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WEST VALLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST

Gloom, Doom, and the Empty Tomb: How the Resurrection of Jesus Should Affect Our Lives and Our Vision of the Future (continued)

When Paul tells the story, it sounds very different though. He returned to Syrian Antioch after this journey and “reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). There had been many trials and tribulations, but there had also been great successes. Thus even as “they shook off the dust from their feet” from Pisidian Antioch, the Bible reads, “And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:51-52).

Paul didn’t just have hope in God; he had hope in people. Paul had never been to the church at Rome, but hope led him to believe these gracious Christians would help him on his journey to Spain (Romans 15:24). Paul had what he described as a steadfast hope for the sinful Christians at Corinth that they would partake of God’s consolation (2 Corinthians 1:7) and grow in faith (10:15). Hope caused him to see the Thessalonian brethren as being with the Lord when He returns (1 Thessalonians 2:19). I have to believe that one of the things Paul intended for us to imitate from his example (1 Corinthians 11:1) was the hope that he placed in people.

Some Concluding Thoughts

I began this article by reflecting on the question I heard asked and answered all those years ago, “Will God continue to bless America?” Do you want to know my answer? I have no idea! Like the disciples who asked about the fortunes of the physical nation of Israel, I’ve learned, “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7).

America might end today, or it might exist until the Lord returns. While I know the particulars of the country ending and/or facing real persecution for my faith would be incredibly challenging, as general prospect, I do not fear them. Further, I know that if I cling to my God and my hope, God can not only see me through them but work amazing things through me as I endure them.

In the meantime, I’m going to do my best not to preach gloom and doom for America. I know it would be wrong to say, “Peace!” when there is no peace” (Ezekiel 13:10), but I also know I’m neither a prophet nor in the audience of a prophet who has a message of doom from God for this nation. Instead, I’m in the presence of Immanuel, the God who is with us (Matthew 1:23), and He’s the Prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6). Wherever Jesus is, there is peace, and there is hope!

Instead of preaching gloom and doom, I intend to do my best to preach the empty tomb. The empty tomb exists whether America does or does not. My hope is not in America, it is in Jesus. However, because my hope is in Jesus, I have hope for America – not the government or the ideals behind it, but for the people in it. I have hope that the hope that I have discovered in Jesus can and will be discovered by others.

Christians, we are called to “always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Peter assumes, yes even of an audience “grieved by various trials” (1:6), 1) that every Christian has hope, 2) that people are going to see that hope, and 3) that people are going to ask about that hope.

Listen carefully: If all we preach is gloom and doom, if all we say is, “What is this world coming to,” and, “America is coming to an end,” no one is going to ask us about our hope. They probably won’t even believe us if we tell them that such a hope exists. One thing that has struck me in becoming aware of just how corrupt the government of Rome was in the first century is just how little Christians talked about it. Is there a lesson for us in that? I’d say there is. Let’s quit being political analysts and prognosticators, and instead be preachers of hope.

