

## HOPE AND FEAR

A. Introduction: There's increasing anxiety and fear over worsening conditions in our country and the world. The upcoming election has added an additional level of angst.

1. To be at peace in the midst of all of it we must know how to look at what's happening in terms of the big picture or God's overall plan for mankind and the earth. When you know the plan and your place in it, it's a source of great hope even in the face of increasingly troubled times. Eph 1:18
  - a. God calls all human beings to become His sons and daughters through faith in Christ and live with Him forever on earth, the home He made for His family. Eph 1:4,5; Isa 48:15; Rev 21:3
    1. Jesus came into this world to pay for sin so it can be removed and all who bow their knee to Him as Savior and Lord can be transformed into holy sons of God. I John 5:1; John 1:12,13
    2. He'll come again to cleanse the earth of every trace of corruption and death and establish the visible kingdom of God (the family home) on earth. Isa 65:17; II Pet 3:10-13
  - b. According to the Bible, the years leading up to Jesus' return will be more and more chaotic. We'll see increasing unrighteousness, immorality, injustice and lawlessness. It's easy to get caught up in the emotions produced by what we see around us and lose sight of the big picture.
    1. This life is only a small part of our existence. The greater and better part is ahead, first in Heaven and then on the new earth. We need to keep the proper perspective. The most important thing is that people come to saving knowledge of Jesus. II Cor 4:17,18; Rom 8:18
    2. We need to learn how to live through the chaos of these years in faith and hope rather than fear and anxiety so that we can shine the light of Jesus more effectively to those around us.
2. Matt 24:6-8--Jesus said one of the characteristics of the period leading up to His return is and will be people groups fighting people groups. We must be aware of this so we don't get caught up in it.
  - a. We shouldn't be fighting with each other over political, social, economic and racial issues. We're called to live at peace with each other. Rom 12:18; I Thess 5:13; II Tim 2:24; etc.
  - b. This doesn't mean we agree with everyone about everything. The Bible allows for differing opinions in non-moral, temporal issues. We must agree to disagree on some issues. Rom 14:1-23
    1. We're called to love one another or treat others the way we want to be treated. I have the right to disagree with you and believe you've made a poor decision. But I must presume you've made what you believe is a reasonable decision based on your life experience and the information to which you've been exposed. Matt 22:37-40; Matt 7:12; I Cor 13:7
    2. The most important issue is not what people believe about politics, economics or social justice. The most important thing is: Do they know Jesus as Savior and Lord?
3. Much of our present passion is coming out of fear that if "their" candidate gets elected and "their" programs are enacted it'll be the end of society as we know it. How do we deal with this fear?

B. First, you must understand what the world will be like at the return of Jesus. The Bible gives specific details about political, economic and religious conditions on earth at Jesus' return (lessons for another day).

1. The world will unite under a leader who offers himself as the answer to all its problems. His seat of power will be in lands controlled by the former Roman Empire. Rev 13:1-18
  - a. These conditions won't come out of a vacuum. They're setting up right now. For several decades there's been increasing talk of global problems that must be addressed by the world community—climate change, terrorism, income inequality. A recent CNN headline: What leader can save us?
    1. These ideas are changing the way people view themselves and government. Many under thirty-five years know nothing other than: We're global citizens of a global world and must break down the barriers that divide us and become a world without guns and borders.
    2. America has to pass off the scene as the dominant world power in order for this scenario to set up fully. More and more of our national sovereignty will be surrendered to global causes. I

don't think we'll become a third world nation but our standard of living may be affected

- b. The final world ruler will be empowered by Satan as the devil works through this man seeking to hold on to his control of the world. The world is and will increasingly abandon Almighty God, paving the way for this man to take center stage. II Thess 2:9,10; Rev 19:19; etc.
  1. As the world increasingly rejects the Lord He is giving them over to the consequences of their behavior. Rom 1:18-32 describes a downward spiral which occurs when men willfully reject God. It produces a reprobate mind, a mind unable to make decisions in its own best interests.
  2. Our lives are and will more and more be affected by these developments and the policies and activities that come out of reprobate minds. It's hard to watch and difficult to live with.
2. This is the point for our present discussion: As we're increasingly affected by choices and decisions with which we strongly disagree, it's easy to lose sight of the big picture.
  - a. It's easy to forget that all the people making these decisions and engaging in these behaviors are valuable to God and have been called to a hope just like us. Instead of damning them, pray for them: Lord, send laborers into their harvest field. Matt 9:36-38
  - b. I'm not saying you can't actively support a particular temporal viewpoint, but keep it in perspective. If every one of your candidates wins and your political, economic, social and racial views are fully enacted, but everyone goes to Hell, it's all for naught. Matt 16:26
    1. I myself have a point of view and intend to vote. Neither candidate can stop the downfall of America but I believe one will slow the tide of destruction and the other will hasten it.
    2. I hope my candidate wins. But I must keep my perspective right no matter what happens. What is most important? What is temporary? What is eternal?
    3. It's clear from scripture which way world circumstances are headed. So in one sense it doesn't matter who wins the election. There's is no turning this around. And why would we want to? It's all going to culminate in the return of the rightful King to this earth.
  - c. If the "other" candidate wins it's not bigger than God. The Lord can and will cause it to serve His purposes as He works in this fallen world with flawed people to accomplish His plan to have a forever family in a forever home.
  - d. I Pet 1:5--None of this means that there's no help and provision for us in this life. God's promise to his people is always to keep (guard) us by His power through our faith.
3. Peter wrote those words. He's one of the disciples who asked Jesus what signs would indicate His return is near (Matt 24:1-3; Mark 13:1-3). Jesus and the disciples had just come out of the Temple when He told them the Temple was going to be destroyed.
  - a. Even though it was the center of their religious, cultural and political life, they weren't freaked out by what Jesus said. They simply asked Him when and what signs would precede it.
  - b. They weren't alarmed because they knew from the writings of the Old Testament prophets that the world as it is (filled with sin, corruption and death) is coming to an end. Earth will be made new as the conditions of Eden are restored and the kingdom of God is established on earth.
    1. They knew these events will be preceded by a time of calamity with Jerusalem being attacked (Zech 14:2,3). But they also knew God's people will make it through to His kingdom.
    2. Joel 2:10,11--The prophet Joel wrote about the Day of the Lord (Jesus' coming). He also wrote a passage quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:16-21). Note that Joel said: Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord will be delivered from the chaos. v32
  - c. Peter didn't live to see the second coming of the Lord because he was martyred for his faith. But remember, he is the one who gave us a detailed explanation about earth's ultimate transformation and deliverance from corruption and death. II Pet 3:10-12
    1. He died looking forward to the new earth where all will be made right and things will be as they were meant to be. II Pet 3:13
    2. He died with Jesus' promise that everything he lost or gave up in this life to serve the Lord will be restored to him on the new earth. Matt 19:27-29

- d. Peter hasn't cease to exist. He's in the invisible Heaven enjoying its wonders as he awaits a return to earth to be reunited with his body to live here forever. He'll have his part in the kingdom.
    - 1. The certainty that Jesus' first followers would have a part in the kingdom didn't mean they weren't going to die. Everybody dies. But it's not bigger than God.
    - 2. I Cor 15:28--Death is the last enemy to be put underfoot. Note, this statement is made in the context of the resurrection of the dead.
  - e. Peter is part of those who've gone before us, the family of God in Heaven, who watch our progress because they are excited that they plan is about to be completed. Eph 3:15; Heb 12:1
  - 4. Go back to his statement that we're kept by the power of God through faith. Note the context. I Pet 1:5
    - a. v3,4--By His great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (RSV)
      - 1. v6-9--Peter encouraged his readers not to be moved by the trials (persecutions) they faced and then defined what he means by the salvation that will be revealed at the end of this age.
      - 2. v10-12 (NLT)--It's the salvation God has been promising since man sinned in the Garden. A Redeemer is coming who will undo the damage and make everything right (Gen 3:15).
    - b. Peter was doing exactly what I'm trying to do through these lessons—reminding them of the big picture so they'd stay faithful to the Lord no matter what they encountered as they served Him.
      - 1. God's power keeps us through faith. But most of us are in fear not faith. The remedy for fear is seeing reality as it truly is. Nothing can come against you that's bigger than God. All that we face is temporary and subject to change by God's power either in this life or the life ahead. God's plan for a family on the earth made new will be completed and you'll have a part in it.
      - 2. This kind of perspective comes from seeing the big picture. It makes you fearless in the face of life's challenges and lifts you up above in the midst of life's hardships.
  - 5. The worst thing that can happen to human being is death. That's why we fear a bad economy or a president who won't stop ISIS. If we have no jobs we won't have food and we'll die. If terrorism isn't stopped we could be blown up or executed. But that's where understanding the big picture is helpful.
    - a. Peter referred to the salvation of your souls (v9). We hear that as a religious cliché and miss the impact. Soul (PSUCHE) means breath of life or the immaterial portion of man, the inward man
      - 1. Because of Adam's sin everyone's body dies (Gen 3:19). It's just a question of when and how. The most important thing is not what happens to the body but to the inward man.
      - 2. If the inward man is born again through faith in Christ then he will be reunited with his body through resurrection of the dead to live on earth again. We have to have things in perspective.
    - b. Matt 10:16-31--Jesus warned the original twelve disciples of the opposition they would face as His followers: You'll be hated, persecuted, betrayed, delivered up to death. But stay faithful to Me.
      - 1. In that context Jesus said: Don't be afraid of men who can harm your body but can't touch you. Fear me. I have power over both your body and soul. v28
      - 2. The point is not: I'll harm you or send you to Hell even if your faithful to me. The point is: Recognize what matters most. Keep an eternal perspective. Don't fear what happens to the body. Be concerned with what happens to the inward man and the body will be taken care of.
- C. Consider several examples of fellow members of the family of God who are now in Heaven waiting to return to earth, all of whom had to deal with hardships in their lives due to decisions made by ungodly men.
- 1. The prophet Daniel was taken as a captive from the land of his birth (Israel) in 605 B.C. and spent the rest of his life serving kings in a foreign land (Babylon and Persia). It's a long story for another day, but poor decisions on the part of national leaders led to Daniel's captivity.
    - a. His book has two great examples of God's people delivered from harm at the hands of the godless.
      - 1. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, three Hebrew princes deported to Babylon with Daniel

were thrown into a furnace for refusing to worship a gold statue of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Their stance: God is able and will deliver us, but even if He doesn't we won't bow down.

Jesus joined them in the furnace and they were wonderfully delivered. God was wonderfully glorified. Dan 3:16-18; 25-30

2. Men jealous of Daniel's position in government conspired to harm him by convincing King

Darius to issue a decree that anyone who prayed to a god besides the king for the next thirty days would be thrown into a pit with lions. God protected Daniel and he survived the ordeal.

The king was so impressed he issued a decree through the Persian Empire declaring Almighty God to be the true God. Dan 6:22-28

b. The Lord gave Daniel many revelations about world conditions just before His arrival to set up His kingdom on earth. Daniel saw that kingdom come (Dan 2:44; 7:27). Note these points.

1. God took care of Daniel as he experienced the consequences of ungodly choices. The prophet lived out his life with food, clothing and shelter, but didn't live to see the kingdom set up.

2. At the end of his last vision Daniel was told: Go your way until the end, You will rest, and then at the end of the days, you will rise again to receive the inheritance set aside for you (Dan 12:13, NLT). What he didn't see in his life time he will see and any loss will be restored

2. Acts 7:54-60--Stephen, an early follower of Jesus, became the first martyr of the church. Certain men, stirred by jealousy, accused him of blasphemy and the religious authorities sentenced him to death.

a. As he was being executed the veil that separates this physical world from Heaven was pulled back and Stephen saw the dimension he was about to enter. Jesus met him and, by the grace of God, Stephen was strengthened. He knelt down and prayed for the men who stoned him to death.

b. John was taken to Heaven and given the information recorded in Revelation (an eyewitness account of events in Heaven and on earth just before the Lord comes to establish His kingdom).

1. Rev 6:9-11--While in Heaven John saw men and women who were killed for their faith in God. John referred to them as souls (PSUCHE) or people in Heaven minus their bodies.

2. Their question to God was not: Lord how could you let this happen to us? Rather it was: When are You going to make this right? They understand a plan is in process.

3. Some of the people we've referenced were delivered out of situations. Some were delivered in the midst of circumstances. All of them were more than conquerors by the grace of God.

a. I can't explain why Daniel came out of the lion's den and Stephen didn't come out of the stoning pit beyond: God maximizes human choice. Perhaps Stephen's death was a major witness to Saul.

b. When we look at it in terms of the big picture it's not a big deal. All of these people (those delivered out and in the midst of) eventually died because everyone dies. All are part of the family of God in Heaven and they root for us as they await the culmination of the plan.

D. Conclusion: We have much more to say. Consider these points as we close. The fear of something is always worse than the thing itself. We need to keep an eternal perspective. None of this is bigger than God. No matter what happens in the months and years ahead He will get us through until He gets us out.