

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God

IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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Inhabitants of the World Learn Righteousness

It is safe to state that, in our day, Christendom has no lack of people warning of impending doom and gloom coming on the earth, whether it is global warming, terrorist attacks, economic collapse, conspiracy theories that seem to run the full gamut of fear, or the mother of all doom, Armageddon. Unfortunately, some of the fear is stoked by Christians who seem to be totally disconnected from the heart of God for the nations of this earth. They make it seem as if God, who loves the world (John 3:16), does not care about the inhabitants of the world and that all He cares about is the "church." After all, according to this thinking, most of mankind has rejected His Son, so God the Father is angry with the world and is determined to take out His anger, as if He is a frustrated god. Many have created a god who is set on destroying or annihilating this world because he is an angry and vengeful god. In my estimation, this is a god in the image of man. Don't take me wrong: our God must judge this world, and perhaps some of what people see coming will happen; but let us not lose sight of what scripture reveals about our God.

God is love (1 John 4:8, 16), and He loves this old world created through His Son and loves every person that He has breathed the spirit of life into since Adam was first formed from the soil of the earth. *God was in Christ conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses to them* (2 Corinthians 5:19 CLV). *Through Christ, God is reconciling all in the heavens and on the earth to Himself, making peace through the blood of His cross* (Colossians 1:20). God's purpose of the eons is to save all mankind because He is the Savior of all mankind, especially of believers (1 Timothy 4:10); it does not state *exclusively of believers*, as if to exclude the rest of mankind. *God works all things after the counsel of His will* (Ephesians 1:11), and *He will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth* (1 Timothy 2:4 KJV),

This is only a drop in the bucket of what scripture reveals to us about the heart of God for mankind. God has purposed through His Son to save all mankind, not to save a few and destroy the rest. The judgment of God is for correction and purging, not for eternal destruction or eternal torture in a place many call *hell*. Surely, judgment will lead to a second type of death (of works) for many, but even death will be abolished at the consummation of the ages. God has a glorious purpose in His judgments.

Consider what Isaiah tells us of the judgments of God.

The way of the righteous is smooth; O Upright One, make the path of the righteous level. Indeed, while following the way of Your judgments, O LORD, we have waited for You eagerly; Your name, even Your memory, is the desire of our souls. At night my soul longs for You, indeed, my spirit within me seeks You diligently; ***for when the earth experiences Your judgments the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness***. Though the wicked is shown favor, he does not learn righteousness; he deals unjustly in the land of uprightness, and does not perceive the majesty of the LORD. (Isaiah 26:7-10 NASB [bold italic added])

First, Isaiah speaks from the perspective of one seeking the righteousness of God. But take note that the righteous know the way of His judgments; meaning even the righteous must experience the judgments of the Lord. The righteous have been trained through the Lord's judgments, and they have seen the mercy

and love of God that leads them to eagerly long and seek for the Lord. They eagerly wait for the coming of King Jesus.

Second, the righteous know that the only way to truly learn the righteousness of God is through His judgments, especially judgments that involve the earth itself. Through Haggai the prophet, as well as the writer of Hebrews, we are told that the Lord will shake the heavens and the earth (Haggai 2:6-9, 21-22; Hebrews 12:26-28) in order to usher in *the kingdom of the heavens, the kingdom of Christ*, upon the earth. Truly, when the earth is shaken, so are all the kingdoms (or, nations) of the earth, that is, the habitable part of the earth that has been organized by man. There is no doubt that the judgments of God upon the earth can be most severe upon the wicked as they are brought into torment that leads to death. When God judges in such a fashion, scripture calls it the indignation or the wrath of God, even the fierce wrath. But there is a purpose in it, and it is not to annihilate or to torture people endlessly and without chance of redemption.

Third, it is through these shakings that the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness. The Hebrew word for learn is *lâmad*, which, according to Strong's *Concordance*, means "to goad, that is, (by implication) to teach (the rod being an Oriental incentive)." A *goad* is a sharp-pointed stick used in driving oxen. Consequently, in its general sense, it means to drive or prod into action or to urge on. This is the purpose of the Lord's judgments. It is to prod the unrighteous to learn righteousness. It is like training up a child with the rod. After all, *he who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently* (Proverbs 13:24). Does the Lord not love all mankind and desire many sons to come unto glory? He most assuredly does!

Notice that Isaiah does not state that the inhabitants of the world will be eternally destroyed or even tortured because they are unrighteous. Our Lord knows the condition of the inhabitants of the world.

As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. (Romans 3:10-12 KJV)

This is a mighty powerful indictment of all mankind. There is none righteous. Let us all be convinced that we are included in this indictment, and we all need to learn righteousness because it is not in the fiber of man that has come from the loins of Adam. **We have inherited death from Adam, and sin reigns in death, and sin is lawlessness, and lawlessness is unrighteousness.**

Fourth, take note that the Lord shows favor to even the wicked, but with the favor of the Lord upon them, the wicked still do not learn righteousness nor perceive the majesty of the Lord. In other words, favor alone does not change a heart; it takes the judgment of the Lord to teach the inhabitants of the world His righteousness.

The good news is that the Lord desires all mankind to learn righteousness, and He has a plan to bring it to completion. When the judgments of the Lord go forth, they go forth with a purpose that is glorious. Can you think of anything greater than to see the inhabitants of this earth finally learn what true righteousness is and to begin to live in accord with this righteousness? It is hardly necessary to be reminded that we live in a day of unrighteousness. Praise God, the righteousness of God is coming. *For as the earth brings forth its sprouts, and as a garden causes the things sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations* (Isaiah 61:11).