

Discerning the times

We are living in one of the most important times in human history. We are closer to the return of Jesus than any other generation before us. This is an incredible harvest season where thousands of people are coming to Christ all over the world.

1 Poi si accostarono a lui i Farisei e i Sadducei e, per tentarlo, gli chiesero di mostrar loro un segno dal cielo. 2 Ma egli rispose loro e disse: «Quando si fa sera, voi dite: "Farà bel tempo perché il cielo rosseggia". 3 E la mattina dite: "Oggi farà tempesta perché il cielo tutto cupo rosseggia". Ipocriti, ben sapete dunque distinguere l'aspetto del cielo, ma non riuscite a discernere i segni dei tempi? 4 Una generazione malvagia ed adultera richiede un segno, ma non le sarà dato alcun segno, se non il segno del profeta Giona». E, lasciatili, se ne andò. (Matteo 16:1-4).

The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away. (Matthew 16:1-4) The Bible speaks a lot about the end and the importance of discerning God's will for the nations in a challenging time. The people of God need to ask themselves some very important questions: How should we then live? What should be our focus and priorities at this time? How should we direct our energy and resources? What God wants to do with his Church in the coming years?

Our Heavenly Father is calling his people to discern the times and move in the Holy Spirit in order to remain a vital force for the days to come. In Matthew 16:3 Jesus confronted the religious leaders for their inability to discern God's works and timing in their generation. The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus to test Him. They wanted a sign from heaven and they had made up their minds not to believe. They did not want to learn anything from Jesus neither did they want to see the truth. Even though Jesus had already performed hundreds of amazing miracles their hearts remained untouched. They refused to look at Him, they were spiritually blind and their hearts were far from God. They created a religion of nice words and interesting meetings, but their lives and focus were not in the Kingdom of God. Jesus said that the only sign these people would still get was the sign of the prophet Jonah. He was speaking about His death and resurrection three days later. This would be their final opportunity to be convinced. Today we need to call people back to Jesus and help them to be born again.

The Greek word for "discern" (diakrino) means to "separate thoroughly" and to "make a distinction" between things. We need to distinguish between right and wrong and understand what is important and what is not important. In vs. 4 Jesus speaks about those who "cannot discern the signs of the times". These signs were the spiritual indications that God provided for his people.

The word for "times" that Jesus uses is not "chronos" (minutes, hours, days and weeks) but "cairos", which refer to occasion, opportunities, seasons, periods, movements. In Hebrew it is called the "Moadei Adonai", the appointed moments of God. The religious people were unable to recognize that the Messiah had come to seek and save the lost! God has appointed certain seasons or times in which He fulfills His purposes on earth. You and I can either partake with God in what He is doing and is about to do on the earth, or we can become an obstacle in bringing to fulfillment that which He has ordained. What is it that God wants to do? Are we seeing what God wants us to see? Are you able to properly discern the ways of God? What is your job in the Kingdom of God? If we don't want to miss God's timing and we have made a decision to be more effective people we need to:

1. Look in the past and see what God has done and what he has told us to do (or not to do). We start from his faithfulness and ability, but as well from obedience to his words for our lives. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105)

2. Know the time we are living and our place in the Kingdom like the sons of Issachar. "... men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do" (1 Chronicles 12:32). This group of wise men were able to look and understand beyond their circumstances. They knew with whom they were meant to connect! They were not critical, passive or independent, but they were loyal to David, knowing that God's mantle of leadership now rested on him. These people fought together and saved each other's lives in a time of transition knowing what God really wanted them to do.

3. Have faith in God and His plans for the nations. The prophets in the Bible saw how God was going to deal with various issues. In a similar way we need to be focused on His ways, living a disciplined lifestyle, knowing that the future is in His hands. "The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations" (Psalm 33:10-11)

4. Stop playing and start to grow up. One of the main problems of today is the church selfishness. Many believers keep seeking ways they can entertain themselves with spiritual toys and different irrelevant church services. They play with spiritual gifts, different "cool" activities and seek fellowship with other bored and fleshly believers like themselves. Sadly, there is little or no spiritual fruits growing out of their lives. "...but solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil" (Hebrews 5:12-14)

5. Get prepared for the harvest. If you are not yet a disciple of Jesus, but only a church goer you need to ask God to show you who can help you to change your life and start to get trained. If you are a disciple, than ask God to tell you who you will need to disciple next. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey every-thing I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20)

In this time we cannot allow ourselves to live lukewarm and we cannot live compromising lives as God's people. We need to "be true worshippers of the Lord in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). This is not just music and words, but lives transformed and offered completely to God. People ready to be like Jesus, think like Him and do the same work He did on earth. "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be reveal-ed" (Romans 8:19).

Let us not be tired in giving ourselves towards continued spiritual growth and discernment. We keep our eyes on Jesus, we listen to his voice and bring the Kingdom of God in the nations with a renewed motivation to serve the King of kings with all our hearts, minds and strengths!

Some signs announcing Christ's return:

- Wars, violence and lawlessness (Matt. 24:6-7)
- Drought and famine (Matt. 24:7)
- Sin, violence and sexual immorality (Matthew 24:37)
- Earthquakes and natural catastrophes (Mark 13:8)
- Epidemics diseases (Rev. 6:7-8)
- Mass animal death (Hosea 4:3)
- Christians being killed (Matt. 24:9-10)
- World pushing for peace (1 Thes. 5:3)
- Aggressive and fundamentalist islamic movements (Dan. 11:40, 42-43)
- European Union seek global primacy (Rev. 13)
- Christians turn away from truth (2 Tim. 4:3-4)
- Rise in spiritualism, false christs and prophets (1 Tim. 4:1; Matt. 24:4-5)
- A strong religious person leads a religious revival (Rev. 19:19-21; 2 Thes. 2:1-3)
- The crisis in Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:1-2)
- The abomination of desolation (Matt. 24:15-20)
- The collapse of western nations - the great tribulation (Matt. 24:21-22)
- Gospel preached to the whole world (Matthew 24:14)