

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, as we approach the end of the church year (and the calendar year), it's common to start looking at all the chaos in the world, and to think that the world is really circling the drain. That the world has gone crazy. That things are slowly grinding to a halt. And you'd be right. The news is full of turmoil and scandal every day.

With all this going on, how do we keep our bearings amongst all that is going on? Well, it can be summarized in this one sentence: Be ready, and that means to keep your feet on the ground and your eye on heaven.

What do I mean by the phrase “keep your feet on the ground”? I mean that we are to not get excessively caught up in all the “stuff” we find at home, at work or on the internet. News, wars, rumours and gossip. We need to be reasonably informed, but there is a kind of feeding on scandal and conspiracy that is not healthy. Keep your feet on the ground as we proceed forward.

Stay faithful to your daily responsibilities. In the church at Thessalonica, there was intense fervor about the coming of the Lord. We certainly should be looking forward to that glorious day. We certainly should prepare ourselves spiritually for the coming of the Lord. There is a lot of Scripture telling us to do that. Jesus gave

the Parable of the Ten Virgins for example. Peter asked the question in his epistle: “Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God . . .?” (2 Pet. 3:11-12). As the end grows near, the need to prepare intensifies. In Titus 2, Paul reminds believers that God’s grace teaches us that “denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

If we are not living in that passionate anticipation for the coming of the Lord, we need to be woken up. To love Christ’s appearing is the norm for followers of the Lord. Something is wrong if that is absent. And the prominent effect of that anticipation should be godly living. John talked about the coming of the Lord and then added: “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3).

In the Parable of the ten Minas, Jesus taught us to occupy till he comes. Be good stewards of what God has entrusted you with. Jesus himself probably worked as a carpenter until he was launched into full time ministry at 30 years old (Luke 3:23). We live in a natural

world, and we all have work to do in that world (work that benefits others as well as ourselves). Fulfilling those duties is part of what it means to love our neighbor as ourselves.

We avoid a lot of unnecessary temptation when we are doing the work we ought to be doing. There is nothing wrong with times of refreshing so that we can work effectively. God commanded Israel to not work on the Sabbath. It was to be a day of reflection and worship of the Lord. But when our days are filled with idleness, we are vulnerable to temptation. David’s greatest failure (his adultery with Bethsheba) came in the context of him not being engaged in his duty. It was a season when he should have been out leading his troops. Instead, he was lounging around the palace and fell into temptation (2 Sam. 11:1).

One value of work is its humbling effect on our souls. When we are doing meaningful work, we encounter problems along the way. There is a lot of problem-solving in daily work. Those problems along with our struggles to solve them is a humbling process. It reminds us of our limitations and dependence on the Lord. There is considerable benefit in seeking the Lord for solutions to such problems throughout the day. You experience his faithfulness in each of those challenges. There is benefit in humbling ourselves in

our interaction with coworkers. It keeps us looking to the Lord and in communion with him.ix

Keep your feet on the ground. Some of the Thessalonian Christians lost sight of that principle. They thought they were too spiritual to get their hands dirty serving other people. They wanted others to wash the feet of the saints while they took their ease.

Much of the Christian life is getting up each day and simply doing the service God has assigned you to do and maintaining a thankful heart while doing it. Often it is simply putting one step in front of the other and doing what you know to do.

The great missionary William Carey wrote: “[I]f anyone should think it worth his while to write my life ... If he will give me credit for being a plodder, he will describe me justly. Anything beyond this will be too much. I can plod. I can persevere in any definite pursuit. To this I owe everything.” Are you plodding for God? Keep plodding and keep praising him for the strength to plod.

Many Christians fail to discern the opportunities God gives them because their concept of serving God is not biblical. They overspiritualize the journey. They want to serve God. But they want it to be something spectacular and impressive. It seldom is. What God

calls us to do is seldom glamorous. It is usually difficult (2 Cor. 1:8). It may not be what you would choose to do. But if we do what the Lord assigns us to do, we will one day hear him say, “Well done good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things” (Matt. 25:21).

The other half of our admonition is to keep your eye on heaven. If we can become so heavenly-minded that we are no earthly good, we can, on the other hand, become so earthly-minded that we are no spiritual good. If we do not keep our eye on heaven, we will lose our joy; we will lose our sense of divine purpose, and we will run out of strength. We have citizenship and responsibilities here on earth. But Philippians 3:20 tells us our primary citizenship is in heaven: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.” We are to live “looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). While we fulfill our earthly duties, we must keep our eye on heaven and the reward that awaits us. We must maintain our spiritual vitality in the Lord along the way (Rom. 12:11).

In Luke 10, Jesus was visiting the home of Mary and Martha. Mary sat at Jesus’s feet to hear his words. She was focused on Jesus and the spiritual revelation he was giving. She was seizing the

opportunity to learn at the feet of Christ. Martha was doing all the work. It is not surprising that Martha would ask Jesus to tell Mary to get up and do her fair share of serving. Jesus’s answer to her is surprising. He said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. 42 But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her” (vv. 41-42). In this situation, Martha had gotten too caught up in the practical responsibilities. She was doing a good thing, but it was not the best that God had for her.

It is interesting that Luke places this story immediately after the story of the good Samaritan. In that story, Jesus commended the Samaritan for rendering practical service to the wounded man. And in doing that, he condemned the hypocritical religion of the priest and Levite. So, in the first story he condemns a spirituality that does not serve the practical needs of others. In the second story, he cautions us about getting so caught up in the natural things of life that we fail to tap into the spiritual nourishment needed to do that service well.

Ministry is often a matter of going up on the mountain to receive the word of the Lord. Then coming down to the valley to obey that word in service to others. If you don’t go up the mountain and

receive the influence of the Holy Spirit in your heart, you will serve out of the dictates and strengths of your flesh. It may look good on the surface, but it will miss the mark and be ineffective. On the other hand, if you live on the mountain and never wash the feet of the saints, that spiritual resource will dry up. God provides strength and grace to do his bidding. Obedience is always better than sacrifice.

After his resurrection, Jesus told his followers to “wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are imbued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). Of the 500 who received that instruction, only 120 obeyed and received the empowerment. What were the other 380 doing? They were doing something other than what they were told to do. Perhaps they had business dealings to conduct. Maybe they had family to visit. Perhaps there were even religious duties to perform. Whatever the excuse may have been, it caused them to miss on the greatest event of the century.

I don’t want to make a mistake like that. I want to be exactly where the Lord wants me to be doing exactly what he tells me to do. The general pattern will be time on the mountain getting spiritually equipped for service, followed by time in the valley serving others in whatever assignment the Lord may give us to do. How do we navigate the days and months ahead? We do it the same way we live

“Being Ready” Matthew 25:1-13 Last Sunday of the Church Year 2024

any other times. Keep your feet on the ground and your eye on heaven. Amen.