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The Future for this Age and the People of God.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come," 2 Timothy 3:1.

The Word of God makes it clear for us just what will be the character of the final days of this age. It also makes clear, just how we may know that we have entered the last days.

Such a knowledge is sadly beyond the parameters of the average Christian today.

It ought not to be!

Jacob was able to say to his sons: "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days," Genesis 49:1. But tragically, the vast majority of the sons of Jacob today have no knowledge of the meaning of their progenitor's words.

But believers should not be in such ignorance.

I was spurred to put pen to paper by the generalisations often heard in petitions offered in prayer meetings and the exhortations from the lips of preachers to Christians that we should pray for a visitation from God like that of the 1859 revival when tens of thousands of people were converted here in Ulster. Something of the marks of that great work of God's Holy Spirit are still evident over some 160 years later.

Now I am not against seeking God for revival nor do I doubt His ability to move mightily amongst the nations again. Indeed, I believe He will do so but that will be subsequent to the return of the Lord Jesus in glory.

No, rather what fashions my thoughts about these matters is what the LORD HIMSELF HAS SAID WILL BE THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF THE LAST DAYS AND WHAT HE WILL DO AMIDST THE NATIONS AS THE AGE DRAWS TO A CLOSE!!

1. THIS IS A DECLINING, DYING WORLD.

It is true that it is most common for a dying person to have periods of returning health but they are short-lived and soon give way once more to the inexorable advance of death.

So it is with this world. Death set in immediately upon the curse that followed the sin of Adam.

"And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," Genesis 3:17-19.

This is a dying world, full of dying creatures. Here is how Paul put the matter:

"For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now," Romans 8:19-22.

Of course, it is not just physical death which was visited upon this world as a result of sin but moral and spiritual death as well. Physically, man began to die when sin was embraced but immediately he became morally and spiritually dead. The warning given to Adam by the Lord spoke of this.

"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," Genesis 2:17.



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The day he sinned Adam 'died'. That is, he became one who had no spiritual life. While he physically lived for some 930 years (Genesis 5:5), he instantly died spiritually the moment he sinned.

That is all that sin can bring!

"Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death," James 1:15.

This explains why the Lord Jesus told Nicodemus,

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," John 3:3.

There has been much puzzlement amongst men about what it was the Lord was saying to Nicodemus just as there was in the mind of the man in question.

"Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" John 3:4.

But the Saviour was speaking of a spiritual birth and not a physical birth for while all on the earth today may have physical life for a time, we do not have spiritual life, life in our souls whereby we are alive unto God.

"Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord," Romans 6:11.

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus," Ephesians 2:1-7.

As death is at work in our physical frames, so moral death is at work in the human race. As the human being is kept alive for his allotted span by the mercy and grace of God, despite the many sicknesses that stalk us, so mankind has been preserved from utter MORAL ruin by God as He works out His purpose amongst men and gathers to Himself His elect.

This is plainly set forth in Isaiah 1:6-9.

"From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment. Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city. Except the LORD of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah."

But the irrevocable moral trend is downward! The disease that brought utter desolation to Sodom will likewise bring death to this age! The death-bed scenes of humanity at the end of this age are depicted for us in Scripture.

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, overs of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away," 2 Timothy 3:1-5.



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Thus, as a person would be warned to stay away from the house smitten by a plague, so we are told to avoid the people and the places where this increasing cancer of immorality, heralding the approaching death-bed of humanity, is seen.

Of course, there are many other depictions of the final scenes on this earth other than Paul's words in 2 Timothy 3:1-5.

"And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed," Luke 17:26-30.

As in these two instances of God's judgment falling upon a people unheeding and careless, so it will be when the end of this age comes. Does not physical death come somewhat unexpectedly to all, even when there are innumerable evidences of its approach? How often the death notice contains the word "SUDDENLY"!

But it should not be so for the people of God.

"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober," 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6.

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, And the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" 2 Peter 3:9-12.

So we are told most plainly just how the death of this age will come about as humanity declines more and more into immorality and spiritual depravity.

Do we not see that today? Surely we do! There are things and practices openly condoned by our law-makers that would have shamed Sodom and Gomorrah, seen every day on our streets! Sodomy is rejoiced in and celebrated with hardly a protest. At least the voice of Lot was raised in protest at the actions of the Sodomites of his day.

"And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly." Genesis 19:6-7.

His solution to the wickedness of the Sodomites showed how his moral attitude had been influenced as a result of living amongst them.

"Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes: only unto these men nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof," Genesis 19:8.

Likewise today, the nations of Christendom (so called) have lost all knowledge of what is right and have conceded to the wicked demands of sodomites everywhere or, worse, have put forth alternatives which are



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more reprehensible. Sodomite marriage is being conceded. Offence is taken when it is pointed out that the sodomite community produces paedophiles. Loud protests are heard and legal action threatened when such is said. To which community do child abusers belong if it not to that community which has departed from the laws of God and embraced perversion??

Of such God says:

"For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them," Romans 1:26-32.

Such is the downward course of a society which has abandoned God's Law and which, in turn, has been abandoned of God.

Is this not the picture we see all too clearly in our land today? I think it is!

2. REVIVAL CAN NOT BE EXPECTED IN ANY SOCIETY ABANDONED BY GOD!

That is why I say that we are wrong to pray for national revival. Such prayers are the result, mainly, of an ignorance of the depths of the nation's sin and how it is God sees such sin. What if we are approaching the spiritual state that Judah was in when the Lord said to Jeremiah: "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble," Jeremiah 11:14. "Then said the LORD unto me, Pray not for this people for their good. When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and an oblation, I will not accept them: but I will consume them by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence," Jeremiah 14:11-12. "Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth." Jeremiah 15:1.

Such times are approaching, if indeed they have not already broken in amongst us. That being so, national revival is not possible and our expectations of it are contrary to God's will.

Now that does not mean that God will or has forsaken His faithful remnant in our nation. No, He did not forsake Jeremiah and the faithful in Judah and so we can expect Him to regard His people with love in the midst of today's apostasy. But we must maintain our separation from the apostasy of the nations and not compromise with the trends of society. If we do then we will feel something of the afflictions that fall upon the nation. Remember what the Lord said to Israel in the day of Korah's rebellion?

"And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation. And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation? And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him. And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins. So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children. And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I



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have not done them of mine own mind. If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD. And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation," Numbers 16:19-33.

God has not changed! His ways have not changed! Those who flirt with the apostasy of today, will share, to some degree, in the judgments that will befall the apostasy. Remember the words of Paul.

"Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built there-upon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire," 1 Corinthians 3:13-15.

There are Christians whose works are tainted by sin and rebellion for they have cosied up to the world and its perverted ways, and such works will be subjected to the same fire that falls upon the wickedness of the world. As Paul says, they "shall suffer loss." The word "loss" means "to sustain damage, to receive injury, suffer loss." Did not David "suffer loss" as a result of his folly? Did not Samson likewise "suffer loss"? These accounts of the folly of the saints of old and the consequences that resulted from their folly are there for our learning. "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope," Romans 15:4.

Those saints suffered loss but not destruction with the wicked for they were still God's elect and even though they had done wrong they were not abandoned by Him. But we must note that their sins were visited by His judgment. That being so, we must today, if we are to continue to enjoy a measure of God's blessing, keep ourselves "unspotted from the world," James 1:27.

Yes, as Noah, in the run up to the judgment of God upon the earth of which he preached, enjoyed God's blessing upon himself and his family, even so may we seek for just such a blessing upon ourselves and the church family. Surely we can take encouragement from Peter's words regarding the labours of Noah: "Eight souls were saved," 1 Peter 3:20.

That was the whole family of Noah. Even so we should pray for our families and take heart from Noah's experience in a most evil age. I think that we may assume that others too were saved under Noah's ministry but who died before the flood came. I base that upon the words of Peter. "The longsuffering of our Lord is salvation," 2 Peter 3:15.

That longsuffering was at work in the days of Noah. "The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, " 1 Peter 3:20.

Where God's longsuffering or patience is at work may we not expect to see poor sinners saved? I think that we may. But as it would have been wrong for Noah to pray for revival in his day, given that God had revealed that His will was to destroy the world by a flood. It is offensive to God to pray contrary to His revealed will. Remember Moses. "And I besought the LORD at that time, saying, O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand: for what God is there in heaven or in earth, that can do according to thy works, and according to thy might? I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the LORD was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the LORD said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter," Deuteronomy 3:23-26.

The Lord was wroth with Moses for daring to pray for that which was contrary to that which the Lord had plainly said was not His will. We need to learn just what is God's will for this world today lest we grieve Him



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by praying for that which is contrary to His revealed will!

How much Moses longed to see the promised land! Yet it was wrong of him to pray as he did. Likewise, to see again the like of the 1859 revival breaking forth amongst us would be something we would most naturally delight in, yet such is not God's will if this world has reached that stage in its decline that it is given over to judgment!

I must again stress that I believe that there never comes a time when the Lord will cease to bless His people. "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end," Jeremiah 29:11. Everything that God plans and purposes for His people is for their good. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose," Romans 8:28.

He will send us trials and afflictions but they are for our good. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations (trials); knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing," James 1:2-4.

There is, I believe, a picture given us of the Church of God at the close of this age in Matthew 25. "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps," 25:1-7.

The "midnight cry" which called the Virgins back to that which was their duty but from which they had fallen away by slumbering and sleeping, depicts, I believe, the stirring and awakening that will take place amongst the people of God just prior to the return of Christ. There will be an awakening to the glorious truth of His return, something from which the Church today has departed. How often I have heard it said by believers: "Our minister never preaches upon the return of Christ!" How different that was from the early Church. It lived with a spirit of expectancy, a longing for that wonderful return even though they were aware that a long time was to pass before that wonderful event would take place.

John the apostle illustrates the spirit of the early Church in the close of the final book of the Bible. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus," Revelation 22:20. These words were uttered in response to the Saviour's declaration: "Surely I come quickly."

By all means let us pray for a quickening breath from heaven upon the Church that it may prepare for the closing days of this age but let us do so in the light of the revelation God has given us of the decline and death of this age as apostasy and rebellion work their terrible consequences amongst the nations of this earth.

I believe that the Church, though beset by trouble and affliction at the end, will nevertheless be spiritually well and very much alive. How often I have heard members of the older generation of Free Presbyterians lament, (yes, that is the correct word) at how dead we are today amidst our wealth and prosperity in comparison to those days of revival blessing amidst the trials and troubles of the 1960s, when man's curse was levelled against us on every hand BUT God's blessing and power was upon us! Those were years of growth, soul-winning and courageous contending for the faith.

So, I believe, it will be at the close of this age. Trouble and affliction in the midst of a God-hating world but with God in our midst, like Israel facing the hordes of Egypt's avenging army, we will know nothing but victory! "And it came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, and took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians. And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen.



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And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them," Exodus 14:24-28.

Even so shall it be for the people of God at the end of this age. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom," Luke 12:32.

Let such a promise fill our hearts with joy and courage and confidence as the days grow darker. Did you note that it was as the dawn of a new day was breaking that God smote the Egyptians? So, for us, a new day will soon dawn.

Let us look up and rejoice!

Ivan Foster.

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