



Understanding in the Last Days

³“Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever...¹⁰Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand. (Daniel 12:3, 10)

From my personal perspective and life experience to date, when it comes to understanding not just the times that we live in, but as a harbinger of the nearness of the Return of our Lord and Savior, these words through the Prophet Daniel occupy the premier position of my “Last Days To-Do List”. Daniel highlights something which seems to be outright overlooked, if not merely devalued, when it comes to discussions of God’s prophetic Word and to what degree the signs of our time are fulfilling the same: the quality of our walk in Christ. Daniel tells us that understanding is the other side of the coin of righteousness, that when it comes to unlocking the meaning of God’s prophetic Word, it is just as important to have deciphered and put into practice the whole of His Word where our personal behavior is concerned. End Times knowledge in and of itself is never enough; the greater requirement is a biblical faith which is experiencing the personal transformation which comes from putting the fundamental teachings of God’s Word into practice. Biblical faithfulness and wisdom are two sides of the same coin.

Although they have probably existed in some form in every historical age of the Church, in these Last Days technology has given rise to the proliferation of what I call the “specialist” within Church circles. Anyone can self-publish their thoughts, articles or entire books through websites, podcasts and online forums in the belief that they can focus on just one aspect or category of God’s Word. Many have never taught on any formal level, whether it be a Sunday School class, small group Bible study, or entire congregation, much less devoted the time and resources for teaching the whole of God’s Word. They think they can simply “specialize” and call themselves a “discernment ministry”, for instance, or restrict their teachings to just the boundaries of prophecy. Not having worked through the basic, fundamental teachings of God’s whole Word, they do not realize when their

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findings outright conflict with a basic doctrine of the faith, nor do they care that what they are doing falls well short of the whole biblical requirement of discipleship. I have heard from such people, whom I know to be well-intentioned born-again brothers and sisters, that they “just want to teach the facts” and not have to deal with all the behavioral “baggage”. But that is exactly what discipleship and the proper handling of God’s whole Word is all about, all that behavioral baggage. Or as Daniel so poignantly contrasts, the difference between righteousness and wickedness. That’s an issue which is wholly devoted to behavior, folks.

Recently a prominent friend suggested that he might quote the following from A. W. Tozer in the course of his teaching at a church’s prophecy conference:

A prophet is one who knows his times and what God is trying to say to the people of his times.

Today we need prophetic preachers; not preachers of prophecy merely, but preachers with a gift of prophecy. The word of wisdom is missing. We need the gift of discernment again in our pulpits. It is not ability to predict that we need, but the anointed eye, the power of spiritual penetration and interpretation, the ability to appraise the religious scene as viewed from God's position, and to tell us what is actually going on.

Where is the man who can see through the ticker tape and confetti to discover which way the parade is headed, why it started in the first place and, particularly, who is riding up front in the seat of honor?

What is needed desperately today is prophetic insight. Scholars can interpret the past; it takes prophets to interpret the present. Learning will enable a man to pass judgment on our yesterdays, but it requires a gift of clear seeing to pass sentence on our own day. One hundred years from now historians will know what was taking place religiously in this year of our Lord; but that will be too late for us. We should know right now.

If Christianity is to receive a rejuvenation it must be by other means than any now being used. If the church in the second half of this century is to recover from the injuries she suffered in the first half, there must appear a new type of preacher. The proper, ruler-of-the-synagogue type

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will never do. Neither will the priestly type of man who carries out his duties, takes his pay and asks no questions, nor the smooth-talking pastoral type who knows how to make the Christian religion acceptable to everyone. All these have been tried and found wanting.

Another kind of religious leader must arise among us. He must be of the old prophet type, a man who has seen visions of God and has heard a voice from the Throne. When he comes (and I pray God there will be not one but many) he will stand in flat contradiction to everything our smirking, smooth civilization holds dear. He will contradict, denounce and protest in the name of God and will earn the hatred and opposition of a large segment of Christendom. Such a man is likely to be lean, rugged, blunt-spoken and a little bit angry with the world. He will love Christ and the souls of men to the point of willingness to die for the glory of the one and the salvation of the other. But he will fear nothing that breathes with mortal breath.

We need to have the gifts of the Spirit restored again to the church, and it is my belief that the one gift we need most now is the gift of prophecy.

A.W. Tozer ("Of God and Men")

With all due respect to our late brother Tozer, what may have been true in his time leading up to his passing away in 1963, does not precisely mirror the state of the Church fifty years later. If he were to observe the apostasy and the abandonment of God's Word which so obviously characterizes what is taking place today, if he encountered the proliferation of Christians who no longer live like Christians in the most fundamental sense, would he advocate the same remedy? I would argue that repentance of sin and a return to the pursuit of righteousness by the personal application of God's Word is not only what is sorely needed above all else at this time, but that the focus he advocates in a modern-day return of pulpit prophets is exactly what is wrong with so many of these "specialists" who claim to be doing precisely that.

Such specialists are constantly pointing out what is going on within the Church; they are characterized as those who "contradict, denounce and protest in the name of God"; and the defining behavior of so many of them is already to be "blunt-spoken and a little bit angry with the world". The problem is that they hold these kinds of behaviors so dear that

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no one can ever detect the precondition which Christ taught would identify authentic faith in Him, *“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* (Jn. 13:35) I keep running across individuals who would take Tozer’s words as a license to become even more specialized, even more isolated from the whole of God’s Word and even more narrowly devoted to just a specific subset, so as to ultimately forsake the pursuit of righteousness for understanding alone, righteousness being the more important goal in these Last Days.

When it comes to the End Times, Jesus expressed concern as to whether He would even find faith upon His Return. (Lk. 18:8) He warned that one of the primary casualties in the shadow of the Last Days would be, *“Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.”* (Mt. 24:12) The opposite effect of pursuing righteousness per Daniel’s advice is a lawlessness leading to the lack of the very thing which Jesus says defines our Christian identity in Him. Perhaps what Tozer spoke of was precisely on point for what was taking place leading up to 1960 when he published these remarks in *Of God And Men*, but I would argue that one of the things which has changed in the intervening 55 years is the rise of an industry of specialists who seek to fill that role of pulpit prophets at the expense of faith, love and personal commitment to being doers of the Word instead of merely hearers.

¹In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans— ²in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. ³So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. (Daniel 9:1–3)

Here is what Daniel did with his understanding of the prophetic fulfillments taking place in the times in which he lived. This is precisely what I wish would become the focus and obsession of those filling our pulpits today, that we would give *“attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes”*. I am apparently too obtuse to see the usefulness of what is recommended by Tozer in the absence of what I believe to be the critical and required precursor to what he suggests.

Frankly, this is why I personally ceased attending so-called prophecy conferences, because I believe that if they were doing the proper job, they would all end with such

personal conviction that what is expressed in Daniel 9:1-3 would be seen as the overall reaction of the conference attendees.

It is clearly our biblical duty to warn everyone about what is coming, and one of the burdens we struggle with is that we have no power over anyone as to whether or not they will heed the warning. That is out of our hands. However, I am of the conviction that the problem is not that insightful warnings as to the meanings of the signs of our times are absent today, but that at times they actually drown out the more pertinent warnings of not living crucified, sanctified lives. At the very least, we need to have as much a burden for passionately maintaining that our fellow Christians should be living and acting like Christians as we do for God's prophetic Word unfolding in the present, because the latter is actually only fully realized within the former.

In Him,

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