buying and selling. In other words, everyday activities go on as always, with involvement in things that are not inherently wicked.

Yet, in Noah’s and Lot’s generations, the pursuit of these things obsessed an entire society. Everyday activities became the main focus, powerful diversions that held people in such a grip the warnings of the Holy Spirit were drowned out.

According to Jesus, the same thing will happen in the last hour, just prior to sudden destruction. The whole world will be given over to seeking security and prosperity, a preoccupation that will grip many even in the church. People’s entire focus will be on the things of this world, and they will forsake their steadfastness in faith.

We’re already seeing many in the grip of such a mentality. Multitudes are convinced prosperity is the only way they can have peace. And so people are in a mad race for prosperity, with speculators crushed by debt, others madly accumulating wealth, and riches being made on the backs of the poor. Beloved, that is precisely when sudden destruction comes.

When that moment of sudden judgment arrives, in what condition will the Lord find his church?

What kind of condition will Jesus’ people be in? Will they have a vibrant faith? Will they be looking for him and yearning for his coming? Or will they be preoccupied with the things of this world?

When Christ comes, will he find his church in the grip of false prophets who preach a false peace, success, riches, good times? The prophet Jeremiah describes such a time in Israel’s history: “From the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealt falsely. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:13–14).

Let me make this clear: prosperity is not inherently evil. Scripture makes it clear that God loves to bless his children. And there is nothing evil about acquiring a lovely house, a nice car, good clothes, or eating in nice restaurants. We are encouraged to provide for our families, including building houses, buying, selling, sowing or reaping.

It is when these things begin to consume us — taking up our time, our thoughts, our energies and activities, to the neglect of seeking God — that our hearts begin to harden. You see, when being comfortable is not enough — when buying, selling and making money preoccupy our mind and soul — lukewarmness sets in. And those who have given themselves over to seeking security and prosperity end up despising God’s warnings:

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts...to whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the Lord is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it...Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken” (Jeremiah 6:9–10, 17).

When Noah prophesied that a great destruction was coming, he was mocked by his generation.

Throughout biblical history, watchmen walked the streets warning of coming judgments, prophesying to God’s people. But often the church shut its ears and gave itself over to pleasures, to food and wine, to buying, selling and building.

Frankly, I’m shocked at the hardness I see in so many Christians today, people who were once so on fire. These same believers loved to pray and be in God’s house. They loved godly reproof and were stirred deeply by the prophetic words they heard. But now they’re too busy to seek God. And their love for Jesus is growing colder by the day.

Such people won’t stand for any sort of preaching that convicts them. They prefer to hear a half-hour sermon once a week that builds up their self-esteem or helps them become successful. Make no mistake, there are multitudes like this who have fallen sound asleep.

God instructed Jeremiah to give his people this warning: “Therefore thou shalt speak all these words unto them; but they will not hearken to thee: thou shalt also call unto them; but they will not answer thee. But thou shalt say unto them, This is a nation that obeyeth not the voice of the Lord their God, nor receiveth correction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth” (Jeremiah 7:27–28).

Likewise in the New Testament, Paul writes, “According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear; unto this day” (Romans 11:8).

Why is there such despising of prophetic warnings?

Why do so many once zealous Christians now turn away from godly reproof? Why is there such judicial blindness? And why does the self-centered, money-focused, wealth gospel entrap so many churches and believers?

One reason is that a growing number of ministers today have drifted from the preaching of the Cross. The message of the poor, homeless, suffering, bleeding Christ has become an offense. The call to sacrifice — to take up a cross, to embrace rejection for Jesus’ sake, to become a living sacrifice, to die to self, to repent, to become humble, to crucify the flesh — all of these topics are avoided by preachers of the gospel of happiness and wealth. And all apostolic warnings to be ready for Christ’s coming — to trim our lamps, to prepare to meet the Bridegroom, to wake up and redeem the time because the hour is late and because he’s coming only for those who look for and love his appearance — all of this is now silenced.

Where does it end?

In recent weeks, one of the prosperity movement’s most famous preachers said of God’s holy Word, “The Bible is simply a roadway to wealth.” Another has promised, “Come to my church, and you’ll be assured of becoming wealthy.”

The secular world ridicules such gospels. The October 22 edition of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* included an article titled, “The Rich Messiah of the Prosperity Gospel.” The idea behind the article was that the prosperity preachers now claim Jesus was a wealthy man, because he had to support twelve associates and pay for their travel expenses.

According to this theory, Christ’s clothes had to be expensive for the Roman soldiers to gamble for them. And Jesus himself had to be wealthy, since his entourage required an accountant. (Judas was in charge of the group’s finances). Moreover, Jesus had to be rich in order to support his mother after he died. And he couldn’t have been homeless, since no one ever heard of a carpenter who didn’t build a house for himself.

Now there is a claim of a newly discovered, older document that tells of two hundred kings visiting Jesus’ crib. These kings came laden with gold as gifts for the Christ child. Finally, the article said the prosperity preachers claim Jesus could not have been poor, because Scripture states, “The words of a poor man are soon forgotten.” Since Jesus’ words are remembered — and since no one would follow a man who’s broke — he had to be rich.

All of this makes me shudder! It takes me back to Jeremiah 6:13: "From the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely." Many Christians sing the gospel song, "It's All About Jesus" — and so it is.

When the Pharisees asked Christ to give them a sign, he responded, "O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times? A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas" (Matthew 16:3–4). In Luke's gospel, Jesus added this word: "For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation" (Luke 11:30).

Jesus — his cross, his resurrection, his shed blood — is the only sign that's needed. He is the full satisfaction.

The day of destruction is going to come suddenly. In just one hour, all material things of this world will lose their value, becoming absolutely worthless. We're going to be left with nothing but Christ — yet we need nothing more. He is the living Word we need.

The Bible isn't a handbook for prosperity. *It is the door to the revelation of Christ, who is our peace and our safety.* He is our riches, our wealth, our gold. William Tyndale knew this, and he printed the first Bible. To do so, Tyndale lived in abject poverty, exile, bitter absence from friends, hunger and thirst, cold, horrible sufferings. And he died as a martyr.

That is the gospel we preach. And this is the Christ we serve.?

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