

The Initiative is with the Church



Facing the Future (Part 20)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we draw near to the close of another week. Today I'm going to continue and complete the theme that we've been studying together for the past four weeks, "Facing the Future."

Yesterday I spoke about the church's outreach to the world at the close of this age. I pointed out the scriptural parallel between the natural and spiritual order in respect of rain and harvest. There's a natural rain and there's a spiritual rain in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Both come in two main outpourings: the first rain at the beginning of the church age, the last rain of the Holy Spirit at the close of the church age. The purpose of each is the ingathering of the harvest. The natural rain leads to the ingathering of a natural harvest of grain, but the spiritual rain, the last rain, is for the ingathering of the last great harvest of souls from all over the earth that's to be gathered back into the kingdom of God.

Today I'm going to develop this theme of outreach and I'm going to show you how, when viewed from God's standpoint, the initiative in world affairs is with the church. So seldom do God's people seem to realize that really the initiative is with us. It's not with the world, it's not with the politicians or the scientists or the military commanders; the initiative is with God's people, the church.

I want to go back to a passage that we looked at earlier in this series of talks, Matthew 24, which is the prophetic discourse that Jesus gave seated on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the temple area, in which He gave a preview of the main events and trends that would mark the close of this age. First of all, I want to look at the question asked by the disciples which prompted the answer that Jesus gave. This question is stated in Matthew 24:3:

> "The disciples came to [Jesus] privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen [that's the destruction of the temple], and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'"

The disciples, being religious Jews, couldn't conceive that the temple would be destroyed without the age coming to a

close. Of course, they were mistaken. The temple was destroyed in 70 A.D., the ages continued for nearly two thousand years longer. Let's leave out then, the destruction of the temple and let's come to the latter part of their question: "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Notice, the question was singular, not "what will be the signs of your coming," but what will be the distinctive, sure sign of your coming and of the end of the age.

In the next ten verses, Jesus gives many signs but not the sign. He speaks about international wars, famines, earthquakes, pestilences, persecution of Christians, apostasy and betrayal amongst Christians, false prophets and cults, abounding lawlessness leading to lovelessness, that's a kind of brief summary of those ten verses. He's given many signs, but He has not given the sign. But He does do it. We read on just a little further and Jesus answers that specific question with a specific answer. Matthew 24:14:

> "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come."

That's very clear. A specific question, a specific answer. "What will be the sign of your coming?" The answer: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." When will the end come? The end will not be provoked by the activity of evil, by the forces of Satan, even by human conflict. All this has got a part, but the decisive factor is the preaching of "this gospel of the kingdom… in the whole world… to all nations." When that has been done, the end will come.

Do you believe that there's a specific day appointed for the return of Jesus? Well let me say I do. But I also believe that certain things must happen first. And I don't know the day, nobody knows the day. We don't know all that must happen but nevertheless, certain things must happen. How do we reconcile these two things? Through the absolute foreknowledge of God. God knows when these things will have happened and He's appointed the day in the light of His foreknowledge.

There's a little parallel in God's deliverance out of Egypt. He delivered one generation but they failed to avail themselves of God's power on their behalf, of God's promises and commitments to them, so they perished in the wilderness. But the next generation entered the Promised Land. Many, many years, about four centuries before, God had told Abraham just when His descendants, the people of Israel, would enter the Promised Land. So, in the foreknowledge of God, God knew that one generation would fail but He knew that the next generation would succeed. And I believe God knows which generation of the church will succeed in fulfilling the task. And I trust and I pray and I believe that it will be our generation. This generation. This is the first generation in the history of humanity when all the technical provision is made by which we can reach the whole world in one generation. It's never been possible before. But with the explosions I've referred to the explosion of travel, communications, population, it is actually possible now, technically possible, to reach the whole world in this generation with the gospel of the kingdom. I believe that's what Jesus intends. I believe that's why He's bringing these facts to our notice so vividly by the Holy Spirit. I believe that's why these promises and predictions are in the Word of God that we might recognize the time in which we live and that we might rise to our destiny.

Let me say again the initiative in world affairs to bring this age to its close is not with the people of this world, it's with the church of Jesus Christ. The church is God's representative, the body of Jesus Christ in the earth, and God will never allow the initiative to pass into other hands while the church is here as the representative of His Son, Jesus Christ.

In closing my talk today, let me take you back to the commission of Jesus Christ to His disciples as it's given in Matthew 28:18-20:

> "Then Jesus came to them [the disciples] and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

There's one very important word there. It's the word "therefore." We must never miss out the word "therefore" when we find it in the Scripture. Probably some of you have heard me say before, "When you find a 'therefore' in the Bible, you need to ask what it's 'there for.'" Jesus says, "All authority has been given unto me therefore go…" Why the "therefore"? I understand it this way: the authority was given by God the Father to Jesus, the Son, after His death and resurrection. Now, Jesus in turn, here transmits that authority to His disciples. So He says, "All authority was given to Me, now you go and exercise that authority on My behalf. The authority is vested in My name, as you go in My name, you have My authority." You see, it's very important to understand that authority is effective only when it's exercised. A man may

have authority and never use it and no one would ever know that he had that authority. And so it is with the authority of Jesus Christ. It's committed to us, but it's effective only when we exercise it. The only way the world will know the authority that's been committed to Jesus Christ as a result of His death and resurrection is when we, His disciples, exercise it on His behalf. Otherwise, the world is left in ignorance of what Jesus has actually accomplished. The world doesn't know that the Father has committed all authority to the Son. Only through our obedience to Jesus' commission can the world ever be brought face to face with this fact that there is a king, a King of kings and a Lord of lords and His name is Jesus and all authority is vested unto Him. We're responsible to demonstrate this to the world. And as we go in obedience to the command of Jesus and bring His message, He will confirm it with the supernatural signs that He's promised and attest His own authority in the Word that He's committed to us.

And then there's another reason, I believe, why He says, "All authority is given to me... go therefore," because there are many places that it's difficult to go. There are governments in the earth that resist and even refuse the preaching of the gospel. There are many "closed doors" today. But Jesus says, "If you will go and obey Me, remember I have the authority. If you will talk to Me about it, I'll open those closed doors, I'll make a way where there is no way. If you're determined to obey Me, I'll make it possible to obey Me."

Let me say in closing, this picture of the world as it comes to its close. Safety and success for the church lies in bold positive outreach, not in getting frightened, not in just looking for survival, not in hiding somewhere in a cave with some hoarded groceries. That's not the way to survival, it's not the way to success. The way to safety and success is bold, positive outreach in obedience to the Lord.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again next week at this same time, Monday through Friday. Next week we'll be looking together at another rich and exciting theme from the Word of God.

This week I'm making a special offer of my book, Restoration Through Fasting. For many Christians, the word "fasting" has an unfamiliar, almost frightening sound. And yet, it is the forgotten master key to restoration, both for each individual Christian and for the church as a whole. This book of mine will place this key in your hand. Also, my complete series of messages this week on "Facing the Future, Part 4" is available in a single, carefully edited cassette. Stay tuned for details.

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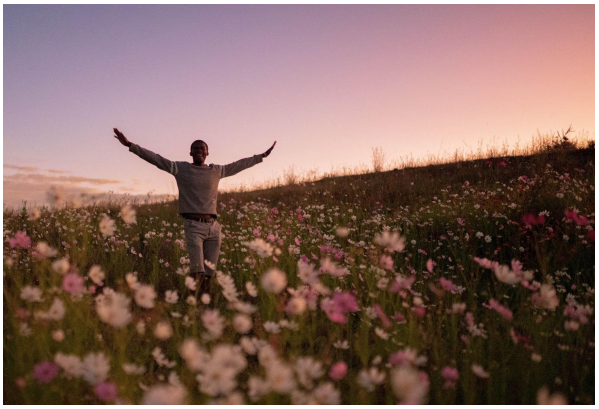

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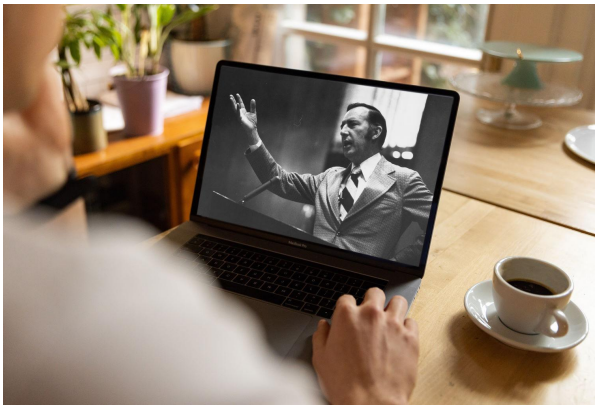

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