

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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THEN SUDDENLY DESTRUCTION WILL HIT

While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. (1 Thessalonians 5.3-6 NASB)

Since the end of World War II, we have seen the greatest economic and technological expansion in the history of the world and its nations. At the forefront of this expansion has been the United States that became the sole super power of the world that, with its goodwill, has greatly helped many nations around the globe. Unfortunately, it has exported many of its excesses as well.

It is said that the 1990's was a period of peace and safety (or security) as the United States experienced an unprecedented time of economic growth and prosperity. But then in 2000, the economy began to sputter, and there was talk of recession. That same year, we had a very tumultuous presidential election that was settled by the Supreme Court and ended with George W. Bush becoming the President of the United States. And then September 11, 2001 came along and all of a sudden, without any warning, the United States was attacked. That day was almost beyond comprehension as many of us were glued to our televisions watching the two twin towers of the World Trade Center crumble to the ground, killing many who were unable to escape this sudden destruction. In addition to the tragic loss of lives and the many families that were torn asunder, the economy of the country began to stagger as well.

I recall that day most vividly; it was a beautiful, almost idyllic, early fall day in Virginia. The sky was a gorgeous blue with no clouds in sight and the birds were chirping happily. The spirit of God was speaking to my heart that day, for the verse that I was meditating on that morning as I stared out the window of my study was: "**And what I say unto you, I say unto all: Watch!**" (Mark 13.37 ASV).

On February 27, 1995, the Lord spoke a word to my heart that I did not begin to appreciate until September 11, 2001, nearly seven years later: "**When the structures crumble, testify of My kingdom.**" Since that day, I have tried the best that I know how to do and with the light that I have to testify of the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

We are approaching seven years since what we now call 9/11, and it is apparent that the crumbled structures include more than the two towers. They were the beginning of the birth pains, the announcement of the beginning of sudden destruction, not the end of it. Since that infamous day, we have seen many things begin to crumble. The political structure of the United States has been crumbling since the 2000 election.

I realize that there are many, including some believers, who will pounce on such a statement to put blame on George Bush. However, let me be clear that I am not in any way making that judgment. What I am stating is that the political structure of this country began to crumble as politics became more and more hateful, vicious, vindictive, and insidious on many fronts. Some would say that politics has always had some measure of this and that during Bill Clinton's presidency, it was not much different, which is true in many respects. However, has it been of this magnitude where it seems that the whole nation is divided and driven by it, and millions upon millions of dollars are spent as if we are in a war against one another? Some states have movements brewing to secede from the Union. Some have passed local ordinances to arrest the President and his Vice President if they step foot in

their town. Others are spending millions to try to ensure the President's ratings do not improve. **Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a disgrace to any people** (Proverbs 14.34). Our once great nation is no longer exalted because righteousness is no longer our heartbeat; sin is. As a nation, we need to repent and return to our Lord God as the Sovereign of the universe and all creation. Christ Jesus is our Lord!

But there is more; last summer around August, the nation began to hear of a financial storm forming on the horizon that started with something most Americans never heard of—subprime mortgages. It was not long before the storm hit us, but it did not stop with one cloud; new storm clouds seem to be forming every month that are shaking the financial system in ways that have not been seen before, or at least not for the last seventy years. There was no warning given to the American public. Sudden destruction hit as wealth vaporized as if it had never existed, and many people began to experience economic hardship. It was sudden, just like 9/11!

To add to this, the price of oil has risen to over \$100 per barrel, interest rates are dropping, mortgage rates haven't kept the same pace, the value of the dollar against other currencies has fallen dramatically, jobs are being lost, and recession is becoming more of a reality (or is it?). The Federal Reserve has been like the little Dutch boy with his finger in the dam trying to hold back the water. It keeps trying to stabilize the system, but it has not been able to bring the stability needed to calm fears and get the system working smoothly. As I am writing this, they are adding another \$200 billion to the system. I am no expert on economics, and I have no word on how this latest national crisis will be resolved, or if it will be. What I do know is that, suddenly, destruction will hit.

I normally do not use paraphrased Bibles, but the Good News Bible seems to aptly state it: **When people say, "Everything is quiet and safe," then suddenly destruction will hit them! It will come as suddenly as the pains that come upon a woman in labor, and people will not escape** (1 Thessalonians 5.3 GNB). Everything is quiet and safe, or peaceful and secure, describes the heart of the 1990's. Many were living a good life with peace and prosperity that our forefathers had never experienced. Simply, life was generally quiet and safe. But what have we experienced since entering the new millennia? Suddenly, and I might add without warning, destruction has hit us; it has been like the pains of a woman in labor. We are being hit with waves of pain. It began with a nasty presidential election from which this nation has not recovered, and very well could lead to a monumental national mistake in electing one who promises a false peace and hope. The political structure of this once great nation has begun to crumble to the point that elected officials have been ineffectively leading this nation due to their rancor and battle for power. Then the two towers, which symbolized our economic might, crumbled to the ground in one hour; we entered into war on a multitude of fronts that has taxed our military to the limit and that has not progressed as planned or hoped for, not to speak of the strain on our national budget. Even our technological might was challenged when the space shuttle Columbia disintegrated on reentry and led to a complete shutdown of the space program for a time. Then in the summer of 2007, the financial system of the United States began to crumble, and we do not know at this point when this crisis will end or how it will end.

Dear beloved in Christ, these are birth pains, and just as in childbirth, the pains come and go; each time they come they increase in intensity, until the child comes forth. We may yet have periods of stability where the pains fade away; but we can be assured that as our present eon comes to its rightful conclusion, the pains will increase until finally the child is brought forth. We do not know what the next pain will look like or when it will occur. Perhaps the current financial crisis will be the last and most painful one; but if it is, then it is a good thing, for it means that the child is coming forth. We should take great comfort in knowing that each intense pain brings us closer to the birth of the child. But what does the child signify? It signifies the bringing forth of many sons to glory (Hebrews 2.10). As Paul wrote: **For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. ... in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now** (Romans 8.19-22 NASB).

The kingdom of Christ is coming to reign over this earth, and Christ will have His sons of glory reigning with Him to lead the nations in the way of righteousness and justice. Praise God!