

WHEN THE END BEGINS

We keep hearing prophecies in the body of Christ, warning of approaching worldwide catastrophe. Recent events have added credence to these prophecies: upheavals in Northern Africa and the Middle East, an endless conflict in Afghanistan and Syria, millions of refugees on the move, a nuclear North Korea. What's going on?

Is this the beginning of the End? Is history out of control?

If this is the beginning of the End, what are we supposed to do? Do we pool our resources and buy land in the wilderness, so that when the chaos comes near we have a place of escape? There are believers who are actually doing this.

But this is hardly what the first century believers did, and hardly what has been done by countless brothers and sisters, who during the last century, have suffered torture, been killed, or who are even now in prison for their faith.

It does seem that the Spirit is warning of dire days ahead.

But is the Spirit telling us to run and hide?

Whether we have a reprieve for another few years, or whether things continue to disintegrate until half the cities on earth lie in rubble, it is essential for believers to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Body of Christ, as opposed to the fear-mongering of the false prophets.

This is hardly a time for believers to leave town and hide in the hills. This is our time of opportunity.

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Matthew 10:16

I send you...not into hiding, but out where the trouble is.

Revelation 5:1 “And I saw in the right hand of him who is seated on the throne and scroll written and on the back, sealed with seven seals...”

The scroll is symbolic of Judgment Time. And the breaking of the seals marks the beginning of the End. When a seal is broken and the scroll begins to unravel, things happen on this earth that reveal heaven's judgment---for those who have eyes to see.

“...and I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals? And no one in heaven or earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I wept that no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it, Then one of the elders said to me, “Weep not; lo, the Lion of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals. And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb, standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes, which

are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth; and he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne.” Rev 5:2-7

The restraining force, from apostolic days down to this moment, the Power holding back the destructive efforts of the kingdom of this world, is Jesus, the Lamb, with the seven horns and the seven eyes, and the Spirit, executing his will through "the seven eyes and seven spirits sent out into the whole earth."

“All authority has been given me in heaven and on earth.”

The Lord Jesus is exercising this authority to hold things in check, and through his Body on earth, not the "Christian success stories", but his true Body, which for twenty centuries, has suffered in his name and has somehow ministered order to the rest of the planet in a mystery.

But when the Lamb begins to break the seals, the order disintegrates, and things become chaotic.

Revelation 6: “Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say, as with a voice of thunder, “Come!” And I saw, and behold, a white horse (white is not a symbol of good here) and its rider had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” And out came another horse, bright red; its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another; and he was given a great sword.

When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come!” And I saw, and behold, a black horse, and its rider had a balance in his hand; and I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; but do not harm oil and wine.

Famine.

When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” And I saw, and behold, a pale horse, and its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed him; and they were given power over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth.

The picture presented here is that everything that occurs now as the End approaches, whether it is the spreading of some new ideology, or a worldwide financial meltdown, or a devastating war, is the consequence of things occurring at the headquarters of the universe.

When, finally, the Lamb permits the prince of this world to have his destructive way, all hell breaks loose. And what follows will make every war and cataclysm of past generations look like a rose garden.

Never since the Body of Christ first came into existence twenty centuries ago, has there been such unanimity among believers that the beginning of the End has arrived. Of course, there have always been sects inside the church, and heretical groups outside the church that have

announced that the End has arrived. But never has there been a time in the history of the Body of Christ, when so many believers were in agreement that the beginning of the End has arrived.

While false prophets and false christs multiply, and hearts harden and turn cynical and cold, it is essential that committed disciples of Jesus have a clear vision of what the Spirit is saying to us now—about this hour in which we live.

The Spirit of God is not saying, “Withdraw.”

On the contrary, the Spirit of God is reminding us that the Lord Jesus stands above all the things that are happening as the Lamb who was slain, and who is worthy!

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints; and they sang a new song saying, “Worthy art thou to take the scroll and open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation...” Rev 5:8-9

We need to focus our attention on the Lamb. He has not changed his attitude, or his nature. He hasn't turned the world over to Satan in disgust. The same mercy that took him to the cross will move him to start breaking the seals, sending this world on its turbulent journey through chaos to the final rest of God's fulfilled kingdom.

The Lord Jesus is right on schedule. He won't make a mistake. Every single soul will have a chance. You can be sure that the Lord will give special care and attention to those who have been given the roughest deal in this world, who have been neglected by self-righteous Christians who were too busy pushing their political agendas to see the suffering ones at their gates.

The Spirit is not telling us to withdraw. He is reminding us, on the contrary, that our task, the rougher things get, the hotter the fire burns, is to proclaim the Lordship of Jesus as the hope of all people. To call them to his Banquet Hall. To touch them with healing as a foretaste of the coming glory.

And they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my Name's sake. Then many will fall away and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. Because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold. But he who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come. Matthew 24:9-14

The gospel of the kingdom is the gospel of the Lamb. Jesus Christ crucified and risen—God's Incarnate Mercy. And this gospel is not proclaimed from a distance by "gospel satellites," but by people on the street level.

We are to spread this good news outside the church sanctuary outside our Christian “inner circle”, into the world. Don't just send a missionary... be one.

We go out into the world, and wait our time. We pray. We live God's mercy. When the right opportunity comes, we speak. And we will see results we've never dreamed of.

The more difficult living gets, the more dangerous life becomes, the more free, bold, joyful, glad, and authoritative will be our message.

The Spirit is not calling us to withdraw. On the contrary, he is telling us that we are invulnerable until our work is done. We cannot be stopped until the job is finished

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to council, and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles.” Matthew 10: 16-18

There are countless people living on the earth right now who are going through all this—both the suffering and the power. People who are no different than we are.

“When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.” Matthew 10:19-22

No where do we even have the hint of a suggestion that we are to run off into the woods and hide in a cave. We are to be out there in the world, living the gospel and proclaiming the gospel. If we are brought to trial, we'll be told what to say when the time comes. And if we find ourselves having to walk through the valley of the shadow of death, the Lamb will be our comforter.

We will be protected as we press on until our work is finished. And when our work is finished, let the bomb fall, let the bullet hit and may God be praised!

The Spirit is not calling us to crawl into a hole and withdraw. On the contrary, he is reminding us that the destination of our journey lies on the other side of the End, in the kingdom of the Lamb.

Here we have no continuing city, but seek the city which is to come, and what liberty and freedom this gives when our hearts are thus detached from this world! We are no longer weighed down by everything that goes wrong or by all the uncertainty that surrounds us. We are free to live with our eyes on the world beyond, and our feet on solid ground.

We live in houses, we drive cars, we have families, we love our children, we enjoy our food, and we rejoice in the sunshine and the blue skies. At the same time the Spirit of God floods us with the life of heaven and helps to detach us from the "treasures" on this side until it becomes clear that the only lasting treasure we have, waits for us in the world beyond.

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do

not grow old, with a treasure in heaven that does not fail, where no thief approaches, and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes..." Luke 12:32-37

You could say that the End really began when Jesus died on that cross. You could say the New Age began when he arose from the grave the Firstborn of the New Creation.

But the climax of these Last Days begins when he starts to break the seals. The issue is not, when will this be? Tomorrow? Next week? Twenty years from now? The issue is what are we doing in response to the signs we can already see? Are we withdrawing and building our bridges of escape, or are we going out to where we are being sent?

"Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

May God help us to go out, and keep going out,
and never stop until the end of time.