

The Form of This World Is Passing Away

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon emphasizes the urgency for believers to focus on God and the Gospel in a world that is rapidly changing and passing away.

Scripture: Matthew 6:30, Matthew 10:34, Matthew 16:18, Matthew 24:7, 1 Corinthians 7:25

Topics: "Eternal Focus", "Kingdom Living"

Description

Richard E. Bieber delivers a powerful sermon on the urgency of the times we live in, emphasizing the transient nature of this world and the need for believers to prioritize their relationship with God above all else. Drawing from 1 Corinthians 7:25-31, he highlights the importance of not being overly attached to worldly comforts, relationships, or possessions, but to focus on proclaiming the Kingdom of God in a world where history is rapidly unfolding. Bieber challenges believers to live as though they are not bound by earthly concerns, but to be fully devoted to sharing the gospel and serving others amidst the chaos and uncertainties of the present age.

Transcript

"Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. I think that in view of the present distress it is well for a person to remain as he is. Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek marriage. But if you marry, you do not sin, and if a girl marries she does not sin. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away.

I Corinthians 7:25-31

Many years ago a Detroit Free Press gossip columnist was having lunch with Paul Neuman in honor of a new film. Amid the chitchat columnist Shirley Eder got an answer to one of her questions which may have baffled her.. She asked, "Do you think the President will live up to his pre-election promises?" Neuman answered, "When history is out of control it doesn't make any difference what you promise." That one sentence from blue-eyed Paul was worth more than all the "inspiration" from all the converted movie stars on the celebrity circuit.

I have no idea how Neuman stood with God when he spoke those words, but he expressed what many who claim to know God are missing: that the form of this world is passing away.

You can't get Noah upset about the price of coffee because Noah knows that when the rain starts falling it won't make any difference. And how different our outlook becomes when God opens our eyes to the precariousness of the hour in which we live. If we could see how many of the things we now consider to be solid in this land are about to melt like butter and be no more, if we could grasp how fragile and how near to its end is the present order of things, our way of life would automatically change.

The Church of Jesus the Messiah was created for just such an hour as this. Many of us grew up thinking of the church as the;

- stabilizing influence in the community,

the

- bulwark of society.

Listen to Jesus again:

"Think not that I have come to bring peace. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother....."

Matthew 10:34

"...on this rock (this confession that I am the Christ) will I build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it."

Matthew 16:18

When Jesus talks about the church, He's talking about something active, moving, aggressive, something which smashes through the gates of the region of the dead. People who are drawn together around the cross of Jesus, fired with the Spirit of God, strengthened to function to the glory of God in the service of perishing men in a world that is falling apart.

Noah didn't build that ark for dry land. And Jesus isn't building His Church for serene summer days. The true church, the real thing, is being hammered together to take the good news of the Kingdom of God to a world where history is out of control.

For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: all this is but the beginning of the birthpangs. Then 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. And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And 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 24:7-14

Notice in the middle of war, famine, catastrophe, suffering, tribulation, the gospel is going out. Who's taking it out? You and I!

"Oh no," someone protests, "we're going to be raptured. The tribulation saints will have to take the gospel to the whole world"

My friend, we are the tribulation saints! History is already out of control. The form of this world is already passing away. The time has come for us to learn how to function in a world where everything shakable will be shaken, until only the unshakeable will be left.

What is called for is not a new lifestyle where we all learn to live on C rations and dehydrated vegetables, but a new state of the heart. A heart that has learned to rest in God like a child resting in its father, to hold on to God by faith and to hold loosely to everything else.

But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. Matthew 6:30-33

The time has come for us to learn to be so wrapped up in God and the doing of His mercy that we're bound to nothing else. Every other attachment,

every other joy,

every other pain,

every other delight, is seen for what it really is: temporary.

The one solid vital thing is that Jesus has called us out of our self-centered lives, washed away our sins, filled us with the Spirit, and sent us into that out-of-control world to proclaim His name and call living souls out of their darkness into His Kingdom.

I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short, from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none....

To function as sons and daughters of God as this age draws to a close, we have to live in such a way that our mate, if we have one, is not our primary comfort. Let those who have wives live as though they had none---live in such a way that they draw their comfort directly from the Lord Himself. Live in such a way that if your mate should be taken away you can go right on doing the one necessary thing; proclaiming the word of God to the crumbling world.

How many believers started out burning with zeal for the Lord. Then they got married. Then they got cozy and comfortable in their little nest. Their preoccupation with their mate becomes the thorns choking the life of God out of them.

"Husbands, love your wives,"

and yet,

"Let those who have wives/husbands live as though they had none."

Get on with the job!

....and those who mourn as though they were not mourning....

Some of us are mourning right now. Mourning because,

- we're lonely,
- we have lost a loved one,
- or because we've experienced tragedy.

Our Lord says,

"Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted."

Yet even though our hearts are breaking we are to live as though we were not mourning, wash our faces, anoint our heads, and get on with the work we've been sent to do - to touch this world with the comfort of God. Your mourning, friend, can never be an excuse for sitting around in gloom while the harvest waits for laborers.

"Let the dead bury their dead. But you go and preach the kingdom of God!"

....and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing....

When we're rejoicing our temptation is to try to build a shield around our joy and keep it, to stop time and hang on to that moment of joy forever. And just when we're putting the last brick in our house of joy, along comes an earthquake and the whole thing collapses. Better to rejoice as though we rejoiced not and get on with the one needful thing; to proclaim good tidings of great joy to all people in the midst of a collapsing world.

There is a heavy emphasis in many places on experiencing the joy of the Lord, and we should. We're exhorted to rejoice in the Lord always. But when believers endlessly stand around and rejoice and never make it out into the streets and lanes of the city with the gospel, never have time to draw near to those whose hearts are breaking with despair, our joy is false.

....and those who buy as though they had no goods....

What do we have? The goods that are in our hands.

our houses,

cars,

bank accounts,

clothes,

books, TVs, CDs, DVDs, computers. The more we're conscious of having things, the more anxious we become about keeping them. And when we become anxious about keeping what we think we have we are enslaved to these things. Better we should live as though we had no goods. Then when what we have is taken from us we can go right on with our work in the Lord, proclaiming His name.

... and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away.

We're in the world and we have to deal with it. We have to buy,

sell,

drive our cars,

take buses,

go to the dentist,

pay our taxes,

stop for traffic lights, like everyone else.

And yet, if we don't maintain a distance with our hearts, if we don't keep reminding ourselves where our citizenship really is, we soon sink into the anti-God atmosphere of this world and lose our vision.

There is something in us which continuously tempts us to settle down and get cozy in anything but God. Get cozy with your mate,

your sorrow,

your joy,

your possessions,

your place in the world,

your status in the church,

your reputation as a committed saint.

To stay alive in the life of God we need to see, every hour of every day, that anything cozy in this world is an illusion and a snare. The form of this world is passing away - history is out of control.

God help us to shake ourselves out of our drowsiness and pull ourselves away from these false nests and find our rest,

our safety,

our comfort, only in the presence of Jesus Christ and the word of the heavenly Father as we take that word to those who still haven't heard,

who must hear,

who will hear,

with or without our help,

- before the end comes.

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