



He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the times. "

—Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:2-3)

Was Jesus really saying that understanding the prophets should be as easy as forecasting the weather?? Considering that national expectations had been running high on the hillsides after periodic explosions of the miraculous took place wherever He had appeared, this seemed a serious rebuke. So, is hope for greatness as a nation to be a thing of the past? Surely, not with Jesus on the scene—only, at times it did seem that some of His sayings were a bit puzzling. Like that comment above, for example, concerning their leaders not understanding the signs of the times.

He had just fed *thousands* with a “happy meal” consisting of some pita bread and a fish sandwich—and the local leaders were now pressing him for an even greater sign, perhaps one with bread falling from the skies as when Moses had led the children of Israel out through the wilderness (Ex.16:13-15)! However, I cannot help sensing a painful similarity between some of Israel’s

expectations and our own. . . when being asked what we expect of those for whom we vote, for example. Of course, the children of Israel never “voted” for Moses: God had simply sent him, and backed him up with miraculous signs. Who could refuse such a leader—especially, when what he offered was freedom from back breaking slavery (or even, freedom from slavery in this country)?

Yet, for Bible believers, prophecy has end-points anchored in the “everlasting,” with a real Paradise at both extremes: Starting with the Garden of Eden just after Creation . . . and ending with the tree of Life, within the new Heaven and earth (Rev. 22:2)—all of which does seem to invite a very healthy level of hope for

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a bright future! Nevertheless, is it possible that some of us may become confused about whether to worship the “gift” . . . or the “Giver”?

Look at it another way: Within another passage Jesus had just fed over five thousand with that “happy meal” –and then later had also crossed the sea of Galilee *by walking on water* to rescue His disciples (John 6). When later greeted by eager “groupies” on the other side of the lake, Jesus confronts them by questioning what they were really expecting of their Messiah; for it was apparent that their whole concept of knowing God had been reduced to filling their stomachs (vss. 26-27). (In a similar manner, we might say that some of us may pursue relationships—like getting married, for example, in order to merely satisfy our appetites (sexual, and otherwise)—instead of considering the person that we are getting married to, and their personal expectations of us. Shouldn’t relationships trump *things* . . .?).

It seems obvious that Jesus was fully aware of the fact that “fleshly expectations” can make for some very shallow relationships . . . as well as destinies. This may be true not only for one-on-one relationships but for communities and even our country, as well. Consider, for example, the way Congress is now doling out money “by the basket fulls”—when our national treasury is in grave danger of collapse. So then, we must ask: What are some of our lawmakers really thinking in the back

of their minds? Can it be that . . . some are unconsciously (perhaps, consciously?) seeking to “milk” our present form of government for all it is worth, and then, after “suddenly discovering” that such a course is unsustainable, plan to trash our present system—with the expectation of building a “superior” society based upon socialism along with a new constitution that no longer respects such “non essentials” as freedom of religion and the second amendment—All of this, within a new country that is “of the government” instead of a society that is of the people, as one nation “under God, with liberty and justice for all”?

The problem with all of what we have just considered is that within *the real world* there is a price to pay for a *real paradise*. For the Christian, this ultimate price was paid (for us) by Christ, on the Cross at Calvary. Yet for all who would live in a truly free society, this sometimes means that we must pull in our belt and deny ourselves (even within personal living) –so that ultimately, we may enjoy a better future.

In other words (to return to what Jesus was confronting the religious leaders with)—our self image and way that we look at “success” often affects how we look at the bigger issues in life: Affecting how we view our family, government and, yes, even God’s promises for us in the future. As Jesus put it: “Seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these *things* shall be added to you.” (Matt.6:33 emphasis added).

Realistic people, are always better able to tell “what time it is.” For when we “keep first things first” the end game does not frighten us. †

This Month's Features:

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2. AWAKENING . . . But not “Woke”!

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DOWN TO EARTH

² And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples ³ and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another

Matthew 11:2-3

John the Baptist was one person who most certainly “kept first things first,” with priorities that were (literally) established from the womb, and if *anyone* was qualified to identify with certainty who Christ was, it was John the Baptist. He was born for this purpose! An angel had proclaimed this to his father before he was conceived by his mother (Luke 1:11-17) and it was he who had clearly pointed Jesus out, before baptizing Him in the Jordan saying, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29-34)!

This gave order to the manner in which Christ was welcomed on the scene by the nation of Israel: both by prophetic declarations (in the past) —as well as a flesh and blood *forerunner*, in our physical world.

However: As usual, the Bible displays to us not only the high points, but their low points and weaknesses of spiritual giants, as well (which gives us hope, when we have questions and doubts . . .!). For here we see a real man, with great faith, being tested as the times and seasons of his life take a radical turn. He was a man’s man, declaring God’s truths in the wilderness around Jerusalem. Yet, now, as he lay “rotting” in prison, his personal situation and that of his nation, was causing serious doubts to leak into the heart and mind of this man of God.

Therefore, as emissaries arrive on the scene to ask Jesus for a word to send back to John, Jesus does more than issue an “atta-boy” or pat on the back to this faithful prophet who had so accurately pointed others to His mission and purpose. The Lord *demonstrated* the answer:

⁴ *Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."*

Matthew 11:4-6

In so *doing*, Jesus *demonstrated* the actions of the promised Messiah as recorded by the prophet Isaiah:

. . . the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. ⁶ Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert.

Isaiah 35:5-6

Yet, please notice the caveat Jesus then issued at the conclusion of his statement to John. For He added, “and blessed is he who is not offended in Me.” In other words, believing is not automatic. The woman and man who would be found faithful must, at times, “press in” to maintain their faith. After the messengers left to return this answer to John, the Lord continued instructing onlookers, with the significance of John’s ministry by telling the disciples:



¹² *And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.*

Matthew 11:12

For millennia, the church has understood that whenever approaching things prophetic, and as we look forward to the new world that is promised within Scripture, there is the birthing aspect of the new world that is coming()—and it is within this context that *perseverance* is a definite part of the life of faith. Repeatedly, when speaking to the church in the opening discourse of the Revelation, Jesus repeatedly warns us that the prize is to the person who *overcomes* (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26, etc. etc.). This does not mean that we “overcome” by performing (what some call) acts of “penance” as we brutalize ourselves or crawl across miles of human obstacles—but that we maintain our faith and belief within the face of threats or persecution (or “cancellation”). For, as the Scriptures clearly state:

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.

1 John 5:4

And how are we to become “born of God”? —by receiving Him by faith, into our hearts. For:

. . . as many as received [Jesus], to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: ¹³ who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

John 1:12-13 (see also John 3:3, & Ps. 87:5)

You will note that I have used Scripture throughout our discussion. You may note, also, that the evidence that Christ gave to those inquiring from John the Baptist pointed *directly* to the writings of the prophets, as well. This we must do, today, as well. It is not enough to rest our eternal souls and (even present day) hopes on na-

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Awake,
but not
“Woke”

And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' ⁷ Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, . . .'

Matthew 25:6-8

As we approach this most critical concept of being awake (or “woke” as some may see it) we must ask ourselves, “What is it, really, to have ‘awakened’ to the times and seasons that we are living in?” The answer may utterly surprise us. For this is what Jesus was formally addressing, when speaking of “virgins” awakening at midnight—as half of them . . . are lost!

Of course, we must realize that this parable/story that Jesus was sharing was spoken as a follow up to questions on His second coming. It was not an isolated story hatched out of thin air, but intended to get straight to the heart of prior insights related to His second coming within His earlier discussion. If it offends you that someone would try to relate current events to Bible prophecy, please accept my apologies—and my invitation to possibly gain a more hope filled perspective again, as we seek to acquire a truly positive (and realistic) perspective on the future. For others, who are more

educated and “protected” by higher learning: perhaps you may prefer to toss this edition. —Be aware, however, that simply because others have cried “Wolf” in the past, and have made bad calls—this does not insulate you from the “real thing” when the thief does come through your window, after having triggered a false alarm numerous times in the past . . . hoping to deaden you to the actual danger.

Further, if all we were to be concerned about is “making a wrong call,” or making a mistake, we may as well not get up from bed in the morning. If you are only afraid of making a mistake, you are already half defeated. No one who accomplishes anything in life does so without taking risks. Further, Jesus urged (commanded) His followers to watch and to discern the times (Mark 13:35) “lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping” (vs. 36)! So, shall we dive in, just a

little deeper into what an “awakening” is?

In a prophetic sense, an “awakening” is not a revival: not exactly. Jonah was the chief catalyst for one of the greatest “revivals” of all time, for he essentially “stopped the clock” of judgment for the city of Nineveh. For, even though he was reluctant to do so: when he informed the inhabitants of that town that they had a mere *forty days* to total annihilation (Jonah 3:4)—they repented from top to bottom (from the king to the dog catcher)!—And God relented.

In a prophetic
sense, an
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Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

Jonah 3:10

This is the ultimate result of what we will here call “revival.” It is turning back of the clock of judgment. Yes, there have been famous revivals in history: the Welsh revival, for example, and the one at Azusa Street, which have changed the course of history and, without a doubt, that of whole nations because of a change of heart within society, in general (2 Chron. 7:14). Further, we can never rule out a “stop the clock” revival for our own time . . . but it must be understood that such moves of God must sweep through society in a manner that utterly blankets society with a tidal wave of repentance.

Such is not an “awakening,” however.

An awakening is, itself, like a burglar alarm that somehow goes off before the thief actually gains access to the residence being targeted. In fact, within the parable spoken by Jesus—when examined carefully, we may notice that this event takes place *before* the break-in is even initiated. Note, carefully, Christ’s wording of this event, which we will quote from the opening verse of this chapter, to give us some context.

¹ *“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish.*

⁵ *But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept.*

⁶ *And at midnight a cry was*

heard: ‘Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!’

⁷ *Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps.*

Matthew 25:1,2, 5-7

After this early warning, which was heralded in advance of the Bridegroom’s arrival (for the foolish bridesmaids *had time* to assess the situation and seek to prepare themselves)—the *actual arrival* takes place a short time later (Matt. 25:10).

What we have just read about . . . is an *awakening*.

We have already had two “awakenings” within our American history: the first one (headed up by George Whitfield) took place—just before the American Revolution.

The second awakening (which awakened the conscience of this nation to the injustice of slavery, while calling serious Christians back to God) was headed up by men such as Charles Finney—just before the American Civil War.

In other words, an “awakening” does not “turn back the clock” of judgment. An awakening alerts and empowers the faithful for the challenges that are about to confront us within our world. Thus, an awakening differs greatly from what we would normally

call a “revival” for, I believe, an awakening always precedes events that have the potential of endangering the spiritual welfare of the faithful (or those “napping” within the kingdom): Its purpose is to allow them to apply their “extra oil” and gird up their loins for the spiritual battle that is to take place as our world encounters the “birth pangs” that Jesus said would accompany a world straining to resist Christ’s second coming (Matt. 24:8-12).

Special Warning:

Please be aware, however, that just as the word “woke” *sounds like* and (in some sense) seeks to mimic the activity of those awakening to the dangers confronting us: BEING “WOKE” IS NOT THE SAME AS AWAKENING! For, while some may casually say that both being “woke” and spiri-

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We have already had two “awakenings” within our American history.

tually awake precipitate what some would call a “revolution”—one is spiritual, while the other secular and godless. To put all of this in another way, within our present context:

Christian believers who are awakening to our country’s current deficiencies will most certainly address civil rights issues that result in a greater self-awareness and *unity* within the body of Christ: between male and female, as well as those of differing ethnic backgrounds. This undergirding corrective activity (i.e. “repentance”) may be said to result in a “revolution” of sorts, when observing the results and changes that it produces; within the makeup of society, etc. *But such activity is constructive, not destructive.*

“Woke awakenings” are activities that ride the wave of impending judgment (such as that forecast by John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus[∞])—with the distinct aim of bringing about the destruction of the present political order, in the name of producing a secular Paradise—while also redefining valid social norms of right and wrong—such as *equality* and *justice*, to mean “equity” and “sameness.” In simple terms? This results in redistributing earthly wealth: robbing the “haves” to give to the “have nots”—forcibly, by government fiat (i.e. via communism).- A discussion of the clash of these two concepts is beyond the scope of our present discussion (see Voddie T. Baucham Jr’s book “Fault Lines . . .” for a scholarly review). My point here, is that; like it or not, everyone within society as we know it, will soon be affected by one of these two movements: either the politically correct “woke” position, or

The “awakened” position, of Christians preparing for Christ’s returning: with one exception.

The apostle Paul speaks of the possibility of *not sleeping to begin with!*

¹ *But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.* ² *For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.*

³ *For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.*

⁴ *But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.*

1 Thessalonians 5:1-4

Here, we have many of the concepts that we have been considering summed up in a few short sentences:

1. That our world is *a changing* (referred to above as “times and seasons”)
2. That Christ will come as a “thief in the night” to an unprepared world.
3. That the naysayers will completely ignore the warning signs (saying “Peace and safety!”)
4. That hiding our heads in the sand will not save us, any more than a pregnant woman, ignoring her pregnancy, may avoid actual birth, and,
5. That those who heed the warning signs: may be fully prepared “so that this Day will not overtake you as a thief.”

But, how is this last point really possible? What is this, about *none of this* overtaking us as a thief?? Why is this? Next verse:

⁶ *Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.*

⁷ *For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.*

1 Thessalonians 5:6-7 (NKJV)

In other words, there really is an option *not to go to sleep, at all!* For, remember, within the parable of the ten virgins—half of those sleepy virgins will be lost (Matt. 25:1-11)! No matter how you look at it, careless living within these times *will have a consequence!* Therefore, the apostle instructs us:

⁸ *But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.*

1 Thessalonians 5:8

And why is this?

⁹ *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*
¹⁰ *who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.*

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

Therefore, let us not “sleep”—and: Let us comfort one another with these words (verse 11)!!

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= **DOWN TO EARTH** =

tional whims or the “hurrahs” of cheering counsels or assemblies. Nor is it enough to suppose that what we believe is accurate simply because we have “a warm and fuzzy feeling” within a given meeting or assembly.

Where is the *Scripture* that supports what you believe?!

As Jesus said to those questioning Him:

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.

John 5:39

Or, as stated in the book of Acts, where the Bereans are commended because:

These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.

Acts 17:11[emphasis added]

Therefore, as we look out across the landscape of current events and notice the continued fulfillment of Bible prophecy *right before our eyes* with the return of Israel to her land, for example—in a fulfillment of prophecies made by the Christ, in response to questions on what to look for prior to His returning (Luke 21:7 “. . . what sign will there be when these things are about to take place?”). We must affirm that one such sign, is the returning of the nation of Israel to her homeland. Said Christ, after forecasting the Jewish diaspora” (i.e. the scattering of the Jewish nation out over the whole world):

And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and

be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

Luke 21:24

Of course, for anyone with a knowledge of what the New Testament forecasts regarding the return of Christ, the above is a virtual “no brainer”—for how can the promise that the angels gave concerning Christ’s future return to the Mt. of Olives in the opening chapter of the book of Acts (Acts 1:11-12) be fulfilled . . . unless the *scattering* of the nation of Israel into all the world first comes to an end?

For the prophecy referred to by the angels, reads:

² *For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; The city shall be taken, The houses rifled, And the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city.* ³ *Then the LORD will go forth And fight against those nations, As He fights in the day of battle.* ⁴ *And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, Which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, From east to west, . . .*

Zechariah 14:2-4 [emphasis added]

Say, have you noticed? The nations of the world are continually pointing the finger at Israel *today!* In fact, Israel is already having to defend itself *today* against *repeated* attacks from her neighbors who insist on lobbing new missiles and fire balloons over her borders. So, I ask you, was Jesus speaking only to the Jews when forecasting the Tribu-

lation coming upon the world that we live in, at the end of this age? (Notice: what Jesus said would happen just prior to His returning is happening in our world *today*.)

Or, was not Jesus speaking to us, as well?

Of course, we (like John, languishing in a dungeon) may feel a certain degree of despair and discouragement when looking at what is happening to our nation and world, today. Yet, the answer is not to look for an “easy escape” from our situation, but into the very Scriptures, themselves, as we prepare our hearts and minds to endure and persevere through the trials and difficulties that now loom just over the horizon, as the world’s one remaining superpower (the United States) comes under repeated attacks *from within* to turn this land of the free and home of the brave into one more socialist state that denies the very existence of God while celebrating the violation human identifiers and livelihood (such as sexual identity)!

So, should we, like John’s messengers, send back to God to ask if He really meant what He said within the Scriptures? Should we, also, “look for another”—Why not simply assure ourselves that God really does know what He is doing, as we press in to be ever more faithful and true within the hour of trial? And yet, I propose to you that another possibility may be eluding many within this hour *simply because many have ignored the obvious*:

And that “other option”?

It is . . . an awakening.

†

What Must I Do?

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."
Acts 16:31

How?

... If you will confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

For with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Romans 10:9,10

In Other Words

Acknowledge: your need

—as a sinner (Romans 3:23, II Cor. 5:14-15)

Accept: His work on the Cross —to be your Savior

Confess: your acceptance of His lordship over you.

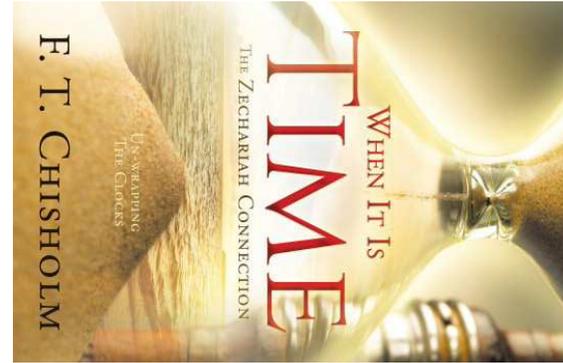
Live for Him: with your new life.

For the scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be ashamed."

Romans 10:11

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A Comprehensive Approach

—to end time events



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