

Hastening His Return

July 1999

June, 2010. I urge you to consider how much of what is written here has already taken place, and to think about how much more complex and serious the situation is now than when I wrote this in 1999! Current world events call serious and wise Christians to seek God with new passion; to invite Him to rule their lives in a much more comprehensive way; and to now define "the good life" by the measure in which we are walking in harmony with Him and fulfilling His purposes for us.

10) But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. 11) Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12) looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! 13) But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. 14) Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, 15) and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation; II Peter 3:10-15a NAS

Hurrying Home!

Over the years my flying career periodically took me away from home for extended periods. Never once did I return to find a note saying "Hi Hon, I'm out shopping with the girls. There's food in the fridge for you to warm up. I'll be home later." Always, Elaine shaped her activities around my return.

There was much that I missed when away, but it was Elaine's enthusiastic "welcome home" that most motivated me to drive many hours, even for a short weekend. She literally "hastened my return!"

Peter speaks of a church that is "looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God." I take that to describe a church that stirs Jesus to say to the Father, "Father, they are ready for Me. They are eagerly looking for My coming. I want them to be here with Me. Please let Me go bring them home."

Three Questions

I ask myself, "Are we that kind of church? Are we 'in holy conduct and godliness,' passionately living for Him and shaping our life around His coming? Are we a 'church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and blameless,' stirring in Jesus the longing to have us with Him?"

The answer shames me. I need to look down at the floor as I give a subdued "No, we are not."

Then I ask a second question. "If we are not that kind of church, what would it take to make us so?"

The answer stirs something deep within me - an incredible mixture of fear and excitement. Sort of like thinking of going on a scary roller coaster ride.

The answer is that it will take "troubles" to break us free from our gods of materialism, power, success, sex, and so forth. The American heart is so given to these gods that nothing else will be able to tear us loose. Among other things, our passion for individualism, our freedom to express

greed, and our soaring economy have converged to give comfort, pleasure and financial security a debilitating grip upon us.

The third question is, "If trouble were to come to America, would it be an act of judgment or mercy?"

The answer is that it would be both judgment *and* mercy. It would be judgment because it is the unavoidable consequence of our sin. As others have said, if God doesn't judge America He will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah. America deserves judgment. But it would also be an awesome act of mercy if God gave us another opportunity to flee our false gods and return to Him.

"Troubles" Out There?

Some time ago a friend and I were talking about the general direction of things in America. He was a lawyer in his mid-30's and one I considered a "thinker." After while he said something like, "Ken, don't you think that most serious Christians in America have the sense that trouble is on the horizon?"

As I have raised the issue with various people since then, there has been a quiet nodding of the head in the affirmative. There *is*, I am confident, a widespread (albeit often unspoken) sense that "we're going to get it."

God is quietly and gently warning His people that something is about to happen.

"Please Don't Light A Match!"

A missionary pilot friend was in a motorcycle accident in Kenya. He reports, "I was lying under my motorcycle, unable to feel my right leg and with fuel dripping inches from my face next to the ignition switch." It was sort of scary, and as quickly as possible he rolled out of the way and into a ditch.

We live in a volatile world with vapors everywhere and all kinds of people holding matches. Only the patience of II Peter 3:9 and 15 is staying the "pooooof."

There are countless combustible situations in our world. Russia has rolled over a bit, but she hasn't died. China and North Korea have very specific agenda.

We live in a world that feels frustrated and helpless in the face of our Rwandas, Bosnias, Kosovos, international terrorists and unprecedented natural disasters. That, especially if combined with a serious threat of a major financial collapse, makes us vulnerable to a leader who promised to keep our world together. Americans would yield easily if he/she promised to preserve their economy.

The greed of corporate America makes it easy for them to lie to us. There is no question whatever in my mind that they would lie about anything that served their interests.

Former luxuries have become life necessities for many Americans. There is a decreasing tolerance for discomfort or inconvenience and a growing sense that we deserve, and others owe us, whatever we want. And violence is becoming our way of expressing discontent.

Families, churches and governments have embraced emotionally based and power driven decision-making processes. They have lost their ability to discern, and to make decisions based on wisdom, rationale and justice. They have little power to protect us from the irrationality and greed that increasingly govern our world.

Many national economies are artificially pumped up, yet stock markets are soaring. It looks like soldiers throwing a wild party the night before they expect to die.

Change could come to America and to our world as quickly as a match can light gas vapors, yet we make little effort to move from danger because we are so infatuated with our gods. Sort of like a drunken motorcyclist might be if he found himself in the same situation as my friend in Kenya. “As in the days of Noah - - ?”

“No Way, Man!”

It’s hard to openly acknowledge the trouble we see ahead, and even tougher to reshape our lives around it.

Probably our American ingenuity and self-sufficiency dull our sense of danger, and possibly the “faith and prosperity” movement has sown the subtle lie that we deserve prosperity and God wouldn’t dare mess with our economy and lifestyle.

Many Christians are heavily vested in our American lifestyle. Denial of its power over us, and of the subservience it demands of us, comes easily.

“I’ll Just Watch Things A While Yet!”

We cannot assume that we will quickly turn to God when troubles come. Our gods will have power to blind us then, just as now. If we can’t see our way in the day, how will we find it in the night?

In fact, the feared loss of our gods will move many to run even further into the forest of spiritual darkness when that time comes. I am confident that in many cases Christian will betray Christian in order to try to preserve what has become “life” to them. But that’s more than we can get into here.

Now is the day for God’s people to search their hearts and to repent. To abandon their houses built on sand for those built on the Rock. To flee their false gods and again worship God with an undivided heart. To give themselves to His eternal and glorious purposes rather than their temporal and shameful pursuits.

Eyes To See

My prayer is not that God will spare America from trouble, but that in the midst of it we will:

- (1) see its mercy side, the refiner’s fire for our purification and our good;
- (2) as Jesus said in John 5:19, see what God is doing and give ourselves to work with Him; and.
- (3) be faithful to Him and to each other through it.

It will be a horrible time for many, but a glorious day for those whose hearts are prepared. Freed from our present bondage we will again serve Him with the fervor and effectiveness that marked the first-century church!

We will see a renewal of the spiritual gifts and God’s miraculous provision and protection - - along with courage and comfort in the face of suffering and death. We will become a church that is truly “looking for and hastening the day of God”!

The Bottom Line

This is the exciting thing! If we were honest about the troubles we see ahead, and if we made appropriate changes in our lives – we wouldn’t have to do anything that we shouldn’t be doing

anyway!!!!!! We would merely be exhibiting the spirit of II Peter 3, Hebrews 11, and similar scriptures!

We would simply be obeying Jesus' "Take up your cross and follow Me" in Mark 8:34-38, and accepting the mandates of II Corinthians 6:14-7:1; Matthew 6:19-34; I John 2:15-17 and countless texts.

Christians who take the Great Commission seriously, and who literally shape their lives around Jesus' prayer in John 17:14-19, are radicals in today's church. However, they are the norm in Jesus' definition of what it means to live a life that demonstrates that He is truly "Lord".

We have nothing to lose and everything to gain by taking a serious look at the world we live in! By turning our backs to the things that are important to the world and pouring ourselves out for the things that are important to God. And by shaping our lives around the return of our Lord.

Jesus *is* coming again! May our holy conduct and godliness in every aspect of our lives hasten His return! Maranatha!

Born in 1940, Ken Stoltzfus has worked as a pilot, ordained Christian minister, businessman, missionary to Africa and writer. This is #2 in his series "Prophetic, 9-11," and is one of many short articles that can be found at www.John2031.com

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