

The Importance of Understanding the Times

Conference theme verse: *I Chronicles 12:32—And of the children of Issachar, who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do, the heads of them were two hundred; and all their brethren were at their bidding.*

May we have a word of prayer:

Dear heavenly Father, we thank Thee for giving us the privilege of coming together to listen to Thy Word. We pray, Lord, that we may be so taken up by Thy Word that it will become life to each and every one of us. We give this time into Your hand and ask Thy blessing upon it to the praise of Thy glory. In the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.

I consider it as a privilege to share the Word with you all. The Lord is so merciful that even in these last days He is speaking to us. We are living in these last days, and it is our belief that the Lord is coming soon. He may come at any moment, and how good it will be while we are meeting here this morning that suddenly the Lord comes! But what if He should come at this moment and some are left behind? That would be a serious thought for every one of us.

Are you expecting the Lord to return? Are you prepared for His return? What if He should come back now? Will you be taken by Him or unfortunately will you be left behind because you are not ready? So we do consider this time that we are coming together a most serious time. We have to consider this: What if the Lord should return now. Will we be taken up or will we be left behind? So as we search the Scriptures this morning, we want to have this seriousness within us. We want to be those who are ready for His return, not those who will be left behind.

Understanding the Times We are Living in

At this time of David's life, he was a fugitive living with the Philistines because of the persecution of Saul. Yet we find a group of people, the sons of Issachar, who understood the times they lived in. Even though Saul was the king of Israel and David was a fugitive among the Philistines, yet these people understood the times. They knew that one day the will of God was for David to be king. So these people went over to David instead of staying with Saul. They knew the time they were living in, and therefore they followed David and were greatly rewarded afterwards.

Dear brothers and sisters, we are living at a critical time. I sincerely believe that we are living at the time of the return of our Lord Jesus. He promised His disciples before He left that He would come back and receive us to Himself. Now two thousand years have passed since our Lord spoke this word, and two thousand years is a long time. Why has He not fulfilled His promise? It is not because He is not anxious to return. If we knew the heart of God, the heart of Christ, we would know how anxious He must be to come back to receive His own to Himself. But somehow there is the delay of His coming, and the reason is because we are not ready.

Thank God, even during the time when David was a fugitive, the sons of Issachar understood the times. Even though Saul was on the throne, they knew that the kingdom belonged to David. So these people came to David and followed him during the time when he was a fugitive, and because of this they were greatly rewarded.

Do we know the times we are living in? Do we know that the Lord is coming back soon? Or are we those who still follow the world thinking there is plenty of time to continue to live our own lives as we want to? Or are we like the sons of Issachar who understood the times and followed David when he was a fugitive and eventually were crowned with David?

We believe that we are living at that critical time when the Lord may return at any moment. Even as we are meeting here this morning, what if the Lord should suddenly return? Will we be raptured to be with Him? Or will we be left behind gnashing our teeth and repenting that we are not ready for Him?

So as we come together this morning, I do sense in my spirit that this is a most critical moment for us. We want everyone to be ready for the Lord's coming which may take place at any moment now. It is not because He does not want to return, therefore He waited for two thousand years. That is not His heart. His heart is anxious to come back to receive His own. It is because we are not ready.

Dear brothers and sisters, the question this morning is: Are you ready? If the Lord should come now, will you be taken up by Him or will you be those who will be left behind?

The Days of Noah

The Bible tells us that in the days of Noah people were eating and drinking and marrying while Noah was preparing the ark. Noah must have preached to the people when they came to see the huge boat he was building. We know that there

had never been any rain or flooding in the past so when they saw Noah building that huge ark, they must have been wondering and questioning whether something was wrong with Noah. But through the revelation given by God Noah knew that He was going to send the flood, and he was preparing for that day.

Noah was faithful to preach to the people during that period, but they must have laughed at him thinking that something must be wrong with him. However, the day came when God told Noah and his family to enter into the ark and He closed the door. Then the heavens opened, rain came upon the earth, the earth broke up, and people began to try and get into the ark, but it was closed. It is a sad thing when we think of what happened in the days of Noah. It was such a huge boat that could have accommodated so many people, yet only Noah and his family were saved in it.

God has told us the story of Noah and his ark in order to warn us today. The day will come, and it will come unexpectedly, when the door will be closed, not by man but by God Himself. When the rain began, people flocked to the ark trying to get in, but Noah could not open the door. I think Noah would have opened it if he could have, but God had closed the door. Unfortunately, during that time only eight people were saved in the ark; but think of the millions of people who were destroyed in the flood.

Brothers and sisters, the Bible has given us this story as a warning, telling us that we are living as in the days of Noah. The flood is coming, but the door will be closed. So are you, by the grace of God, within the ark and saved? Or are you outside the ark and will be drowned? I think this is a thought that each one of us should consider very carefully now. The Lord may come at any moment. He has waited and waited for two thousand years, and He is anxious to return. He is waiting for you because He wants you to be ready and in the ark when the flood comes.

What a pity when you think of the 120 years that it took Noah to build the ark, all the time preaching to the people, yet none of the people believed him. They laughed at him, made jokes about him, but in the end they realized it was real. But it was too late.

So as we come to this time, the question we want to ask each and every one of us is: are you ready? Two thousand years have passed which is a long time. The Lord has waited patiently for you because He wants none to be lost but all to be saved.

The Faithful Slave and the Wicked Slave

The Bible tells us in Matthew 24 that when the master left, he set over his household his bondservant to take care of it. If the servant is faithful in small things and carefully takes care of the house, knowing that his lord might return at any moment, then he will greatly reward his servant and will put him in charge over all his possessions.

On the contrary, the Bible also tells us in Matthew 24 that the servant who thinks his master will not come back so soon and begins to eat and drink and even beat his fellow servants, when the lord of that bondman unexpectedly comes back, he will cut him in two. He will appoint his portion with the hypocrites and there will be weeping and repenting, but it will be too late. The Bible warns us very seriously; thus we cannot afford to be careless anymore.

Dear brothers and sisters, may I warn you again. If the Lord should return at this moment, will you be left behind or will you be taken? Blessed is the person who will be taken by the Lord because he shall reign with Christ for a thousand years. We only live on this earth for a very short time. If you should live for a hundred years or over, it is just a very short period. But think of the millennium, the thousand years that you will be reigning with Christ.

Outer Darkness

The wicked servant tried to find pleasure in his short period of time. The Bible tells us he will be cut into two and put in darkness with gnashing of teeth which means repenting. Now I know people are very curious. Wherever I go, young people will ask me the question: "Where is outer darkness." Of all the books I have read, and I have read a lot, there is only one author who tried to explain where the outer darkness is, and what it is, and this is Robert Govett. He is one who took the Bible literally and he tried to explain what the outer darkness is. But when people asked me the question about the outer darkness, do you think I will tell them? When Robert Govett explained what the outer darkness might be, he said to be cast into that outer darkness is to be outside the kingdom of God and the light of His glory. In the millennial kingdom they will be outside the glory of God's kingdom, and that will be outer darkness. Think of that! If we are not ready for the Lord today, this will happen literally to us. We will be cast into outer darkness.

The Ten Virgins

In Matthew 25 we find the story of the ten virgins who represent the church of God. They all take their torches and go out to meet the Lord, but because the Lord seems to have delayed, they all went to sleep which means in that parable they all died. Throughout the ages, God's people have been waiting for the Lord to return, and they all go out to meet the Lord. But because of the delay, they all went to sleep. In other words, many saints have died throughout the ages, but that is not the end. Suddenly the word came, "The Lord cometh," and they all woke up and tried to trim their lamps. The wise ones have extra oil in their vessel so they are able to replenish their dying torch. But the foolish ones do not have any extra oil, because they filled their vessels with other things that they considered as more important. It seems to be so. But the wise ones are able to replenish their torches because they had extra oil. However, the foolish ones could not because what they found in their vessels was not oil but other things they considered as more precious but is now useless.

The oil could not be shared, but not because the wise ones were not willing to share. I think if there had been enough oil, they would certainly have shared, but they could not. So when the foolish virgins went to buy their oil, the Lord came and the door was closed. When the foolish ones came back (we do not know if they got extra oil or not, most likely not), they knocked on the door, but the door was closed to them. They were sitting outside in darkness gnashing their teeth, repenting.

So this gives us a very clear picture. If we are not waiting for the Lord's return now, one day when the Lord comes back, we will be those in outer darkness gnashing our teeth and that is repenting. Thank God He will never forsake us. Once saved, forever saved, and that is the mercy of God. Once God's mercy has come upon you, it will never come to an end. Even if you miss the opportunity of being taken by the Lord into the millennial kingdom, even so in outer darkness you will repent.

God Never Forsakes His People

Think of the long patience of God. If He has saved you, He will save you to the uttermost. You may misuse your time today, but God will never forsake you. You may have to go through outer darkness and repent, but He who has called you will save you to the uttermost. So in Romans 8 we are told: "Whom He has called, He has justified; whom He has justified, He has glorified" He loves us to the uttermost.

So far as God is concerned, this is the mercy of God. So far as the wicked servant is concerned, he has to suffer much for what he tried to escape.

So the warning for us today is that as long as it is today this is our opportunity. Thank God for gathering us together for this time here. I do not know if this is the last opportunity, but it is quite possible. The Lord may come today, and it is His longing that you won't be left in the outer darkness to repent. Eventually, all who have been called, will be saved to the uttermost because it is God who is doing this work. But a thousand years is a long period compared with our life here on earth. If you live over a hundred years, compared with the millennium, it is just a fraction. Why should we forsake God's grace and choose to be under discipline until God's purpose in every one of us is fulfilled?

So brothers and sisters, as I am talking with you this morning, on the one hand I feel most happy because I know God's will is that He will save us to the uttermost, all of us. Once He lays His hand upon you, He will never leave you. But on the other hand, I feel sad as I think of people who for the sake of the pleasures of this life that for a little while they have to suffer darkness, they have to go through repentance in order for God's mercy to completely come upon them. This is why we are here this morning.

Brothers and sisters, are you serious? Or are you careless? What if the Lord should come back this morning, where will you be? It is the prayer of my heart that if it should happen this morning, this auditorium will be empty; none will be left behind but all will be taken. Praise the Lord! But if this does not happen, and some, or even most, will be left behind, how sad it will be.

Brothers and sisters, I cry for you lest you be left behind, but I will rejoice with you if you are taken. So I want each and every one of you to consider very carefully this morning. Let not this opportunity pass by. This is the time for us to be ready for the Lord's return.

Shall we pray:

Dear Lord, it is with hearts of gratitude to know that Thou dost love us and love us to the uttermost and that Thou desires to save us and save us to the uttermost. It is not Thy will that we should pass through outer darkness. It is Thy will that when Thou dost come, we will all be taken up by Thee and be with Thee for a thousand years. So may this mercy and grace be upon each and every one of us. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.