

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry
for the Christian community*

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COMING OUT OF LOCKDOWN – Part 3

April 2021. Here in the UK, we are at present in the middle of a huge national vaccination programme, and the incidence of Covid-19 infections and deaths has fallen dramatically. Only time will tell if this is lasting, or whether a new wave of the virus will sweep across the land, as it is doing in many other countries currently. As a result of the present relaxation of the rules, many Christian churches and groups are slowly and tentatively returning to physical meetings, albeit with social distancing, wearing of masks, and limited numbers. Generally, there is still a limit of 30 people allowed to meet at any one time for a service, and so use of the internet is still a common means of worship and fellowship, especially now with increasing livestreaming of services, funerals, etc.

In this series of studies, we are taking the unprecedented worldwide Covid-19 attack, and consequent lockdown conditions, together with humanity's yearning for a return to some sort of normality, and seeing the way in which all this is a remarkable illustration of the whole human situation in the 6000 years since the Fall. In Part 1 we examined the condition of lockdown in its broadest and biblical sense, together with God's plan through the Gospel for our freedom from this universal lockdown. We also saw the challenging conflicts our freedom brings about in the present life for those who follow Jesus. In Part 2 we looked at three of those conflicts in more detail, and sought to draw some of the conclusions that are relevant to the Church's duty as God's voice to the world.

Here in Part 3, we are looking at the force of the scriptures which indicate our duties to the Lord when we see the signs that He advised us would clearly herald His imminent return for His Bride. We note the personal responsibilities of each individual Christian who will be alive when He returns, as we consider five of the instructions which Jesus has given us, indicating what He will look for on His return. They show the readiness required of His people at the ultimate moment when the Church permanently and collectively comes fully out of lockdown – the occasion of the Church's rapture into eternity, with each of us receiving resurrection newness of life in the Lord's presence.

1. Faithfulness to the Lord and His Word – Matthew 24 v 12 – 13

Jesus will be looking for those who have stood firm against the onslaught of wickedness *to the end*, which in this context means when He returns. When Jesus says that the love of most will grow cold, it implies that most Christians then alive did once love Him, but so easily lost their first love - the love they had at first, and which puts Jesus first (Revelation 2 v 4). Our love for Jesus is demonstrated primarily in how we think and act, not just how we feel, for He is the Truth that sets us free (John 8 v 31 – 32). The Lord made it clear that if we love Him, we will obey Him (John 15 v 10). If we are not faithful to the Lord's Word, the Bible, it is a firm indication that we are not being faithful in our love for Him. The true definition of wickedness is believing anything other than the truth given to us by the Lord - His Word. John 8 v 44 speaks powerfully about this, for what a person believes will determine how they act, and the character they display. Satan does not mind what people believe, so long as they do not believe the Word of God, thus undermining their love for the Lord. The attacks on the Bible today are not just from the world – those attacks have always been there – but the desperate state of unbelief in the church. Particularly in the English-speaking world we have a vast resource of faithful Bible teaching and teaching aids, stretching back centuries. So, it is no excuse to say the Bible is too complicated for us to understand, and that we must interpret it in accordance with our own preconceptions and cultural preferences. The rapid loss of biblical authority and belief today amongst Christians is staggering. This includes ignoring the fundamental nature, power and justice of God when considering origins and the rest of the first eleven chapters of Genesis (Romans 1 v 20 – 21); the essential uniqueness of the Gospel of Jesus (John 3 v 16 and 14 v 6); the permanent covenant God has with the nation of Israel in respect of the land and Abraham's descendants (Jeremiah 33 v 23 – 26); the Millennial Reign of Jesus on earth (Isaiah 9 v 7 and Revelation 20 v 1 – 6); the true nature of marriage as instituted by God (Genesis 2 v 20b – 24, Matthew 19 v 4 - 6); and so much more.

2. Faithfulness in service and obedience to the work He has given us – Matthew 24 v 45 – 46 & Luke 12 v 42 - 43

Giving the servants in the household food at the proper time refers to spiritual provision and care, but also includes practical love and protection, not just teaching. It means, quite simply, that when He returns the Lord expects us to be faithfully carrying out the tasks we have been given, without slacking and with continuing love, gentleness, and wisdom, especially looking after others in the Christian family. The duties listed in Ephesians 4 v 11, such as prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (the apostles have gone to their rest and left us their continuing authority in the form of the New Testament writings) are obvious examples, but I believe the Lord's words here refer to all duties of care He has laid upon us. This includes parenting, friendship, good neighbourliness, prayer and intercession, and service as Christians in whatever form, whether in the Church or in society around us. Knowing that the end times are going to be tough is not an excuse for giving up, unless the Lord has made it very clear that we are to bring a work to an end. If this does happen, He usually gives us other duties instead.

3. Stewardship of the gifts and resources we have been given - Matthew 25 v 19

Whether or not this chapter refers particularly to the aftermath of the Rapture (I believe it does), the whole of this passage (Matthew 25 v 14 – 30) involves a principle of stewardship which is always fundamental in the Lord's work. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not egotistical playthings, given as rewards or to confer superior status. The gifts, including gifts of leadership, are for service, and the more gifts we have, the more we are expected to serve others with humility (Philippians 2 v 1 – 13). Similarly, this applies to the resources we find ourselves blessed by, particularly those Christians who live in the more wealthy and free societies around the world, and where the Gospel has had so much of an impact over the centuries. It is always good to "count our many blessings", especially financial and political ones, and to use them as much as possible for the glory of God and the blessing of others. I find it very humbling when I consider all the conveniences of our present era, and then realise the huge amount of effort put in by past generations of believers, and even by Christians today in less-favoured societies. This stewardship will be carefully assessed at the Lord's "judgement seat", as He apportions rewards (2 Corinthians 5 v 10).

4. Alertness, especially to the enemy - Mark 13 v 33 – 37

The Lord has put His people in charge of His work: giving the Gospel call worldwide; being salt and light in a dark world; acting as ambassadors of a very different kingdom. As we do not know when Jesus shall return, we must always be alert and watching for any attack on His interests, and that means constant spiritual warfare. Whether the enemy goes about as a roaring lion, or as an angel of light, we cannot let up our guard, and in any case, we have the Holy Spirit and spiritual armour to help us - if we are walking in the light of His Word. There is a very instructive parallel in modern life today. We are being warned constantly about the danger of hackers, scams, phishing, false phone calls, cyber-attacks, and many other attempts to breach our personal and financial security in the world of communications. If we are so aware of the need for continual vigilance in that area, we should be equally aware of our responsibilities in areas of the Lord's interests. It is so easy on occasions of conflict, attack, personal setbacks, dangers, etc, to just think in worldly terms of personalities, politics, opinions, emotions, psychology, etc., instead of looking for the underlying cause of satanic activity. When we do have that spiritual discernment of enemy attack, we can be far more effective in dealing with the real issues that threaten to undermine the work of God entrusted to us.

5. Righteousness as we prepare for His appearing – 1 John 3 v 2 – 3

We are still "work in progress", but our desire should be to be ready in character and behaviour for the moment of His appearing. Maybe this is hard work, but it is work in which we are to be engaged when He comes back to take us home; or, for that matter, even if we should be ushered into His presence suddenly through death. If we are so keen to see and be with the Lord, we should live daily with the deep desire to be ready in every possible way. This is not just our behaviour and service, but the underlying attitude of our hearts (Matthew 6 v 21). The trouble is that we can so easily become preoccupied with the everyday events of life – as legitimate as they may be – that we neglect our spiritual development. The Lord gave a warning of this happening in Luke 18 v 8, and this was said in connection with a failure to earnestly plead with God for the justice of righteousness to be seen and done throughout His creation. That can only happen after Jesus returns, which means we should have a great concern at the godlessness and evil of the lockdown conditions prevalent over the past 6000 years, pleading for His appearing and an end to all unrighteousness. If an unjust judge has to bow before the force of God's righteousness, how much more should we plead for the reign of righteousness which by faith we believe lies before us, ultimately for the whole of creation.