

# Are You Worthy To Escape?

by Staff

***Forerunner, "Prophecy Watch," September-October 2000***

We often become frustrated and/or discouraged when we try so hard and still fall short. Our desire to overcome is often overtaken by the ever-present law we find within us that takes us into captivity. Paul writes of this in Romans 7:23: "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members." Though we battle to put this law of sin away for good, it just seems to pop up somewhere else.

In Luke 21:36, Jesus tells us to, "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." That He advises us to pray that God will count us worthy suggests we will probably never actually succeed in overcoming all the sin we see in ourselves—and even more, what we do not see. Instead, His words indicate that as long as we remain humble, continue to try to grow, improve, and overcome, our effort and faith in God's grace, given through the sacrifice of Christ for each of us, will cause us to be "counted worthy" to be saved.

## **Accounted for Righteousness**

In Romans 4:13-16, 19-25, the apostle Paul uses a great deal of ink to explain to us just how we are counted worthy by God:

For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. . . . And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

God did not give the promises to Abraham and his seed because of the patriarch's own righteousness but because of his faith. Abraham's faith in God's grace was the determining factor in righteousness being "accounted" to him and his seed subsequently. Although he was obedient to God, Abraham's works in overcoming were not perfect enough to "tip the scales" in his favor, but He trusted God to deliver what He had promised.

In the same vein, we must also believe even when it seems there is no hope. Like Abraham, we must be strong in faith, not overemphasizing the obvious physical evidence that surrounds us, but trusting in God's promise, "being fully convinced that what God had promised He was also able to perform"

(verse 21). Paul ends this discussion with encouragement that, just as this "formula" worked for Abraham, it will work equally for us. We will be counted worthy if we believe God, which includes doing what He says.

### **Not Just the Tribulation**

Being "counted worthy to escape all these things" may not be referring only to the period during the Tribulation. It can also refer to our escaping all the trials and tribulations of our daily lives. In a general sense, this instruction from our Savior applies anytime crises and troubles spring up and attempt to distract us from seeking first the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33).

In Mark's version of the Olivet Prophecy, Jesus says, "And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet" (Mark 13:7). Clearly, He means that wars and other hostilities will occur repeatedly through the ages until His return.

Notice Psalm 91:5-7:

You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day, nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness, nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you.

This has the same tone as the passages in Mark 13 and Luke 21. They all have both general and specific applications. The psalmist gives the reasons why we do not need to fear all the disasters that occur around us: "Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, nor shall any plague come near your dwelling" (Psalm 91:9-10). We must believe this just as Abraham believed God would give him a son, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

### **Heavenly Signs?**

The section in which Luke 21:36 occurs begins with verse 25, when Christ introduces the signs that will presage His second coming: "And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring." We have traditionally understood this verse to refer to the heavenly signs of the sixth seal of Revelation 6:12-17.

However, is this not already happening, at least in less spectacular ways? Are there not already problems with the sun because of the ozone layer dissipating? Is there not more concern about wearing sunblock because of the damaging rays of the sun? This has only become a concern in recent years. When we were young, we never heard anyone telling us to stay out of the sun, wear a hat and long sleeves and glob on the sunscreen.

Certainly, there is plenty of distress among the nations on the earth, even while we live through some of the most prosperous times ever seen. Some fear nuclear war between India and Pakistan. Others are concerned about immigration, ethnic cleansing, piracy, water rights, food allocation, diseases like AIDS, and global climate change. The mood among many nations is one of almost frantic and perplexed worry about their survival.

Jesus says in the next verse, ". . . men's hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21:26). The distress stems from their "fear and the expectation" of those things which are coming. Obviously, this fear and expectation happens before the disasters come. The stresses involved in impending disasters can easily cause us to lose focus on overcoming, growing and leading faithful lives.

It is because of the signs we see around us that we know the end is near. That we are living in the end time is something we have been aware of and discussed for years. Lately, it seems many of us have let down because we feel the "master is delaying his coming" (Matthew 24:48). Jesus supplies encouragement on this score too.

He says in Luke 21:28, "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near." When we begin to see the signs of the end occurring, we are to look up—take our eyes and thoughts off the distractions that keep us from committing ourselves to seeking the Kingdom of God. Looking up refers to taking our eyes off earthly things and setting our eyes on heavenly things.

To lift up our heads means to raise our focal point and information input to a higher level. In other words, we are to lift our minds and thoughts above what we see around us that can distract us. Paul echoes this in Colossians 3:1-2: "If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." Our Savior says this is the best way to be prepared for our redemption.

### **Signs Out Early**

Jesus then gives us the Parable of the Fig Tree to help us understand how signs work. Interestingly, He says, "Look at the fig tree, and all the trees" (Luke 21:29). He does not limit the parable to just the fig tree. We know from our own experience that signs of summer or harvest are evident in many trees long before it occurs. One can see buds on a tree months before the fruit is ripe.

"When they are already budding, you see and know for yourselves that summer is now near" (verse 30). When the trees are budding refers to the time when God begins to put the pieces of the end-time puzzle into place. Sometimes it takes several years or decades to bring forces and nations into line with His prophetic Word.

"So you, likewise, when you see these things happening, know that the Kingdom of God is near" (verse 31). This means us now because we see these things happening now! Like a farmer who knows that harvest is near, we have to get prepared for it.

"Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all things are fulfilled" (verse 32). Jesus emphatically says that an entire generation will live through the times of preparation for the return of Christ. A generation of people can live three score and ten or more, not just three and a half years. If this generation is the one born when the truth began to be re-proclaimed to the world through Herbert Armstrong, "this generation" is in its final years.

He then advises us, "Take heed to yourselves" (verse 34). His instruction has narrowed to focus on each of us as individuals, not necessarily collectively as "the church." The church is composed of

individuals, just as a body is composed of individually unique parts with different functions (I Corinthians 12:12-27). Each part must perform as God intends so that the whole church will be healthy.

We must take heed "lest [our] hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and the cares of this life, that the day come on [us] unexpectedly" (Luke 21:34). Here, He specifically tells us not to allow ourselves to become distracted by the world and its cares and concerns that we miss the signs of the approaching end. "For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth" (verse 35). Evidently, the majority of mankind will be so distracted and miss the signs. If we work hard at coming out of this world (John 2:15), we will not follow their example.

He concludes, "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man." If we watch and pray always and do our best to live according to the way of God in every aspect of our lives—if we believe in God's promises to us of salvation and escape, we may be "counted worthy" to be spared the sore trials of the last days. This also suggests that if we watch, we will see the signs and not be caught off guard and snared.

### **Reaping What We Sow**

We can avoid the trials and tribulations that are forthcoming to some degree or even completely if we commit to seeking first the Kingdom of God and the attitudes and attributes that make up God's righteousness. It is by seeking His righteousness—seeking to live right according to His Word, law and example—that we may, by faith in the grace of God through Christ Jesus, be accounted worthy of escaping all these things.

God will not do the changing and growing for us. He is watching to see what we are going to do in the various situations and trials in which we find ourselves. He promises, though, to give us what help we need: "Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

We will reap whatever we sow (Galatians 6:7), so we need to sow righteousness to reap salvation. Paul says in the next two verses, "For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."

God's promises to us are sure if we believe as Abraham did, and this certainly includes His promise of escape if we are counted worthy. Christ assures us, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23).