

St. Paul: On The Same page

11.10.13 Week #272

Day One: Malachi 4:1-6

“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays.

People who live in comfort don't think much about justice. But those who know what real injustice is like – those who have suffered under it and who are ready to despair, praying that a rescuer would come – people like that understand what it means to long for a day of justice.

There have been believers in Syria for almost 2,000 years. Some of our oldest copies of the Gospels are written in Syriac. Today, during a civil war in which one group of Muslims is fighting another group of Muslims, it is the Christians who suffer the most. Driven from their homes, tortured, killed for

“Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

Luke 21:28

their faith, they long for justice. But Liena, a Syrian sister in Christ, said, “even if he allows us to die, it will be an honor for us to die for his name, to glorify his name.”

We may forget that we have such an enemy because he gives gifts like fleeting wealth or pleasure. But he is an enemy who would steal our children if he could. But God has a promise for us – for those who feel the pain of the oppressor's boot. “The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays.”

Prayer: Heavenly Father, extend your strong arm to defend my brothers and sisters in Christ who suffer injustice. Give them strength to endure. And give us victory together. Amen.

Day Two: 2 Thess. 3:6-13

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

Paul served as what we call a “worker priest.” He supported himself by making tents, and then he also preached the gospel and began congregations. Few pastors would be willing to do that today, because they don’t want to be the only one making a sacrifice while the congregation takes it easy.

Paul is not asking that he have an easier job, or that someone lighten his load. He is asking that others would labor alongside him. Why? Not because the work is so hard, but because the work is so important.

In the chapter before, Paul warns that the end is near. There will be enemies working

against the Gospel. The time they have to bring the good news to those around them is rapidly slipping away. Therefore, he says, they must “not grow weary in doing good.”

I know that you are sometimes weary of serving. Setting up chairs for church on Sunday, preparing another Sunday School class, coming to chaperone for another youth event, attending still another meeting. These things get old for church staff also.

But “do not grow weary in doing good.” Because we know that God has a good purpose in our labors, and he will use these earthly things for an eternal, heavenly blessing.

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”

Prayer: Lord God, you gave Adam and Eve work in the Garden and it was good. Their work was not a curse. Bless our work together that we may rejoice in it, and give thanks that we can be your partners in building the kingdom. Amen.

Day Three: Luke 21:5-28

*He replied: "Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and, 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. **When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened.** These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away."*

Every now and then a couple of nice, smiling people come to my door with brochures. They want to talk with me about the end of the world.

Pastor Charles Russell predicted the end of the world would occur in 1874. The Ghost Dance movement said it would happen in 1890. The Catholic Apostolic Church called it for 1901. Russell tried again, predicting 1914, and his followers (later called the Jehovah's Witnesses) tried a 3rd time with 1918. Herbert W. Armstrong (Worldwide Church of God) tried 1936, 1943, 1972, and 1975.

The end has still not come, even after hundreds and hundreds of people have predicted it. What does that tell you about living in fear of the end?

We do often hear of wars and uprisings, and these are

very real things, not mere phantoms. We remember well the sense of uncertainty after the attacks of September 2001. We could see that our world was changing and our sense of safety was much reduced.

But Jesus says that these are precisely the things we ought to expect. And our reaction should not be fear or sadness or dismay. It should be confidence, because we know where this world is going.

Soon or late, we know that this world will end. If we know that the world will end soon, how should that change the way we live? Perhaps we would be less attached to these things that don't really matter, and we would use them for eternal purposes. On the other hand, if we know that the end could still be a long way off, then how should we live? We will live wisely, not in fear, but trusting that the Lord who has brought us this far will still guide us on.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you promised to return. Help us to wait wisely and well, neither doubting nor slacking. Help us to wait faithfully, keeping your Truth in hand. Amen.

Day Four

What is the “rapture” and what should I think about it?

Some Christians believe that God will remove all of the believers from the world before a time of tribulation. Based on a misunderstanding of Luke 17:34 and 1 Thessalonians 4:17, this idea is comforting to some people because it means that they will not have to endure persecution. It is also used to make others afraid of being “left behind.”

We know, because Jesus warned us, that the believers will all go through a time of tribulation. That’s the time we’re in right now. For some it is a time of physical attack, like the believers who are being attacked right now in Egypt, in Pakistan, in India and Nigeria and Syria. But for many it is a time of temptation, in which false teachers seek to lead us away from Christ.

Nevertheless, Jesus’ second coming is not something for us to fear. When he comes at last it will be a great relief and joy for all of those who have waited for him!

After all, even though Jesus warns us about false prophets and persecution, the main thrust of his teaching about the end times is this...

“When you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified.” Luke 21:9 “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed...” Matthew 24:6 “When you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates.” Matthew 24:33 And perhaps best of all, “Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Luke 21:28

Yes, bad things will happen. Look around you. Terrible things are happening all the time. But what else is taking place? God’s Holy Spirit is still leading people to faith, washing away their sin and guilt and fear, and giving them life and joy eternal. Lift up your head! Your redemption is near!

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, along with all the believers of every time and place, I wait eagerly to see your face. Keep me in faith until that day. Amen.