

LIVING IN ANTICIPATION

Titus 2:11-14

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I invite you to look at the two main support pillars on which the future of humanity rests. They are events in time; and God has determined that they will carry the future for all of God's creation—not just humanity—for on these pillars rests God's solution to a much more comprehensive cosmic challenge. God's intent is to make the future secure for all. Paul hints at these pillars in the above passage in Titus. They are, quite simply, the first and the second coming of Christ. One is past; and the Bible tells us to get the other one in focus, and to live in anticipation of it. Arising out of the first comes our longing for, as well as the power to live in anticipation of, His second coming.

The scenario which the New Testament presents of human history is that it is moving rapidly toward a climax at which everything that is evil, hurtful, and destructive will be overcome and wiped out by the forces of good. If the messages of the book of Revelation tell us little else with absolute clarity, this is one message which is unequivocal and clear. Christ is and will be the Victor, and His cause will be vindicated. The age-old battle between Christ and Satan is moving rapidly towards an inevitable and certain conclusion. Our world is coming apart! Just look at what has happened since our last General Conference Session in 2000. At the moment of His most intense suffering the Redeemer says, "Behold, I make all things new." And in that new order Christ promises that "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev. 21:3-5). And that is the climax towards which our world is moving relentlessly and unstopably. And we live in anticipation of that moment.

We know it is coming, but we don't know 'when'; and we probably should not ask. The more important question for me to ask is: How does the certainty of this scenario affect me and how do I prepare for it? And that is a very personal question, but it is also a corporate one. You will answer for your life, I for mine. But collectively we shall also have to answer for the directions, choices, and values of the community for which you and I have been entrusted with some responsibility.

Facing the question: What can we do and how should we prepare for what is coming? I suggest we look at it in three segments:

(1) PERSONAL—This is private and has to do with me as an individual. Paul, writing to Titus, says that the reality of Christ's second coming compels us individually and personally to "say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives" (Tit. 2:12). What does that mean? So many of us find it so difficult to say 'no' to anything.

There are very few passages in the New Testament which so vividly set out the moral power of Jesus Christ—the power to change lives—as does this text. This is the moral power both to say 'no and to say 'yes.' Isaiah, similarly, appealed to his people to "stop doing wrong, learn to do right" (Isa. 1:16, 17); and Paul elsewhere writes: "Hate what is evil, cling to what is good" (Rom. 12.9). It is an appeal to give up pursuing that which you know to be destructive, debilitating, and degrading to both yourself and those who surround you. Instead, there is so much good that can be done. Basically, what God says to us is: Be a force for good! You know what is good! Ignorance is not the problem of God's people; disobedience is. Well, use your energy to pursue what is good.

I am sometimes asked, particularly in conversation with youth: How do you know whether you should or should not do something? Everyone does it. Why shouldn't I? It is expected. So, what's wrong with it?—It has to do with what we eat and drink, how we entertain ourselves, and what is

moral. It has to do with living life!

And to that there are two kinds of answers to look at: (1) Sometimes, but not always, the Bible gives an objective and absolute standard. The Bible draws the line—there is a clear ‘yes’ or ‘no’; it’s a ‘black-and-white’ answer. And it is important to know what that is. But many will find that very arbitrary, very cold, very clinical, and, yes, very legalistic. But there is a second kind of answer you also have to look for: (2) As a young person in particular you have to ask yourself: What is becoming of me as a person? What is happening to me? Is doing whatever you are considering doing good for you? Are you going to like yourself better afterwards? Will others respect you more? Or are you in fact doing damage to yourself and to your own future, and to those who love you? In other words: You need to weigh what is happening to your own life— what are you doing to yourself as a person—for as a person you are of inestimable value to our Lord.

What did Paul mean by “worldly passions”? One of the early Fathers, Chrysostom, said that “worldly things” are the things which do not pass over with us into heaven, but are dissolved together with the present world. Surely one is very short-sighted if one sets all one’s heart and spends all one’s time and energy on that which has to be left behind. But there is an even more basic meaning to the phrase “worldly passions.” These are the things, or values, of which we are not very proud and would rather not show to God. It is the work of Christ to cleanse us from that which we are ashamed that God should see. It is the work of Christ to make us presentable! Only He can do it, and He will do it caringly, lovingly, and protectively. He will make you and me fit for God to see. Living in anticipation means inviting Him to “work on me” and get me ready. In describing what it means to live as “children of light” in anticipation on Christ’s coming, Paul says some very pointed things: Put off falsehood and speak truthfully; don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry; watch your language; get rid of

bitterness, anger, brawling, slander, and malice. Try to be nice, to be kind and compassionate; and try to forgive for you have been forgiven so much (see Eph. 4: 25-32).

And again, linking it specifically to the second coming of Christ, Peter writes: “Since everything will be destroyed . . . make every effort to be found blameless and at peace with him” (2 Peter 3:11, 14). The moral power of Christ—the power of His resurrection (which is why we will not let go of the “first pillar”)—is not just the power to say ‘no’ but also every bit as much the power to say ‘yes’—‘yes’ to prudence, to moral goodness, to justice, to reverence before God, and to allowing the fruits of the spirit to develop. It is living in anticipation of Christ’s second coming, which is the reality that drives this. A royal visit is expected; things are to be set in order—housecleaning is done and made ready for the King to see.

It is important that we note that living in anticipation of Christ’s return is not a negative lifestyle, although clearly there are things we will say ‘no’ to. It is a positive, constructive, and creative life full of energy which reaches out to do good for others and for yourself. A lifestyle which is essentially an exercise in saying ‘no’ to a range of issues is not only a drab, dull, and dark form of living but is ultimately also unsuccessful. God wants our lives, I believe, to be proactive in search of the good rather than to live negative lives focused on denials. How can one be a happy Christian if all you can focus on is what you have to say ‘no’ to? Paul hints at something more positive when he writes that his deepest longing is to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection” (Phil. 3:10), which is power over death and decay. It means not to be destructive of yourselves or of others. It means to be so united with Christ day by day that we let the values He modeled be lifted high in our lives and seen in the choices we make. His physical resurrection will then assure our bodily resurrection when He returns.

(2) AS A COMMUNITY OF FAITH—living in anticipation of His coming.

How is life to be experienced within the church between individuals who share the same values and the same hopes? And this has a lot to do with relationships—with people treating people (2 Cor. 2:15). It has to do with people being the “fragrance of Christ.” Reflect with me for a few moments on this:

(a) 1 Peter 3:8: “Live in harmony with one another . . . be sympathetic, compassionate and humble.” In my words: Be nice to each other.

“The value of courtesy is too little appreciated. Many who are kind at heart lack kindness of manner. Many who command respect by their sincerity and uprightness are sadly deficient in geniality.” (Ed. p. 240).

“You may be true to principle, you may be just, honest, and religious; but with it all you must cultivate true tenderness of heart, kindness, and courtesy. If a person is in error, be the more kind to him; if you are not courteous, you may drive him away from Christ.” (TM p. 151)

(b) James 4:11: “Do not slander one another.” This refers to the habit of making destructive comments about someone else in that person’s absence when he is not there to defend himself. This, a common habit, is condemned throughout Scripture. (See Titus 3:1.)

“Whoever slanders his neighbor in secret, him will I put to silence.” (Ps.101:5), Paul lists slanderers among the evil of the pagan (Rom. 1:30); similarly, I Peter 2:1 says, “Rid yourselves of . . . slander of every kind.”

And from the pen of Ellen G. White:

“He who takes it upon himself to correct others, is likely to cultivate a habit of faultfinding, and soon his whole interest will be in picking flaws and finding defects” (CD 464); “Cultivate the habit of speaking well of others” (MH 492).

One more statement from her pen: “The truly converted man has no inclination to think or talk of

the faults of others. His lips are sanctified, and as God's witness he testifies that the grace of Christ has transformed his heart. . . . Those only will enter heaven who have overcome the temptation to think and speak evil." (Sons and Daughters of God, p. 348).

To judge another person is to take unto ourselves a right to do that which God alone has the right to do; and he/she is a reckless man/woman who deliberately infringes on the prerogatives of God.

(c) "Bear with each other and forgive grievances you may have against one another" (Col. 3:13).

This statement comes in the midst of a list of qualities which God's chosen people are expected to display. And they all have to do with relationships between people. This is the positive side to the "not slandering."

The Message Bible puts it this way:

"So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. This is your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it."

Jesus, at the moment of His most extreme physical suffering, set the standard for forgiveness when He said: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." Is there then anything which the follower of Christ should or can not forgive?

(d) Come together and "encourage one another—and all the more so as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:25); and when you do, remember to pray for and support your leaders (Heb. 13:17, 18).

One of the noblest of human duties is to speak encouragement to each other. It is easy to pour cold water on someone's enthusiasm; it is easy to discourage others. The world is full of discouragers. We have a Christian duty to encourage each other. The going ahead of us is tough. Let us help each other. And when you do that, please, remember your leaders. Life on the podium of leadership can get lonely and chilly. And when your leaders make mistakes, just remember that you chose them from among yourselves, and they are not "translated" yet.

(3) OUTWARDLY AS A WITNESS to the world which is not of faith. How is my church as a community, and I as a part of it—we who live in anticipation of His coming—how are we to relate to those who do not know Christ and do not share His values? The church exists for mission.

(a) Jesus taught that there is a work to be done. Time is running out. "Night comes when no one can work" (John 9:4). With an eye to our role as the community of believers, Jesus said that you are to be my witnesses, and you are to make disciples. And the two are not the same. Being a "witness" is a primary function of telling it as it is. Sharing what you have found. Whatever happens next may flow from the witness, but there is the role of witnessing even when you have no influence on what happens next. In terms of the mission of the church in the 10/40 window, this is pretty much where we are. In so many places all we can do is deliver a witness. The human interaction by which we can influence the response is in many places difficult or impossible to have. The Lord and the Spirit are at work, but I may not be able to be part of it, and we may not be able to measure what happens. Living in anticipation will always mean to live in mission.

(b) Be known in your community as men/women of peace. (Heb. 12:14). What is He talking about?

Firstly, there is the kind of peace of mind which comes from knowing that you are doing the

right thing, primarily, in that you are acting to the best of your knowledge in harmony with what God wants and expects of you. Obedience to God gives peace of mind. It is important to be at peace with yourself.

Secondly, live in peace with the people you meet and associate with. We remember the well-known injunction of the Lord: “Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called children of God.” The word “peace” in the Bible is never just a negative word to denote the absence of trouble; it means also to be positively driven to seek man’s highest good; not just freedom from trouble but enjoyment of all that is good, and a sense of being safe.

Peace-makers seek to make this world a better place for all to live in. A statement attributed to Abraham Lincoln says: “Die when I may, I would like it to be said of me, that I always pulled up a weed and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow.”

There are people who seem always to be acrimonious, cantankerous, and mean-spirited. There is always a storm center brewing around them. They either quarrel themselves or they cause quarrels between others. They make trouble; they don’t solve anything. They are in fact doing the devil’s work. And then there are those who somehow can bridge the gulf which is there; they heal breaches; they bring sweetness to that which is bitter. They do a God-like work.

We have both kinds in the church.

So, I say to you, a people living in anticipation of Christ’s return: I would so much want that the ones who do not know Christ will know us as kind, caring, and good people.

I take you back to the verse with which we started these thoughts: Titus 2:11-13:

“For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared. . . It teaches us to say ‘no’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age

while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and savior, Jesus Christ.”

We are called to live in anticipation of His coming. Therefore, my prayer is:

1 Thess. 5: 23, 24:

“May God himself, the God of peace,

Sanctify you through and through.

May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless

At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who calls you is faithful

and he will do it.”

Amen