

Getting Ready for the End of All Things



David Wilkerson October 6, 2008

In his first letter to the church, Peter speaks of the last days. He states bluntly: "The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:7–8).

Peter also mentions the last days in his second epistle. Moreover, in that letter he refers to his own limited time on earth. He tells the church, "Shortly I must put off my tabernacle" (2 Peter 1:14). He's saying, in other words, "God has shown me my time on earth is short."

Peter knew the Lord would soon take him home. Yet before that would happen, the Holy Spirit gave this disciple a word for the church about the very end of days. And so, in Peter's second epistle we read the last words of a dying shepherd to the believers in his charge.

This godly man was fully aware the world would never believe his message about the end times. Clearly, Peter's message was meant for the New Testament church, both in the time he wrote it and for every succeeding generation of believers. It is a message of warning, as Peter prophesies the following:

"There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies... And many shall follow their pernicious ways... And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you...."

"There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.... (They will) walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government [the laws of the land]. Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities...."

"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 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, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" (2 Peter 2:1–3, 10; 3:3–4, 10–12).

As Christians, we believe God's Word about the times to come. And we receive Spirit-directed warnings from God's holy watchmen today. Indeed, we see the handwriting on the wall.

Still, an important question arises for every Christian today, as it must have arisen for believers in Peter's day.

The question that arises for many Christians is, "How do we prepare for the tumultuous events to come?"

I think it is normal to want to know how we'll survive the frightful times to come. When the storm hits, destroying all roots of recovery, what will we do about jobs, housing, food, clothing? As a grandfather, I am concerned about the

future of my children and grandchildren, wondering, “How will they make it through the times to come?” I believe this is a legitimate concern for any follower of Jesus.

Amazingly, Peter gives no advice about physical or financial preparations. He says nothing about where to put our money to safeguard it, nothing about how to face a housing crisis, nothing about how to survive global warming or inflation. Peter simply does not go there. Why?

I believe it is because Peter had already experienced poverty, and through it all he had experienced God’s faithfulness. As Peter literally followed in Christ’s footsteps, he lived with no money. In order to eat, the disciples had to pick corn from the farmers’ fields. At one point, when they needed money, Jesus instructed Peter to look inside the mouth of a fish, where he found a coin.

Peter knew what it meant to sleep under the stars, with no bed or pillow. He followed Jesus without a job or any means of support. He owned a single change of clothes and one pair of sandals. In short, Peter had to rely on God’s provision every day for his needs. And day after day, Peter saw those needs met faithfully.

Now, in his message about the end times, Peter focuses not on having needs met but on the importance of preparing our hearts. Thus, he says, “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness...?” (2 Peter 3:11).

In the face of all that is to come, Peter zeros in on character issues.

The apostle is asking us, in essence, “What is in your heart in these last days? Who are you becoming as the end times approach? You already know God will take care of your physical needs. But are you preparing yourself spiritually?”

If this sounds unusual to you, consider what Jesus had to say about preparing for the last days. He also left us very little advice about physical preparations for end-time upheaval. Like Peter, Jesus warned of tumultuous times to come: wars, rumors of wars, ethnic and tribal conflicts, famines, earthquakes, persecution, floods of iniquity that would cause the love of many to grow cold. He also predicted that armies would march on Jerusalem to wreak awful destruction, razing the temple to the ground.

In the face of this terrible upheaval, Jesus says little about how to survive the times. He doesn’t speak about how to prepare for the loss of a home or job or the crashing of the economy. Rather, he instructs us, “Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (Matthew 6:31–32).

Peter echoes Jesus’ words when he says, “The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer” (1 Peter 4:7). In short, he says, “Here is basic instruction for preparing for the end times: Be sober-minded. And stay calm, no matter what happens. There is no need to panic. Instead, take it all to prayer.”

Right now, many Christians are in panic mode. People who have testified all their lives that God is their keeper are now scrambling in fear as the storm clouds gather. Peter is saying to them, very simply, “Bring all your natural feelings under the control of faith.”

Next, Peter tells us to bring everything to God in prayer: “Watch unto prayer” (4:7). Only by seeking the Lord will we be able to control our anxieties about the times. According to Peter, the blacker things become the more we should walk in the peace and rest of the Holy Spirit.

Right now the secular world is desperate to find calm in the chaos. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, corporate leaders and others in high-stress jobs are turning to yoga, mantras, Chinese chants. As Christians, we have a God who promises to keep us in perfect peace, if we will fix our minds on Christ above anything happening in the world.

Peter tells us we should be concerned with one thing above all others in these times.

What should our one focus be? We find it in the next verse, the final exhortation of this dying apostle. Peter writes: “Above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

Peter’s summation is, “If you want to know what survival is all about — to see how God is leading his people

through these times — then show unconditional love to your brothers and sisters. That has everything to do with the future of the church of Christ.”

Here, Peter says, is our most important concern. In light of the great mercy God has shown each of us — in light of his unconditional forgiveness toward our past sins, his compassionate longsuffering toward us — we are to reach out with mercy to those who have sinned against us. And we are to forgive them as if they had never committed those sins.

You may be wondering, “What does forgiveness have to do with the end times?”

Perhaps you feel let down by the promise implied in the title of this message, “Getting Ready for the End of All Things.”

Maybe as you read the title you thought, “Great, Pastor Dave is going to show us specifics about how to survive the troubling times.” Already I’m halfway through my message, and yet you may feel you haven’t received any specifics from me.

This was the feeling of a Christian who wrote to our ministry recently. He said, “You have faithfully warned us about the economic holocaust you see coming. I believe you are a righteous man. But surely the same Spirit of God who showed you these things to come will show you how we are to survive. A good God wouldn’t warn us and then not tell us what to do to make it through the storm. Please, give us a word.”

Another Christian wrote, “I feel cheated. I asked you for financial advice about where to invest my money and how to save my family when the economy goes into a depression. You told me to go to prayer and ask the Holy Spirit for direction. It was the same old theological copout. I need specific answers.”

Beloved, what I am sharing here *is* the Lord’s specific word on the subject. Peter was surely a godly man, and through him the Holy Spirit shows us exactly what God says about how to face these last days. Peter is telling us very clearly, “Here is the main issue, your most important preparation: *Get your heart ready*. If this matter isn’t dealt with, all other preparations are in vain. At the end of all things, stay calm. And stay on your knees. Above all else, practice unceasing mercy and love toward your brothers and sisters. Forgive and cover their sins.” “Charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

In this last verse, we are commanded to “cover” those sins committed against us — meaning, we are not to expose the sins of others. “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (4:10). Who has hurt or wounded you? Who has spread gossip about you? According to Jesus, if you do not forgive and cover that sin, you are like the man who was forgiven a great debt but later choked a man who owed him a few dollars.

Let me give you a glimpse into why this issue of forgiveness is so important in these times.

We have over 100 ethnic groups attending Times Square Church. Christ has unified the many races and ethnic groups here in brotherly love. The sign above our church doors reads, “The Church That Love Is Building,” and that love is Jesus.

I realize this racial unity makes our church a target marked by hell. In a world of racial hatred and tribal upheaval, God has blessed us with a powerful testimony. Simply put, Jesus is the source that breaks down every barrier, including that of race.

Several times in our church’s history, we have felt the fury of demonic forces coming against our loving unity in Christ. And there is no greater weapon used by hell than the unforgiveness of fellow believers.

You may say, “But I’m not holding onto any grudges. I don’t have any bitterness toward anyone. I only have pure love for my brothers and sisters. When someone sins against me, I never expose their iniquity. So, I don’t see how Peter’s admonition applies to me. What does he have to say to me about preparing for the end times?”

The truth is Peter’s message here has everything to do with the future of the church of Jesus Christ. You see, God is preparing his church for a latter-day outpouring of his Spirit. According to the prophets, the Holy Spirit will come in a great wave upon the earth, filling God’s people with joy when the world is in upheaval. This won’t happen,

however, in a church where people hold grudges and wounds are left unresolved.

Peter is asking us, “Do you want to be ready for what’s coming? Do you want to be fully prepared when all things are being shaken? Then make sure you have nothing in your heart that hinders the flow of God’s Spirit. Something wonderful is just ahead. Make sure you are not left out of it.”

What is this last-day outpouring of the Holy Spirit all about?

The prophets — from Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel down to the minor prophets — reveal that in the last days God’s Spirit will once again fall on a prepared people. This event is referred to as the “harvest rain.” It is promised to be greater even than the “former rain,” which was the Spirit’s mighty outpouring at Pentecost.

This prophecy of a last rain refers to two rains that occurred annually in Israel. Israel’s seasons were opposite to ours today. The former (or first) rain came in the fall, watering the newly planted crops. This typifies what happened at Pentecost, when the “first rain” fell in a great outpouring of God’s Spirit. That rain watered the seed of the Word, and it grew and spread to become the worldwide church we see today.

Israel’s “last rain” came in the spring, ripening the crops just before harvest. Zechariah refers to this last rain, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days: “Ask ye of the Lord rain in the time of the latter rain; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field” (Zechariah 10:1).

Moses said there simply could be no harvest without another rain. The Lord said to Israel through him, “If ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments...I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil” (Deuteronomy 11:13–14).

Finally, Joel gives us a vibrant picture of what it looks like when this harvest rain comes:

“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice; for the Lord will do great things. Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength. Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.

“And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the fats shall overflow with wine and oil. And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you. And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed. And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed” (Joel 2:21–27).

Joel is saying, in effect, “Wake up, church! Look around you. What you see happening has been prophesied. It is beginning to rain, and the Lord has made the clouds bright and full of water. The Spirit is preparing all things for the last great harvest.”

Satan knows about this final rain to come and the glorious harvest that will follow it.

The devil knows what is written in God’s Word. And he is determined to hinder the great harvest he knows is coming. He has unleashed a furious attack on the church, using every weapon he can to remove the peace of God’s people. Indeed, many Christians have been overwhelmed by the darkness now covering the earth, all set in motion by the fury of Satan’s activity.

The gloom and fear hovering over every nation has left people feeling helpless. Here in America, courts have made laws that glory in perversions, all against the will of the people. And it chips away at the righteous soul. The result is hopelessness and stress, weakening the spirit and even causing physical sickness.

In God’s house, sin has been downgraded and hell discarded. The Episcopal Church is splitting apart over gay marriages. Meanwhile, evangelicals — those who are the supposed torchbearers of God’s Word — are becoming more focused on earth than on heaven, placing their energies in movements that are not Christ-centered.

I hear godly people today asking, “Have we sinned away the day of grace? Will our generation go out being known only for dysfunctional families and dead, dry churches? Will we wither away as Israel did in the Old Testament?”

Not so, according to the prophets! God will arise amid the darkness and begin to rain down his Spirit upon his latter house.

In Haggai's day, God's people were downcast because they focused completely on the past.

The Israelites in Haggai's day were discouraged over the new temple they were building. That work seemed so insignificant compared to the magnificence of the former temple. As they reflected on all of God's past glories, they wept with despair at the modest house before them. Haggai asked the people, "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" (Haggai 2:3).

Beloved, the same question applies today. You may recall great revivals of the past, where the Spirit fell powerfully with multitudes saved. Tell me, do you see the life of the church today as nothing compared to those past times? Maybe you're discouraged over how much God's house has withered in power and witness during your lifetime.

I tell you, the word God gave Haggai for his church is meant for us today: "My spirit remaineth among you... The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts: and in this place will I give peace" (2:5, 9).

Peter had been present when the "former rain" fell at Pentecost.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell upon a prepared people who "were all with one accord [of one mind]" (Acts 2:1). So, what is meant that the people were of "one accord," one mind? Simply put, mercy was flowing through them. Let me explain.

Consider those who were on the scene at Pentecost, people we revere today as church fathers. Some of these men had sinned grievously against the Lord and against their brethren. They all had to be forgiven, their sins covered, or the church never would have moved forward with the work the Spirit was about to do.

Consider Peter. He had blasphemed horribly, wounding Jesus as well as the other disciples. That church body forgave Peter, and they covered him so his past would never be held against him. Consider also James and John, the "sons of thunder." They too had sinned grievously, offending their fellow disciples when they professed to be greater than the rest. They also were forgiven and covered.

In truth, anyone present that day might have said, "Hold it, Peter. Who made you the leader here? You denied Christ." No one did that, because their hearts had been prepared through mercy. And they were ready to receive the Spirit when he came in the great outpouring at Pentecost.

Beloved, this is why Peter's focus in his epistles is on *the issues of the heart*. He knew firsthand all these things had to be cast out and forgiven, lest the Spirit's work be hindered by any flesh. The same is true for Christ's church today, we who are to receive his mighty harvest rain. Will we hinder that work of the Spirit, by failing to forgive? Or will we be prepared by allowing mercy to flow through us to others?

As the hour approaches, I do not want anything in my heart to hinder God's work. He is preparing his people to receive his latter rain. And I am determined to continue doing just as Peter has instructed: "Be sober. Take everything to prayer. Show mercy to all." I urge you to do the same. Pray for rain in this time of God's latter house!

I leave you with this powerful final image: "Upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe" (Revelation 14:14–15). So it is!

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