

## Facing Reality

*“Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you” (Revelation 3:2-3).*

As I read my Bible, something strikes me as strange, very strange, something that has undoubtedly occurred also to others although I can't recall any preacher or expositor ever calling attention to it. It's this: All through the Bible, in every era, in almost every chapter, there are people who either fail to face reality or they refuse to. And as I look around me, I see the very same thing going on, everywhere, even in our evangelical churches. It's a deep and heavy problem. To the Church in Sardis, Jesus says, “Wake up!” That's another way of saying, “Face reality!”

Cain knew what had happened in the Garden. It's inconceivable that his parents hadn't told him. So he surely was aware of things that matter in life. He knew the reality of God being in control, of God demanding obedience, of God judging. God even spoke to him directly. Yet he rejected the reality he knew and did exactly what he wanted to do, get rid of his brother. What was he thinking? What did he suppose would happen? OK, clearly, this exemplifies the sin nature expressing itself, as every Bible teacher has pointed out. But it more compellingly illustrates what I'm arguing here. Cain refused to face reality. Except for a very few individuals narrated in Scripture, this is a huge, indeed massive, problem with all humanity ever since. It afflicts us today.

A few more instances: The people of that pre-Flood civilization surely knew that God exists. They surely knew of His demand for righteousness. If Seth knew, and Enoch knew, and Noah knew, we have to assume so did everyone else. They also knew that God controls His creation, and that He judges. And moreover they heard Noah preaching imminent doom and they saw him building that massive boat. Nevertheless, they refused to face reality and, as a result, they were wiped out—although, had they faced the reality confronting them, they could have been in the ark with Noah and been saved.

Pharaoh saw the mighty deeds that Moses called down, they were happening before his very eyes. Nine times! The reality was, he had better yield to Moses' demand before something worse happens. But Pharaoh couldn't or wouldn't face reality and so suffered that 10<sup>th</sup> plague, and worse saw his mighty army wiped out.

The people of Israel walked thru the Red Sea with a wall of water on their right and on their left. They saw the waters return in force to drown the pursuing Egyptian army. They experienced a miraculous deliverance. They saw the miraculous pillar—cloud by day, fire by night—guiding them. The reality was, God loved them and was in absolute control of their destiny. Yet . . . unable or unwilling to face reality, when the critical test came at Kadesh-Barnea, they rebelled against God. They even declared, “We want to go back to Egypt.” What were they thinking?

It's all thru the period of the Judges and the Monarchy: Failure to face reality. Or abject and willful *refusal* to face reality. What was Samson thinking? Solomon? Rehoboam? What was Jonah thinking? Nebuchadnezzar? The list is long, very long. Rahab though was different. She

*did* face reality. She heard of the miraculous works of Israel's God and realistically thought, "I want to be part of that." So she was delivered from judgment and was given an essential role in the lineage of Messiah Jesus. Abigail saw that God was doing something very great thru David. She too faced reality and made a right choice: "I want to be part of that." So too Daniel and his three friends. And others. Hebrews Chapter 11 reviews the stories of many O.T. saints who confronted reality head on, correctly understood the spiritual issue they faced, and made the right decisions.

What is the message of all the Wisdom literature in the Bible? Isn't it that the wise person acknowledges that God, as Creator, Ruler and Judge, has the right to demand that we live according to His will for us? The wise person, in other words, knows and accepts the realities revealed in Scripture *and lives by them*. The fool, in contrast, doesn't care about reality. He does what he wants to do, oblivious to, or in spite of, what God has said.

But it all gets worse when we turn into the New Testament. Herod knew the prophecies of a coming Messiah-King, and the miraculous evidence that He had come was presented to him. Like Pharaoh, however, he refused to face the reality of God fulfilling Scripture right there and in his lifetime. The Pharisees too knew the prophecies and that the time was perfect for the promised Messiah-King to come. They saw with their eyes the marvelous miracles Jesus worked. For a man lame since birth to be able to walk involved the creation of a whole new body system. For a man blind since birth to be able to see likewise involved a miraculous creative work. Jesus was Creator! To be able to raise Lazarus from the dead could mean only one thing: God Himself was there in their midst. Yet they deliberately refused to face the reality of it and sought to have Him put to death. The Sadducees rejected Messianic prophecy, but they too saw the miraculous works Jesus did. Blinded by the love of power they too refused to face the reality that God was there among them.

Jesus called the Pharisees "hypocrites." We today smirk at someone who's a hypocrite. Politicians say one thing to one group and something else to others and we call that hypocrisy. A hypocrite is one who knows what's true but says or does something else. For whatever reasons, a hypocrite is one who refuses to face reality. Hypocrisy is not a failure. Humans fail all the time; it's part of being creaturely. Hypocrisy is deliberately rejecting reality for something else. And hypocrisy is not comical, it's deadly; that's because God judges it. There's massive hypocrisy in our world today.

Paul understood what reality is. He faced it, embraced it, lived on the basis of it, although it meant great self-sacrifice, suffering and loss. And he repeatedly exhorted his readers to be like him and do the same. Evidently frustrated with the intransigent church at Corinth, he challenged them: "Examine yourselves!" That was his way of saying, "Wake up!" or "Hey, face reality!" The reason he wrote letters was precisely so that we understand the realities of life and live on the basis of them. And he warned us of failure or refusal to do that. Unbelievers don't care. But what about us who profess to believe in Jesus? Do we care?

We moderns want to believe that we're autonomous, independent of anyone or anything, free to live as we please. We may or may not believe in God, but that doesn't matter. We cherish our supposed freedom to live according to our own values, ideals and desires. Well, that flies in the face of reality! For, the reality is, we have to eat every day, and God makes food for us. He makes our heart to beat and our body to take in air. We're *not* independent. So thinking correctly on the basis of the realities of life, as we're dependent on God for our existence, we'd

better live according to *His* values, ideals and desires. The God who exists, who has revealed Himself, is not a Deist god. He's a God who sees how we respond to Him—that is, to His self-revelation and His will for us—and He judges.

We don't want to face reality. We prefer to live in a world that's unreal, a world of fantasy, a world of our own imagination. Thus, ignoring the Word of God, we pursue life indifferent to God's revealed purposes. We suppose sitting in a church for two hours on Sundays, singing hymns and listening to a sermon, fulfills our obligation to God. So we're free to live the rest of our time as we wish. We suppose that because God is loving and we believe in Jesus, we have forgiveness of sins and won't be in hell. That's not the reality of salvation revealed in Scripture! Salvation imposes responsibilities, and we refuse to face the reality of that, so we ignore Scripture.

The reality of life on earth today is hideous. There's violence, lies, and hatred everywhere. There's false religion controlling the minds and lives of billions of people. The reality is, all those people are already condemned to ghastly horrible judgment. The reality is, we've been commanded to do our part about this by extending the Gospel to all people everywhere. The reality is, God has elected some to salvation, everywhere. The reality is, the Gospel is powerful to change lives by the working of the Holy Spirit. The reality is, obeying Christ will necessitate very major sacrifice on our part, and that selfless sacrifice glorifies God. And we know (or *should* know) all these realities. Yet we don't want to face them. We prefer to live in comfort, indifferent to what's happening in the world.

The great reality of Scripture is that Messiah Jesus is returning to earth. A Messianic Kingdom is coming, an era of peace, righteousness and joy, and from all evidence, it's imminent. That's been revealed to us to influence or control how we live in the here-and-now. But we refuse to face that reality. To us today, the Return of the exalted Son to rule is just abstract theology, irrelevant to our lives. Likewise, a day of judgment is coming for all of us. But we refuse to face that reality either. What's wrong with us?

There's lots, lots more. But I think I've made my point. Dear reader, let's wake up to the realities of Scripture! God's Word is truth revealed to us. And truth revealed demands a response. And the response must be what God expects—or else. We'll be judged on the basis of what is reality, not on what we would like reality to be. And denying known, true realities isn't merely hypocrisy or failure; it's rebellion. May God have mercy on us if we rebel against truth.

Not much time remains. Jesus has said He will return suddenly and unexpectedly, which means there'll be no time or opportunity to repent. So let's heed the warning and repent now, and live as Jesus has clearly willed. A wise person faces reality and lives according to it. We must be wise and faithful, now or never.