

Take Heed To Yourselves

Christ's Warning in Luke 21:34

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As Christians, called out of this world, and chosen by God to be His witnesses, it behooves us to take a good long, realistic look at the world that we live in. Early in each sacred year, we are encouraged, even urged from the pulpit to examine ourselves, as Paul exhorts us to do in II Corinthians 13:5. We all know that scripture,

II Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test [prove] yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you are disqualified.

So, we are supposed to go through a procedure where we check on ourselves to see how well we are doing; to find out what kind of spiritual growth we have had the past year. As well as to look for weak areas—things we have fallen back on, and we might have backslid a bit. Or, things that we just found out that we actually have a problem with, that may have been hidden until something recently came up and brought it to our attention.

And we do this—we do look, most of us do, over our lives each year as Passover approaches; we find those areas where we have grown in, feeling a bit of proper pride in that we are drawing closer to God, as well as finding those weak areas, and we repent, striving to do better.

However, a clear-eyed evaluation of this world is also necessary every now and then, because we need to be reminded just how deep the cesspool has become—the cesspool that we are living in. It is an ugly figure to think about, but it is true. We are being dirtied and polluted; we are in the stink of all of that sin that has been piling up not only over time, but even increasingly more as the end approaches.

Now, nearly 2000 years ago the apostle Paul called his day, “This Present Evil Age.” You will find that in Galatians 1:4. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong used to quote that scripture quite a bit. He was using the King James Version, and so he called it, “This Present Evil World.” Obviously, Paul has such things on his mind as the harsh and cruel Roman government caused the persecutions that they were going through at the time (the church), and the debaucheries of those big cities like Corinth, Rome, and others where just about anything went.

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So, he knew that the world was horrible in his time. He saw how deeply entrenched paganism was over the whole Mediterranean area; it really was the entire world, not just the Mediterranean, and it included those scattered Israelites who has migrated away from the Middle East. He was worried about the influence of Plato and other Greek philosophers on his own people, the Jews. And they were being slowly sucked into the world and their religion was being changed by it.

Now this hardly scrapes the surface, these few things that I have mentioned, because there was still in Paul's day murder, lying, stealing, adultery, and all the other forms of corruption that always seems to make its appearance when people get together. It seems that you cannot have two people or more get together in a room before sin breaks out somehow.

Now the same apostle Paul prophesies in II Timothy 3:1,

II Timothy 3:1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come.

We have read these often, and we will get to them a bit later today. And then in verse 13 of the same chapter, he tells us that evil and imposters will grow worse and worse. So, everything—everybody—is getting worse. It is not getting better. Technology may be making our lives a bit easier, and more convenient to live, but is it not really making things any better at all.

So, how bad is this world? Have you really thought about it lately?

I know that we do not like to think about these sinful things, but it is important to do it every once in a while. The reason for us is that we live in relative peace and quiet. We may have our troubles, but we live in a relatively free, prosperous western nation. We do not have a lot of trouble. We can hardly be saying that we are living hand to mouth. We have enough money to buy food, keeping ourselves fed pretty well—maybe 42% of all Americans are obese, or at least overweight? Well, we live in a land of plenty.

We wear fine clothes. Many of us wear very fine clothes—clothes that people in earlier days would have killed for. Back in the days of Samson, a good set of clothing was something that was used in reward for doing something wonderful. People did not have good clothes. They did not have light weight clothes that could also stand all kinds of wear and tear. But we have clothes like this all the time. And if they do wear out, we just go up to some place and buy a new one. It is cheap, relatively.

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We drive fairly nice cars. Certainly they are better than a horse and carriage, or wagon; or walking on shoe leather.

We can take an occasional vacation; we can have our kids educated for free (if we so choose). They can play organized sports; baseball, soccer; swimming lessons. We can take them to the amusement park now and then. Or take them to a ball game, or a car race, or some other thing.

And our homes! Open the doors, and they are like Fibber McGhee's closet! Things just tumble out of them they are so full! We have so much stuff, that not only do we have garages full, and sheds full, and attics full; but we have to go out and rent a place to put the rest of our stuff that does not fit in the house. We have so much.

But we have all this stuff in an evil time.

We live in relative peace and safety. Yes, we lock our homes, and our cars when we go out, but we do not really constantly fear that they are going to be burgled or destroyed. And if they are, well we got insurance that will give us some money, and we can do what we can to replace or rebuild. We may take extra care when venturing into certain parts of certain cities, knowing that they are tough. Or, we may avoid certain businesses because we have learned that they have bad reputations. They are shysters and going to cheat us one way or another, so we avoid them.

So, we pretty much move about and act freely, without much concern. And we do not think much about violence against us; not in this country at least. We do not think that walking the streets that we are going to get mugged; not here in Charlotte, North Carolina. And, probably not in your town, wherever you happen to be. It is not a place where you really think that someone is going to jump out of the bushes, hit you on the head, and take your personal things. We do not think those things. We might imagine them, but we do not take them very seriously, because we live in a still fairly well ordered lawful country. There are some places that are not like that, but most of us live here in the United States, or Canada, or Australia where law and order is still the rule. Violence is something that we hear about or see on the evening news report. It happens to other people.

But, we, as members of God's church, live under God's protection. And I hope that we thank Him every day for it, that He has put us in places where we can live like this; where we do have peace. Surly He shields us from more harm than we realize. He keeps the bad people away, and He supplies us with all of our needs; we just go merrily along innocent, not knowing that all of this is taking place around us in our ignorance.

Yet, even so, the world is a horrible place.

Humans legally murder more than a million pre-born babies each year—and that is just in the United States—just in one nation of only some 300 million. This does not include however many hundreds of thousands that they may kill in Canada, Europe, Russia; how many million do they kill in China every year with their one-child policy?

And then, there is India where every couple wants boys; so they kill a lot of their pre-born and baby girls. That is getting worse too.

And then there are other so-called progressive and developed nations of this world who do the same things—South America, Asia, Australia, and just everywhere.

So, tens of millions of lives are snuffed out each year just for the sexual freedom and convenience of some selfish, unthinking hedonist.

And now, ethicists are talking about “after-birth abortion,” which used to be called “infanticide.” There are hundreds of thousands of murders of adults; billions of dollars are lost in theft; billions of dollars are lost in fraud; billions of dollars are lost in government waste through graft and corruption; and then there are an uncountable number of lies told and deceptions, misinformation and other falsehoods that are purposely perpetrated for unlawful gain of one sort or another.

I am only going to bring to mind the evils of war, debt, and bankruptcy on a massive scale; pornography; decreasing political freedoms; the sex trade; sexual promiscuity; human slavery; terrorism; riots; divorce; genetic engineering; illegal drugs; euthanasia; the Mafia and other cartels; gangs; homosexual marriage; religious extremism and persecution; corporate espionage; psychopaths and serial killers; nuclear weapons; nuclear accidents; sexual diseases; ethnic cleansing; Wicca and new age religions; inflation and higher taxes; and, not to mention the fact that they only run one race at Darlington every year. I am just kidding with that last remark, but I felt the need after giving you that list of awful things of giving you a little comic relief, because it is very bad out there. It is horrible. And when we list all of these things, it really can get us down; that this world is so bad. I mean, what is this world coming to? When we are constantly surrounded by all this wickedness? And, people are forgetting God as if He has never existed. In fact, a lot of them think that He does not exist.

All kidding aside, we cannot avoid the fact that the world that we live in is an evil, scary, horrible place.

Now, I just mentioned those obvious things. I could have gone on with that list for probably another ten minutes, had I really thought deeply about all the different kinds of evil that there is in this world. I just mentioned a few things.

And I think I need to add one more thing to that list, and that is something that humans did not cause, and that is Satan and his demons. They saturate this world with their influence, and they tempt, goad, and attract every living human being to give in to his human nature and to do evil; to work for their own selfish advantage; to undercut the next guy; and to satisfy all his desires. They are out there all of the time doing this. And the only person that we can thank that this has not totally overwhelmed us is God Himself—that He has kept things down to a dull roar, as it were. So, the cesspool is deep that we live in, and we are just barely keeping our nose above the smelly water.

And if we are not living in the time like the days of Noah were, I think we are painfully close. We live on the cusp of heighten human evil, that will try, and will in some cases succeed, in crushing us under its merciless weight of distraction and temptation, and sin.

Fortunately, though, our Savior leaves in His word some vital warnings and instructions just for this time in history, because He knew what it would be like.

So, what I would like to focus on, today, ultimately, is that He tells us to take heed to ourselves. We need to pay attention to His warnings about this time in which we live.

Please turn to II Timothy 3. I said we would get there, and so now we will. I want to enhance the atmosphere of the evil of the day, just a bit more. I want to read the full paragraph, here.

II Timothy 3:1-9 But know this, that in the last days perilous times [of stress] will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.

Paul gives us a rather in-depth description of the personality and lack of character of those living at the end time. He lists nearly 20 different kinds of evils that people are; not just what they do, but what they are. It is their character that he is getting at. And that their actions come out of this kind of character. I do not want to go into them in any more detail. I just want you to feel the atmosphere that the Bible says that the end time will have. I have been calling it a cesspool so far today. But, it is just that you cannot go anywhere to escape the sin. You cannot go anywhere to escape the evil.

I have use the word “saturate” because the entire world is saturated with sin, and these attitudes that we have just read about. You cannot find a lot of people who are really good anymore, because when you peel back the layer of goodness, you see the evil underneath. Someone will present himself as a fine member of his community—he goes to church; he has a good job; he wears nice clothes; he keeps his family fed; he volunteers for charities; he coaches the kid’s ball teams. But, then you also find out that he is been leading an adulterous life for years, too. And there are other things that he does—he may seem a pillar of the community, but you find that he is been doing fraudulent things, taking money under the table, for instance.

This is the kind of thing that Paul meant when he said that they had a form of godliness but they denied its power; they have a kind of shield up where they present a face or mask of goodness, calling it Christianity, but they do not give it any credit. They do not rely on it. They do not give God any power in their lives. They do not have any real faith to make any real changes. That is where they deny the power. They do not give it a chance to change them.

Overall what we see here in what Paul describes in the last days is a time of rampant selfishness—self-indulgence, over indulgence, and lack of care for others. All they care about is themselves. They are unloving. They are lovers of themselves, and they are unloving toward others, is what it means. I mean, they do not even obey their parents. And, for everybody else, they brutalize, and slander, and betray.

This is the kind of world we live in.

They have a patina of godliness—of goodness, but when you peel it back, this is what we have.

People are intelligent, it says, and always learning, but they resist the truth. It is out there. The Churches of God have done a wonderful job of putting that information out

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there for them to find and see. All they need to do is turn to it, read it, and apply. But they do not. They resist the truth, because they do not want to give up their self-indulgences, and their over-indulgences. They want to keep things as they are, they do not want to rock the boat, because they think they are living too well. They do not want to make the sacrifices. So, their minds, Paul says, are corrupted, because they are totally fixated on their own lusts. That is what their lives revolve around—fulfilling their lusts. And, this is no new thing with Paul.

Please turn to Hosea 4. I want to pick up about three verses to give you another taste and impression of this time, but from an Old Testament perspective. He comes at it from a different direction, but it is still the same, really.

Hosea 4:1-2 Hear the word of the LOORD, you children of Israel, for the LOORD brings a charge [a legal complaint] against the inhabitants of the land: There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint, with bloodshed upon bloodshed.

Hosea 4:17-18 "Ephraim [not just Britain, but all of Israel] is joined to idols, let him alone. Their drink is rebellion, they commit harlotry continually. Her rulers dearly love dishonor.

They are in love with doing dishonorable things—shameful things. It seems that by this time, Israel had just about completely forgotten about God, or any good thing. They were evil through and through. It says that they break all restraint, meaning that there is nothing that holds them back from doing whatever they please. If they set their mind on doing one thing or another, no one is going to stop them. Do not we hear that all the time? "It is a free country! I can do what I want!" They have no conscience; there is no external standard that they hold to; there is no fear of retribution or penalty; nothing keeps them from indulging their desires. They rebel against every good thing—every right thing.

And, it is not just the people. It is their leaders, too. In fact, the leaders lead the people into sin, and then the people choose the leaders that allow them to keep on sinning. And since the leaders do it, it must be okay! Is not that what we see in the land today? As the progressives gain more power in this country, and they open the doors wider for doing whatever you please, the people will keep electing them to office because they let the people do as they please. There is no restraint.

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So, whether we look at it from the Old Testament or from the New Testament, it does not matter which point of view...God sees this time of the end, of the corruption of Israel and the whole world, the same way. The verdict on the last generation before the return of Christ is the same—it is thoroughly wicked, narcissistic, and perverse.

It is similar to what is seen at the end of other civilizations down through history. It does not matter when it was, no civilization fell because it was righteous. Usually civilizations fall because they stopped living up to the standards that got them to that good point in the first place.

Usually civilizations start out fairly virtuous—strong in their virtue. Think of Rome. Rome, early on, was known for its very clear, rigid, and conservative way of living. And as things progressed to about the time of Julius Caesar or a bit before...when they became a dictatorship, they began their downfall. That is why the book is named, “The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.” They were at a height back in their early centuries, 2nd, 3rd, 4th centuries BC, but by the 1st century BC, they had already started to decline and fall. That was when they had their greatest power.

So, whether it is Sodom, or Israel and Judah, or Assyria, or Babylon, or Persia, or Greece, or Rome, or Egypt—bringing it all the way up to the 18th century and the French Revolution—the same things happen when those civilizations fell—the people lost all restraint. There was blood and murder, theft, sexual problems, and deceit of all kinds.

But now, it is not just one civilization, but it is worldwide. And worse, it is amplified by international media, the internet that sends things anywhere in a split second, rapid transportation, and perhaps one of the most important factors: a lowered language barrier. Now, most of the world knows English. And guess who is leading the world in corruption? The English speaking peoples.

People in other countries, though they speak another first language, can hear and read in English because they have been taught English as a second language, and they begin to think, “Why not do this too!”

The idea for this sermon came about because of that last sermon, Matthew 24:34, where Jesus said that this generation shall not pass before all these astounding events at the end time take place. And as I explained, this generation may refer to the generation of people who have the ability to wipe all life from the planet. Another way that we could put it is that this generation means “those alive,” when the signs of Christ's return begins to happen.

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Now, His larger point in making that statement in Matthew 24:34:

Matthew 24:32-34 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! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

The overall point in making that statement is that when the signs begin to appear, the events are going to happen quickly. He says that once the signs begin to be fulfilled, Christ will be at the very doors. How long does it take to open a door and step inside? That is the time element we are talking about here. It is very close. You step up to the door, you pull it open, and then you step through it. It takes you all of a couple seconds even if you do it slowly.

We are talking about this idea that things are going to wind up swiftly. And, this is from God's perspective, what He considers swiftly; but He has a perspective on time that is not like our own. But, it is a short enough time that we need to be concerned about it.

Now, such a warning of the end's swiftness is all throughout the Bible. I mean, just think how fast things happened in the days of Noah—when the rain began to fall; it was very quick (seven days). In a few weeks, there was not a living soul left on the face of the earth that was not in that boat.

So, that is the kind of thing we are talking about here. Let us see a few of these. Please turn to Zephaniah 1.

Zephaniah 1:14 The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out.

But notice—it hastens quickly. It not only hastens, but it hastens quickly. We are to get the point that time is going to move very fast. Events are going to happen—bang, bang, bang, bang, bang! There will not be a great deal of time to react.

Turn to Malachi 3. This one is interesting. This passage comes right before the famous verse we quote all the time.

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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 LOORD of hosts. For I am the LOORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

I get the impression with these two verses juxtaposed to one another, talking about first of all, God being swift to judge, swift to come against sin, and then Him saying that this is why Israel is not totally consumed. If He were not swift to come in judgment against sin, then Israel's sins would mount to such a point that He would have to wipe them off the face of the earth.

So, we had better be glad God does not change; that He comes back soon enough or comes down and changes things soon enough that we do not kill ourselves. And what did it say there in the book of Matthew about the Great Tribulation? It said that if He did not return, if He did not cut that time short (which is a shortening of the period we are talking about), all flesh would perish. No flesh would be saved alive.

So, we are talking about a narrow window, here. Of course, Revelation is full of such warnings. It is the end time book. It is interesting that three of these warnings about the quickness of His return come to the church.

Revelation 2:5 "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

This was to the first church. This next one is to the third church.

Revelation 2:16 Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.

That sounds rather like His second coming to me. Is this not what happens in Revelation 19?

This is to the Philadelphia church.

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Revelation 3:11 Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.

So, He is saying that He is going to come back fast—rapidly. He will be here soon, before you know it. So, keep on keeping on! If you do not, you will end up drowned in the cesspool. And, your reward will be taken from you.

Revelation 22 is how God closes the book. We have read about everything that is to come about; we have learned all the instructions (hopefully); we have done what God wants us to do. Now we come to the last chapter in the Book, and He gives this closing exhortation:

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.

This means that there is a judgment.

Revelation 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

This is how we end the Book. "Look! It is going to come fast! Once you realize what is going on, there is a very, very short window! Do not lose the opportunity that comes in that window!"

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 Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong used to say, that it will make our heads spin. God is not going to tarry once that point is reached. The Father will say, "Son, go!" And He will.

He is not going to let things linger and fester too long, because as He stated in Matthew 24, that no flesh would be saved alive. He does not want to lose humanity. So, He has to come quickly once things reach that point.

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Now, this has very serious ramifications for us. There will not be a great deal of time for us to prepare ourselves. Spiritual growth and fruit cannot be produced quickly. You know that the Bible-wide image for spiritual growth is a harvest—from the very earliest parts of the book, He is talking about the kind of growth that occurs in nature. You plant the seed, which will pop out of the ground; it must be watered; it must have sunlight; it must be cultivated, and all these other things that must happen. But, it does not happen quickly. It usually takes an entire season, or in the case of a fruit tree it takes years to get to the point where it will produce useful fruit. Grain is planted and must go through an entire season before it is ready to be reaped.

I want you to see this. Turn to James 5 and see this idea of waiting for Christ to return.

James 5:7-8 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

Now, he is on a bit of a different track than I am, but the crux of the idea is that it takes time to produce fruit. And, our God is the husbandman. And, He is taking the time that He needs to take to produce the harvest in us. And so, He must be patient. And we must be patient.

But the idea here is that spiritual fruit and growth takes time. My idea is that when the end time signs come, there is not going to be time anymore. When the Master tells His servants to go and reap the harvest, they get out their scythe, enter the field, and they reap immediately because it is ready for harvest, and you just do not want to leave it out there to rot. So, He gives the word, and they go.

How much time is there? Could you stick a seed in the ground, when the master tells his harvesters to go out and harvest, and you have your seed ready to harvest by the time they get out there with their scythes? No! It will sit there in the ground, and there cannot be anything harvested from it—it has not had the time to grow and mature.

So, this is why Jesus tells us, “You must be ready!” Once the signs start happening, there will not be any more time. Things are set by that time. This is what He is talking about in the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins.

Matthew 25:1-13 Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them

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were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil [symbol of the Holy Spirit and the growth that comes thereby] with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed [be patient, James said], they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' [It cannot be transferred.] And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he answered and said, 'Assuredly [pronouncing something of great significance], I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming.

Notice that the cry goes out at midnight—deep in the night when you cannot see; when you are not expecting it. And you think, “Oh, it will happen in the morning.” No, it comes at night.

The virgins are supposed to rise at once—another indication of quickness—and go out to meet Him. Think of what is happening here. The Bridegroom has left His house, His chamber. And, He is going to where there will be the Wedding Feast. It is in the same town. How long does He take to leave His chamber and get to where the Wedding Feast is held? It does not take that long to walk. Just long enough to go down the street. How long does that take? Not very long! And that is the time that we have to react to the summons. “Behold! The Bridegroom is coming! Go out to meet Him!”

So, we must understand that once the cry goes out, the window we have to react is short and closing rapidly. So, there is no time. The door is closing at that point. And, it will slam shut in our faces if we are not there already. Those who are unprepared will be cut off at that instant.

The foolish virgins were off doing something else. They did not arise and go meet the Bridegroom. They arose, complained that they were not ready, and left to go someplace else to try and get ready—but it was impossible. It could not happen.

So Jesus' command, here, is to watch yourself—to be vigilant, to be prepared, to be

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awake, to be aware, and to be able to respond at a moment's notice. When the call goes out, there is not time for anything else.

Go, and meet the Bridegroom!

Luke 21 is where I have been headed this whole time. Jesus just said in the parable, "Watch!" Verse 34 is what stopped me short in my studies for the last sermon, and where this sermon has been headed the whole time.

Luke 21:34-35 But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.

Notice that: On all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. That is quite comprehensive, is it not? No one is going to expect it. Not you, not me. We will all be taken by surprise. It will come at an hour when we do not expect it. The cry goes out at midnight, when we are not paying attention—doing something else like sleeping or what have you.

Now, He explains this, "that day come upon you unexpectedly," in verse 35. What He does is give us an image—a metaphor. And, the metaphor is as if we are a bunch of birds, hopping about pecking for things, doing as birds do. And, suddenly we trip a snare that was lying there in the grass. We did not see it, because we were too busy hopping along, eating bugs and seeds, and doing whatever we were doing like birdbrains. And, in an instant we are flailing about in a net, or our foot is caught in a string pulled tight around us. We cannot go anywhere. We are stuck. We are trapped. We never saw it. It came out of the blue, as they say. That is how the coming of the Son of Man is. We are flailing about, hanging there, meat for the pot because we have been caught in a snare. We could say that our goose is cooked.

But, the idea is that He comes, it is quick—sudden—swift—unexpected—like a whirlwind that takes you to Oz, we do not have the chance to get out of the way, because we are doing something else. We are not ready for it

This is why Jesus tells us to take heed to yourselves. He is saying, "Pay attention to your own spiritual condition. Focus on your relationship with God."

When the Church of the Great God got started and we said that we were going to focus

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on preparing the Bride rather than preaching the gospel out to the world, a lot of people accused us of a gospel of selfishness. They said that we were going to turn the people of God inward onto themselves; they were going to be just looking so much on themselves and trying to save themselves that we would just simply cease doing anything good; we would ruin people because we would turn them inward.

But you know, Jesus Christ Himself said, "Take heed to yourselves!" (Luke 21:34a) He was not lying. Actually, this is the thing that needs to be done at this time, because He is going to come unexpectedly like a snare that will spring up and trap us if we are not ready. This is not self-centered at all.

It is paradoxical, because when you are attending to your spiritual health and well-being, you are actually paying more attention to God.

So, taking heed to yourself is God-Centered, because the only way that you could be ready for Christ's return is to have a solid and growing relationship with the Father and Jesus Christ, His Son. Taking heed to yourself is loving God, because that is where your focus will be. That is why you want such a relationship with Him because you love Him. That is where our salvation is. Jesus Christ is our Savior. And, He told us to love God. And, to love our neighbor.

And do you know what? When we love God, when we get into this relationship with Him, and try our best to make it closer and closer—do you know what happens? It is inevitable! We, in turn, will love other people, because you cannot take upon you the love of God or have God give it to you without it just pouring out of us in acts of service and love toward others.

That is the way that it works. That is why it is agape love. It is a love that is not centered upon the self, but is outgoing toward other people. And so when the love of God comes into us, it must go out of us like a river. Is that not what Jesus said? That rivers of living water will flow from our hearts. And so, when we take heed to ourselves, we are not doing something selfish. We are doing something Godly.

So, if you want to be prepared for Christ's return, you have to take heed to yourself. It is the practical course to take. Taking heed to yourself is loving God.

So, Jesus tells us to do this. He advises us to pay attention to our spiritual state, and then He adds, "Lest your hearts be weighed down." (Luke 21:34)

He uses the imagery of the heart, rather than the mind, because the heart (in the Bible)

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is the symbol of character. It is our hearts that He wants to soften, right? He does not want them to become hard. He want them not to be a heart of stone, but a heart of flesh—soft and malleable, like His heart is! A heart that will go out for others. So, He uses the heart, not the mind.

Our minds are not weighed down, it is our heart—our character. It is not knowledge or understanding that He is focusing on, but He is talking about the spiritual things that we have learned and instilled as a way of life—our true being—the real you and the real me. Or, as it has been explained before, what you do in the dark when no one was looking.

Turn to Amos 2 because this idea of being weighed down also appears back here. It is not quite the same, but it is close enough to bear a look. This passage is interesting because God is speaking:

Amos 2:13-16 Behold, I am weighed down by you [Israelites], as a cart full of sheaves is weighed down [bundles of un-threshed grain; collected after the growth cycle is finished; but their harvest of character was evil]. Therefore flight shall perish from the swift, the strong shall not strengthen his power, nor shall the mighty deliver himself; he shall not stand who handles the bow, the swift of foot shall not escape, nor shall he who rides a horse deliver himself. The most courageous men of might shall flee naked in that day," says the LORD.

God is saying that when it reaches this point, where He is weighed down by their sins, then He is going to make sure that they are destroyed. And, this is the point in time that He does not want us to reach. He told us in Luke, "Do not let your hearts be weighed down."

Do you know what happens when you get too weighed down? Destruction.

So, if we were to choose another word for being "weighed down," we would use the word, "wearied" or "burdened." Do not let your heart be burdened or wearied, weighed down by these things He mentions, because we do not want what happened to Israel, who got their hearts weighed down with so much sin that it weighed down God's heart, and He had to crush them with it.

Christ warns us that the heart can take only so much burden of sin before it hardens completely and must be destroyed.

The Greek word in Luke 21 that is rendered, “weighed down,” is *bareo*. It means burdened, or overloaded, or oppressed. Luke may have been also referring to a widespread expression across the Greek world that meant, “heavy with wine.” If this is the case, the allusion is to a sense of sleepiness and dullness that comes with from drinking too much. Just a little bit loopy, and you can no longer think straight. Your eyes begin to roll a bit and become a bit unfocused, so that you cannot really even see; you cannot concentrate on what is going on around you. It looks like everything is tilting so you cannot get a bead on things.

When you get to this point, if you have a little bit of smarts left, you just want to find a nice soft couch or bed to lie down in and sleep it off, because your eyelids are heavy, and all you want to do is close them and sleep.

So, not only is this idea of the heart being burdened by sin, but it is also that sin makes us spiritually dull of mind, unfocused, and sleepy. He is telling us that when we get to this point where we have become burdened or weighed down with sin, that we can no longer come to right conclusions or walk steadily in the right direction. You do not want to get to this point.

Now, let us see what is weighing down our hearts.

First, Luke lists carousing. This is normally a word used for intoxication and drunkenness, but the next word is drunkenness. So we know it means something else here. Interestingly, carousing is also the headache and distress, dizziness and nausea that comes along with it—the hangover. And the Greeks did use this word for their hangover.

So, we can see the whole process here—not just the self-indulgence, but all if its affects, too. So, it appears that Jesus is not implying drunkenness, but simply eating and drinking—feasting—partying. These things may be perfectly fine—that you can have good food and good drink that does not have to be alcohol, but what Christ is talking about is indulging in good things to the point that they become gluttony. They are indulged in excess. It is almost like what the Israelites did when God gave them quail—a blessing from God. But, they took it off the wing, and starting stuffing it in their mouths raw. They just ate, and ate, and ate—even though it was a good thing. This is the sort of idea that Jesus is talking about here in Luke 21. He is talking about using good things in a wrong manner and to excess.

Some bibles translated this word as “dissipation.” And so, the effect of eating and drinking good things to excess produces the same kind of overindulgence and

drunkenness would.

Now, the next word is drunkenness, by which He means overindulging in alcohol. But, I should also say that He is talking about what would happen in His day—people getting together and drinking each other under the table—bouts of drinking. And, our colleges and universities are known far and wide for this sort of thing—in various drinking games—until some suffer alcohol poisoning, while others get riotously drunk. Who knows how many have driven away from one of those things and not made it home. This is real drunkenness.

And then, there is the third thing: the cares of this life. This means the everyday, ordinary business of living. This is working; buying; staying safe; watching our kids; fixing the house or the car; maintaining our relationships; going to school; engaging in our hobbies; all the things that we do on a normal basis. It includes all the usual things that we do.

But, each one of these things place on us a measure of stress—things that have to be done—things that take up time. It could be in our relationship with our mate, or children, or parents, or employer, or neighbor—anyone. It is just what we do day by day. It is anything about this life that we have to care about, maybe too much, that distracts us, and takes up our time. And it includes ourselves—maintaining our bodies, our health—it does not matter.

But, those things are the cares of this life. They are the things that worry us. The things that give us anxiety and fear. Obviously, He is talking about things that push us over the edge; things that get too much attention than they deserve.

For our understanding I have whittled the meanings of these three words and ideas to three modern terms—what Jesus was talking about—self indulgence, addiction, and distraction.

These are the three things our Savior warns us against as this time narrows toward the close. These are the things we need to be concerned about. What is most astounding to me, and if you think about it, it is most astounding to you too, is that He warns **us** against them—His own people—His very elect! He has got to warn His people against self-indulgence, addiction, and distraction.

And why is this? It is because we are up to our ears in the cesspool! That is why I started the way I did. It is all around us. We cannot help but be affected by it. And, if we are not careful, as it gets worse and worse, we are going to get drawn right into

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it—indulging our fancies; addicted to certain things and their ways; we will get distracted away from God by all these little things we have to do.

We should be beyond these things. We have been in the church for ages! We should have grown so righteous by now and Godly, too, that nothing could distract us from God. But Jesus Christ our Savior tells us that when we get to this point, when He is about to return, every one of us is at risk.

This world is evil and rotten to the core. We live in it. We are constantly beset with enticements to overindulge in good things—to do more and more, until we cannot get enough of it. And to just spend so much time and effort on narrow portions of our lives that should not get that much attention. Then, we forget the weightier matters of the law—and we, like Israel, can forget God.

Jesus knew way back then what we would be up against, and He knows even better than we do now. He knew how tough it would be to stay above it, and not be pulled into the maelstrom of sin that is spinning wildly about us.

I wish to close in Romans 13, an exhortation from the apostle Paul.

Romans 13:11-14 And do this, knowing the time, that now **[NOW]** it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But [and] put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

Now is the time!