

The New Horizons Newsletter

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Matthew 28:19-20

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Be Ready!

The world, it is generally agreed, is presently in a bad place. No surprise, then, that in many faiths there is widespread expectation of an imminent overthrow of the present regime and the restoration of a past 'golden age'. In Christianity and Judaism it is the Messiah, in Islam it's the Mahdi who is already here and is to appear soon. In Hinduism the Kalki, the tenth avatar of Vishnu, is expected at the end.

Expectations! But when? Is his coming imminent? For Christians—however much they may desire the return of the Saviour—there's a clear answer: *we don't know*. There's no doubt Jesus will come again: '*...I am coming again and will receive you to Myself, that where I am you may be also*' (John 14:3, Acts 1:11). His disciples knew this: but it isn't for us to know *when*: '*...It is not yours to know times or seasons which the Father placed in His own authority*' (Acts 1:7, Matthew 24:36).

And what of his coming? The Islamic Mahdi is considered to be waiting, now, with his assistants in the Saudi deserts. Kalki isn't expected for thousands of years. Jesus, by contrast comes when the Father gives the say so, and his coming is spectacular, for '*...every eye shall see him*' (Revelation 1:7). Jesus warned us of such deception '*... he is in the wilderness; do not go out. Behold, He is in the inner rooms; do not believe. For as the lightning comes forth from the east and shines as far as the west, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man*' (Matthew

24:26-27).

It's no surprise that we are all on edge, for are we not experiencing increased seismic activity and erupting volcanoes. Isn't here a shift in climatic conditions with floods and drought and famine in various places. Is there not widespread civil unrest and disregard for the law, with hot wars in many nations and persecution of Christians. And don't we have recurring killer disease epidemics. *All happening now*.

Jesus did indeed say we can expect such events (Matthew 24:5ff), but he added a cautionary note: '*...it's not the end yet*'. Throughout the ages mankind has experienced such self-inflicted calamities, so '*...don't be terrified*'; but there *is* more to come (v.6). '*...for there will be great affliction, such as has not happened from the beginning of the world until now, no, nor ever will be*' (v.21). Given mankind's violent history that's not hard to imagine!

The Key Sign

Such events are to a degree subjective: *just what is 'worst ever'*. But Jesus, citing the prophet Daniel (*ch* 9:27), does give us a sign which can't be missed. It refers to both the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in the sixth century BC and in AD70. Jesus then references his (second) coming: '*... And then all the tribes of the land will wail. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and much glory*' (Matthew 24:22-30). We await that precious moment.

Luke adds the detail: '*...when you*

Insight from Paul

The apostle Paul's letters shed a bright light on our walk with God

Over fifty times in his letters Paul has call to use the word *peace* (Gk *eirene*). Not a surprise, though, when you minister among the squabbling brethren in the Corinthian assembly and elsewhere. (The Greek is a pale reflection of the Hebrew). The need for such a quality is with us throughout life—in and out of church.

The world-encompassing events of the past couple of years have been a major stressor for us. The inner resource of ‘peace’, God’s peace, the peace of Jesus. (John 14:27) is the ultimate antidote. The apostle explains: ‘...*Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything. With thankful hearts offer up your prayers and requests to God. Then, because you belong to Christ Jesus, God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand. And this peace will control the way you think and feel*’ (Philippians 4:6-7).

Whatever effects we have experienced, the apostle advocates ‘...*forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before*’. That may take conscious effort! But God’s Spirit in us sows the seeds of ‘good fruits’ (Galatians 5:22-23), and as we nourish them they drive out the debilitating fear that can adversely affect our health and well-being.

The apostle goes on (v.8) to urge us to direct our minds, to be focused, on the positive. Ω

Letter from England

Greetings all

It may come as a surprise that a vicar can present a dramatic tv panorama of our magnificent universe with all its beauty and diversity—and then claim it didn’t need God to create it.

I can’t but be awed by the stunning visual BBC presentation depicting the incredible complexity that is woven into the material universe. From dark matter to blue giants to red dwarf stars to our unique verdant planet’s positioning in the darkness of cold space.

Many Christians may reject his thesis that all this assembled itself over some fifteen billion years and suddenly materialized out of nothing, along the way formulating the essential infrastructure of gravity, laws of thermodynamics *etc*, while the ‘fundamentalists’ stand for an instant creation six millennia ago.

But we are where—and when—we are. The divine plan is on schedule. Jesus came on schedule. The end will come on schedule—*God’s*. And as long as we remain faithful in Christ we will witness the consummation of the physical and the beginning, for us, of the eternal.

James

Be Ready!...cont’d

see Jerusalem being encircled by armies, then recognize that its destruction has come near’ (ch21:20), and pin-pointing the timing: ‘...the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the heavens. And then all the tribes of the land will wail. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and much glory’ (v.27).

Since Adam was ejected from Paradise lasting peace has eluded mankind. Seismic and cosmic events have from time to time over earth’s long history devastated many areas; nations and empires have come and gone; pandemics have decimated populations; conflict has impoverished nations. But, as predicted, all of that *will* pass away, for a *new* world is on the horizon.

A False Peace

Every Christian who remains faithful will, in a glorified body, accompany Jesus at his coming, having been with him at the ‘wedding feast’. They will, for their allegiance to Christ, have experienced extreme privation (and some martyred) under the world-ruling despotic leadership. The rest of mankind will have yielded to its rule and simply carried on with life and, as said Jesus: ‘...*as they were in the days before the flood: eating, and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah went into the ark. And they did not know until the flood came and took all away. So also will be the coming of the Son of Man*’ (Matthew 24:38-39).

Coerced into submission (in effect to the worship of Satan) the bulk of mankind will be prepared to actively resist the King of kings as he returns to judge and rule (Gk=shepherd) the nations in his millennial kingdom (Revelation 19:11ff).

How to Prepare

So *when* will Jesus return?: ‘...*Always be ready!*’ he said, ‘*You don't know when the Son of Man will come*’ (Matthew 24:44). Decisions made now determine our core character, determine our future reaction when we experience severe pressure (Gk *thlipsis*, tribulation). Let’s daily build a firm trust in our heavenly Father as we ‘...*search the scriptures daily*’ to discover his will for us. Or ‘faith muscles’ mature slowly through the little trials that afflict us—and they are all witnessed by our Father, while in us is the holy Spirit, our comforter, our guide, our helper.

Jesus, *as must we*, referred his every day-to-day choice to Him, acting in accord with His will. He was in constant contact with his Father in heaven. As said Paul ‘...*be instant in prayer...pray always*’.

While world leaders plot a godless future dominated by despots we must, as we eagerly await Jesus’s return, become ever closer to him, and ever aware of the devilish attempts to undermine our loyalty to him. And, finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might (Ephesians 6:10). Ω

‘...trust in the LORD with all your heart; and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths’

Why on Earth are you here?

That thought crosses the mind of most of us sooner or later. The basic reply is ‘from mum and dad’. But where did that *life force* originate?

Almost universally it is believed that each of us has an ‘immortal soul’. It’s in us throughout life and persists in some form when we die. Few give thought as to where the ‘soul’ originated. In the Mormon faith all humans lived in a premortal state before coming to earth. The Hindu belief is that the soul continually recycles. For Catholics each human soul is ‘individual and immortal, immediately created by God’.

The Christian perspective—as presented in the Old and New Testaments—is that ‘...*the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul [Heb.nephesh: creature]*’ (Genesis 2:7). That ‘life’ generated in each of us ‘...*the spirit in man*’ (eg Job 32:8). It is the life force that activates all our in-built body processes.

Having created the material universe, some six millennia ago He created us –*with purpose*. Having created and animated the clay model (we are made from earth’s elements) He designed us, uniquely, to communicate with Him, to have His characteristics, to be rational beings and with the possibility of our becoming His Spirit children—a part of the divine family.

To that end the Creator gave us Earth as our training arena. We were to ‘...*dress and keep*’ it (look after its bountiful resources), to *subdue* its wild nature (Genesis 1:26-28), to deploy our God-given intellect to further His purpose.

God’s proviso was that our freedoms would work only when in harmony with the ways He taught us. Adam chose his own contrary way, a way mankind has followed ever since—to our obvious detriment. International conferences will not restore that lost harmony!

Humanity Restored

Having cast aside the Creator we lost sight of the divine purpose, and our perverted mindset spawned a plethora of belief systems that simply hid God’s plan. That plan remained

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intact and the shining torch of the true way was passed to faithful believers down the ages who faithfully kept the torch of burning.

But what of man himself? He had severed his relationship with God and was now destined to oblivion. The ultimate step was a Redeemer, who in God’s time perfectly fulfilled God’s original purpose. That was Jesus *of Nazareth*, God’s Messiah, His anointed, (*Gk* Christ) and the only one in all history through whom fallen mankind can become a child of God, His heirs (Romans 8:17).

Jesus, the ‘*lamb of God*’ became the perfect sinless sacrifice who as ‘*God with us*’ (Immanuel –Matthew 1:23) qualified to carry away the sin of all mankind, thus restoring our filial relationship with the Father’.

The choice is ours. Face destruction—or fulfil the purpose for your life. **Ω**

Pandemic Perspective

Our Adversary, the devil, has several core unpleasant characteristics. He is a *liar*, he manipulates *natural events*, he induces *fear*, he *deceives* and he *divides*. And from the beginning he has employed all of these devices in repeated attempts to overturn the divine plan—interacting with individuals, with groups and with the world at large.

As Christians, however, we know with absolute certainty that God is firmly in control and that His will is unconquerable.

A Destructive Spirit

It will be worthwhile to consider the on-going destructive pandemic in the light of Satan's designs, for he has deployed the weapons of fear, deception, division on the bulk of mankind. He has manipulated natural events—with divine consent and the connivance of world leadership—in order to undermine God's plans.

Face-to-face communication—normal human interaction—is inhibited by the imposition of (ineffective) face coverings—a historical mark of subservience. It's a sign that many are fearful—a characteristic alien to pure religion. Fear is a trigger factor in that lowers resistance to illness. As Job at one point found (but resisted): *'...the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me'* (Job 3:25)

Sadly, Christians have not been exempt from this fearfulness, yet we are told *'...perfect love casts out fear'* (I John 4:18), and *'...God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind'* (II Timothy 1:7). It is our privilege in Christ to be ever in his care, remembering that *'...you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear'* (Romans 8:15).

Some faithful brethren have been cut down by the effect of this virus, so it's important to remember that *'...Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints'* (Psalm 116:15). And that we pray and offer support for those afflicted, and for their families

Faith in Action

That widespread fear is magnified by the devilish lies disseminated *via* toxic social media and the manipulation and repetitive airing of frightening statistics fuelled by often inaccurate tests, by social distancing and by lock-downs. Recall the awful plight of the patriarch Job, struck

down by a horrendous plague, and who experienced, at the behest of Satan, the loss of children, property and a vast business empire. Job's reaction?: *'...Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly'* (Job 1:21-22). Even his wife, lacking faith, succumbed to fear, berating him: *'...Do you still retain your integrity? curse God, and die'* (ch 2: 9). But to his friends he later adds, *'...Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him'* (ch 13:15; see Psalm 116:15).

Divided We Fall

The devil, the adversary of all that is godly, is also *'...the accuser of the brethren'* (Revelation 12:10). When we abandon trust in our Father we align ourselves with Satan's attitudes,. He sows the seeds of division—in the world and even among God's people—by setting vaxxers against anti-vaxxers, by setting the wearers of face coverings against those who don't (or can't) wear them, by diverse views regarding climate change. Families have been ripped apart over such.

The word 'hate' (Gk. *miseo*) in scripture is best considered as 'loves less, rejects, despises'. The apostle John advises *'...He who loves his brother man continues in the light, and his life puts no stumbling-block in the way of others. But he who hates his brother man is in darkness and is walking in darkness; and he does not know where he is going--because the darkness has blinded his eyes'* (I John 2:10-11).

The Antidote

We already know the antidote—to fear, hatred, lies—for it is the foundation of our faith. Jesus reminds us: *'...this is my commandment, That you love one another, as I have loved you'* (John 15:12). It's a message repeated by Paul, by John, by Peter. Not just sentiment but a practical acceptance of others and respect for their right to their opinions. It is practical concern for the temporal and spiritual well-being of others. Wrote Peter: *'...seeing you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently'* (I Peter 1:22).

Paul concludes his letter to the squabbling and hostile Corinthian church with a universal solution: *'... be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you'* (II Corinthians 13:11). A maxim for all of us to take on board in difficult times. Ω