



There is

FIRE
IN
THE
LAND

THE ISSUE

We would be rightfully indignant if a passerby noticed that our house was on fire but failed to alert us. Nevertheless, prophetic voices are warning us that God's fire of judgment is upon our nation, while as a people, we remain indifferent to their words. What is the reason? Very simply, the issue is sin!

As a nation, we have begun to call evil good, and good evil. Homosexuality is now approved as a valid lifestyle. The murder of unborn babies is permitted by law. Freedom of choice and permissive lifestyles that include perversion are legally protected rather than the moral conduct based on God's laws. Social goals are based on a spirit of materialism that has created enormous personal and governmental debt. Murder rates are the highest among developed nations. God has been taken out of our schools and courts. Drug use is rampant among the youth of our nation. Children bring guns to school, gang violence is common in city streets. Pornographic movies and videos are readily available in the market place. The rates of divorce and rape are high and increasing. Education programs in schools endorse our social lifestyle and make condoms available to the children. Instead of teaching the principles of righteousness, New Age concepts and practices are increasingly being introduced. These sins are what constitute the issue facing our nation!

Probably the most important truth for believers in any age is to recognize the issue of their day, and thus to understand God's intentions and purposes for them. Certainly, Israel's primary failure at the time of Christ was not knowing the day of their visitation.

How does a "Christian" nation lose sensitivity to the voice and way of God? Any country which tolerates growing social sins will not recognize when it crosses the threshold of God's patience, breaking His commandment by transgressions which He has specifically promised in His word would result in judgment.

National repentance is the only answer for peace with God. The principles of justice in the Law of God, like Himself, do not change. During the Old Testament, when Israel backslid from serving the Lord and went into idolatry after other gods, He sent judg-

ment upon them that He had forewarned them of. These judgments consisted of pestilence, crop failures by insects and drought, wars, captivity, natural calamities such as earthquakes, famines, violent winds, hailstones, etc. (2 Chronicles 7:13-14; Jeremiah 14:3; Ezekiel 13:10-13; Amos 4:6-10). God's moral absolutes have not changed, so why should His judgment of our transgressions as a nation be any different? The truth is that as a nation, as a church, and as individuals, we need to repent!

OUR DAY OF VISITATION

This generation occupies a unique and important period of church history as the age of grace comes to a close. It is a time of testing and sifting of nations and individuals, for both will be brought into the valley of decision. The purpose of God shall be accomplished (Isaiah 46:9-10). The time ahead will see fulfillment of what the Lord has planned to accomplish since the beginning of creation. He will prepare His bride, a holy church without spot or blemish, to present to Himself. We need to clearly understand that transition from the turmoil and upheaval of the present into the future glory of our Lord's return will take place during a time of deep darkness and spiritual deception. It will be a time of great shaking!

As sin increases, the judgments of God will become ever more evident in the world. However, they will be accompanied by His mercy and love as He pleads through the gospel for men to repent. The end of this age will be climaxed by a mighty demonstration of the love of God as many who are crippled by sin and despair, and who see the hopelessness of their way of life, will be swept into the kingdom by His grace before the day of wrath (Luke 14:16-23).

All people will have to choose between love of truth in the gospel of the kingdom and deceptions of the New Age (2 Thessalonians 2:7-12).

Climactic events, all of which are subject to the Lord's control, will be designed to remove tares from among the wheat, to separate out from Christendom those who will not submit to the Lord. In these days, God will deliver His people from the control of man and ways of the world. He will prepare His army for a final, mighty conflict of

spiritual warfare to gather in His harvest. Those who prove faithful in these days of testing, who are trained by the discipline of the Lord in trials and afflictions, will be warriors in His army.

In a final outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Lord will manifest His love, mercy and power through His army, and multitudes of souls will be gathered into His kingdom. We stand at the threshold of a quick work in righteousness by the Lord in which the gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed to all nations in a final demonstration and witness of the grace of God. And then the end shall come (Matthew 24:14).

The great shaking to come will not be confined to the earth, but there shall also be great shaking in the heavens as well, for the real issues are spiritual (Revelation 12:1-12; Haggai 2:7).

The day will come when there will be no gray in the church. All people will have chosen one of two options: to serve the Lord or to go their own way; to choose the way of truth or to believe a lie. The real issue is not better ministry; it is the Lordship of Christ!

The Lord is calling His people to draw near to Him, to come out of the shadows and be a light to the world in this day of visitation.

THE FIRE OF GOD

All that every believer has built for the Lord in ministry and service will ultimately be tested by fire (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). Whatever will be found to not be of God will be burned up; whatever remains will be rewarded by the Lord. Each one of us have to face this final judgment of our service.

However, before that day arrives, the Lord is bringing the fire of His judgment upon men and nations for the purpose of redemption. Fire purifies as well as destroys. And this is what we face in our nation today. God is speaking to us through shakings that He is bringing upon the land.

Although the general population would not see it as such, believers would have to be blind to not recognize the hand of God in the recent tsunami off the shores of Indonesia. There can be no doubt

that AIDS is a plague that God has rightfully sent upon the nations because of the sin of homosexuality.

It is important to recognize that the floods, AIDS, anarchy in our streets, economic problems, earthquakes, wars, riots, ethnic strife, hurricanes, etc. are the fire of God! They are instruments through which He speaks to us, and they are wholly under His control. Even though each calamity has arisen because of sin, they never take place apart from God's control. Their purpose is to call nations to repentance. God allows the consequences of our sins to come upon us as a curse that is intended to move us to humility and repentance. To we who are Christians, these winds of calamity are not sent to destroy us but to deepen our roots in Him, and to bring us into His purpose for these days.

It is vital, first as a church and second as a nation, that we hear the voice of God warning us through the worldwide traumatic events coming upon the earth. The warning in the following scripture is particular significant for us today.

See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those (Israel) did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape who turn from Him who warns from heaven. And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven." . . . for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:25, 26, 29)

WHAT ABOUT THE CHURCH?

Judgment always begins at the house of God. As His people, we must recognize what is taking place, and that the apocalyptic scenario of events are intended, first of all, to bring us to a place of repentance. The church cannot hold back God's judgment if she is entangled in the ways and sins of the world. Believers cannot live above their material means in the world and still walk in the principles of God's kingdom. Simplicity of lifestyle must replace extravagance. Sin must be removed from the hearts and lifestyle of believers if they are to become a voice of intercession and direction for the world.

To that end, the Lord is beginning to shake everything that can be shaken in the church. He will replace the scaffolding of human institutionalism with the organic nature of His body, and the sectarian spirit of pride with a spirit of humility and brokenness; the Lordship of Christ will become the primary focus instead of the charisma and dominance of human leadership. Holiness, compassion and mercy must highlight those who preach the gospel. There will be a great manifestation of the power of God in signs and wonders as the gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed in word and deed to the nations. However, this will not take place until first a spirit of holiness rests upon the church.

We stand today on the threshold of a great awakening and harvest. What transpires will depend to a large extent upon how the church responds to her Lord. She must repent, and in humility turn away from the superficial, religious hype and facade that marks so much Christian ministry in America.

What lies ahead are difficult but important events destined to bring forth the glory of God upon a victorious, overcoming church, the bride of Christ! The question is, "How will she respond to these things?"

We are living in a time of restoration as God brings His purpose to pass in the earth. Israel again exists as a nation and there has been restoration in a measure to the church. Spiritual gifts, the five-fold ministries of Ephesians 4:11, and the rapid rise of churches open to body ministry have resulted in many bodies of believers moving toward a more biblical decentralized church structure oriented around cell groups or home churches.

However, what lies ahead during this final phase of restoration requires new dimensions of commitment to the will of God in order for the power, love and compassion of Jesus to produce an evangelism that will touch the entire world. Spiritual conflicts with demonic forces of Satanism and the New Age will become more common. Worldwide economic difficulties, persecutions, ethnic conflicts, anarchy and tribulation will bring new environments of testing that will call for great perseverance in the saints and serve to draw them closer together around the Person and Lordship of Christ. There is much knowledge about God and His ways in the church in America. This

can bring great deceit to the hearts of those believers who put their trust in such knowledge rather than in the intimacy of their relationship with the Lord. The true church will be freed from alliances and structures of the world. Bodies of believers will move in great unity to gather in the harvest which will come for the most part from the poor, those crippled by sin, the street people, those without hope because of drugs or economic despair, from Islamic nations and countries that in the past have been closed to the gospel. At the same time, there will be a falling away of many from nominal Christianity (Matthew 24:3-25). Nations and men will be sifted by the Lord during days of great shaking.

If these things are true, then there are three, profound steps facing the church today that are the keys to the end-time harvest:

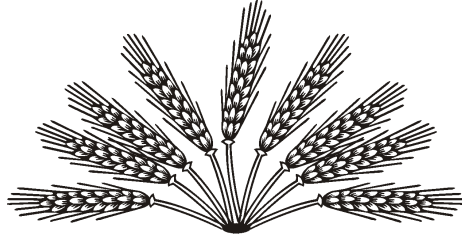
1. To repent, confess and forsake all sin that hinders us from living what we proclaim in the gospel of the kingdom. Righteousness and personal integrity are essential qualities of spiritual ministry.
2. To tear down in our minds those fortresses that have made us susceptible to the social sins of today (2 Corinthians 10:3-5). These strongholds include unforgiveness, spirits of jealousy and competitiveness, fantasies, elitism, racism, anti-Semitism, materialism, sectarianism, pride (personal, cultural and national), etc.
3. To intercede for the church and our country by personally identifying with the sins of both so that we come before God as repentant representatives. We are to pray as Daniel prayed for his people, Israel (Daniel 9:3-19). This means to seek forgiveness for sins such as abortion, homosexuality, etc. and to pray for a spirit of supplication and repentance to sweep the land.

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth, and deep darkness the peoples; but the Lord will rise upon you. And nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. (Isaiah 60:1-3)

The days ahead will see greater depths of darkness and deception in the world. However, at the same time the light of signs and wonders will arise upon His church. God will pull back the curtain of heaven and reveal His glory upon His people. Revival must come;

and it will come through those who see the desperate need and intercede until God comes and rains righteousness upon them.

Many believers don't understand how essential humility and intercession are in spiritual warfare. It will cost everything to embrace the above three steps. However they are the way of broken hearts that weep because God's fire is in the land.



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