

ROAD TO REVIVAL

By

Vance Havner

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PROPHETIC DOCTRINE AND PRACTICAL DUTY

WOULD be outside my province if I came to you as a Bible teacher and very much so if I came as a specialist in prophecy. The HOLY SPIRIT has not given to me the teaching gift. GOD's Word speaks of would-be teachers who have no business teaching (I Timothy 1:7) and of learners who long since should have been teachers (Hebrews 5:12). I have tried to find my place between the Presumptuous Pedagogues in the first verse and the Pathetic Pupils in the second.

We have with us those who belong to neither of these classifications but who are teachers indeed. With them leave the intricate problems of prophecy. We thank GOD that while Belshazzar listens today in vain to Chaldeans and astrologers, there are still a few Daniels who can read the handwriting on the wall. The world has its experts and prophets but the Heavenly Hieroglyphics are too much for them and if all the wisecracks of earth today were laid in a row they never would reach a conclusion." But we thank GOD that there are among us those whom GOD has gifted and the SPIRIT has guided, who have learned from GOD's sundial that it is later than men think.

I am concerned with the practical issues that grow out of these profound prophetic truths.

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be?" In my part of the country, many have lacked interest in the subject of prophecy because some who have discoursed so vividly on the tenth verse of this third chapter of Second Peter have shown up so poorly in the eleventh verse. The expert in the mystery of prophecy has not always been an example in **"what manner of person."**

Throughout the Word of GOD one thing stands out crystal clear in this matter of prophecy: wherever the HOLY SPIRIT sets forth some great prophetic truth, He joins it every time with a practical exhortation as to what we are to do about it. The subject of prophecy has, of course, held an attraction for a great many superficial souls with a flair for the spectacular. Gog and Magog, the 666, the beasts of Revelation, have, indeed, fallen into the hands of too many mere sensationalists who have ranged over the country with wild and weird charts of their own devising, setting dates almost as brazenly as ever the Millerites dared to do.

But then any good light will attract a certain number of bugs, so we need not be discouraged by the false to forget the true. Certain it is that no Bible subject holds more practical implications than the matter of prophecy. **"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved,"**

immediately the rejoinder comes, What are you going to do about it? "**What manner of persons ought ye to be?**"

The first truth that grows out of all this is, of course, the necessity for preparation. "**Prepare to meet thy God.**" "**Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh**" (Matthew 24:44). A generation ago, "**Prepare to meet thy GOD**" was a favorite text of evangelistic preachers. Today over the country at large it has been granted an extended leave of absence. The reason is not hard to find.

In many quarters:

- GOD is no longer regarded as a personal being
- hell is a byword
- Heaven is a joke about St. Peter with a bunch of keys
- and the judgment day is a medieval superstition.

Men no longer believe that they are hastening on to the Great Accounting. But, for all that, there is still a Judge and a judgment and an inflexible standard of righteousness that must be met. But, thank GOD, it was met long ago in Him Who was made sin for us though He knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of GOD in Him. He Who is coming is the one and only preparation for His coming. Clad in His righteousness alone are we faultless to stand before the Throne.

I heard a minister tell how he as a boy tried hard to weigh one hundred pounds. He could weigh ninety-five and ninety-six but he could not reach the coveted hundred mark. One day he stepped on the scales and, to his astonishment, went way over the mark. He gave a yell of triumph, but just then he heard a chuckle behind him and looked around to discover that his older brother had put a big foot on the scales.

I know something better than that. GOD had a mark that I could not reach, but my Elder Brother, the Lord JESUS CHRIST, did not merely add His weight to mine; He put Himself in my place and GOD reckons me righteous in Him, because as a convicted sinner I received Him as my Saviour and rest in His finished work and perfect righteousness. So it is He Who is coming Who prepares me for His coming. In the CHRIST Who came I am ready for the CHRIST Who will come.

But "**be ye also ready**" is not the only message that grows out of prophecy. And right here one thinks of many, many Christians whose position is something like this: "Oh, yes, I know that the Lord is coming. But if one is ready, what more can be done?"

Then they bring up the story of the old moderator of some assembly in New England years ago, when the celebrated "dark day" plunged thousands into hysteria thinking the judgment day had arrived. They tell how he asked for the candles to be lit and proceeded with business, saying, "If the Lord is really coming, we can do no better than to be found at our duty." Now that is admirable as far as it goes, but it overlooks something very vital.

The New Testament Christians were not only ready, they were expectant, hilariously anticipating

the Lord's return. And we are bidden not only to prepare but to look for our Lord. **"Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God"; "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." "Look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."**

It is one thing to be ready for someone to come; it is another thing eagerly to expect and await the coming of someone. In my pastoral calling, I am sure that many of my church members were ready for my visits who were not thrilled with anticipation.

If you grew up at home with a sister, I am sure you recall how that when an ordinary friend called, she was ready but not particularly excited about it: but when the one of her heart's desire was expected, you could tell the difference hours ahead of time. The program of beautification began at least by noon and by the middle of the afternoon the hands on the clock seem to have stuck, so slowly moved the hours.

One wonders about these believers who say they are ready but who act as though it did not matter whether the Lord came or not. It is evident from the Scriptures that joyful expectancy is an evidence of readiness.

But while readiness without expectancy is not the New Testament attitude, there is another position that misses the mark almost as widely. It is possible to be worked up over the coming of the Lord without being stirred up about the Lord Who is coming. One is an event, the other is a Person, and it is the Person Who makes the event. Looking for something to happen is one thing; looking for Someone to come is another. Academic speculation about the Program is dry as dust unless there is joyful expectancy of the Person Who makes the Program. That would be like a bride more interested in the trousseau and the wedding trip than in the groom himself. Certainly, the most important thing about the Lord's return is the Lord.

Let us visualize a small-town railroad station at train time. Inside the little ticket office is the station agent. He is an authority on the train schedule, he has read up on that, he knows when the train is due. Out in the station yard is a young bride-to-be who is looking for her lover to come on the next train. She does not know a great deal about the train schedules and the only reason why she is interested in this schedule is because of him who is coming.

The station agent may be an authority and yet he may be very dull today, because he is not eagerly expecting anyone on the train. The girl in the station yard may not be an authority on the schedule but she is so happy that she can hardly live. If I had to choose between them, I'd rather be the girl in the yard. But I don't have to choose between them, for the old station master also may have dear ones coming in on the train, loved ones whose advent turns the time-table from prose into poetry. And yet it is possible, in this matter of our Lord's coming, to study the time-table and miss the Visitor!

Prophetic truth calls us not only to preparation and expectation but also to purification: **"And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure"** (I John 3:3). And along with that comes the call to separation: **"What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?"** (II Peter 3:11).

In I Corinthians 7:29-31, there is a combination of prophetic doctrine and practical duty. I have never heard a sermon from that text, but somebody ought to be preaching about it:

"But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away."

If this means anything at all, it certainly means that in these last days, in the Saturday evening of the age, in these perilous times, in this night of apostasy, with the mystery of lawlessness nearing its climax:, with the flames of judgment already reddening the horizon, we Bible Christians are called upon to practise what we preach and conduct ourselves with a special soberness and seriousness in keeping with the urgency and emergency of the times.

I remember hearing a young missionary relate how that in her last year of nurse's training, a young doctor asked her: "Do you really believe that all men who never have heard of CHRIST are lost?" She answered, "Yes, doctor, I do." Again he asked, "And do you believe that those who have heard of Him and have not accepted Him are lost?" and she answered, "Yes, I do."

Then with a look of utmost seriousness, he said, "Well, all I have to say is that if you believe that, you cannot live like the rest of us do."

If we believe these terrific prophetic truths, then we cannot live like other men. They that sleep sleep in the night and they that be drunken are drunken in the night but we who are of the day must be sober (I Thessalonians 5:7, 8). It is against a prophetic background in Romans that we are exhorted to cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light, to walk honestly, as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying (notice that strife and envying, our respectable sins, are in the same company with low-down immorality!), but, and here is the climax in that verse that changed Augustine from a slave of lust to a slave of CHRIST? **"put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof."**

Now, here are a positive and a negative: some put on CHRIST in a positive act of faith but keep on exposing themselves willfully to temptation, making arrangements to sin, flirting with the world, winking at evil, playing hands with Satan, singing hymns lustily but thinking lustfully.

Much as we believe prophetic truth, too often we have an argument but not a testimony. We do not live as pilgrims and strangers, we are often starched and ironed but not washed, our Pilgrim's Progress too often includes Vanity Fair on its approved itinerary. We let Delilah shave our locks, and let us remember that while Samson may have looked better after his haircut, he had no power. If there is any Bible truth that walks hand in hand with prophecy, it certainly is GOD's call to holiness, and if we profess the Blessed Hope we should practise the Blessed Holiness. You will note that the verse says, **"every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself."**

It is the blood of CHRIST that cleanseth from all sin, but we are also called upon to cleanse our hands and purify our hearts (James 4:8), for we have the responsibility of repentance and confession and abstinence from fleshly lusts that war against the soul.

Along with this, there goes a kindred truth already indicated in our passage, from Romans 13, where we are admonished not to walk in strife and envying. In the fifth chapter of First Thessalonians we have a choice prophetic passage. In verse 2 Paul moves on to bring out of it a call to comfort, and if we had time we should consider prophecy's message of consolation.

Next, he asks his readers to have due regard and esteem for GOD's ministers, and there is material for a dozen sermons right there. If some who claim to be Bible Christians today had carried their doctrine over and translated it into duty, there would not be so many brokenhearted pastors who have gone to pieces trying to keep together groups of professing fundamentalists who remind us of that brand of matches that won't strike anywhere except on their own box; who write "JESUS ONLY" over their churches but have "US ONLY" written in their hearts.

But I am concerned especially with Paul's next word: "**And be at peace among yourselves.**" Prophetic truth makes for pacification. There is a passage (I Timothy 1:5-7) which needs to be placarded amongst us today: "**Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned: from which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say nor whereof they affirm.**"

We Americans are rather like these Corinthians in our tastes: there is much emphasis on tongues of men and angels; the gifts of prophecy flourish; there are many who understand mysteries and knowledge; amazing faith is displayed in some quarters; much goods is bestowed to feed the poor, and some are martyrs in spirit if not in body. But, for all that, what is this noise I hear over the land? Is it believers singing together, "Blest be the tie that binds"? Not every time. Too often it is the noise of sounding brass and clanging cymbal, the raucous discord of those who have turned aside to vain jangling; Paulites and Cephasites and Apollonians, with a sprinkling of the CHRIST party, debating as to which Diotrephes shall have the pre-eminence.

The marks of carnality in Paul's day were not card playing, theatre-going and dancing, but envying, strife, and divisions (I Corinthians 3:3). There are those today who draw back in horror from the first three, and well they may, but unfortunately some of them are past masters at the second three.

The HOLY SPIRIT knew that discord and division would be the bane of the church down through the ages, for He warned against that more than against other evils which have engaged most of our attention.

One reason why I want the Lord to come is that I may have the joy of really seeing brethren dwell together in unity. Our prophetic doctrine has certainly parted company with practical duty on this point. If we believe that the time is short, and that we are pilgrims together on the last lap of the journey, it seems to me that our fellowship should be as sweet as that early comradeship of the Acts of the Apostles. There are not many of us at most, and we certainly thin out when, forgetting what manner of SPIRIT we are of, we occupy ourselves calling down fire on all Samaritans who do not dot all their i's and cross all their t's according to our private system.

I have read of two war vessels that met in a fog and, after firing at each other for hours,

discovered, when the fog lifted, that both flew the same flag!

We are not pleading for unanimity on one hand or for unification on the other. We are pleading for unity, the unity of the SPIRIT in the bond of peace. The message here in I Thessalonians 5 is: "If you believe in prophecy... Be at peace among yourselves." In some parts of our country the fields in springtime are separated by fences visible to the eye. But in autumn the harvest has grown higher than the fences and the fields are as one. It is not necessary to tear down all our fences; but we need revival showers of blessing that will produce a harvest so great that our fences shall not appear.

Finally, we have a duty to the outside world, for prophetic truth calls us to EVANGELIZATION. We are to hasten the coming of the day of GOD (II Peter 3:12) and we do that by winning the lost to CHRIST, for when the elect number is gathered, the Lord will come. Our Lord is pictured throughout the Word as the Great Gatherer and, however orthodox we may be, if we gather not with Him we scatter abroad (Matthew 12:30).

Certainly, in this matter it is high time to awake out of sleep, for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. It does no good to revel among the clouds of prophetic truth if it stir us not to practise it on the cobblestones, questing for souls. In an experience meeting conducted by Mr. Moody, a man boasted of having lived on the Mount of Transfiguration for fifteen years. Mr. Moody asked, "Have you ever won a soul to CHRIST?" When the man answered, "No," Mr. Moody replied, "We don't want that kind of mountain-top experience."

Prophetic truth, like all other truth, should be fuel for the fires of evangelism. The Mystery from above must be lived out amid the Misery here below. Our Lord said, "**Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.**" It is evident, then, that a true disciple is a soulwinner.

It is possible to sit on the shore discussing the signs of the times when we ought to be driven by the signs of the times to launch out into the deep and let down our nets for a draught. Dwight L. Moody had very ordinary fishing tackle but, in a day when many were discussing ways and means, what tackle to use, and where to fish, Moody went fishing with what he had and outdid them all.

The real test of how much we believe of prophetic truth is this: What are we doing to warn men to flee from the wrath to come? It is not enough to lament the apostasy so vividly described in the book of Jude. It is not even enough to build up ourselves in the faith, pray in the HOLY GHOST, keep ourselves in the love of GOD, and look for the mercy of the Lord. There is a further duty: "**And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire: hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.**"

It is high time we stirred up ourselves, first, as Isaiah said, to take hold of GOD, and then to take hold of others to snatch them from destruction. I have often thought that one of the most unappreciated tasks on earth is that of a Pullman porter who must go down that mahogany lane early in the morning to arouse passengers who are in no mood to be awakened. But this business of awakening people is a thankless job, whether it apply to Pullman porters at 6 A. M. or to preachers of the Gospel at 11 A. M.

Far too many Christians come to church to rest at ease in Zion, while across their faces one can almost read that sign often seen on hotel room doors: "Please Do Not Disturb."

The power of the SPIRIT is a stimulant, not a sedative, and Bible believers should appear drunk and not doped. To believe the solemn truths of prophecy and then make our way complacently through a world of sin and shame is not merely unfortunate, it is criminal. Said a dying soldier to a chaplain: "If I believed a tenth of what you claim to believe, I'd be doing ten times more about it." After all, we do not actually believe any more than we are willing to put into practise.

It is related that during the reign of Oliver Cromwell the government ran out of silver coinage. Cromwell sent his men to a cathedral to see if they could find any silver. They reported: "The only silver we can find is in the statues of the saints standing in the corners." "Good," he replied, "we'll melt down the saints and put them into circulation!" Certainly, today the need of the hour is that the saints be melted down in revival fires and put into circulation winning the lost.

GOD help us to combine prophetic doctrine with practical duty. "**Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be?**" Prepared and expectant, purified and separated, at peace among ourselves, hastening His coming as we witness and work and win.

~ end of chapter 9 ~
