

The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching: do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry...

By Graham Osborne

Are you discouraged by what is happening? Yes, much of it is beyond imagination. It is all discouraging at times, and there is a feeling of helplessness. I get the same thoughts so I have been thinking about this.

But all I can think about is Jesus' parables and teaching about his return: wise/unwise virgins, the guys with the talents, etc. In all of them, the master is delayed. Jesus' instructions? Over and over: be watchful, be prepared, be found as servants doing **exactly what their master asked** them to do, so that when He returns at an hour, we do not expect, that's exactly what we'll be found doing.

And St Paul confirms that true Christians will NOT be caught in this way: off guard, not doing what they are supposed to be doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:2-11: *"For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people say, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape. **But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief.** For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober... since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."*

I think what many faithful Christians are still doing today – sharing the faith, evangelizing – is critical. We must keep doing this, out of love for those who don't know the truths Jesus left us, and how much the Father loves us. If they choose not to listen, that is up to them. But we must also realize: we may be resisted, even persecuted, for doing this. Especially in this increasingly hostile culture.

But we cannot forget: this is *exactly* what happened to the Old Testament Prophets as well. I think of Jeremiah: over and over, he was not listened to, spoken against, rejected by the authorities, imprisoned. Many – but not all – of the people turned against him and persecuted him. We know what happened to Israel as a result of not listening to him!

Or Elijah and the 450 prophets of Baal: "I only, am left a prophet of the LORD", Ezekiel laments, "but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men" [2 Kings 18]. But we know what happened to those false prophets on that very day!

We need to follow the example of these great Prophets, *even today*, and keep faithfully doing what God sent us to do.

Consider St. Paul's letter to the young Bishop, Timothy, in 2 Timothy 3:12-13 and 4:2-4: *"All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived... **I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead... preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching.**"*

St. Paul prophetically continues: *"The time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own likings, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander into myths."*

This is the context to what he says immediately after this: *"As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry."*

This is our call! Be encouraged! And always remember that it is never about numbers! It is always about being faithful to what God calls us to – in every situation.