

SURVIVAL

By

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The “something’s gotta give” philosophy is gaining momentum daily. Everywhere there is the feeling that something big is about to happen.

Kurt Waldhelm of the United Nations General Assembly is quoted as saying “an almost universal sense of apprehension” about the course of world events now combines with feeling of “helplessness and fatalism which I find deeply disturbing.”

This state of apprehension and helplessness has fertilized the see-bed for a rich crop of false prophets and panic profiteers. The prophets of doom now are found among the best experts in the land. The financial wizards produce “survival bulletins” telling us how to get rich on the coming economic collapse. Into the vortex of expectant fear legions of prophets have entered with sensational (and profitable) predictions hung on veiled Biblical text like mobiles suspended from invisible strings. These predictions include a gory Armageddon about to take place in the Middle East, the secret rapture of the Saints called by some “the great snatch”, a time of trouble called “The Great Tribulation”, the building of a temple in Jerusalem, a kind of reincarnation of Satan on the throne of world leadership, and a number of other fantastic and exciting events with which the modern prophets tickle the itching ears of people in the pews and those who sit at home before the one-eyed idol of TV.

It is folly to try to straighten out the false prophecies and erroneous teachings of all the sects, denominations and private interpreters of the Bible. New predictions are conceived faster than a thousand men could explain biblical truths. The fact is we are living in crises times and many of the very best minds in government predict an economic collapse not only in this nation but throughout the world. They say that such an event would trigger massive riots such as the world has never known.

If this doesn’t happen then there is the treat of World War Three after our own military arsenal has been drastically depleted by our pouring arms into Vietnam, Israel and the Arab countries as well as our great give-away to the Communists in Russia.

What is a Christian to do? The answer is found in knowing God’s purpose as revealed in Christ. Christ said that he did not come to bring peace, but a sword, indicating the intense conflict that obtains between His reign and all the unrighteous of the world who rebel against it (Psa. 2, 110:2). All the sword-rattling and warfare in the world is to be expected. The forces of Satan have always militantly warred against Christ and His people, therefore we are not to flee from the conflict but to join it. We are to fight the good fight of faith, as did the apostle Paul, who explained that our warfare is not of the flesh; that is, not a war of politics nor for territory nor the killing of other people. Our warfare is spiritual, our sole offensive weapon being the word of God, called the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:12–17). Whether we live in good times or bad the warfare is still the same, a fight to uphold the truth and to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ (II Cor. 10:5).

The New Testament was written in times of fear, political upheaval and violence. Christians were rounded up like animals, imprisoned and put to death. Civilization was

on shaky grounds; the economy was like quicksand. Paul wrote II Thessalonians to assure the Christians that in spite of these conditions, Christ was not returning just yet and for them to get on with the business at hand. Of course that was nearly 2,000 years ago. It may be that we are drawing very near to His coming. If He doesn't return soon the evidence is strong that there will be another world war, that our economy will collapse and that our nation will finally go down the drain as other nations have and as all nations must who forget God.

What shall we do? Shall we build a bomb shelter? Invest in a mountain hide-out? One survival bulletin recommends buying a yacht or large boat, storing it with supplies for a year and when violence breaks out just put out to sea. Others have suggested that in time of crisis the Christians should take residence in the mountains, using the advice Jesus gave to the Christians of Jerusalem: "When you see the abomination of desolation...standing in the holy place then let them that are in Judea flee unto the mountains" (Matt. 24:15, 16). These instructions were for the saints of Jerusalem during the siege before its destruction in 70 AD, and so does not apply universally nor to our time. This week I was invited to subscribe to a "survival bulletin" for the modest price of \$175.00 per year. Obviously the writer do not believe their bulletins, which insist that when the collapse comes our money will be worthless!

Significantly missing from the prophets of panic is the call to faith in the Sovereign power of God "who rules in the kingdom of men" (Dan. 5:21). Also absent is reference to the fact that "The angel of the Lord encamped round about them that fear him and delivers them" (Psa. 34:7).

Survival for a Christian does not depend upon his wealth or his ingenuity but rather upon Christ. In fact this is Christ's supreme concern — our survival. This is the primary object of the gospel, that believers survive. God create with the purpose that he might have a creation suitable for his highest creature — man — created in his own image. Paul wrote that "the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now" and that "the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19). God has not abandoned his creation but is deeply concerned with it, with every blade of grass and with each little bird (Matt. 6:26, 30). God is more concerned with your life than is the conservationist and the ecologist and all the other do-gooders who would enslave us for our own protection! The Creator of all things still desires to have man in His own image. He will carry out this purpose by rescuing from this deteriorating world all those who by faith are aligned with his purpose.

The very conditions in the world which are causing the apprehension are evidence of God's concern, for it is a prelude to God's ultimate judgment upon sin. The burden of sin which lies on the heart and mind of a right thinking person is nothing compared to the weight of that evil that grieves a holy and righteous God. The misery of sin over the world can be realized to only a small degree by any one person, but God must see the horror of the whole scene. It is the absolute justice of God that demands that the wicked be destroyed and the righteous preserved. "Jehovah upholds the righteous...but the wicked shall perish" (Psa 37). God's infinite love is best seen against this background of his infinite justice. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes on Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The world, alienated from God, is to perish because of sin, but in tender love God will rescue those who believe, that they may survive. Jesus carefully explained that life for the

Christian in this world is one of tribulation and warfare. Much of the tribulation stems from the unbeliever's hatred of Christ and His people. However, some tribulation is also from God's hand as a Father who chastens his children for their own development because he loves them. As the depth and horror of sin can be known completely only by the Almighty so the depth and compassion of genuine love in its perfect wholeness can be felt by no creature as it must be felt by God.

He wills His beloved to survive.

He will save His own.

The idea of a world in chaos is certainly not new to God. Foreseeing man's negative response, his rebellion, his overt wickedness, God has promised to judge and destroy him. The Creator will sustain and give life only to that which is according to His eternal purpose and creation. The apostle Peter wrote that "there were heavens from of old, and an earth compacted out of water and amidst water, by the word of God; by which means the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens that now are, and the earth, by the same word have been stored up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men (II Peter 3:5-7).

Stored up for fire! We are living on a planet that is literally a keg of powder and time is running out. But just as God rescued eight souls through the ark before flooding the world, so He will rescue those who are safe in His ark of mercy, the Church, before destroying the world with fire. Survival does not depend upon your ability to outguess or outmaneuver those who are out to enslave you. Rather survival depends upon our fellowship with the One who holds the power of life or death over all. The Christian is concerned not with mere survival in a mortal sense but with survival in eternity.

Jesus said, "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it, but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it" (Luke 9:24). This does not mean that we should not take normal precautions against obvious dangers. We should be good stewards of our lives, as well as our possessions. But the Christian's business is not to find ways and means to save his life in this world by laying up in store his earthly goods, nor by seeking a hideout from the builders of Babylon. We **are** told to "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things (the necessities of life) will be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). We are instructed **not** to set our minds on earthly things, but rather upon the things that are above where Christ is seated on the right hand of God (Col. 3:1, 2). We are to run the race of life, "looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross" (Heb. 12:2). The plagues which are falling upon this nation and the world are part of God's judgment and give every Christian opportunity to witness to the power and purpose of God. Like Pilgrims and strangers upon the earth, Christians look for a kingdom with foundations built by God, one that is eternal, where righteousness and peace reign because all sin and sinners have been eradicated through the judgment.

The violence and deterioration seen in the world are but the natural result of man "walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the powers of the air, of the spirit that works in the sons of disobedience" (Eph 2:2). In the midst of such darkness the Christian has a light, the light of God's truth. In the midst of the corruption we are told to "do all things without murmuring and questioning; that you may become blameless and harmless children of God without blemish in the midst of a

crooked and perverse generation, among whom you are seen as lights in the world, holding for the word of life” (Phi. 2:14–16).

Survive? That is really not our problem. Christ promises to protect, to rescue and to preserve, by resurrection from the dead if necessary, everyone that belongs to Him. Our task is not to save the world or even to save our lives, but to hold forth the truth of the gospel both in word and in deed that we might be seen as new creatures already being trained to inhabit a new creation.

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