

THE ALTERNATIVE TO GLOOM AND DOOM

I don't know about you, but I sometimes get tired of all of this "***gloom and doom***" preached by the news media these days. Now don't get me wrong—we need to be informed about the very seriousness of the crisis going on all around us in the world today—I certainly agree with that. But, is a steady stream of stories containing nothing but death and hopelessness really a balanced picture of what is going on all around us? Is there no hope? Yes, there certainly are. And for our purposes this morning, I would like for you to think about the Bible and the message of hope and love that it offers to you in both good times and the bad ones as well. You see, the Bible is the Word of God. And God's Word gives us the truth. It tells us the truth about how things really are. And the truth is that hearing about "***gloom and doom***" isn't necessarily a bad thing as long as it's balanced with the rest of the truth—and the rest of the truth contains the offer of hope that we have through Jesus Christ. So in these troubled times, I want you to consider the real "***gloom and doom***" that confronts us all, as well as the alternative that is available to you through faith in Christ.

In years past, it would not be unusual to go to church and you'd hear what might be referred to as "***gloom and doom***" sermons. They were sermons that would mention the prospects of a person's eventual death and would sometimes try to scare people into turning to God. And when I say, "***in years past***", I am talking about "***ancient times***". But the thing is that as far as some young people today are concerned, the 1950's and 1970's would be considered "***ancient times***". Accordingly, I—along with many of you—we are part of the "***ancient past***" in the eyes of some younger people. In any event, let me ask you this: In today's world, do we need a return to those "***gloom and doom***" sermons of the "***ancient past***"? Well, let me give you a typical lawyer answer to that. In response to the question, "***Do people need 'gloom and doom' sermons today***", the answer is . . . "***IT DEPENDS.***" (Now that, indeed, is a typical lawyer answer!) And yet, it is a true answer. In fact, it is an answer suggested by Jesus in one of the parables that He gave to His disciples.

In the 24th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus' disciples asked Him when the ***End of Time*** would take place. Now, that's a "***gloomy-doomy***" question. But, Jesus did not give a totally gloomy answer. Rather, He gave a ***balanced answer*** that provides a clear alternative to the doom that we face. In response to their question, Jesus offered a short parable about two different servants and their very different responses to the prospects of the ***End of Time***. Jesus turned to His disciples and said:

⁴⁴ You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected. ⁴⁵ "A faithful, sensible servant is one to whom the master can give the responsibility of managing his other household servants and feeding them. ⁴⁶ If the master returns and finds that the servant

has done a good job, there will be a reward.⁴⁷ I tell you the truth, the master will put that servant in charge of all he owns.⁴⁸ But what if the servant is evil and thinks, ‘My master won’t be back for a while,’⁴⁹ and he begins beating the other servants, partying, and getting drunk?⁵⁰ The master will return unannounced and unexpected,⁵¹ and he will cut the servant to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Matthew 24:44-51 (NLT2)

You see, there are two different “**ends of time**” that you need to think about. One is the **End of Time** involving the return of Jesus when He, indeed, will make all things new. That, of course, is a time that Christians long for. It is a time that the evils of this world will vanish when Christ returns and we will see a “**new heaven and a new earth.**” (Revelation 21:1-2) And it will be a new earth in which there will be no more fighting, no more war—rather it will be a time when men will “**beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks, nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.**” (Isaiah 2:4) It will be a new age, where “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things [will be] passed away.” Revelation 21:4 (KJV) There’s no gloom at the **End of Time** for those in Christ. Rather, it’s pure joy, but only if you are like that first servant Jesus mentioned—the one who was found, in His Master’s absence, to be a faithful servant whom, when His Master returned, found him to be diligently pursuing His Master’s interests.

But, for the unfaithful servant, Jesus’ parable paints a very different picture—one in which the balance shifts from joy to sorrow—or, if you like, to “**gloom and doom.**” For those who are found engaged in the evils of this world upon Jesus’ return, it will be a time of judgment. And, according to Jesus’ parable, for them it will be a time of “**weeping and gnashing of teeth.**” So what does that mean—“**weeping and gnashing of teeth**”? Well, this is an expression used repeatedly in the New Testament that applies to those who are overcome with a raging despair coupled with extreme grief and regret. It often refers to the reaction of those who are judged by Christ at the End of Time and are found wanting due to their sinfulness and their failure to ever take the time to repent. Consequently, they are consigned to an eternity in a place called Hell. (Matthew 8:12, 13:42.)¹ But, this parable doesn’t give a despairing picture simply for the sake of provoking despair. Rather, Jesus gave this parable to provide an alarm—a warning for those who, like the unfaithful servant, remain content to bide their time in doing whatever evil they wish because their attitude is something like this—they say to themselves, “**My master won’t be back for a while—I’ll do as I please and then change just before he shows up.**” But, that’s just it—they don’t know when the Master is coming.

You see, Jesus reference to the **“End of Time”** also applies to each and every one of us on a personal level—not only to the cosmic **“End of Time”** marked by the Second Coming of Christ. On that personal level, you will definitely experience the **“end of YOUR time”** when your days here on this earth are concluded. And, that may well occur before Jesus comes again. And just like the two servants who were found doing opposite things, you will be found in one of two positions at the time of your own demise. You will either be a faithful servant of Christ—and have eternal life lined up for your future in the Kingdom of Heaven; or, you will have wasted your time here on earth and will have failed get to know God and surrender your life to Him. In the latter case, you will, indeed, find out exactly what **“weeping and gnashing of teeth”** means as you regretfully ponder for all eternity why you never took the time to enter into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Now, I know what some of you are thinking: “Oh boy, now there he goes preaching his own little **‘gloom and doom’** sermon—how typical, isn’t that just like a lawyer!” And yet, just because we talk about what many see as two very unpleasant realities (i.e., death and Hell), it doesn’t follow that the message is all **“gloom and doom”**. You are faced with the decision of changing that **“gloom and doom”** to great joy in eternal security. You have a choice to make, because in the end you ultimately are the one responsible for choosing what your fate will be—whether it’s in Heaven or in Hell. You see, before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, Moses informed them of the choices that God laid before them. Moses said: ² ***If you and your descendants will turn back to the LORD and with all your heart obey His commands that I am giving you today,*** ³ ***then the LORD your God will have mercy on you. . . .*** ¹⁹ ***I am now giving you the choice between life and death, between God’s blessing and God’s curse, and I call heaven and earth to witness the choice you make.*** [And then Moses gives some incredibly good advice when he says:] ***Choose life.*** ²⁰ ***Love the LORD your God, obey Him and be faithful to Him . . .***” Deuteronomy 30:2-3, 30:19-20a (TEV)

God offers you the choice between life and death today. That’s the message for those who don’t know Jesus. In asking the earlier question as to whether or not we need more **“gloom or doom”** sermons, I said that the answer is, **“IT DEPENDS.”** Depends on what? Well, it depends upon whether you are saved or not—it’s that simple. If you are not saved, then yeah—You need to hear quite a few **“gloom or doom”** sermons until you wake up to the reality of the eternal nature of God’s Kingdom and answer the question as to whether or not you want to be part of that Kingdom. The last thing that I want to hear when I appear before Jesus at the **End of Time** is for Him to turn to me and say: **“Well, you know what—here’s the problem. I’ve had to judge some folks who heard you preach in my little church down in Louisa, Virginia—the one named ‘Forest Hill Baptist Church’.** And when I find some of

them disqualified from entering my eternal Heavenly Kingdom, the biggest complaint that they have about my judgment against them is that you that never told them about their need to repent—and you failed to mention anything about an eternity in Hell. They all said, ‘I could have used a few *‘gloom or doom sermons’*, but all that guy ever fed me was a bunch of *pleasant feel-good stories and some cute little jokes. What I really needed was the truth.*” Man, that’s one of the last things that I want Jesus to ever say to me. I don’t want that on my head and neither do you.

So all of us, as Christians, we have to take on our obligation. We are obligated to witness and share the truth of God’s Word with others. I know that times are tough, but when times are especially difficult, they usually provide us with greatest opportunities to spread the hope and love on Jesus Christ. There will come a time when Christians will look back on this terrible coronavirus crisis, and see the amazing time for witnessing that we are now living in. We cannot afford to miss these opportunities to share the Good News of hope with others. It reminds me of something that Bear Bryant once told his football players before one of their big games. Some of us who grew up in the “*ancient past*” of the 1950’s through 1970’s know who Bear Bryant was. But, for others who are not familiar with him—he was the football coach of the Alabama Crimson Tide and is considered by many college football fans to be one of the greatest college football coaches of all time. During his coaching career, Bear Bryant won 323 wins games, took 29 teams to bowl games and led 15 of his teams to conference championships. Another coach who was one of his competitors put it this way: “*He wasn’t just a coach; he was THE coach.*” John Croyle was an All-American defensive end on Coach Bryant’s 1973 national championship team. He described one of Coach Bryant’s pregame speeches as follows:

As we sat in the locker room, Coach Bryant paced in front of his assembled team as the band played for the capacity crowd waiting outside in the stadium. He made eye contact with each player as he spoke the following words: ‘In this game, there are going to be four or five plays that will determine the outcome of this contest—four or five plays that will swing the momentum toward us, or away from us. I don’t know which plays these will be. You don’t know which plays these will be. All you can do is go out there and give all that you have on each and every play. If you are doing that on one of those crucial plays, and you catch your opponent giving less, that play will swing things in our direction. And if we rise to the occasion like that, on those four or five plays, we are gonna leave here today a winner.’²

That is where we, as Christians, find ourselves today during the current health and economic crisis in which we are engaged in. But for us, it’s not just four or five football plays that are involved. No, the outcome concerns something immensely greater than the outcome of a ballgame. Rather, how we apply ourselves as witnesses to the love of Jesus Christ may make all of the difference in the salvation of those who are struggling all around us—looking for a source of hope to cling to. They may

not even know it, but that source of hope is Jesus Christ. And we too, like the players on Coach Bryant's team, need to be prepared to **"give all that we have on each and every play."** It is not so much that you will always need to deliver some **"gloom and doom"** message to them—with some it may be appropriate, but with others not. Actually, our attitude in witnessing should be a little less **"gloom and doom"**, and a lot more **"plant and bloom"**. God's Word is what we plant. The Word of God provides the seeds of faith and hope that we must sow. And we plant these seeds into the hearts of loved ones, friends, neighbors, co-workers—or even that person standing six feet away from us in line at Food Lion who doesn't know Jesus Christ. If we will just plant that seed—for those who will respond—something amazing will happen. God will see to it that that seed grows to full bloom as those who are receptive will find the truth and come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. (1 Corinthians 3:7.)

I saw a video on the TV of a doctor singing a song while another doctor accompanied him on the piano. They were trying to lift the spirits of those in their hospital who were so exhausted by combating the virus. The song being sung was John Lennon's, *Imagine*. We have all heard the lyrics: **"Imagine all the people, living for today—ay, ay."** We need to plant a new song in our hearts, with different lyrics—a song that sings: **"Imagine all the people, living for Jesus Christ today—ay, ay."** If you live that song out in your life, you won't need any **gloom and doom sermon** that confronts you with the prospects of Hell, just to motivate someone to try to get to Heaven. Actually, if your motivation to get into Heaven is solely to avoid Hell, then your chances of ending up in Hell and never seeing God's Kingdom are far greater than you might think. Why?—because that is such a self-centered approach to eternity. Those who will see Heaven aren't **self-centered**; rather they are **Christ-centered**. And when you are Christ-centered your ticket to Heaven is based upon loving the **"THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND"** and loving **"YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."** Matthew 22:37-39 (NASB)

At the outset, I asked you to consider the **"gloom and doom"** that really confronts people, as compared to the alternative of hope in eternal life offered through Jesus Christ. The **"gloom and doom"** that un-believers face is bound up in a question that they avoid asking themselves. So what's the question? Well, it's this—they avoid asking themselves: **"What's going to happen to me when I die?"** It's a very unsettling question for anyone who has never come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. I love the way Pastor Greg Laurie put it in a recent article when he wrote: **"What's going to happen to you when you die? Does death freak you out? If you're not a Christian, death should freak you out. You should be scared to death of death. But if you know Jesus, you don't have to be afraid."**³

If you don't have a relationship with Jesus Christ today, maybe it's time for you to trade in all of your "***gloom and doom***" and replace it with the security of eternal life in God's Kingdom. Choosing life over death—it's the only sensible choice to make. If you do have a solid relationship with Jesus—my advice is this in sharing His Good News with others: Go light on the "***gloom and doom***" sermons, yet never fail to tell the truth about the reality of both Heaven and Hell. And, never miss an opportunity to witness for Christ—Coach Bryant's plea to make every play count stands for us as well. But, in the game of life, winning a single soul to Christ is far more valuable than all the national championship games ever played.

So, do we need a little "***gloom and doom***" in our lives? Yes—but only to the extent that it gives us a perspective on the choices that lie before us—the choices between life and death. Chose life!—chose Jesus Christ today.

Amen.

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¹ Dictionary of New Testament Background, Craig A. Evans & Stanley E. Porter, Editors, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of the USA (2000), Database 2006 WORDsearch Corp.; Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Chad Brand, et al., General Editors, Holman Bible Publishers (2003) Database 2014 WORDsearch Corp.

² "Coach Bear Bryant Urges His Players to Stay Alert," Preachtoday.com, offered by Dave Bolin, Gadsden, Alabama.

³ Greg Laurie, "Why Did Jesus Have to Die?", Decision Magazine, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, Vol. 61, Number 4, April 2020, p. 10.