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TOUCH TIMES

Life is difficult. We live in uncertain times.

And it's not going to get any better (especially if you're a Christian). I'm not a pessimist, but that's the hard and sobering reality.

This shouldn't surprise us. When Jesus was asked about the signs of the end of the age He replied, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. . . . Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of the birth pains" (Mt. 24:4-8).

He then went on to tell His disciples, "You will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other. . . . Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold" (vv. 9-12).

As history unfolds, the days are going to get more difficult. Don't let any politician (or preacher) tell you otherwise. Jesus' statements in Matthew 24 begin with this sober plea, "Watch out that no one deceives you" (v. 4).

The Apostle Paul was deeply concerned that we not be fooled. He wrote, "But *mark this*: There will be terrible times in the last days" (2 Tim. 3:1). Paul was imploring his young son in the faith to realize and understand something, to not be naïve: Times are going to get tougher as the Second Coming of Christ approaches. "People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (vv. 2-4).

Paul follows this list by warning, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12). So much for triumphal thinking.

Does this mean we are to hang our heads and abandon our posts as those called to take dominion? After all, "If the world is doomed and it's all going to burn up in the end, shouldn't we just pack our bags, retreat to the safety of our 'holy-huddles,' and hold out until He comes?"

Absolutely not! We must understand that though this world is fast sinking, human history is going somewhere gloriously wonderful. One day the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our God (Rev. 11:15). In light of this, Peter tells us to "look forward to the day of God, . . . to a new heaven and a new earth" (2 Pet. 3:12-13). And then he admonishes us with these words, "Make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (3:14).

I want our students to live well. I want them to die well.

I also want them to suffer well.

So we tell our students that there is an all-wise God who is sovereign, working out all things for good. We tell them that this God will not abandon His creation, and that He can be trusted.

We also tell them that they're going to suffer. I don't want them to be "surprised at the painful trial . . . as though something strange were happening to (them) (see 1 Pet. 4:12). Trials are part of life on a sin-cursed planet. Even more, trials are part of what it means to carry the cross and be in allegiance with Christ—especially in the last days.

Just as Paul wrote to one group of believers, we don't want anyone to be "unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them" (1 Thess. 3:3). So we don't tickle our students with empty platitudes suggesting that everything is going to be okay and that the best is yet to come—not here at least.

These are perilous days, but we need not fear. Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33).