

Article of the Month
February, 2021

“Today”

We have been observing monumental changes in the world around us — and, no doubt, are yet going to be experiencing more of them. And, while we cannot suggest to the world in general as to how they should think about it all, if we are disciples of our Lord, we need to know how WE should be thinking about it all. What’s next? How do we behave or react? It is difficult to live during the end of the old world! Each day (“today”) will become important. “Today” has always been the Scriptural focus for disciples.

We can think about the PAST; we can think about the FUTURE; or we can think about the PRESENT — “Today.” In some senses we can justly do all three; but the kind of thinking we do in each case is not the same.

We can learn from the *past*; we can hope for and expect in the *future*. But we must live in and focus on the *present* — “today.” It is the only time over which we have at least some control.

For those of us who rely on Jesus, Paul has reassuring words: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today; yes, and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8) Disciples need not adjust their thinking or objectives, therefore, from past to present to future.

THE PAST — “YESTERDAY”

The Christian doctrine of forgiveness is so important when we view our past. We cannot re-do the past. We can, but should not, be encumbered by it. If we have erred in it, (and we all have), we must not let it push down upon us so that our present and future are hampered by it. If we believe that God forgives, we MUST accept that and go forward. If we do not accept it, our faith (at least in that area) is weak and needs repair.

Where we can, we must make restitution for wrongs we have committed — cleaning up the past. But among disciples, Jesus is very clear that our brethren must forgive us once we have repented of what we have done wrong. (Luke 17:3) In Matthew 6:14 and 15, Jesus makes it clear that if any of us does not grant this forgiveness to others, our Father will also not grant it to us. So, even toward others, we must let the past be past.

The point, of course, is this: God is well aware that we cannot carry the past with us (except to have learned from it). It is too heavy for anyone to carry. If we insist on hauling its weight with us, we will never successfully “run the race set before us.” (Hebrews 12:1)

Our past experiences are only there for us as a series of building blocks. We never want to have a sentence like, “Oh, if only I had done or not done this or that!” Instead, we want to be grateful for what we have learned and will hopefully never repeat.

“Yesterday,” however, can be important and positive for us in other ways. Bible students rely on prophecy which was written “yesterday,” and we learn from the past lives of the faithful ancients. The Old Testament is yet alive as a predictor and an instructor. It is a “yesterday” which is not yet gone. As Paul wrote to Timothy, “The sacred writings (which were then ONLY the Old Testament) are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture inspired by God is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.” (II Timothy 3:15, 16) That is a “past” which we want to carry with us.

THE FUTURE — “TOMORROW”

Tomorrow is going to be there for all of us — brighter than nearly anyone anticipates! Christians rely on “tomorrow” as promised in prophecy. Much of our fellowship consists of discussing “what will be” according to our understanding of prophecy.

We also want to be “ready” for tomorrow. In temporal things, it is required of us that we be good stewards. But this does not mean that we take anxious thought about what we will eat, drink, or wear tomorrow. We do what we reasonably can to secure provisions as needed, knowing that our Father has it all planned anyway. (Matthew 6:30-34) As Jesus summed it up, “Do not be anxious for tomorrow, for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

But earthly matters are not the chief concern for disciples. Spiritual matters are. It is the development of the New Creature in Christ Jesus which is paramount for us. That, of course, looks forward to “tomorrow.” But “tomorrow” will be an outcome. It will be the results of what we do today. In that sense today is FOR tomorrow. The Apostle Paul was always cognizant of his daily work toward faithfulness in himself. He looked at “today” as a stepping-stone to “tomorrow.” We see this in I Corinthians 9:27 where he says, “I buffet my body and make it my slave lest, possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified.” He admonishes the same in us in Philippians 2:12 where he writes, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

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In both of these texts Paul is not consumed with fear of failure. He is simply telling us that “tomorrow” will be the result of “today.” Tomorrow is a goal; today is the means to the end. Today requires reverential thoughtfulness. This is why “today” is so vital to us.

“Tomorrow” will be the fulfillment of the prayer, “Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven.” In THAT respect, tomorrow is everything! Having “everything” before us is a wonderful stimulus to faithfulness today. But our place in tomorrow is not regulated by how we dream about it! It is regulated by how we pursue it. This is where “today” becomes our current “everything.”

NOW — “TODAY”

The world around us simply sees a series of “todays” ahead of it. Isaiah saw this as he looked ahead to our day and its characteristics. (Isaiah 56:12) He reports today’s general attitude as “Tomorrow will be like today, only more so.” How interesting it is that, even amidst the world’s current upheavals, few seem to doubt that we will somehow manage it and return to “the good old days.” We won’t! But Isaiah saw the attitude way ahead of time.

Christians must take care that their thinking does not mimic this. We live today in the time of the overturning of all that man has done for the last 6000 years. Our perspective cannot be like those whom Isaiah mentions. Jesus picked up on this thought and told us that in the days when he is taking over the affairs of earth for the establishment of his Peaceable Kingdom, the world would be like it was before Noah’s great flood — “Thy were eating and drinking; they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark; and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away.” (Matthew 24:37-39) They were ignorant of the monumental change coming. So is mankind today.

Jesus and Isaiah are both telling us that mankind doesn’t know what is happening. They go on — even in the midst of pandemics and social upheavals — thinking that it will all somehow just even out and correct itself. It won’t! “Today” is very special. It is the threshold of “Peace on earth, good will toward men.” But it is also the threshold of “The time of trouble such as never was since the world began.” (Matthew 24:21; Daniel 12:1)

So, the question for us who attempt to some degree or other to seek or to serve the Lord, is “What should WE be doing? What should WE be thinking regarding all that is happening?” Among other things, WE should dismiss our thinking from the prevailing thought of mankind in general because we know better!

Two Groups of Sincere Christians

Jesus made it clear that “many are called, but few are chosen.” He didn’t mean that many are offered salvation, but few succeed. What he meant was that “the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus” — the offer to become a part of the “Body of Christ,” the 144,000 — would be offered on a wide scale during the Gospel Age. But few would be willing to offer themselves in totality to the dedicated consecration needed. Few would end up being chosen to enter the “race.”

Jesus divided Christianity into “Wheat and Tares” in his parable in Matthew 13. “Tares” are imitation “wheat.” Thus many “Christians” are not truly fully-consecrated, dedicated, and sacrificing individuals whose ONLY purpose in life is being a faithful disciple and follower of Jesus. They are “Christians” only in a generic sense — a peripheral or nominal part of Jesus circle. However, a great many “tares” are NOT hypocrites! They are sincerely devoted to righteousness — consecrated to it. And they are “friends” of God (but they are not His “sons” — and they may not even be aware of this distinction). They constitute one group which needs Scriptural advice for behavior in this challenging day. “Tares” who insist on “bundling” themselves with today’s institutions and attitudes will find themselves “bound” — and ultimately, as Jesus predicted, to have their expectations and connections “burned” (“Go up in smoke” — as the saying goes). The old order of institutions and society will be vaporized.

The other group who need counsel for this day are the truly consecrated and sacrificing “saints” — the sons of God who are striving to be a part of Christ’s “body.”

To the “Friends” of God” —

Scripture offers specific advice to those who are in this category of His “friends.” It is written in Zephaniah 2:3, “Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances. Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the LORD’s anger.”

This is a remarkably unusual Scripture in that it says “maybe” (“perhaps”). Scripture almost never uses that idea! This is likely the case now because these “Christians” are NOT God’s “sons.” They are God’s “friends.” And, as such, they DO have certain prayer privileges along with other minimal advantages; but they do not have the absolute Divine protection suggested in Romans 8:28 and Hebrews 1:14. But they ARE God’s friends, and, consistent with their faith and with those parts of God’s plan progressing in the earth, they will “perhaps be hidden.” “Hidden” MAY mean spared from the worst of things by being at the right place at the right time. It MAY mean that they might die so as not to experience the worst of the Time of Trouble. It MAY mean that their neighbors so much respect their characters that the neighbors help to shield them from things. It MAY even mean that their faith structure will be strong enough that their experiences will seem lighter than will the experiences of their neighbors. Only the Lord will be able

to explain what He meant by this Zephaniah text. But, clearly, being “hidden” is something to be desired.

The text suggests the proper SEEKING which is to be done by these people. They are to seek righteousness (to which they are actually devoted), and to seek humility — teachableness (the desire to learn rather than to rant). In the context of “today,” this admonishes separateness from the political fray, from the economic grasping, from the social struggling, and from the religious fanaticism which are all so endemic in the lives of people all around us. This kind of separateness may, indeed, be difficult. But it will give the peaceable fruitage which all who are sincere toward God desire.

To the “Saints” of God —

While the total devotion and consecration of this group has always granted them special prayer and protection privileges, “today” can prove a special trial for the sincerity of their spirituality. Revelation 3:10 predicted that our “today” would be an “hour of testing that would come upon the whole earth to test those who dwell upon the earth.” “Those who dwell upon the earth” is a Revelation code for people who have roots in the present order or way of doing things. IF saints keep themselves from ANY connections or roots in the political, economic, social, and religious affairs of “today,” they WILL be spared the attendant “testing” which is going on. But if they even dabble in these things, they are subject to terrible purging experiences from the Lord who does NOT want his saints to confuse the sacred with the profane. (Ezekiel 42:20; 44:23)

Jesus warned that our “today” would have such deceptions as would, “if possible, deceive the very elect.” (Matthew 24:24) We cannot take his words lightly. He is speaking of subtleties! He is telling us that the final members of his Church on the earth would be subjected to tests of their character designed to make them ready in the little time which is left for the completion of the Church. It is not a time to get caught up in the excitement, the conspiracies, the fears, and the concerns which today hold the entire world in their grasp.

“Today” has throughout the age been a day for a Christian to work on his character development. THAT duty and pursuit have not changed just because the world is changing. So the question for the Church — “What do we do now?” — has not changed. It remains to develop personal character and to edify the other saints. Current circumstances in that respect have changed nothing. Paul summarizes our commission in Hebrews 3:7, 13, and 15. He is speaking of the “today” of the entire Christian Age. But that age has been simply one “today” after another.

“Today” will soon become “tomorrow.” By the Lord’s grace, let us be ready for it — not overwhelmed by the complexities of our perishing world.

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