

Foretastes of the End Time

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Eccl. 3:1 *For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:*

A Change in the Season

Deep within our hearts, all of us here know that to know Jesus is life-transforming, and good for us personally, and for indeed wonderful for any person. Where society as a whole, comes to know Christ, in large numbers, and where people structure their community life, family, worship culture, and even their society according to the ways of love, mercy, grace and justice that we know in Jesus Christ—there are many blessings, that flow.

It is a fact of the Christian life that we will encounter resistance, and be opposed. Jesus promised that we would. “If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you.” (John 15:18) In a Muslim, Hindu or perhaps Communist society, opposition can be in the form of violence, or legal pressure, or prison. Here, it is often in the form of apathy, argumentative people, or caustic bitter critics, active atheism, or just daily body language—rationalising you as having gone all ‘religious’.

However, we need to know, that the gospel is not always simple resisted. In God’s world, there have been—and we trust, will continue to be—times and seasons of people being awakened.

Memorial Stones

Joshua 4:1-24 tells how God instructed Joshua to raise up a memorial of twelve stones, to remind the people of a very significant event in history—the crossing of the river Jordan on dry land *as the water flow stood still* (Joshua 3:16). How sad it is, for the confidence of God’s people, when great events of the past are forgotten. This talk is to raise up some memorial stones, recall the amazing moves of the Spirit, and be encouraged to seek similar outpourings, in a new, genuine way, happening in our day.

I barrack for a certain football club, who has put up their trophies on display - to remind them that the normal thing they expect is premiership success. These trophies are very good to be able to look at, in the down times, when, the new breed of players has gone soft, and things are not so good - for the moment at least.

Christian Life

As people of hope, we anticipate great days in the age to come! By the Spirit, Jesus sometimes gives us such a rich foretaste of what he is about in history, that we experience in our lives, in this age, incredible fellowship, love, communion and joy. My parents used to own a two-story house near the lookout as you come into Victor, on the top of Kleinig’s hill. One year after summer school, I can remember looking out over Victor Harbor, on the Friday evening, after tea with mum and dad. It was balmy, and I was so at peace with Christ, and everyone and everything, that I said, to Lynne, (who often says I whinge too much): *I am happy. I am actually happy!*

My Task

I have often enjoyed hearing about the lovely movements of God’s Spirit, which have awakened whole communities of people to love and enjoy Christ Jesus in their lives.

Warburton—An Australian Favourite

In Western Australia, there is a remote township of predominantly Aboriginal people, called Warburton—it is roughly half way between Alice Springs and Kalgoorlie, 1000km each way. Friends of mine Jerry and Denise Moss have worked their in recent years. Warburton, was once dubbed by the Western Australian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs as the worst place in Australia. In March, 1979 on Elcho Island in the Northern Territory, there was an amazing awakening, revival, renewal in the Holy Spirit, so powerful that it spread across through Arnhem Land, and down to Warburton in Western Australia. This is just a little first-hand snippet of what happened:

‘Many people have been delivered from alcohol and from fear. The devil has tried to trap them, but they have been set free. **I have been thankful to God that just after the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs said that Warburton Ranges was the worst place in Australia, now it has become a happy place.** God has touched that area which was the worst place. ‘Every month we have a service of communion here and we pray for people who have problems, diseases, or are possessed with demons, and we have seen them healed. During that revival there was nearly a week when no one went to hospital. The nursing sister came in, “Nobody has been coming to the hospital, but the people are really rejoicing”.

Q. How did that happen? Well, Jesus came to the town, and was welcomed!

China

We will come back to South Australia, later but I want to remind you of what has happened in China since, Chairman Mao stamped out public Christian faith in 1969.

In 2004, Lynne, Jonathan and I visited China. We went to church in a publicly approved 3-self church, in Shantou (5 million Port) and met the Pastor, who’s Parish was 15,000 people. He said that 3000 of them took it on turns to be in the choir.

Jason Mandryk in 7th Edition of “Operation World”, says,

“The survival and growth of the Church in China are two of the decisive events of our generation. The staggering recent growth of the Chinese Church has no parallel in history - from 2.7 million evangelicals in 1975 to over 75 million in 2010.

It is estimated there are 120 million Christians there now. The China Post mail delivery service goes into the Amity Press of the Bible Society and distributes the Bibles, as an approved service by the Chinese Government. People are very keen to love Christ, and share his Word in the hardest zone, of largely Muslim people, between China and eastward to Jerusalem. The Bible Society has just printed a New Version of the Bible in modern Chinese. Since about 1919 they have had a sort of old fashioned, difficult to read “AV”.

Wales

It was 1904. All Wales was aflame. The nation had drifted far from God. The spiritual conditions were low indeed. Church attendance was poor. And sin abounded on every side. Suddenly, like an unexpected tornado, the Spirit of God swept over the land. The churches were crowded so that multitudes were unable to get in. Meetings lasted from ten in the morning until twelve at night. Three definite services were held each day. Evan Roberts was the human instrument, but there was very little preaching. Singing, testimony, and prayer, were the chief features. There were no hymn books; they had learnt the hymns in childhood. No choir, for everybody sang. No collection; and no

advertising. Nothing had ever come over Wales with such far-reaching results. Infidels were converted, drunkards, thieves, and gamblers saved; and thousands reclaimed to respectability. Confessions of awful sins were heard on every side. Old debts were paid. The theatre had to leave for want of patronage. Mules in the coal mines refused to work, being unused to kindness. In five weeks 20,000 joined the churches.

Pakistan

The following excerpts detail some experiences of revival in Pakistan in the 1960's:

A MUSLIM said he had been seeking God for years but could not find him in Islam, in spite of constant reading of the Koran, and faithfulness in his prayer. Out in the desert he had had a vision of great water flowing, bringing life to the desert and to him, and a voice told him it was the water of life, and he would receive this in the city of Hyderabad. He had walked into the church—an unusual thing for a Muslim to do—and he had heard of Christ as being the water of life. The message of the Cross affected him deeply, and now he knew a fountain of life's water was springing up within him.

ON THE last night of the meetings the pastors walked to the door to shake hands with the people as they left the church. Only a few folk did that, and even they hung around the door, as though anticipating something. I, who for years had dreamed and prayed and longed to see revival, had sensed God would do something even more wonderful than the things we had witnessed. Each night there would be over one hundred people praying at midnight and no less than fifty when the day broke at dawn. I—with the other two pastors—was wondering what might happen.

Suddenly something happened. The whole congregation broke out in spontaneous singing. It was singing, yet singing like nothing I had ever heard. The songs were well known and were in both Urdu and Punjabi, and some even in Gujerati, but it was the beauty and the sweetness of the singing that was beyond description. Joy was flooding the whole congregation. Nothing was organised or led by the pastors or others.

After some of the songs, some members of the congregation would rise and embrace others with tears of joyful reconciliation. Occasionally someone would stand and read a passage of Scripture so that some promise or encouragement would come to all. As the passages were read they would seem to fit the occasion, and seem to be adding one to the other on the themes of love, forgiveness, cleansing, fellowship and unity.

The few folk who had gone out hurried back into the building and joined the others. The pastors had gone to the vestry and people came in and out of that room, being helped by their ministers, or bringing others with them to receive Christ as their Lord and Saviour. The meeting which was supposed to complete the teaching series went on and on, through midnight, and until the morning. The congregation never seemed to weary. Here and there a person rose and went home, but on the whole no one wanted to miss what might happen next. Many stood before the congregation and shared what God had done in their lives over the months, and in particular, during the series of meetings, and even on that night.

Certainly love had come to the church—the pastors and the people. Folk demanded that the meetings continue, but the pastors were firm. There would be a late-afternoon meeting each day, but folk were to have their evening meal at home. After that, if meetings happened spontaneously, then they would be in order. What happened was that folk decided to meet in this home or that, and the pastors and I were called to minister to them.

Each night when we returned to the compound we could hear folk singing in their own homes. We—my wife and I—would get out a hymn book and sing together, something we had not previously done. Music was in the air, singing kept wanting to express itself from the heart. Worship was as pure as I have ever known it anywhere. Teaching began to be the gift of some of the younger as well as the older men.¹

The most outstanding memory is of a lady missionary, well known to everyone as an acerbic, straight-talking, no-nonsense and honest woman. I think most people—missionaries and nationals alike—admired her, though many were also scared of her, afraid ever to cross words in conversation or discussion. She had been thirty-five years on the field and seemed immensely devoted to her work.

I can see her now in a state of horror as she cried out, 'I have never loved the Pakistanis. Not in thirty-five years have I ever loved one of them. I have only been critical and suspicious and cynical. Now I see I have been wrong. I am their sister in Christ, and they are my brethren, and I have never loved them.'

She was deeply shocked at herself. She did not doubt she was a Christian, but that made the whole matter just so much more terrible. She wondered how she could ever have gotten into the state of mind and the attitude that had become so fixed. She wept.

It was very beautiful to see her become a loving and tender woman, and also to see the affection the national brethren gave to her. Those hours were very holy ones.²

The final chapter, 'Lovefest Three' warrants a full reading. This is a taste:

From then onwards was a stream of happenings, phenomena which often attend revivals. Given in what we would call supernatural happenings, and accepting these phenomena, the greatest of them all was the love which came upon the whole group. It was indescribable; it was the most notable thing of all.³

... At the end of that service a very beautiful Urdu song began to well up within me, and I sang it. I did not know what words were coming next—but they came! When it was finished there was scarcely a dry eye.Where did you get it? It is the sort of song that is like our old folk-songs—from a thousand years ago!' Certainly it was a strange and beautiful song.

The old sense of inferiority which had dogged many Pakistani Christians for generations was gone.

The last meeting was so memorable ... I was about to give the blessing when suddenly the song I had sung at Hyderabad, and whose words and lines I had forgotten, began afresh, of itself, so to speak.... I know I will never see love in quite the same light as ...that night.

Wudinna, South Australia

Perhaps one of the most memorable series of meetings in country South Australia, that many of us could easily relate to, are the events that took place at Wudinna in 1969, 1970, 1971. Dean Meatheringham was the Methodist minister over there, and there was a very significant turning to the Lord, in fairly large numbers. Geoff Bingham was the visiting speaker, or missionary, and there had been numerous genuine prayer meetings in preparation for the event.

¹ Geoffrey Bingham, 'Lovefest One', in *Twice Conquering Love*, NCPI, Blackwood, 1993, p. 135-137

² Geoffrey Bingham, 'Lovefest Two', in *Twice Conquering Love*, p. 142-143

³ Geoffrey Bingham, 'Lovefest Three', in *Twice Conquering Love*, p. 155, through to p.158