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Truths for Bitter Providences, Part 22

In Christ's second year of ministry in the region of Galilee (which was north of Samaria), he issued an incredible call:

Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light."

We love this verse, but some might argue that it contains a little bit of false advertising, "My yoke is easy, and my load is light"? Read *Foxes Book of Martyrs*, would the martyrs referenced there say that it was "easy" following Christ? Would the twenty-one Egyptian

Christians recently kidnapped and beheaded have said following Jesus was a cake walk? What would the Reformers say who suffered so much on account of Christ? Or how about Paul and the apostles? Would they say it was “easy,” living out their Christian walk? I dare say ALL of these people would be able to identify with the words of the Psalmist which we read last week, “How can we sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land?” (Psalms 137:4)

Throughout Redemptive History, following Jesus has never been an easy calling. And it will continue to be that way until Christ returns! This last section of Daniel at which we are looking contains a prophecy “of conflict” (Daniel 10:1) concerning the last days, the days in which we live.

Daniel 12:1b, “...and there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time...”

Throughout the last era, “many antichrists” will indeed arise (1 John 2:18), all of whom will culminate in the coming of THE Antichrist who will make life very difficult for God’s people. And yet far from being burdened, God’s people will be characterized by joy, hope, peace, and a glorious anticipation of the future! Think of the words of one who suffered much on account of Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:16, 18, “Therefore we do not lose heart... though our outer man is decaying... [for] we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen...”

In fact, we must interpret Christ’s promise of an “easy” and “light” yoke in this context. It was NOT given in reference to the external circumstances of life (the outer man), BUT in reference to the moral freedom that comes from a saving relationship with the Lord. It was of this “freedom” that Horatio Spafford wrote upon receiving the news of the death of his family members:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll;
whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say, ‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’ (Great Commission Publications, 1990, p. 691)

How is it that we can know peace, comfort, courage, hope, and joy when the world is falling in all around us? How is it that we do not “lose heart”? The section at which we are looking this morning in Daniel was given to answer that question! Daniel 12:1-4 contains six reasons for hope in difficult situations.

The first reason is the promised protection of the Lord. Just gazing upon the person and calling of the angel Michael we concluded that God is all about our protection! Oh yes, Satan may kill the body (Matthew 10:28), but in and through all things we are being;

1 Peter 1:5, "...protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

The second reason for hope is because of our certain deliverance.

Daniel 12:1, "Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And [as we've seen] there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; [BUT] at that time your people, everyone who is found written in the book, will be rescued."

The word for "rescued" is מִלֵּט (*melet*) which is one of many Hebrews words denoting deliverance. However the focus of this word, in contrast to the many others, is that of *rescue or escape from the threat of death* (e.g., 1 Samuel 19:11; 23:13; 2 Samuel 19:10; Psalms 107:20)!

How will this "rescue" be affected? Recall that there is going to come a time when the Antichrist will threaten the people of God (Daniel 11:45) and endeavor to rule over the church (Matthew 24:15, 21, 22, 29). Many at this time will submit such that the apostate church will be included in the designation "the whore of Babylon" (Revelation 17:5; 18:4). But there will be a remnant who will not bow their knee. As a result, they will be attacked, persecuted, and shamefully treated. At the darkest hour when all hope will seem to have been lost, the Bible says that Jesus Christ will return to the earth!

Picture the scene: The world will be fraught with wars and rumors of wars as never before. Again, in the words of Daniel:

Daniel 12:1b, "...and there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time..."

Take all the wars/battles/atrocities this world has ever witnessed (take Nazi Germany and the holocaust, Stalin and his reign of terror, the Rape of Nanking during WWII) and these will seem like picnics in comparison to what it will be like on the Last Day! In the angelic realm, there will be chaos as (1) Michael and his forces are "restrained" by God and (2) Satan and his demonic hosts are then freed to ravish the world!

At this dark hour when all creation will have failed to stand against Satan and all hope will seem to have been lost, it is then that Christ will return in His glory, and Satan will "...come to his end, and no one will help him" (Daniel 11:45b)! In fact, 2 Thessalonians 2 indicates that Christ's victory will be brought about quite easily, speaking of the Antichrist:

2 Thessalonians 2:8, "...the Lord will slay [him] with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming."

We read about it further in Revelations:

Revelation 17:14a, "These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings..."

Isn't that the picture given to Daniel at the beginning of this prophecy in Daniel 10:4-9? Christ is THE sovereign, glorious King who cannot and will not be thwarted! Understand this before you enter into the valley of weeping! In fact, Revelation 20 tells us how it is going to happen:

Revelation 20:7-10, "And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city [just like Daniel indicated in 11:45], and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

That is how the people of God will be "rescued" in the Last Day (Daniel 12:1)! There will come a time in earth's history when the forces of this darkness will have their way. That which currently restrains them will have been removed, God in His sovereignty will have put it in the hearts of the non-Christian to attack and so endeavor to destroy the people of God (Revelation 17:17), yet one subtle reality will remain... our God reigns!

And because He reigns we ever and always live with the certainty and so the confidence of victory- for we know that we ever and always are held in the palm of His hand (Isaiah 49:16). Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:39). The gates of hell will not prevail against us (Matthew 16:18). Accordingly when the horrible events predicted of the last time come upon us, Christ's charge to His people is and ever more shall be, "...straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 21:28)!

I love this! While we understand that this world is NOT our home, BUT is in fact a crucible/a veil of tears; though the outer man is decaying, nevertheless we are NOT beaten down, do NOT walk around in gloom and doom, and are not as Eeyore! No! The "joy of the Lord" remains our strength as we live and long for the glorious return of Christ! In fact, 2 Timothy 4:8 describes the child of God as one who has "loved His appearing."

So how can we "sing the song of the Lord in a foreign land"? Because we behold the protection God has given us in Christ, which includes the angelic host who under the command of Michael serve to protect God's people! The deliverance that Christ will bring

about when He returns in His glory at which time Satan, his hosts, and his followers will be cast into the Lake of Fire to suffer for eternity!

Thirdly, we have hope on account of the resurrection.

Daniel 12:2, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake..."

I love this! Do you see that all the trial and tribulation of this life climaxes in resurrection?! That is where everything in this life/age is headed! Accordingly, this has and continues to be the hope of God's people.

- It was Moses' hope! Speaking of Moses, "He considered that God is able to raise *men* even from the dead..." (Hebrews 11:19a)
- It was Job's hope, "And as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes shall see and not another. My heart faints within me." (Job 19:25-27)
- It was an important part of Isaiah's message, "Your dead will live; their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, for your dew is as the dew of the dawn, and the earth will give birth to the departed spirits." (Isaiah 26:19)
- We read about it in Hosea, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction!..." (Hosea 13:14a) *NKJV*
- It constituted David's hope, "My flesh also will dwell securely. For Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Sheol; neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay..." (Psalms 16:9b-10) Truly, it could easily be said that it was this that has enabled God's people throughout history to keep going when so much was against them.
- Hebrews 11:13-14: "All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own."

Truly this has been the hope of God's people throughout Redemptive History. Accordingly, as we face tomorrow and all of its burdens, we know there is hope! Someday there will be deliverance (again, the Second Coming of Christ) which involves an incredible destiny, a resurrection- for the non-believer it will be unto death and the Lake of Fire; but to the believer, it will be unto life everlasting! 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 describes how it is going to happen.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ

shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air..."

Paul's wording here is vivid. He places one powerful concept next to another to convey the glory that awaits us when Christ returns. Notice the text:

1 Thessalonians 4:16a: "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout..."

This denotes nothing less than an authoritative utterance. For example in Paul's day it was used of the cry that was made by (1) the ship's master to his rowers, (2) the military officer to his soldiers in battle, (3) the hunter to his hounds, and (4) the charioteer to his horses. In the ancient world this "shout" denoted a loud authoritative cry, often uttered in the thick of great excitement. And so, the appearing of Christ will be accompanied by a loud, authoritative call. Yet this will not be the only voice heard that day. Notice Christ will descend also.

1 Thessalonians 4:16b, "...with the voice of the archangel..."

As the angels have been very important characters throughout Redemptive History, to have the Lord descend at the voice of an archangel reveals further to us the multifaceted character of their work! In fact, the only "archangel" we know by name is Michael (Jude 9) and it could very well be that it is he who is spoken about here! And so, not only will a shout of great excitement accompany the return of Christ, but an "archangel" will add his voice to the call which wakes the dead!

1 Thessalonians 4:16c, "...and with the trumpet of God..."

"Trumpets" are often mentioned in the Old Testament in connection with times of festivity and triumph. They were used in connection with great religious occasions, theophanies (Exodus. 19:16; Isaiah 27:12; Joel 2:1), or God, when He came to rescue His people from hostile oppression (Zephaniah 1:16; Zechariah. 9:14). Truly in the Scriptures the trumpet was the signal of deliverance, and thus fits in as part of the pageantry of the Second Coming, stressing the majesty of the Lord and the greatness of the day.

There are some today who believe that this passage references a "secret" rapture of the elect before the tribulation. Yet that doesn't comport with this verse, "...with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God!" I love how Morris put it:

I do not doubt that, if He so wished, God would make the voice of the archangel, the shout, and the trumpet call to be inaudible to unbelievers. But I do greatly doubt whether that is what Paul is saying. (Morris, 1959, p. 145)

1 Thessalonians 4:16d, "...and the dead in Christ shall rise first."

As the resurrection of Christ's body is one of the most convincing demonstrations of Christ's power and deity (cf. Romans 1:4), so also the final resurrection of those who have died in Christ will testify to the glory and awesome splendor of God! Samuel Davies describing the scene that came to his mind from this verse wrote this:

Now also the slumberers under ground begin to stir, to rouse, and spring to life! Now see graves opening, tombs bursting, charnel-houses rattling, the earth heaving, and all alive, while these subterranean armies are bursting their way through! See clouds of human dust and broken bones darkening the air, and flying from country to country over intervening continents and oceans- to meet their kindred fragments, and repair the shattered frame with pieces collected from a thousand different quarters, where they were blown away by winds, or washed away by seas!... Whole armies spring to life in fields where they once lost their lives in battle, and were left unburied! They spring up from fields which fattened with their blood, produced a thousand harvests, and now produce a crop of living men! See a succession of thousands of years rising in crowds from grave-yards round the places where they once attended, in order to prepare for this solemn and decisive day. (Davies, 2015)

Wow! What a day that will be!

1 Thessalonians 4:17, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them..."

The word for "caught" literally means "to seize" or "to carry off by force." It denotes the notion of a "sudden swoop"- usually that of a force which cannot be resisted (Acts 8:39; 23:10; Revelation 12:5). From this we conclude that Christ will come and forcibly take the living. The Latin word for this is *raptus* from which we get the word "rapture." And what a glorious "rapture" this will be!

1 Thessalonians 4:17b, "...to meet the Lord in the air..."

This is an incredible statement! In the first century the "air" was thought of as the abode of demons (e.g., Ephesians 2:2). The fact that the Lord therefore chooses to meet His saints there- on the demons' home ground- speaks of Christ's complete mastery over Satan. Not only will He merely speak a word and Satan will be defeated (2 Thessalonians 2:8), but Christ will demonstrate His sovereign glory by taking over that which belongs to Satan!

Now I want you to notice the word "meet" (*ἀπάντησις* [*apantēsis*]); it is an important term! In the ancient world it referred to the *formal reception* of an arriving magistrate to a city. The idea was that of a *royal reception* (cf. Acts 28:15; Matthew 25:6). When this occurred, the leading citizens of the city would go out and meet the visiting dignitary *and escort him*

back to the city. The idea behind this term is “a meeting in order to return.” In fact this formal reception and escort was formally called *Apantasis* (the word used here)! In light of this, based on Paul’s word choice here we expect that at the Second Coming of Christ, the Lord will be met by His people in the air and then be escorted back to the earth with His people in tow!¹

In light of all of this, I ask the question raised by Peter when he reflected upon the glory of Christ in the last days, “What sort of people ought we to be” (2 Peter 3:11)? Ought we to “hang up our harps”- In other words, quit our service of the Lord, ever live with the expectation of doom and gloom? Absolutely not! Of all people on this earth, we must see that we truly are “more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37)! The wealthy and powerful pagan lives today with purpose because in the short run, they anticipate:

- Great returns on their money!
- The next victory!
- The next gain!

Yet we know that they are deluded for through Scripture “we perceive their end!” (Psalms 73:17). Listen again to Daniel:

Daniel 12:2, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt.”

Following their resurrection, the non-Christian will be judged and then cast into the Lake of Fire where they will suffer for eternity! In contrast, we KNOW the future that awaits all in Christ, and it is nothing short of glorious! When Christ returns, we shall be raised immortal to co-reign with Christ over a renewed earth! Yet once again I am getting ahead of this text.

In light of what we most certainly can, yay we must, “sing the Lord’s song in a foreign land!” Listen to how Isaiah put it when he came to realize what we have seen :

Isaiah 61:1-3, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn *in* Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified.”

¹ The dispensational theologian- those who pride themselves in their literal approach to Scripture- at this point will say, “You can’t take this word literally!” E.G., John MacArthur, MNTC, on 1 Thessalonians 4:17!

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