

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Victory Through Troublesome Times

by Dan Trygg

“...flee from youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a clean heart. ²³ But decline foolish and ignorant debates, knowing that they produce quarrels. ²⁴ And it is not necessary for the Lord's bond-servant to quarrel, but to be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵ with meekness instructing the ones opposing them, if perhaps God may grant them a change of perspective unto a recognition of the truth, ²⁶ and they may think right again and escape the snare of the devil, having been captivated by him to do his will. ^{3:1} But know this, that in the last days troublesome times will come. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, abusive in speech, uncompliant to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, unpersuadable, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, having-become-conceited, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; ⁵ having a form of religion, but having denied its power; and avoid such people as these. ⁶ For among them are the ones entering into households and captivating vulnerable women having-been-weighted down with sins, being-led by various impulses, ⁷ always searching-for-answers and never able to come to a recognition of reality.”

2 Timothy 2:22 - 3:7

We live in “troublesome” times. The word means “difficult, hard, oppressive, trying”, even “harsh” or “violent”. **Paul predicted that such “seasons” would come in “the last days”.** The “last days” began when Jesus defeated sin and Satan at the cross, and sent the Spirit to establish the church (Heb. 1:2; Acts 2:17; I Jn. 2:18). Since that time, the enemy has been thrown down to earth, and is in a rage (Rev. 12:7-12). Jesus appointed His called-out people (the church) to “disciple all nations”, and the adversary is doing everything he can to sabotage and block that effort. **These are the “last days”, because they are the assault and advance of the Kingdom of God upon planet earth. The enemy is being displaced, souls are being won to Christ, lives are being liberated from bondage to Satan.** In spite of the advance of Islam in recent years, the growth of the church continues to outpace them. From the early beginnings in the upper room in Jerusalem (Acts 2), **the Spirit has brought the name of Jesus to every corner of the world, and today there are more Christians than any other world religion.** One out of three people on the planet claim to be Christian, compared to one out of four Muslims. **The advance and growth of the Kingdom of God has not been without challenge, opposition, and even violence.** Worldwide, there are more people coming to Christ than ever before, but there are also more people being imprisoned, persecuted, beaten and even murdered for their faith than any time throughout history.

The apostle Paul predicted that the enemy’s attack would come on two fronts: from *without* and *within*. “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to *draw away the disciples* after them. **Therefore be on the alert...**” (Acts 20:29-31). **Throughout history, this has been the enemy’s strategy. He has used ignorance, suspicion, fear, pride and prejudice to motivate people to *resist* the message of Christ.** This escalates to personal or legal sanctions against Christians, trying to stop them from sharing their faith. In some cases, this has erupted into violent lashing out against those who share the truth. **Meanwhile, the enemy attempts to *infiltrate* the church with people who are not really Christians at all** (cf. Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43), **...people he can motivate, manipulate and utilize to *divert the people of God away from the truth, or discredit their testimony.* By far, the biggest obstacle to the effectiveness of the Church comes through the immaturity, inconsistency and worldliness of its members.** If Satan can keep us walking in the flesh, he will have ample opportunities to point out our flaws and hypocrisy, ...because worldly Christians *will* be defeated in their personal spiritual and moral lives. When they live *by* the flesh, they will produce *only what the flesh can produce*, which is sensual, sinful, selfish, angry, and judgmental (Gal. 5:19-21). **By keeping them from pressing through to discover the power, purity, goodness and liberty of the life produced by the Holy Spirit, the enemy succeeds in discrediting the name of Jesus.** Wherever the Church has gone, there has been a slow departure in succeeding generations. There is a decline from genuine, vibrant Christian experience, into a dead ritualism or a lifeless liberalism. Thus, we see the birthplace of Christianity now has only about 4% of the population who claim to be vibrant Christians. Europe, which had been the birthplace of the Reformation and modern missions, has seen a steady decline of church attendance, and a corresponding rise of agnosticism or atheism. North America has also suffered a significant loss of its spiritual vitality. Canada and the US have both experienced a decline in church membership, attendance, *activism*, and *relevance* in the eyes of their respective populations. Yet, the growth edge of the Christian movement is *exploding* in South America, Africa and China. This explosive growth rate more than offsets the losses incurred in these other parts of the world, so that on a world-wide stage, Christianity continues to grow. **It is significant that in all these areas of healthy growth, people are converted by a real, Spirit-led, Bible-based expression of Christianity. Those who simply believe and obey**

what the Bible says, experience the same reality that NT believers experienced. It is also in *these* areas, or their neighboring countries, where the enemy is most violent in his attempts to block the spread of the gospel.

What's to be done? We have to get serious about our spiritual walk, and about the warfare going on around us. *We have to stop allowing ourselves to live fleshly, sub-standard Christian lives.* Did I say "sub-standard"? What is the standard? **We are to look, think, talk and act like Jesus did! Is that possible? Of course, it is! That is part of the problem, we are expecting so much less than what God calls us to!** God has *called us* to become like Jesus in our character, and in our mode of living. The apostle John says that *if we walk in the light, we will keep God's commandments, and that, in fact, we ought to be walking as He walked* (I Jn. 2:3-6). Isn't that why the new covenant was such a revolutionary advance over the legalism of the old covenant? **God came to give us a new heart and a new Spirit, and to write His law upon our hearts, so we could keep His commandments, ...and that He would even cause us to walk in those commandments** (Ezk. 11:19,20; 36:26,27; Jer. 31:31-33; cf. Heb. 8:6-10). This doesn't mean we will be like robots. **God gives us the choice to walk in the power and privilege He has made available to us in Christ, ...or to walk in our old, fleshly ways.** Either way, we get *the consequences* of our orientation and our choices. If we sow to the Spirit, we *will* reap life; if we sow to the flesh, we *will* reap the corruption and rottenness of death. **Do you want the power of God in your life? It is available, and God wants you to walk in it, but you have to make it the priority of your life.**

As I write this, I think of the many who have been Christians for *years*, but still **do not read the scriptures** on a daily basis. *Really?* They still **do not have a time of prayer**, or even talk to God throughout their day. *Really?* They still **do not honor God with the first part of their income** (Prov. 3:9,10), ...they give Him the leftovers, if there *is* any left over! *Really?* They make sure they have their cigarettes, soda or coffee, but they do not give God the tithe, which *He* says is His part (Lev. 27:30; Mal. 3:8-11). To Him, to *not* give the tithe is like *stealing* from Him! **No wonder they do not have more of God's power and presence! He said that those who honor Him, He will honor; but those who think little of Him, will be esteemed accordingly** (I Sam. 2:30). In Ezekiel's day, the Israelites set up idols in their hearts, and "the stumbling block of their sin in front of their face", and then tried to inquire of God (14:4-8). He was *angry*, and said He would set Himself *against* such people! **God is not to be trifled with! If we want to draw near to God, we need to repent (change our perspective), confess and put aside our sins, as well as the stumbling blocks that we have repeatedly trip over, and humble ourselves before Him.** That is another issue. **Many Christians have sin patterns** that have gone unaddressed for *years*! **Many have areas of emotional brokenness** that also have gone unaddressed for *years*! **Many have areas of physical health that they have ignored** and left unaddressed for *years*. *Really?* **How can we say we are serious about our spiritual walk, if we are not doing our best to clean up our lives and be as healthy as reasonably possible?** Aren't we robbing God of our full potential? We are not *truly* living *for God*; we are living *for ourselves*! We don't want to *be inconvenienced*, or *take the time*, or *put forth the effort*, or *spend the money* to get healthy, spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically. At least, bring these issues before God, and submit them to Him. **If we want spiritual life and fruitfulness, we have to plow up the fallow ground of our lives** (Jer. 4:3,4; Hos. 10:12), **and put forth effort to seek God.** Like the preaching of John the Baptist and Jesus, we need to "Prepare the way for the Lord, make His paths straight!" **We need to adjust ourselves to welcome God's presence into our lives**, not quench or offend the Spirit of holiness by our talk, attitude, thoughts, or behaviors (I Thess. 5:19; Heb.10:29). **We need to put aside our preoccupation with entertainment, and make God our preoccupation.** God encourages us to ask, seek and knock. Each of these verbs are continuous actions, not one-time requests. God is willing to give, help us to find, and will open things up to those who persevere.

This is a spiritually dark and dull season in our country. If you read what Paul wrote, he is describing *our* people, *our* culture. **When you look back in history, you will discover that there have been many such seasons.** When the people of God become distracted by worldly things, ...when we are not attending to the main purpose for our being here on planet earth..., it doesn't take long for the enemy to riddle our culture with evil, compromise and injustice. We are seeing it on every side. **The question is, "Do we have a form of godliness, but deny (or, don't expect or draw upon) the power of it? Have we become seekers of pleasure more than seekers of God?"** Are you seeing the fruit of the Spirit in *your* life, or the works of the flesh? Do you feel like you have stalled out, or lost that fire for God? **This troublesome season is not something God has not dealt with before.** There is an old promise He gave to His people years ago, found in II Chronicles 7:14, "If my people who are called by My name *humble themselves*, and *pray* and *seek My face* and *turn from their wicked ways*, then *I will hear* from heaven and *will forgive* their sin and *heal* their land." More than just the healing of *our* land, however, **we need to ask God for a mission mentality.** We need a *larger* vision than just our personal comfort. We need to rise to our calling as Kingdom warriors. **Satan wants to put us to sleep with TV, movies and video games. Do you want to waste your life watching someone else's fantasies, or do you want to live a Christ-filled life that will count for eternity?**