

Feeling 'Left Behind'?

Though it feels like everything is crumbling around us, we have a choice; we can watch from the sidelines or be used as God's vessel in the midst.

☒ The times you and I now live in could be lumped into categories ranging from "unsure" to "unsettling" to "unnerving" to flat-out "frightening." One great positive during these days, however, is the fact that God is not the least bit nervous about what's happening.

He, in fact, told us there would be periods like this. Living our lives from God's perspective allows us to share one of many distinct advantages with Him—we can have peace while troublesome times are brewing all around.

Some passages in the New Testament provide us with a parallel to current world affairs. Consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 24. His disciples asked Him, "'What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'" (v. 3, NIV). When I think about how Jesus answered His followers, it seems as if He had been watching today's CNN Headline News reports. He said:

* Many would come in His name and deceive many. That was true in Bible times and, unfortunately, is still true today.

* We would hear of wars and rumors of wars. That is the essence of terrorism, isn't it? Are we or other nations at war, and if so, where and against whom?

* Nation would rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom. "Once an ally, now a foe" is the story of relations between many countries. Tomorrow could always bring a role reversal between peaceful nations.

* Famines, pestilence and earthquakes would occur in various

places. Even in the United States we have hunger, AIDS, cancer, Ebola, hepatitis C and earthquakes—not just in California, but also in the Midwest and along the East Coast.

* Persecution would arise and many would be offended because of the gospel. Seemingly over nothing we will split marriages, friendships, relationships, even churches. I have met people who become offended at the drop of a hat.

The list continues with lawlessness abounding (often evident in the church as well as the world) and love growing cold (toward God and others). This could get downright depressing. But take courage—causing fear is not the Lord's purpose in these verses; neither is it my purpose in this column.

To these disastrous yet prophetic truths Jesus adds words of instruction, encouragement and exhortation. In them lie liberating truths that are applicable to our lives, whether we are living in the actual end times or not.

Liberating truth 1. “‘Watch out that no one deceives you'” (v. 4). How? Get solidly grounded in your everyday walk with Christ. Become deeply rooted in God's Word. Some clear-cut contributing factors that can lead to deception include having no knowledge of Scripture, patchwork theology, unrestrained pursuit of carnal appetites and a know-it-all spiritual attitude.

Liberating truth 2. “‘See to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come'” (v. 6). The good news is, we can do something about what troubles us. When you live with a solid assurance of who God is and what His Word says, your trust will be in Him and not in the circumstance du jour.

Liberating truth 3. “‘But he who stands firm to the end will be saved'” (v. 13). This is probably not a favorite sermon topic (for a pastor or for his flock), yet Jesus wouldn't speak of it if it weren't a necessary element of personal end-

time victory. The message of enduring hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ is probably not the most popular way to recruit workers for ministry either, but the Scripture says, "We count them blessed who endure" (James 5:11, NKJV).

Liberating truth 4. "'And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come'" (v. 14, NIV). God will make sure that in good times, bad times or end times, the gospel will be preached. The question is, will He do it with us or without us?

You and I have a choice of either being on the sidelines watching or being in the middle of it all as a vessel of love, life, healing and salvation.

Let's not wait until the end times to allow Jesus to use us to bring others into the kingdom of God. Let's start today!