

Be Faithful amid Fear and Doubt

11
week of
05.11.14

Lesson Text

Luke 21:25-27

25 And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;

26 Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

27 And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

Hebrews 10:23-25

23 Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

25 Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Focus Thought

Faithlessness marks the age before Christ's coming. The Lord's bride will emerge as a faithful people who will reject fear and doubt.

Focus Verse

Hebrews 10:25

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Culture Connection

Sin on Parade

by C. A. Brewer

Without question dramatic and disturbing events are taking place in today's society. It is not just that we hear of moral corruption in all levels of government or that Hollywood continues to spew out its filth. Of equal concern is that dishonest practices and sexual perversion are increasing, many forms of hardcore pornography are legal in most North American communities, and abortions have become commonplace.

Sin no longer slinks along in the dark alleys of our cities. It no longer has to hide its face for fear of public outcry or legal consequences. Sin, in fact, is on parade. It marches brazenly down our streets in gay parades. It invades homes and destroys marriages. Many new forms of immorality have been invited into the classrooms of most public schools and critically wound the youth.

We can throw up our hands and think nothing can be done. But rather than giving into fear and frustration, we must believe in God, who still sits upon the throne. Brave men and women have always had to stand against imposing odds and the high tides of sin. God told Joshua as he began his campaign to conquer Canaan, "Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest" (Joshua 1:9).

I. END-TIME ATTITUDES—FEAR AND DOUBT

- A. Fear of Events
- B. Fear of the Unknown
- C. Doubt of God's Word

II. ANTIDOTE—FAITHFULNESS

- A. Derived from Faith
- B. Expressed in Consistent Living
- C. Rewarded in the End

Contemplating the Topic

Because faith is so essential to salvation, Satan does all he can to create doubt, the arch-enemy of faith. He knows believers must keep believing. Therefore if Satan can do anything to disturb that continuing process of faith, he will. To avoid Satan's darts of doubt we need to strengthen our belief system against such attacks and demonstrate faithfulness amid fear and doubt.

Doubt is just as evil and destructive as fear. With these two saboteurs of spirituality, Satan attacks believers to try to defeat and destroy them. When individuals allow fear to control them, they become powerless as Christians, for the source of believers' power is their faith.

Believers should not allow the thought of these kinds of attacks to discourage them because there is an antidote to fear and doubt—faith: "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (Ephesians 6:16).

With unwavering faith in God, fear and doubt become ineffective and impotent. Further, faith enables believers to be faithful because faithfulness is derived from faith, expressed in consistent living and rewarded in the end. We can live victoriously in the end times and be faithful amid an atmosphere of fear and doubt.

Searching the Scriptures

I. END-TIME ATTITUDES—FEAR AND DOUBT

We live in an age of fear. There is a phobia for everything from ablutophobia, fear of bathing, to xenophobia, fear of foreigners. Because fears have been given labels, it troubles many people to consider the preponderance of fears and they believe they have more fears than people used to have. There is even phobophobia, which is fear of fear. Franklin D. Roosevelt, in his inaugural address, said, "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." Fear is undoubtedly a major attitude of the end times.

Transparency 1

Transparency 1 quotes Ephesians 6:16.

Doubt is the other end-time attitude we are considering in this lesson. *Doubt* is translated from a Greek word meaning “to stand in two ways.” In other words, it is to be double-minded about a matter. Doubt is damaging to a believer because it neutralizes his faith, and faith is necessary for a person to please the Lord. (See Hebrews 11:6.)

When fear and doubt join hands, their attacks can be devastating to Christians, especially new converts. Fear and doubt cause believers to question their experience, themselves, and even God. Even an established believer must withstand attacks of fear and doubt.

A. Fear of Events

“Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken” (Luke 21:26).

For those who are under sin’s condemnation and not ready to meet the Lord, but who have some understanding of the coming events of the last days, there is an accompanying fear. These people know two things about this matter. They know they are not ready for such times. Also, they know perilous times are imminent. With this combination of condemning knowledge, individual’s hearts are failing them.

“Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Not only are there scriptural events associated with the last days, but also there are events prophesied by would-be prophets that frighten the masses. These events, from dates advertised as the end of the world to catastrophic prophecies by self-appointed seers. Satan uses these dire predictions to compound some people’s fear of coming events.

When a person has experienced the new birth, is living according to the Bible, and has

a spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ, he may not look forward to the events of the last days, but he does not fear them like a non-believer. Believers know that the last-day events, no matter how severe they will be, are only a prelude to eternity with Jesus Christ. Unbelievers, who have nothing to look forward to in eternity, naturally fear these events greatly.

According to statistics by Weill Cornell Department of Surgery, heart disease is America’s leading health problem and the leading cause of death. Unfortunately, fear is damaging not only to a person’s health in general but to the heart specifically. The saying “scared to death” can be literally true. Upon hearing of tragedy, many people suffer heart attacks.

It is interesting that the expression “giving their heart to the Lord” is often used when people come to the Lord in repentance. Further, the Scriptures instruct us to love the Lord with all our heart (Matthew 22:37). The heart is the focal point of surrender and service. When people are out of communion with God, some would say that “their heart is not right with God.” While these uses of the word *heart* are both literal and also representative of the central core of an individual, the physical heart of a person benefits or suffers when a person lives in communion with God or does not. It is understandable that the heart is the organ that signals the presence of extreme fear.

Speaking of the last days, Zechariah prophesied, “Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth” (Zechariah 14:12). Jesus spoke of coming wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes (Matthew 24:6-7). In his second epistle Peter wrote, “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (II Peter 3:10). There are many other frightful events prophesied in the Bible concerning the last days, but these alone are enough to strike fear in the heart of an unbeliever.

Various people and groups have advertised in relatively recent years several dates of the end of the world or apocalypse. Some undoubtedly have been well-meaning and others not so well-meaning. It would appear that Satan is inspiring these self-appointed apocalyptic prognosticators that he may strike more fear in the hearts of people. Paul warned of

these false prophets in his second epistle to the Thessalonians.

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (II Thessalonians 2:1-3).

B. Fear of the Unknown

The world today tends to identify and label everything. Over the centuries people have occupied themselves with identifying and classifying everything from plants to rocks, from flowers to birds, from fish to soil. Anything man cannot identify he places in the category of the unknown.

There is something about the unknown that produces mystery and fear. From the Abominable Snowman or Sasquatch, to the Loch Ness monster, stories often produce a strange kind of fear in many people. Stories of the Bermuda Triangle and UFOs are two other unknowns that sometimes strike fear in the hearts of the unsaved.

A person whose faith is anchored totally in Jesus Christ has no fear.

Fears of the unknown are enough to cause a lot of people to be apprehensive. But the subject that produces more fear in some people is the unknown aspects concerning the hereafter. Such questions as “Is there life after death?” and if so, “Where?” torment the minds of many people. Although many skeptics do not believe in Hell, they wonder if there could be something to the beliefs of those weird evangelicals who believe in a literal burning Hell where the wicked go. Many of these topics may be unknown to unbelievers, but the Scriptures give us many of the answers.

There may be some things unknown about Heaven and Hell, things not addressed by the Scriptures, but believers in Christ Jesus do know they can trust in Him for they know Him. A person whose faith is anchored totally in Jesus Christ has no fear. He knows whatever happens in the future, God has his best interests at heart and God will take care of him.

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (II Timothy 1:7).

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love” (I John 4:18).

When we receive the Holy Ghost, we receive peace. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27).

Not only do we receive peace when we are born of the water and the Spirit, we receive love, for God is love (I John 4:8). “Perfect love casteth out fear” (I John 4:18).

C. Doubt of God’s Word

“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (II Peter 3:3-4).

If the last days is a time of unprecedented doubt concerning God, how much more is it a time of doubt concerning His Word? To the skeptics the Bible is just another book. The respect for the Word of the Lord that past generations had seems to be a thing of the past. To many, it is just another book. To the child of God, however, it is the Word of the Lord.

“For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89).

“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right,

rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether” (Psalm 19:7-9).

Believers are constantly bombarded both by Satan and by skeptics who challenge the validity of the Scriptures. Satan, who is not the sharpest cosmic entity, tells believers God and the Bible are not true. Apparently he does not realize if the Bible were not true and God did not exist, then he too would be a myth, for it is the Bible that authenticates Satan. It is interesting that Satan will tell a believer, “God is not real,” and then tell him later, “God does not love you.” The believer should ask Satan, “What God?” If there were no God, there would be no God to love us.

In spite of the ridiculous arguments submitted by Satan and skeptics to try to refute the validity of God’s Word, they shake many believers and tempt them to doubt. These attacks are more effective against new and inexperienced converts, for Satan knows his flimsy arguments against God and His Word will not stand the test of the knowledge of a child of God who knows his Bible. For this reason the Bible says, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (II Timothy 2:15).

II. ANTIDOTE—FAITHFULNESS

In uncertain times people need to understand they have a certain God who has left an inspired Book that is accurate in foretelling the things that will come upon this world prior to the coming of the Lord. The Holy Bible tells us God is faithful (I Corinthians 10:13).

The antidote for fear and doubt is faithfulness. Because God is faithful, we can be faithful. It does not matter what skeptics and Satan use to attack; if we are faithful to the Lord, we have sufficient strength to resist and overcome.

A. Derived from Faith

The root word of the term “faithfulness” is “faith.” We can only be faithful if we have faith. Faith is fundamental in the believer’s response to God. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe” (Hebrews 11:6). Faith is the most basic requirement of salvation. We cannot be saved without faith.

If we will be faithful in all things concerning the Lord and His work, we will be rewarded accordingly. In the parable of the talents when the faithful servants came to their lord and reported they had doubled the talents given to them, their lord said to each, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21). Likewise, the one unfaithful servant was condemned.

If we will be faithful in all things concerning the Lord and His work, we will be rewarded accordingly.

B. Expressed in Consistent Living

If we have faith and are faithful to the Lord and His Word, we can survive in the midst of fear and doubt. This kind of faithfulness expresses itself in what could be called four keys that will prevent backsliding.

Transparency 2

Transparency 2 lists four keys to prevent backsliding.


1. *Pray.* “Pray without ceasing” (I Thessalonians 5:17) is a command so basic it should not have to be mentioned. Prayer is to our spiritual health what oxygen is to our physical being—essential. Prayer, which is simply talking to God, feeds every starved cell of our spiritual body. As “perfect love casteth out fear” (I John 4:18), perfect prayer strengthens us in casting out fear and doubt.

Were faithfulness to represent the bricks of our spiritual house, prayer would be the mortar. Without mortar the stability of the bricks is compromised. The building may stand, but it will not withstand any challenge to its stability.


How much should we pray each day? Some say an hour and others suggest a half hour. The Bible does not tell us how much we are to pray every day, but it does tell us to “pray without ceasing” (I Thessalonians 5:17). “Pray

without ceasing” does not mean we are commanded to pray twenty-four hours every day, which is logistically impossible. It means we are not to stop praying or having a prayerful attitude. We should stay in an attitude of prayer and let it be a vital part of our daily existence. Praying each day is necessary to be faithful to the Lord.

When we get our first automobile driver’s license, friends ask, “Are you driving now?” When a person answers yes, it does not mean that the person is at that moment driving his car. Someone may ask an elderly driver if he is still driving. Again, if he answers in the affirmative, it only means he has not stopped driving. “Pray without ceasing” means we are not to stop praying. We may not be praying every moment of the day, but we are still praying.



Praying each day is necessary to be faithful to the Lord.



Prayer is not offered to us as a choice. The Scriptures command us to pray. If we are to survive as a Christian, we must pray. If we are to be faithful amid fear and doubt, we must pray.

2. *Read the Bible in daily devotion.* The Bible is the believer’s guide to God and everything about God. A Christian without the Bible is like a chef without a recipe, a conductor without a score, a mechanic without tools, a surgeon without a scalpel.

Many years ago an elder minister advised one man to read the Bible like he reads the daily newspaper. Implied in his advice was that there are several reading levels to the Bible. At one level we read more rapidly as we glean the main points. At another level we read with less rapidity and absorb more of the meaning. At the deepest level we read word for word, savoring each syllable and studying each implied nuance.

Every believer should read the Bible through regularly. With 1,189 chapters in the Bible, a person can read the Bible through in one year by reading just over three chapters every day. Reading four chapters each day will

enable one to read the Bible through in about ten months.

3. *Be faithful to church.*

“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

A person sometimes says, “I do not have to attend church to be saved.” How many times have we heard people make an attempt to disassociate themselves from what they call “organized religion.” However, the Bible makes plain the necessity of church attendance.

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Romans 10:13-14).

If we cannot hear without a preacher, it would seem that associating with a truth-proclaiming assembly would be vital. Further, it is not enough to hear a preacher preach through media. The Bible instructs us not to forsake assembling together (Hebrews 10:25).

Faithfulness in church attendance involves going regularly to the services as one is able. Some people may only attend on limited occasions and consider themselves to be faithful church attenders.

Some individuals may complain they are so busy and have so much to do they are unable to attend faithfully, but we have more advantages today than ever before. In the early days of the twentieth-century Pentecostals, automobiles were rare and believers attended churches that generally lacked the comforts existing in churches today. Further, many early churches had numerous services every week and in revivals the people were usually in service every night. Believers today have no excuse for unfaithfulness in their church attendance.

4. *Testify to others.*

“And ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Our witness to others is a key to our faithfulness. It is essential to our victory. “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony” (Revelation 12:11). When the fire of Pentecost burns brilliantly in our hearts, there is a strong desire to share it.

Our testimony does not have to be a lengthy commentary on our life or an exhaustive exegesis on apostolic doctrine. It may be a brief declaration concerning the goodness of Jesus Christ. However, it is vitally important that every believer share his faith in Christ.

C. Rewarded in the End

Transparency 3

Transparency 3 quotes a portion of Revelation 2:10.

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

God requires faithfulness. For a person to be rewarded in the end, he must be faithful unto the end. “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13).

The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) is a fitting illustration of how our rewards for faithfulness will be handed out. There will be some who have sacrificed much for the kingdom of God who will be rewarded much. There will be others who have sacrificed and given some to the Lord’s work who will receive some reward. But there will be others who are like the man who was given one talent and he went and hid it in an effort to preserve it. As this one man received a rebuke from the master, so they will receive a rebuke from the Lord and will lose even what they have tried to preserve.

Although we are living in the end times, it is not the end. There is still time for us to do our best and be faithful in living for Jesus Christ and doing His work. We can be faithful amid fear and doubt.

Internalizing the Message

We are surrounded by fear and doubt. Inspired by the spirit of antichrist, this end-time attitude is manifesting itself as two components that are doing their best to destroy believers. Thankfully, we have an antidote to neutralize the attempts of Satan to distract and destroy us, which is faithfulness. A believer who has faith in Jesus Christ has the potential to be faithful to Him, which the Christian expresses by consistently living his life according to the Lord’s expectations. Further, the faithful will be rewarded in the end.

This end-time attitude of fear and doubt is manifesting itself in three major ways: fear of events; fear of the unknown; and doubt of God’s Word. Let us be aware of this two-dimensional, diabolical onslaught and brace ourselves to withstand it. Knowing beforehand the strategy of Satan helps us to prepare for his attacks.

REFLECTIONS

- Discuss fear and doubt as end-time attitudes.
- What last-day events do many people fear because they are not ready to meet the Savior? Discuss.
- Discuss reasons why people often fear the unknown.
- Discuss the antidote that neutralizes the fear and doubt that attack believers.
- Discuss ways in which we can be faithful to God.