

THE RECONCILER

KEEP YOUR FOCUS

*"But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, **ungrateful, unholy..**" (2: Tim 3:1-2)*

We live in the times of the end and of special tribulation, pressure and stress. The passage from Timothy certainly describes this time. The wickedness and rebellion in the earth can be a source of great discouragement and depression to believers so many get caught in the trap of **BIBLE BASED NEGATIVITY**. The joy they once had when they discovered the mercy of God has gone, as their focus has slipped from the goodness of God to the problems that are in the world.

Jesus prepared us for this. He did not say that His presence on the earth and the triumph of His resurrection would remove evil from the earth. Indeed, He told us that there would be wars, rumors of wars, and all kinds of stresses, distresses, earthquakes natural and ecological disasters and famines until the end. (Mt 24) It seems that these distresses get even worse as we approach the end of the age. This does not mean that His mission or Christianity has failed. It simply means that His mission is not complete. The world systems that govern this world have failed. They have failed to end social injustice, stop wars, end famines, and establish righteousness .

Their intention may be good but because their worldview is inspired by philosophies of this age which do not take into

account the PLAN of God or the WORD of God, they end up in opposition to God. They are under the same deception that Adam and

Eve came under when they adopted an alternate plan for the government of the world from the rule of God. This is why John can say: *"the whole world (world system) is in the power of the evil one."* (1 John 5:19)

Jesus never leaves us under any illusion about the evil that is in the world. He directs us not put our trust in, or expect too much from it. *At the same time*, in spite of the dismal condition of the world, and the appalling failure of its systems, He wants us to be totally filled with **thanksgiving, hope and great expectations**.

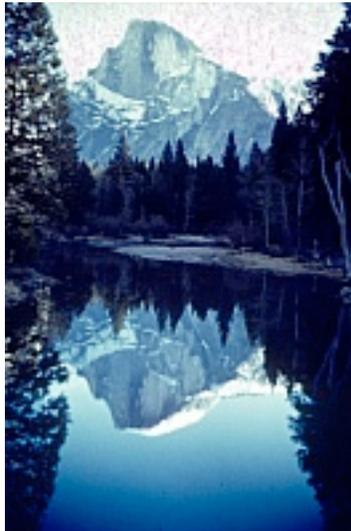
Keep Your Focus!

*"These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have **tribulation**: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world". (John 16:33)*

In these days of 24/7 news we can easily be pulled down by the constant reminder of the misery that is in the world. However, if the misery that is on the earth becomes our focus the darkness will swallow us.

This is why the Lord directs us to cultivate an attitude of thanksgiving, joy and faith. The Holy Spirit who knows all about the dreadful condition of the world says:

*"Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with **thanksgiving** let your requests be made known unto God." "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to*



*the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye **thankful.***" (Php 4:6, Col. 3:15)

*"And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: **see that ye be not troubled:** for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."* (Mt 24:6)

He wants our focus on the fact that in the midst of darkness the Lord has provided

- a spiritual ark of escape,
- a place of refuge in a time of suffering,
- a kingdom that exists in the midst of the failing kingdoms of this world
- a table in the presence (not absence) of our enemies.

He also assures us that God will shortly replace the ineffective systems of this world with the complete rule of His kingdom. *"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."* (Rev. 11:15)

The present day release of the Holy Spirit on all nations, the advance of the gospel of the kingdom to every nation and the restoration of Israel, are preparing the way for this great victory.

- The prince of darkness wants us to be devastated by the devastation he seeks to produce on the earth.
- The Prince of Peace wants us to be full of good cheer at the salvation, blessing, He is able to provide us with even in days of conflict and stress.

Thanksgiving And Praise

Thanksgiving and praise are the great instruments of spiritual warriors. Overcomers give glory to God, like Abraham, fully convinced (in the face of all contrary indications) that God is able to do what He has promised. Faith and praise anchored in real hope are the weapons he has for us.

Each one of us have

- dreams and aspirations that await fulfillment;

- perplexing situations that await explanation,
- alienations that await reconciliation, and
- problems that are yet to be overcome.

Should we therefore complain and be depressed. Absolutely not! This was the mistake of the ancient Israelites. They grumbled in the face of God's provision.

They were warned that if they did not *constantly keep their focus on God and His goodness by thanksgiving*, they would lose their blessings. *"Because you did not serve the Lord your God **with joyfulness and gladness of heart**, by reason of the abundance of all things, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you,."* (Deuteronomy 28:47-48) Focus on temporary discomfort rather than God's faithfulness caused them to come under the dominion of the OPPRESSOR. Their failure to develop the ***lifestyle of thanksgiving*** opened the way for the dominion of the one who steals, kills, and destroys the ABUNDANT LIFE. Next to unforgiveness, failure to develop the heart of thanksgiving is the greatest blockage to the Abundant spiritual Life our Good Shepherd came to give us. (John 10:10)

The principle of praise was so recognized in ancient Israel that two praise choirs were appointed to continuously thank and praise the Lord. This principle is not a side issue but a major component of our new life. We are required to develop a ***lifestyle of praise and thanksgiving.***

In this way, we ***keep our focus on the Lord, His goodness, power, mercy and faithfulness.*** Against the background of a world in disarray it is vital to maintain and foster an attitude of deliberate and unshakeable HOPE in God's present day sufficiency and ultimate triumph in our personal lives and on the earth.

Praise & thanksgiving not only restores our focus but it actually connects us with the throne of God in such away that it releases His hand to do His will in our situations.

Which Kingdom Are We Focused On?

One of the problems for believers in the West is that we expect too much from our governments and society and too little from God. In third world countries, the situation is reversed. Believers expect little from the government and everything from God.

The religious right in their patriotism tend to exalt the role of the government to too high a place. They tend to expect it to deliver what can only come from the throne of God. They get distracted from the golden throne of God by focusing on the shaky thrones on earth.

Of course, we should pray for our governments, presidents and Prime ministers. However, we should have no illusions concerning the limitations of government and of the political social and economic order to deliver. Our focus should never be on the performance of our government or on the strife

of politics but on the faithfulness of our covenant-making covenant keeping God. The *lifestyle of praise and thanksgiving* to God will keep us aware that we are citizens of a greater and more reliable kingdom than any kingdom of this world.

We are told that the interests of God's kingdom and the agenda of our nations often collide. They did at the birth of Jesus when Herod was incensed with murderous rage. They collided at the Crucifixion of Jesus. They collided so many times in history from the persecution of the apostolic age to the persecutions of the holocaust and in many parts of the world today. And they will continue to collide because we belong to a greater and a better kingdom. What will happen to us if our patriotism is stronger than our acknowledgement of God as the source of all blessings?