

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers walking after their own lust, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?”. II Timothy 3:1; II Peter 3:3,4

THE LAST DAYS

by Craig Marlatt

Are we really in the last days? Since I first became a Christian I have been told that we are in the last days. It seems so exciting to think that we could really be living when the Lord Jesus returns, but didn't every generation before us think that they were in the last days too? What makes it so different for us now?

When Peter stood up to preach on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts chapter 2, he rebuked the scoffing crowd by telling them that what they were witnessing was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy concerning the last days (Acts 2:14-21; Joel 2:28-32). So in reality, in a manner of speaking, we have been in the last days, since that day of Pentecost.

Today we are living in a time when we are seeing almost daily fulfillment of the word of God concerning the last days. With the eyes of the world focused upon the Mid-East, and Israel in particular, it certainly appears that the Lord's return is near at hand. God is calling his people back to the land of their inheritance, a re-gathering that was prophesied extensively in Jeremiah and by other Old Testament prophets. The stage has been set and God may soon fulfill his word concerning these things.

Some of the most outstanding and even frightening things from the prophets concerning the end times are those spoken about the conditions that would arise in society and in the Church itself. To me these have as much or more significance to the watching Christian as those prophecies concerning Israel as a nation.

Perilous Times

“ This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come”. During the latter part of the last century and now into the twenty-first we have seen a growing escalation of violence in society on a worldwide scale. From mass killings, serial murders, political and religious terrorism, to random murder and mayhem among our youth in frightening proportions. In the 90's in many large cities young people were being killed for something as foolish as designer coats or shoes . . . by other young people. Who can deny that we are becoming a violent barbarous people? And for what reason? No one really knows. Certainly illegal drugs and the abuse of sex and violence in our movie, television, music and video game industries have helped to deteriorate the moral fiber of our societies, but regardless of the reasons it is hard to deny the truth of the prophecies: *“Perilous times [have] come”*.

With the tremendous rise of terrorism in the U.S. and around the world since even before September 11, 2001, we have become a frightened people, unable to pinpoint just who the enemy is. Is he the wealthy fundamentalist religious leader willing to finance chaos and mass murder wherever anarchy is fomenting or active? Or the lone sniper

picking his victims at random, killing for the sake of killing? As though killing itself was a means to an end. Is it some international conspiracy headed by an elite coalition of men who want to control the world's natural resources for their own benefit? Or those who indeed fear such a conspiracy of men and governments, and wish to topple them for the sake of humanity and decency. Or is it some evil force outside of man himself who plays the whole thing like a teenagers video game where the killing and violence is just part of the entertainment. All arranged for the pleasure and benefit of the user? Who can say? But certainly we are in "perilous times".

False Prophets

"For many shall come in my name, saying I am Christ and shall deceive many ... and many false prophets shall arise and deceive many" (Matthew 24:5,24). There has never been such a rise in cult activities in America as during the past forty to fifty years. Moonies, Krishnas, The Way Movement, Transcendental Meditation, Buddhism, Yoga, Ek-Ken-Kar, New Testament Judaism, The Children of God, The New Age Movement, Scientology, Islamic Fundamentalism, The Nation of Islam, extreme right wing so called Christian cults, skinheads, etc. And over the past hundred years we've seen a vast explosion of Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Science and other well established world wide sects. Every year new groups come upon the scene. God's word is being fulfilled right before our very eyes. Do we care to see or will we just sit back and ignore the facts?

Daily, multitudes of people are being drawn away into eternal damnation and being deceived just like the Lord said they would be. Many of those who are drawn to these cults have come from Christian or Jewish upbringing; young people who are looking for something to believe in that has meaning and purpose. Often because religion is a tradition in their own homes and not a reality they find nothing worth believing in and are easily lured away. Do you care? Where are your children today? Have they *"...departed from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits"* ?

False Teachers

"But there were false teachers among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you . . . through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you" (II Peter 2:1-3). Today, I believe, there are tremendous numbers of people joining the ranks of Christendom who are not seeking God, but rather they are seeking what God can give them. They will not endure sound doctrine. Their teachings say that if God is really your Father there will be no struggle, just blessings. They seek God's hand rather than his face. To them God is not the way to eternal life, but the way to getting what they want. They have exchanged repentance from sin for "positive life concepts". For them renewing of the mind is merely an attitude adjustment: "Just learn how to act, and think, and talk and all things can be yours."

Paul calls these teachings *"... perverse disputing's of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth supposing that gain is godliness: from such"*, he says, *"withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain . . . But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some*

having coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (I Timothy 6:5-10).

Certainly there is nothing wrong with prosperity in itself. I have known several Christians whom God has greatly blessed financially who see their responsibility to be channels through which God can bless others and support the various works of the kingdom. But not everyone can handle this type of ministry. If you were to walk into the average Christian church today and give everyone in the room a million dollars I wonder how many would be there six months from now? Or even next Sunday? God gives to every man severally as He will.

We must be careful not to be drawn into doctrines which major on the minors: prosperity, tongues, demons, miracles, special anointings, prophecy, faith-teaching, spiritual gifts, etc. All of these are good and from God, but they in themselves are not the Gospel. They are a great part of the Good News but they are not the central issues.

We see and hear teachers every day on radio and television who make big promises of what God will do for us if we send them money. They seem to be men and women of great power and anointing and some even operate in the realm of the supernatural. But if you look closely at their lives do you see the character of Christ? Often instead what we observe is arrogance and spiritual elitism. Don't accept the power of God unless it comes with the character of Christ. Just because someone has miraculous gifts does not label him or her as God's servant. Many who probably started out with valid anointing from God have been overcome by the power that was given to them. Because they did not allow God to work out the character of Christ in them they have fallen sway to passion and pride, spiritual arrogance, and covetousness and they will, "... pierce themselves through with many sorrows".

We need to realize that God does not take away his divine gifts just because a vessel is in sin. When a trusted bank employer turns into an embezzler does the combination he was trusted with refuse to open the safe? Of course not! So it is with the gift of God: Spiritual gifts and insights are like keys given to many who may have, since receiving them, left off serving the Lord with a pure heart and motive. But still the gift may remain. Whoever possesses it is held responsible to walk uprightly or they will stand in judgement before God.

What can we as Christians do in the light of such things? Should we go off into a cave and save ourselves? Should we run panic stricken into the streets proclaiming to everyone we meet, "*The sky is falling! the sky is falling!*", or just ignore it all and go about our business singing K'sara, sara Whatever will be will be? Obviously not! If these things are true they should act to stabilize our faith and convince us even more of the truth of the God's Word, the Bible. We should become more surrendered to God and committed to the task of loving those around us. Devoting ourselves to the work and ministry Jesus left us to do.

Don't let the fear of the times we are living in cause you to forget that we are 'sojourners'; strangers just passing thorough on our way to a place whose Maker and builder is God. A place especially prepared for us who love Him and want to live in harmony and peace under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is upon these promises that we must rest our hope. And just as the things He spoke about concerning the times we now live in our coming to pass, those promises He left us about our eternal home will follow a life of trust, obedience and faith.

