

Hartford Bible Students Newsletter

January 2013

OUR CHANGING WORLD

Incredible Changes

It is hard for many people to face change, whether it be in their personal relationships, in their work life, where they live, or even changes in their own bodies. It is also difficult to accept the changes occurring globally to our world. We are all aware that the old world is on its way out and that this course is progressing at an alarmingly rapid pace.

We all lament at the increasing tragedies we see as a result of hatred, drugs, mental health problems, etc., and cry, What can be done to stop this? Everywhere we turn there are discussions on identifying the numerous causes that are a contributing factor in the horrible violence. We are not surprised at the increasing trouble, as it is predicted in the Bible in 2 Timothy 3:1-4: *"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God."*

While many of the changes we see are negative, there are also many changes that have been very positive to the world as a whole. When we pull back a little bit from the sea of bad news that is assaulting us these days, what we actually see is a preponderance of trends that are moving in a fantastic direction.

The day we live in is spoken of in the Bible in Joel 2:3: *"A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and none hath escaped them."* Although we do expect trouble (represented in the fire), this verse also gives us hope for the future: *"the land is as the garden of Eden before them."* Let's take a moment to review some of the incredible changes, both negative and positive, we have seen in our lifetime and look for the "Eden" that is before us in the great progress that is taking place.

Population Change

Populations are shifting and increasing. A study on populations from The Global Burden of Disease Study released in December 2012 states that a sharp decline in deaths from malnutrition and infectious diseases like measles and tuberculosis has caused a shift in global mortality patterns over the past 20 years, with far more of the world's population now living into old age and dying from diseases mostly associated with rich countries, like cancer and heart disease.

The United Nations "World Population Ageing" reports that the balance between young and old people is shifting throughout the world. The increasing proportions of aged persons have been accompanied, in most populations, by steady declines in the proportion of young persons. Over the next 50 years, the proportion of children is projected to decline by almost one-third, so that by the year 2050, the share of persons aged 60 or over in the population will, for the first time in history, match that of persons younger than 15 (about 21 percent each).

These population shifts are a wonderful example of the blessings that have come to our world through the advancements of modern technology and medicine. It brings us a step closer to the day when *"there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away"* (Revelation 21:4).

Climate Change

Climate change has been sweeping the world. A draft of the third National Climate Assessment put out in January 2013 warns that the United States is hotter than it used to be, rainfall is becoming both more intense and more erratic, and rising seas and storm surges threaten U.S. coasts, and with the current rate of global carbon emissions, these impacts will intensify in the coming decades.

Although these climate predictions can be daunting, we have assurances in the scriptures that "the earth abideth forever" (Ecclesiastes 1:4) and that God "laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever" (Psalms 104:5). It is only the **symbolic** "earth" (social order) that will be destroyed and a new righteous "earth" (social order) under Christ will be set up, as 2 Peter 3:13 states, *"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth."*

Poverty and Healthcare Change

Although we hear much about the world's economy being on the brink of disaster and we are all very concerned about the financial distress we see about us, it is interesting to note that poverty has dropped more in the past 50 years than it has in the previous 500 years. Child mortality rates have dropped by 90 percent, while the length of human lifespan has doubled.

One trend watcher recently commented: "At a global level, the gap between wealthy nations and poorer nations continues to close. Across the board, we are living longer, wealthier, healthier lives. Certainly, there are still millions of people living in dire, back-breaking poverty, but using almost every quality-of-life metric available – access to goods and services, access to transportation, access to information, access to education, access to life-saving medicines and procedures, means of communication, value of human rights, importance of democratic institutions, durable shelter, available calories, available employment, affordable energy – our day-to-day experience has improved massively over the past two centuries.... Today a Masai warrior with a cellphone has better telecom capabilities than the President of the United States did 25 years ago. If he's a Masai warrior on a smartphone with access to Google, then he has access to more information than the President did just 15 years ago."

When we listen to the news today, we may feel as though we are living in dire straits. But looking at the big picture, we see that over the past century, much improvement has taken place.

What Are We Still Missing?

Although we may see much progress and improvement in the past century, there is no doubt we are still missing something. What is the missing element that will finally bring peace and blessing to all men? What will finally end the tragedies, the sorrows, the violence, the heartache we see every day?

The missing element is the promise that God will eventually turn men's stony hearts to flesh. Ezekiel 36:26, *"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh."*

When God's kingdom is established on earth, sin will be erased from the human heart. All men will be given the opportunity to accept Jesus as their redeemer. They will then be instructed in righteousness, and all those who choose will gain everlasting life here in the restored earth -- a worldwide Eden.

As some misjudge the skill and wisdom of a great architect by his unfinished work, so also many now misjudge God by his unfinished work. But when the rough scaffolding of evil, which has been permitted for man's discipline and overruled for his good, has been removed, and the rubbish cleared away, God's finished work will declare His glorious, loving plans and character. *"As it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."* 1 Corinthians 2:9

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