



"It is better to live ready than to get ready!"
—Smith Wigglesworth

29-May-15

A Swift End

This world is a horrible place. The planet on which we live along with more than seven billion other human beings is an evil, scary, terrible place. The facts are clear and obvious.

People legally murder more than a million pre-born babies each year—and that is just in the United States. This does not include the many millions that they kill in Canada, Europe, Russia, China, India, and elsewhere! Tens of millions of lives are snuffed out each year just for the sexual freedom and convenience of selfish, unthinking hedonists. Now ethicists are discussing "after-birth abortion," which used to be called what it is—infanticide.

Hundreds of thousands of murders of adults take place each year. Billions of dollars are lost in theft, fraud, waste, graft, and corruption. People tell an uncountable number of lies, and an equally unknown number of other deceptions, distortions, and falsehoods are purposely perpetrated for unlawful gain of one sort or another. Fornication and [adultery](#) take place on a scale that is dizzying to consider. Homosexual rights and demands have reached a fever pitch.

We should not forget the evils of war. The news is constantly informing us about terrorism, ethnic cleansing, riots, gangs, drug wars, psychopaths, and serial killers. We hear far too much about pornography, the sex trade, and human slavery. [The world](#) is full of debt, bankruptcy, and corporate malfeasance and espionage. We have to deal with

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religious extremism, persecution, Wicca and New Age religions, atheism, and anti-Christian secularism.

The evils of this world can really get us down. We are constantly surrounded by wickedness, and people are forgetting [God](#) as if He has never existed. It can truly be difficult to bear.

[Jesus](#) gives good news and a muted warning in [Matthew 24:32-33](#): "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!"

His overall point is, when the signs of His coming begin to appear, the prophesied events will begin to happen quickly. The fulfillment of the signs means that Christ stands at the very doors. How long does it take to open a door and step inside? Opening, stepping through, and closing a door takes mere seconds, even if done slowly. This hint about time indicates brevity. In other words, the events at the close of the age will wind up swiftly, even from God's perspective, who has a perspective of time unlike our own. In short, we need to realize this truth.

Such warnings of the end's swiftness appear throughout the Bible. Consider how fast things happened in the [days of Noah](#), when the rain finally began to fall. After Noah's family spent just seven days on the ark, God caused it to rain for forty days and nights. In a few weeks, not one person who was not in that boat remained alive on the face of the earth.

In [Zephaniah 1:14](#), the prophet writes: "The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly." Not only does it hasten, it does so *quickly*. Time will move swiftly, and events will transpire with the rapidity of a machine gun on full automatic. There will be little time to react. A similar warning appears in [Malachi 3:5-6](#):

"And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear Me," says the LORD of hosts. "For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob."

With these two verses juxtaposed, we can see that God is saying that, if He reacted in judgment any more slowly, Israel's sins would mount to such a point that He would have

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to wipe them from the earth. We can be glad that God does not change, that He acts in mercy to rectify matters before we erase ourselves out of existence, an idea echoed by Jesus in [Matthew 24:22](#): "And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved."

Revelation, an end-time book, is full of warnings of a sudden conclusion to this present, evil age ([Galatians 1:4](#)). Three of these warnings about His swift return are said directly to the churches in [Revelation 2:5](#) (to Ephesus); 2:16 (to Pergamos); and 3:11 (to Philadelphia). As in the Olivet Prophecy, He warns the [Laodiceans](#), "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" ([Revelation 3:20](#)). His return will be unexpected, as a thief in the night. His concern is whether we will be ready.

In Revelation 22, God closes His Book, and He gives these closing exhortations:

- [Revelation 22:7](#): "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."
- [Revelation 22:12](#): "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work."
- [Revelation 22:20](#): He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly."

In effect, He is saying, "Look! My return will be swift! Once you realize what is happening, there is a rapidly closing window of time! Do not lose the opportunity that comes with it!" The warning is clear. Once things reach a certain tipping point, God will move speedily and decisively, and things will wrap up so fast, as Herbert W. Armstrong used to say, that it will make our heads spin! God will not tarry once that point is reached. The Father will say, "Son, go!" and He will.

This fact has serious ramifications for us. There will be little time for us to prepare ourselves. Spiritual growth and fruit cannot be produced quickly. The Bible-wide image for spiritual growth is a harvest, and plants must grow, flower, mature, and ripen their fruit over an entire season before it is ready to be reaped. The apostle James illustrates this in [James 5:7-8](#).

But when the end-time signs begin to be fulfilled, the time for long-term spiritual growth will just not be there. So Jesus commands us, "Therefore you also be ready" ([Matthew 24:44](#)). In the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, they had to be ready for the brief

moment in which the Bridegroom would appear, a time that they did not know for certain.

Jesus knew the type of world we would be up against. He knew how tough it would be for us to stay above it and not be pulled into the maelstrom of [sin](#) spinning wildly about us. He knew that we would have to be working with Him at Christian living for a good while to be able to face the turmoil of the end. For this reason, He exhorts us to get ready now, while there is yet time, so we will not be caught short of Christian character just when we need it most.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Preparations For Christ's Return](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh, reflecting on the economic impact of presidential trips, indicates that the local economies in the wake of the visit virtually implode. The preparatory work of preparing the way for Christ's first coming was comparatively low budget, in comparison to the extravagance of Israel's leaders. It was more efficient, however, because God Almighty had coordinated the events. The preparation for Christ's second coming will be far more elaborate, a series of events which will turn humanity on its ear. Because of its intractability, the earth will require considerable softening up through earth-shaking events consisting of the seven trumpet plagues, symbolized by the Feast of Trumpets. Just as God is preparing vessels for mercy and destruction, God is also working to see that His people are prepared, clearing out any obstacles for us, saving the remnant that He has chosen. God is planning to finish the work, even cutting it short for the sake of the elect. God dots every I and crosses every "t." God has a process and blueprint, planning to make all of us look like Christ; He always finishes what He starts. Are we making our own preparations as co-workers with Him or are we the clay questioning the Potter? We must refrain from murmuring or complaining as we work out our salvation, continuing to build character when no one is looking, being totally harmless and without blame, radiating moral purity. Our looking for the appearing of our Lord is not a static activity, but consists of getting rid of sin, and replacing it with righteousness, integrity, and self control, with great reverence for God. O

From the Archives: Featured Article

Where Is the Promise of His Coming?

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

As this world keeps on turning, more people become skeptical about the return of Jesus Christ. The Bible, however, insists that He will come again and quickly. Richard Ritenbaugh advises watchful, sober expectation because the Lord does not delay His coming.

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