Peace from the Lord Jesus Christ to you and all your family

The Bibles makes very clear that Jesus is coming back to this earth. The progression of history as we know it will come to an end. The Bible tells us that even though life will continue as it has, with people living their daily lives, evil will increase. This increasing evil and the problems that come with it are “birth pangs”; they are painful and increase in intensity as the moment of birth arrives.

The Bible tells us that as things continue to go downhill, it is not the time for the Christian to be downcast and afraid. We are told to “look up”, because our redemption draws neigh. This means that Jesus is coming soon and all the evil will be brought to an abrupt end. When Jesus comes back, it will not be as a babe in a manger, but as a conquering king who will rule the earth in righteousness. We who are His followers will be with Him in His glory.

There will be many who come claiming to be Jesus, some of them will be very convincing, some of them will even be able to perform miracles. They might attain very high levels in government. Christians must be on their guard so that we are not fooled. Fortunately, the Bible tells us exactly what to look for: When Jesus comes back, He will come from the sky; there will be angels and saints with Him; it will be very noisy with trumpets and archangel shouts; and all the world will see it with their own eyes, not on the internet, not on video, but His return will be literally visible to the whole world.

Have hope in trial; don’t be fooled by false Christs; our King is coming.

*And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”*

 Acts 1:9-11

In Christ’s love

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Esther 10

We come now to the final chapter in this strange book of the Bible; strange because it never mentions God, never mentions prayer, never even mentions Israel. If we read this account through secular eyes, we would be amazed at all the coincidences that take place. In fact, probably too many to be believable. But we are blessed to have the indwelling Holy Spirit. By His divine gift of insight, we are able to see that nothing in this account happened by chance. We can see the hand of God in everything that took place. We recognize this book as tracking God’s providence on behalf of His people, and of the entire world.

One reason God saved His people, the Jews, is because He promised to. He told Abraham a long time ago that he would become a great nation of many people and that these people would be special to God Himself. Another reason God protected the Jews is because He had already ordained that the Saviour of the world would come from this people. Jesus hadn’t been born yet, so we can see that any attempt to destroy the Israelites would fail. Remember what Mordecai said to Esther back in 4:13-14. “*Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish*.” This remains true to this day: God will have His people turn to Him at the end of history; so, one way or another, the nation of Israel will continue to exist.

What we see in chapter 10 is the Persian empire returning to normal. King Ahasuerus taxes the whole empire, including the coastlands and islands. These would be lucrative because of all the trading that would take place at ports. Taxing is what governments do; that is how they make their money to operate. All of us are taxed and I’m pretty sure that none of us like it. However, even though we are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven, we are still temporarily citizens of this area; and as citizens, we are required to pay taxes.

The Bible tells us to submit to this taxation. In the famous account in Matthew 22, Jesus is asked whether or not it is lawful to pay tax to Caesar. Everyone is familiar with His response: “*So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s*.” Believe it or not, this is actually very freeing for us. We are not responsible for what the government does with the money. In this country, we do have the right to vote. It is our responsibility as Christians to vote for those who we believe will uphold Christian values. It is also our responsibility to pray for our government regardless of how we feel about them.

We can get very discouraged about how the government uses tax money. There is a tremendous amount of waste. It is also used for programs, such as abortion, that are fundamentally against Christian beliefs. But as long as we perform our responsibilities, to vote and to pray, we are not accountable for what the government does with tax money. There are some who will try to calculate what percentage of their tax dollar goes to programs they disagree with, and then withhold that percentage from their tax payment. This ends up costing a lot of time and money. The Lord has better things for us to do with our time.

We can think also of the account in Matthew 17 where Jesus instructs Peter to catch a fish, look for a coin in its mouth, and use that coin to pay the temple tax for Himself and Peter. The temple tax was not always put to proper use. Remember that this is where the 30 pieces of silver came from used to bribe Judas to betray Jesus.

Notice how Mordecai is included along with King Ahasuerus in the chronicles kept of the Persian court. There is a familiar ring to this; we see this mention of chronicles kept over and over in the books of Kings and of Chronicles. Certainly, these books would have painted Ahasuerus in the most positive light and the indication is that his kingdom prospered during his reign. But by reading between the lines, we understand that Mordecai was behind the prosperity.

It is important to note that Mordecai did not let his new position and power go to his head; contrast him with Haman. Mordecai used his position to help those who needed help. Not only his own people, but all of Persia. This is the same as when Joseph became a powerful person in Egypt and when Daniel became powerful in Babylon. These were pagan nations, but these men worked for their good without turning against God. This can be done in our lives now. We can and should work for the good of where we live, but never at the expense of Christian values.

Whether we have a position of influence or not, we cannot compromise on Biblical principles. It is very tempting to water-down Biblical principles with the idea of getting along or maintaining peace. While getting along and peacefulness are themselves Biblical, they are never to be achieved at the expense of other Christian doctrine. If this process of letting the world soften our Biblical views begins, it is a slippery slope that leads to the apostacy that is so prevalent in our churches today.

The Gospel, while it is by definition good news, is first divisive. Either a person will accept it or they will not. The Gospel divides people into those who are truly followers of Jesus Christ or those who reject Him. Those who try to walk a middle ground of reconciling the world and the Bible will find themselves with those who reject Christ. In other words, there is no middle ground. The Bible and the Gospel will bring unity and unity is important; but it will only come to those who accept Jesus.

Peter and Paul both wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that Christians were to be submissive to their government, but never at the cost of Biblical truth. Peter and Paul were both executed by the government they were submissive to, because they would not compromise on the word of God. Jesus promised us that, as followers of Him, we would be persecuted. This wasn’t just for the apostles or people with special ministries; this was for all of us. If you stick to Biblical principles, you will be persecuted. You will be accused of being a bigot, of being narrow minded, of needing religion as a crutch, of being foolish and unintelligent for believing in such myths, you will even be accused of being unloving.

This is where we must depend on strength and wisdom from God. We must stand firm. This does not mean that we go out and argue with people, or stage protests, or look for fights. It does mean that we tell others the Gospel message as Jesus commanded us to and that we quietly live our lives in doing good works for the Kingdom of God. As we live this way, the pressure will come to compromise with the world. It is at this point that we must stand and refuse to compromise; regardless of the consequences.

A couple notes of caution. A strong, unyielding stance on Biblical principles is never to be done as an act of defiance or rebellion. We can peacefully and lovingly remain true to the Bible and Jesus. The whole point of our loyalty is to bring glory to God. Remember that it was the Zealots, the radical Jewish freedom fighters, that brought about the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The persecuted Christians accepted confiscation of their property, imprisonment, and death. Certainly, they would try to escape, but if caught, they would maintain their loyalty to Christ to the end.

Another point where we need to be careful is “the hill we choose to die on”, so to speak. Make sure your hill is Jesus, make sure your hill is a Biblical principle. We are not called to die on political hills; we are not called to die on social hills. Is there overlap? Yes, but we have to be very careful that we don’t get confused as to which is which. Keep in mind that our ultimate goal as Christians is to bring glory to Christ. Our next goal is to love others as a Christian example.

Keeping in mind the necessity to avoid compromise, there are some things in the book of Esther that we need to consider. One question that probably comes to mind is “Were Esther and Mordecai people who did not compromise on Godly principles?” There are a number of things that they did that seem questionable to us, especially when we compare their actions with other Biblical people who lived pious lives in spite of any danger they faced.

We might compare Esther to Daniel, Shadrack, Meshack, and Abednego. These four were taken prisoner into Babylon and also enrolled in a contest to see if they could become advisors to the king. They obviously worked hard at the program they were enrolled in and excelled beyond their peers. But when it came time to eat food that was not according to the Law, they refused.

Esther went into a yearlong program for beautification. While it doesn’t mention food, she had to eat and she would have eaten what they served her. Was it right for her to do this?

We read about Joseph in Egypt. He was the slave of Potiphar. Potiphar’s wife had more power than Joseph, yet he refused her advances to have sex. He also suffered the consequences by being thrown in jail.

Esther knew from the beginning that she was there to be used for the sexual gratification of the king. There was a chance that she might become queen in the process. But in the end, she would either be the wife or the concubine of a pagan king. Was she wrong to go through with what she did? Was Mordecai wrong, being her father-figure, to let these things happen to Esther without protest?

There are other questions. Why were Mordecai and Esther still in this area? They would have had the same chance to go back to Judea that the other Jews did: Back to their homeland; back to the holy land, back to the land that had been given to their people by God. Was it necessary to have Haman’s ten sons impaled on stakes for display? It was definitely a sign for all to see and know about, but so was killing 800 men who were enemies of the Jews in Susa.

These questions have been written about and debated for centuries. These are questions for us to think about and decide ourselves; these can be questions for gentle conversation between Christians. There are times when questions like these come up in the Bible and there is no clear answer. What that tells us is that the answers are not that important; something else is. What we must find is what is important.

In this case, let us consider what was happening in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. In the book of Ezra, the Israelites were first released under the Persian king Cyrus, to go back home to rebuild Jerusalem and Judea. The first group came back under the governorship of Zerubbabel and the priest Jeshua. They succeeded in establishing the alter and the foundation for the new temple. This account takes us up to chapter six in Ezra. Between chapters six and seven, there is a long time gap. During this time, the people in Jerusalem made no progress because of threats from their enemies. It is also during this time gap that the account of Esther took place.

In chapter seven of Ezra, Ezra the scribe went with another group from Persia to Jerusalem. Under Ezra, the people finished the new temple. Next, in the book of Nehemiah, Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem to rouse the people to build the wall around the city.

So, during the time of Esther, God’s people in Jerusalem, whom He had recently brought there, were surrounded by enemies, disorganized, without a temple, and without a wall for protection. While God is concerned for all His people, His people in Jerusalem and Jerusalem itself were of major importance to Him. This is where His Son was to come and redeem mankind. God can use anyone to fulfill His purposes, whether they are good or bad. God raised up Pharaoh in Egypt to show His glory in releasing the Jews. God raised up Mordecai and Esther to protect His people in Judea from the plot of Haman.

Were Mordecai and Esther good, God-fearing Jews? It doesn’t matter. What matters is that God took care of His people. He simply used them to do it. This is what is important. That God can and does take care of His people. Both the Jews and the Christians.

Prayer

Blessed God, we are so thankful that by Your might and wisdom, You are able to care for all of Your people. Not simply nations and groups, but even individuals do not escape Your notice. You are all-powerful and all-wise God. You are worthy of all glory and honor; You are worthy of all worship.

Thank You, Lord, for the protection You provide for each and every one of us. If not for You, we would perish. Most of all, we thank You for Your precious Son, Jesus Christ. He has paid the price; He has redeemed us. By His stripes, we have been healed of all our spiritual injuries. We have been made whole and acceptable to You; our Father.

Lord, we lift up prayer for Your people now. We pray for Israel, that they may turn to their true Saviour, Jesus. We pray for Christians throughout the world, especially for those who are facing persecution: give them strength and courage; give them that blessed vision of the glorious life that awaits them. We lift up Your church in this country: that all would stand on the Bible as the inerrant word of God; that we would all follow Your commands to worship God alone, spread the Gospel, and love those around us through selfless action.

It is in Jesus’s name we pray these things

Amen