

## **Knowing These Things...How Shall We Then Lead** **A sequel to “How Shall We Then Live”**

By M. Wayne Benson

In a previous document, I wrote about the state of current worldwide events and interpreted them in light of the Apostle Peter's letter in 2 Peter 3 where he describes the horrors of end times events and then asks, "Seeing these things, how should we then live?" In other words, in light of threats, persecution or worldwide catastrophic events, and judgement, how do we, as believers respond? I spoke about the answer to that question from a broad context.

In this sequel, I would like to follow up with more specific thoughts from the perspective of leaders – specifically pastors. Here are seven things I believe we as pastors and influencing agents in the Body of Christ need to do...or at least position ourselves to do... "seeing these things."

1. **Preach the Word:** There is no culture, no circumstance, no cause or consequence that nullifies the eternal truth of the Bible. There are hundreds of issues of concern or of interest to the world, and specifically to the people of God, but without a divine compass, we are stuck providing hundreds of answers from hundreds of opinions. Whether it's current events, last days parallels or social causes that dominate the blogs and news media, pundits may raise questions but issues and arguments do not provide answers from the heart of God. Even prophetic words must be measured against the eternal Word for accuracy. This is not to suggest that we should avoid dealing with what is happening around us, but it must always be framed in what God has to say. The commendation of the Men of Issachar in the Bible was, in essence, that "they understood their times and knew what to do about it." (1 Chr 12:32)
2. **Pay attention to Israel:** In Psalm 122:6, God tells us to pray for the "peace of Jerusalem" and prospers those that do so. Throughout biblical prophecy, several events are revealed that characterize the window of time prior to Christ coming and the nation of Israel is still there, ensconced within that centerpiece of prophecy. Unless you're an amillennialist or postmillennialist, there are still more promises yet to be fulfilled that surround the nation of Israel.
3. **Remember our evangelistic mandate:** Yes, there are incredible and terrible world events happening around the world. Russia's invasion of Ukraine rises to the level of antichrist-like behavior. For President Vladimir Putin to rally a nation to invade and devastate another sovereign nation, slaughtering innocent civilians as well as the defending Ukrainian army is barbaric. And for him to deceive his own people into believing that he is "defeating Nazism" and doing it "for the sake of Christianity", while declaring that Russians who voice disagreement are "scum" that should be purged to "purify" Mother Russia is truly evil. Sooner or later, he will be characterized by some, just as Hitler, Saddam Hussein and many others have been, as "The Antichrist." Put the brakes on that kind of speculation

– or any effort to box God into our Second Coming calendar.

Surely there is much the church needs to do during these times...such as reaching out to the millions of displaced Ukrainians. And there probably is much to criticize about our government's response or non-response to the crisis, but the pulpit is not just another news outlet or op-ed source. "Knowing these things" ...what does God have to say about it? And then how should we live? If, indeed, it is the end times, are we evangelizing our world...or at least our next-door neighbor, our friends, or our family?

4. **Be smart about your church budget:** The reality is that inflation is changing the economic landscape. At this point, the average American family is projected to lose about \$3,500 in post-tax income. Will that impact the church income? If not in stretching the faith of tithing believers to continue to give an honest tithe, it will most certainly affect the church's expense budget if it costs 20% more for goods, utilities or services. Building prices are already up 20%. The fuel fill-up to run your church van might cost \$150 instead of the \$80 you paid before. And if it's time to replace it, count on it costing about 30% more for the used version the board approved last December. Would it not be wise to refigure your church budget now, adding another 10% to projected expenses?
5. **Preach about the blessing of giving:** God has never been shortsighted toward His people. In the worst of times, God has demonstrated His care over those who love Him and walk in faith. Erase from your mind the false notion that preaching on the tithe is somehow self-serving. And don't let ministers who abuse God's people with extreme teachings on giving cause you to "turtle up" lest you be categorized among them. Do not rob your people of the blessings ...generational blessings in the fulfillment of God's promises. When I think of Paul's second message to the church in Corinth, it is clear that "they gave out of their own need" in a "great ordeal of affliction" (2 Cor 8:2-3) – and it is just as clear that God will bless them. Some of the greatest missions-giving moments have happened during desperate times.
6. **Pray for those who have authority over us:** Many in the church are frustrated with the moral decay in our country, a decline virtually solemnized by the very leaders elected to protect us from it. Whether it's justice delayed, denied, or just outright dismissed, or whether it's the short-circuiting of the most vulnerable lives of the unborn, it's enough to make us frustrated if not furious. The problem is anger cannot bring about righteousness (Ja 1:2). Let me be clear, righteous anger against sin or injustice can absolutely motivate us to preach about evil and effect change. How much longer would slavery have existed in America if it were not for the preaching of the Spurgeon's or Wesley's? They did not hold back – Charles Spurgeon calling it "the foulest blot..." that would have to be "washed out in blood;" John Wesley denouncing human bondage as "the sum of all villainies." But preaching against sin and injustice to change hearts and lives is not the same as simply fuming in anger against the leaders who either promote it or

accept it.

God dealt with me on two different occasions about my misplaced focus regarding two of our presidents. When Bill Clinton's womanizing seemed to be ignored, eventually erupting into the disclosure of the abuse of a young intern in the Oval Office, it was frustrating. But God did not excuse my failure to pray for him because of my dislike for what he did. He was our president and came clearly under the category of the 1 Tim 2 directives. I was reminded of that lesson through the years. Nevertheless, God chastened me again when Donald Trump's sophomoric behavior or egotistic focus, which may have cost him the presidency, grated against my spirit. I actually agreed with many of his policies but disagreed with his poor stewardship of such incredible power. The truth is I failed to pray for him, other than dutiful, perfunctory prayers.

We may not feel that our leaders "deserve" our prayers at times. However, we tend to pray "blessing prayers" over those with whom we agree...but shallow prayers, if any at all, over those with whom we disagree. That's not our prerogative! God didn't tell you to pray for them for their sake...but for ours: "That we may live a peaceable life in all godliness and dignity" and that others may "come to the knowledge of the truth." In the final analysis, we probably get the leaders we pray for rather than the ones we think we deserve.

7. **Preach for change:** Academic proof-texting, whittling off nothing to a fine point, or oratory without a purpose is a waste of precious moments in this vanishing vapor called time. I encourage you to pray until God shows you the faces of the people you're preaching to and reveals what they so desperately need. Preach for change...and show them how to get from where they are to where God wants them to be. Yes, preach on heaven and hell, but show them how to get from the hell they live in to where there's some divine heaven in their home. Throw out the net...give invitations for response. And, sometimes, you need to challenge people to respond publicly or openly.

I am well aware that it is not the culture of the day to call people forward in open confession of their repentance. I understand the sensitivity about "privacy" in today's seeker-sensitive church. However, one would almost think that altar calls are "HIPAA" protected. I'm not suggesting we go back in time to the days of Wesley where people were literally called forward to confess their sins before the church during their gatherings. Nor am I suggesting that the only way people are "genuinely saved" is to walk up to the steps in front of the pulpit at the behest of the preacher. But I do believe that the Holy Spirit Who calls people to Christ and empowers people to "change" can also strengthen their faith in an open show of concerted prayer, whether for salvation, or corporate repentance, for healing, for deliverance or some other divine work. The call of God is so sacred, so Holy Spirit led, that we must not limit ourselves to the cultural "norm" that morphs into a tradition.

The key to change is not illusive...it's in your hand. But it is mystical, invisible, and supernatural. It is an irresistible force that opens the door to the hardest heart. That force, that power is the anointing of the Holy Spirit. And it is humanly unattainable, forcing us to become helplessly, totally dependent upon God. It's the force for lasting change in those who hear the Word.

There are tons of blogs, websites and e-books offering self-help and ministerial advice on how to minister to or administrate the church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I often research great articles written by brilliant men and woman...lest I become isolated in my own ideas or become dependent upon my own experiences. But in the end, we all...even those writing the advice...are incapable of effecting eternal change in the human heart. Jesus said, "without Me, you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). From time to time, especially when things are "going great", we need to remember that. We are totally incapable of saving a soul or delivering a demon-afflicted victim of Satan...or doing any other deed of eternal consequence without Him. Not only when we are faced with the prospect of difficult times, or in the anticipation of the Second Coming, but also as we approach the pulpit where supernatural things need to happen should we say, "even so, come Lord Jesus."