

Faith in the Last Days

Part 1

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[00:00:01] Death and Judgement are behind us.

Grace and Glory are before us.

All the souls of all the world see, there is strength that must be found. Death and Judgement are behind us.

Grace and Glory are before us.

All the billows roll for Jesus, there is strength that must be found.

As fruits of the resurrection, [00:01:02] He is risen from the tomb.

Now we stand in new creation, free from the gloom.

Jesus died and we are grave, buried in His grave we lay.

All within Him resurrected, now with Him in Heaven's bright grave. [00:02:07] 492. We seek the things that are above, beyond this earth and sky, whence, Lord, Thou lookest down, in love with God's right hand, on high behold Him, 492. We seek the things that are above, beyond this earth and sky, whence, Lord, Thou lookest down, in love with God's right hand, on high, beyond this earth and sky, [00:03:05] Thou art the light we seek, Thou art the Father's hope divine, and we are raised in Thee.

Our hidden mind in dark abound, but soon Thou shalt come in.

In brilliant bliss shall ev'ry brow thy glorious image bear.

[00:04:20] We read just a few verses from the prophet Haggai. The second chapter of Haggai, verse 2.

Chapter 2, Haggai, verse 2. Speak now to Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the son of Josedeth, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? And how do you see it now?

[00:05:03] Is it not in your eyes, in comparison of it, as nothing?

And how do you see it now?

Is it not in your eyes, in comparison of it, as nothing?

Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord, and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedeth, the high priest, and be strong, O ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work, for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts. According to the word that I had covenanted with you, when ye came out of Egypt, so my spirit remaineth among you.

Fear ye not.

But thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land, and I will shake all nations, [00:06:02] and the desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former, saith the Lord of hosts. And in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts.

And then in Acts 2, Chapter 2 of Acts, verse 41. Then they that gladly received his word were baptised. And the same day there were added about three thousand souls, and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread [00:07:02] and in prayers.

And fear came upon every one of them. And fear came upon every soul.

And then in, towards the end of the book of Acts, Chapter 27, verse 29.

Acts 27, 29.

Then fearing lest they should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern and went for the day.

And the next day they went again.

I'd like to speak very briefly and simply, dear brethren, with the Lord's help [00:08:02] in regard to these few verses and to apply them to ourselves and our own circumstances in this day.

You recall the time when the temple was rebuilt. And there was the reaction of the old men and the reaction of the young men. The old men wept.

The young men rejoiced.

The old men wept because, as in Haggai, as the Lord's word to Zerubbabel brought before their hearts, they looked upon what had been done then and compared it to what they'd known formerly. And in their minds, and the Lord seized it in their hearts, [00:09:01] it was as nothing.

And so the old men, they cast their minds back to, as we would say, the good old days, and they saw the declension and the failure.

And all that had come in. And they wept.

But the young men had not such a comparison. And to them, they saw, I suppose, what was positive. And it cheered their hearts to see something that the Lord had done.

And in a way, both reactions are good and right and proper in their place.

Taking Haggai a little bit out of context, certainly in not interpreting it, but applying it to ourselves and our circumstances, we can say that in our own day [00:10:04] things are not as they once were. And there are those amongst us that have sufficient experience and history to be able to compare today's circumstances with what has gone before. Some can look back perhaps 60 years or thereabouts. Others may only have a consciousness of two or three or five, ten perhaps.

But even so, we would acknowledge that we can see decline and failure in very little time at all.

The Lord takes account of it. And it's right that we should be very sad at what has come in.

And we should own our part of it. We've been reminded very forcibly in our conference that we need to hold [00:11:03] in our hearts' affections the whole body, every true believer in Christ. But there's another way in which that comes in too, and that's we are responsible with every failure of the body of Christ.

That which is connected with Christendom we're responsible for. You may say, well, we can't be responsible for that section of Christendom that permits this or that or is doing such and such a thing because we have nothing to do with that section of Christendom. But, Brethren, whether we like it or not, we are part of professing Christendom and we have to own our failure and our part in the breakdown publicly. But there's a side of things that the Lord takes account of [00:12:01] and he says to Zerubbabel and others and the people, he says, the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former. And I would like to apply that to the circumstances which will exist at the very end.

There will be something particularly attractive to the Lord's heart about those conditions which he finds when he comes. Philadelphia conditions that has the little strength.

It's easy, isn't it, to do right things when everyone else is doing right things because being part of the crowd is the easy thing.

And when everyone else is doing the opposite, [00:13:02] then it's harder to do the right thing. And what a wonderful thing it would have been to be in the days of Acts 2.

Three thousand souls added and a verse we didn't read tells us that the Lord added daily. What a wonderful evidence of the work of God. What wonderful days they were. Wouldn't it have been wonderful to have been around last century at the revival, the recovery of these truths?

Well, you know, I think it was Mr. Wigram remarked when he saw the many who were taking their place amongst the ranks of the brethren. And he remarked that in our day he said these things were prayed out on our knees [00:14:01] and now they can be bought easily. There wasn't the exercise of that generation that there had been earlier. And so it is in the days in which we live to be a few amongst many who are going on on another course is all the more difficult. And the Lord takes account of it. And I like to think that this verse is not out of place, that the glory of these things in the latter day, there'll be something about them that precedes those things at the beginning.

And so we need to be encouraged, to be found amongst those who are going on in a right way when the Lord comes.

I was reminded, you know, of that verse where people say, peace, peace, and then sudden destruction comes upon them.

The events of last week in America bring home to us, don't they, [00:15:01] just how suddenly things can overturn.

In the grand scheme of things, in amongst all the activities of the world, what happened, although enormous and tragic in their proportion, were really quite simple and insignificant.

We might say one incident, one day's events turned the world on its head.

And it's just an early warning sign. And just a very small example of what will come upon this world in the coming day. Most of which will take place after the Lord's come for his own. So we take comfort from that. But we're reminded, aren't we, that the Lord's coming is surely very, very soon. Things can't get much worse, can they, surely, before the Lord comes. So it's really [00:16:02] a word of encouragement that we're nearly there.

Let's not give up right at the end.

You know the sad thing to see at the end of a marathon someone within sight of the winning post giving up through exhaustion or distraction.

You think, they've got so far, they didn't have much further to go. Well, brethren, we're in that position. And it is a marathon. It takes endurance. And we read it in Acts 2.

What did they do? The brethren then, they continued steadfastly.

And that's what we have to do. Firstly, we have to continue. We have to go on.

What we did last week, what we're doing today, if it's right, we've got to go on doing it. Let's not give up.

Let's not be discouraged. [00:17:02] Let's not despise what the Lord's doing, even in its weakness and smallness. The Lord doesn't.

We were reminded the other day that the Lord deigns to be present even with two or three.

The very smallest possible testimony He takes account of. So let's not be, let's not despise two or three.

Easy to say, you know, oh well, yes, it's a good thing the Lord's with the twos and the threes. The Lord puts us to the test. I suppose it was about twelve years ago I was in another company of believers and for some time had not been not been happy with things generally. Little things, one thing here, one thing there, all added together made me feel that I wasn't really in the right place. [00:18:01] And one Wednesday morning there was about I suppose twenty or thirty of us and a hymn

was given out and we sang it and I really felt quite discouraged and disheartened.

The singing was quite pathetic and we had help from a box in the corner and it was still very, very poor. And I said to myself Lord, really, I'd rather be with just two or three unable to praise and give worship in a simple way, in weakness.

And I'd rather do that with two or three others who know what they're doing, want to be there and have a sense of the Lord's presence. Well, you know, the Lord put me to the test [00:19:02] and it wasn't long before I found myself in another little company. We were about a dozen.

Well, numerically it was a downward step you might say but it was a happier place. But it wasn't long before the Lord took one or two and circumstances were such that we were whittled down. And on many an occasion we were just two or three.

You see, the Lord brings these exercises before us and we answer to them and he puts us to the test. But thankfully the Lord is faithful and he gives us that which we need to be maintained in those circumstances. Well, it may be that some of us have been used to larger numbers than twos or threes. Are we prepared to be one of those two when the Lord comes?

[00:20:01] It's very trying.

Not as convenient. Takes a bit more effort. You can't just go away on holiday when you're pleased. There's a responsibility to maintain the testimony of the Lord. Well, are we prepared to continue even to the end? They continued steadfastly.

Steadfastly. And that's an attitude of heart and mind, isn't it? That's really linked with what we had this afternoon. A bent of mind.

They didn't just do these things out of habit because they were swept along by everyone else.

I don't often quote Billy Graham. In fact, I don't think I've ever quoted Billy Graham before. But I remember his speaking about this matter of the narrow...

Broad is the way that leads to destruction and narrow, the narrow pathway. And he said, we often get this picture, don't we, and I have posters of it, [00:21:01] the broad and the narrow way. Before, one to the left and one to the right. But he said, you know, really, the narrow pathway is going against the stream. You have a broad way with everyone sweeping in one direction and the narrow way is going against the stream. And that struck me, you know. I think there's a lot to be said about that.

We're going against the stream in the world.

This world is on a decline. We see it. We've remarked on it. Every level of society, morally, the legislative framework, the political framework, all these things are against the things of God. Everything, increasingly, is working against the things of God and we have to follow the Lord Jesus in a pathway which is diametrically opposed [00:22:01] to such things.

That's the cost.

Well, in Acts 27, we didn't read any other verse but the verse we read and I was quite happy to do that because I'm sure we know the context. The storm that arose on one of Paul's journeys.

And it appeals to me, you know, viewing this as a history of Christendom or the assembly.

It's not a view that's accepted by all but my view on these things is, well, it may not be the primary interpretation but if the Lord helps us to see these things in application and if we can get help from it, well, that's a good thing.

They, [00:23:01] yes, they would have fallen upon rocks. They cast four anchors out of the stern and wished for the day.

The very things which might have secured them, they cast off, cast over the side.

And it's not a thought of mine own, my own.

Very glad to have a brother locally who brought this before us. Suggestion was made that the four anchors could allude to what we had in Acts 2.

Let's go back to it.

Are these the sort of anchors that we're casting over the side when difficulty comes?

One, the Apostles' Doctrine. Two, fellowship. Three, breaking of bread. Four, prayers.

Very basic things.

[00:24:01] But do you know that there are countries of Christians where these things are not continued in?

And there's a danger that we become one of those countries.

Now you might say that's a very surprising statement to make. But, you know, these things come in little by little, imperceptibly.

The Apostles' Doctrine, a very wide term.

How easily we can give up some aspect of the Apostles' Doctrine.

We were reminded recently in our studies in Revelation in Wales of the Ephesian church, how they had left their first love. And it was a mark, again not an original thought. It was suggested that when Paul said, all in Asia have forsaken me, [00:25:04] he wasn't saying that they'd given up Christianity for good. They were apostates. He wasn't saying that. It's quite evident there were those in Asia who were going on in Christian things. Otherwise there would have been no need to write to the seven churches in Revelation.

But what Paul meant was that they had given up, they had forsaken Paul in regard to his ministries.

Those things which were peculiar to Paul's ministry, and perhaps developed by other apostles.

It's possible to be a practicing Christian and yet to have forsaken Paul's teaching.

And it really leads us on to the other things.

Two ministries of Paul we refer to.

I'm always a little bit unhappy with making too much of a distinction of things. [00:26:01] We're very good at that, humanly speaking, to pigeonhole things and really to break the link. And I like to think that really Paul's ministry was one ministry.

It has a beginning and it has an end. And you really can't divorce the two completely. And when we do, that's when we are in trouble. The scripture says, doesn't it, it's God's desire that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

So in one sentence there we have really those two aspects, don't we, of Paul's ministry. All men should be saved, that's the start, and then come to the knowledge of the truth. Well that encompasses all that follows, doesn't it.

So we don't want to give up any of these four anchors.

Apostles' doctrine. Fellowship.

[00:27:04] It's true locally. We can be absent when we ought to be present. Very easy to have excuses. We've all got responsibilities. We sometimes get ill.

Sometimes we make more of these things than we need to. Let's be present as much as we can.

I know the lawn needs cutting.

My lawn doesn't get cut nearly as often as it ought to.

There are meetings to go to. It would perhaps be a quite legitimate excuse that it's not a good testimony to have an untidy garden.

Very easy to do that when we could be the Catford Lectures or a fellowship meeting and you have your own [00:28:01] local meetings which you get to.

Some, you know, they don't have such things available to them. They're miles away from another company. Let's make use of what the Lord has provided in regard to fellowship one with another.

Some believers, they don't have the habit of going outside their local place of meeting.

And the practice that we have in the gatherings of helping one another out and coming to such meetings is a very good thing and it's an essential thing. And increasingly so as the days continue in the direction in which they're going.

In breaking of bread it's very easy to start on a slippery slope [00:29:02] in regard to the breaking of bread.

We're not doing enough in outreach. People aren't coming into the Gospel.

What are we going to do about it? Well, we'll get them in on another occasion. We'll do something else. When should we do it? We'll do it in the morning. Well, we'll need to move the breaking of bread aside. We'll bring it forward and bring it back a little. Very good thing when people come in and hear the Gospel.

Wrap it in whatever way you like.

Plenty of scope to be guided spiritually in regard to these things. But what we find is that the breaking of bread then is slightly displaced in our thinking.

Some people, well, they can't get to both so they don't go to the breaking of bread.

You think this is far-fetched? [00:30:02] I've seen it happen.

Then it's displaced to the Lord's Day evening.

Too much to have two meetings on the Lord's Day morning.

Before you know it, it's once a month.

You see the slippery slope, what it leads to.

Let's not lose sight of the primary, of the fact that the breaking of bread is the most important meeting of the assembly.

It's all for God.

The fact that we derive any pleasure, any blessing from it is really incidental.

It's a measure of God's grace. We gather to the name of the Lord. He's there.

We remember him.

[00:31:03] Yes, he died for our sins.

But it's not us that we remember. It's not us that we recall. It's him.

Yes, what he did is recalled in the emblems.

But it's him as a person. He is there.

We bring our hearts' affections to him. He has drawn us out, as the hymn says, of our wilderness ways. Close the door. We leave behind us toil and conflict, and so on.

We're drawn to a blessed person. And if we understand the apostles' doctrine, you see these things aren't divorced from each other. If we read John's Gospel, we see that there's a divine order in these things.

And we take note of the person of the Lord Jesus, what he does, and who he is.

[00:32:02] What he has done.

What does he do?

He leads us to an appreciation of the Father.

And there's an outflow of worship.

This isn't the rigid timing of men.

This is the order of Scripture. In the liberty of the Spirit, there's room for an infinite variety. Have you ever been to a morning meeting that was exactly like another? I haven't. And I don't believe all eternity will see a repeat at any moment of what the Spirit brings before the saints in their regard to the Lord Jesus in the coming day.

We need to get in our minds the vital importance of the breaking of bread.

Because it's going in, isn't it? [00:33:01] And then we go out. If we don't go in, well, there's no coming out, but if we try to go out without going in, we'll have nothing to give. We'll have nothing to bring in service to others. We'll have nothing to bring in the Gospel. No, we need to go in to the Lord, firstly. Well, I don't want to take up too much time. I trust the Lord will bring these thoughts to fruition in our minds. We finish with prayers. The prayer meeting.

Another vital meeting of the Assembly.

Again, it's a meeting that's dispensable, isn't it? It's only midweek. We're busy at work. We work a long distance away. We're tired.

Others can go to the prayer meeting. We never take part anyway.

Are these thoughts that ever enter our head?

[00:34:04] You know, if you are in a situation where you're one of two, or one of three, you'll find that the prayer meeting is a real joy.

You'll go with a heavy heart. You'll know you'll go with a responsibility. You're the only one that can take part, perhaps. You're a brother.

The others are sisters. There's a responsibility.

But you go.

And you bring your praise and thanksgiving to God, for the Lord Jesus, for the blessings of the day. And then you bring your needs. We've got many needs. Many difficulties. We need to be sustained. And at the end of the meeting, speaking reverently, you'll find your batteries recharged. You've been revived. You've been cheered and encouraged. And these things are essential.

[00:35:02] I'll close with a challenge, brethren, to maintain, to continue steadfastly in those things which some have called, there's a little booklet with this title, some distinctives of those known or called brethren. And really, they shouldn't be.

They should be characteristics of every true believer.

But sadly, some of these things are perhaps only found amongst the gatherings. And I don't say that with any pride, because it's a tremendous responsibility to go on. My grandmother cut out a cutting of a newspaper that she spotted. She was a crowd coming out of an underground station. And she spotted herself in it. And she'd kept it in a handbag or something. And some years ago when she was alive, [00:36:02] she showed it to us. And you know, every single person in that picture, in the city, was wearing a hat. Man, woman, boy and girl.

For the sisters to be covered in a meeting assembly situation, it wasn't a thing that the world took account of particularly. Everyone went everywhere with a hat. But you know, nowadays, it's not the norm. There's something peculiar about it. Something distinctive. Not only in the world, but in Christendom as well. We don't like to be different. We don't like to go against the flow, do we? But these things are important. Let me remind you. The angels look down.

A simple thing.

Sisters having their heads covered. Brothers having their heads uncovered.

And if we have a question about whether it's appropriate [00:37:04] for a sister to be covered, ask yourself, would it be appropriate in this situation for a man to have his head covered? And then you have your answer. It often makes it a very simple thing. Would a brother feel right to have his head covered at this time? And if the answer's no, then the sister should be covered and vice versa. Very helpful, practical suggestion and a very simple way in which we can answer to the Apostles' Doctrine and give honour to the person of the Lord Jesus as head of the assembly. Brethren, I want to encourage us.

We're in difficult days. Some of us find ourselves in difficult circumstances. Maybe we feel isolated. Well, let us continue steadfastly in these things and let us not give an inch [00:38:03] these distinct tips of normal Christianity.

Let's not claim them for ourselves and find this out as a peculiar denomination. Well, if others look upon us like that, so be it.

We're obedient to the Word, first and foremost. Let's cling to these things, understand the Apostles' Doctrine and let's follow them practically, day by day. The Lord is coming very soon and when he comes, he wants to find those people of his own, being obedient.

In simplicity and in fewness of number, yes. But, as we were reminded the other day, wouldn't we

rather be doing that? Wouldn't we be found in the company of the Lord Jesus than in the company of the things of this world? I'm wondering. We've been reminded of it this afternoon. Let's turn our minds to the things above [00:39:01] and these things will characterise us down here. Brethren, may the Lord help us to do these things day by day, week by week and be found together, continuing steadfastly in these things. All the same to you.