



PREPARING TO STAND

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“In this age, just prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, God calls for men who will prepare a people to stand in the great day of the Lord.” SW 3/21/1905

“WRAP YOUR CLOAK AROUND YOU AND FOLLOW ME”

by Jim Buller

Recently, my friend, Christopher Fischer, emailed me the following commentary of the story in Acts chapter 12 about when Peter was freed from prison by the angel:

There are many passages of Scripture which skeptical critics have declared to be uninspired, but which, in their tender adaptation to the needs of men, are God's own messages of comfort to His trusting children. A beautiful illustration of this occurs in the history of the apostle Peter. Peter was in prison, expecting to be brought forth next day to death; he was sleeping at night “between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.” Peter, suddenly awaking, was amazed at the brightness that flooded his dungeon, and the celestial beauty of the heavenly messenger. He understood not the scene, but he knew that he was free, and in his bewilderment and joy he would have gone forth from the prison unprotected from the cold night air. The angel of God, noting all the circumstances, said, with tender care for the apostle's need: “Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals.” Peter mechanically obeyed; but so entranced was he with the revelation of the glory of heaven that he did not think to take his cloak. Then the angel bade him: “Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.” . . .

Skeptics may sneer at the thought that a glorious angel from heaven should give attention to a matter so commonplace as caring for these simple human needs, and may question the inspiration of the narrative. But in the wisdom of God these things are recorded in sacred history for the benefit, not of angels, but of men, that as they should be brought into trying positions they might find comfort in the thought that heaven knows it all. Jesus declared to His disciples that not a sparrow falls to the ground without the notice of the heavenly Father, and that if God can keep in mind the wants of

all the little birds of the air, He will much more care for those who may become the subjects of His kingdom and through faith in Him may be the heirs of immortality. (*Testimonies to the Church Vol. 5*, page 748-749.)

Looking at this story from the perspective of emergency preparedness and survival, what a fascinating glimpse into the mind of God! We can certainly sympathize with Peter's lack of presence of mind, or his sense of urgency over-riding his sense of prudence, or his awareness of the upcoming needs.

All of us could face these things, virtually without warning. God knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust; and He will be faithful to teach us the essentials, and bring all things to our remembrance as needed. Yet He requires that we all exercise all of the powers which He has given, and develop these talents to the full extent possible.

[End of Christopher's comments.]

This story also has some interesting implications in connection with Jesus' instructions in Matthew 24:17-18 about fleeing to the mountains.

Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes.

The Greek word translated "clothes" here, is the same word that is translated "garment" in Acts 12:8, where the angel told Peter, "Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me." More modern versions translate this word as "cloak" in both of these verses, which is probably a little better translation. In earlier times, one's cloak was not only their coat on a cold day, but also their blanket to wrap up in at night. Note what it says in Exodus 22:26-27.

If you take a neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to Me, I will hear, for I am compassionate. (NIV.)

Unfortunately, many have interpreted Jesus' instructions in Matthew 24:17-18 to mean that we are to flee to the mountains without taking our coat or a sleeping bag —or anything else for that matter. They feel that fleeing without anything will be an act of faith and demonstrate that we are trusting wholly in God. However, this interpretation doesn't really go together with the story in Act 12. If it did, why didn't the angel just tell Peter, "Just leave your stuff behind. Let's go!" Instead, so that Peter will not be chilled by the "cold night air," the angel tells him to put on the clothes, sandals, and cloak that God had already provided him with.

In the same part of the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus tells us that, "God can keep in mind the wants of all the little birds of the air," He also says that God clothes the grass of the field. (See Matthew 6:28-30.) The lesson in both of these ideas is that if God cares about these little things, "He will much more care for those who may become the subjects of His kingdom and through faith in Him may be the heirs of immortality."

God is well aware, and concerned about our need for warm clothing and bedding, and does not expect us to “flee to the mountains” without them.

But what about Jesus’ instructions? Well, let’s look at the bigger picture. The prophecy Jesus gave in Matthew 24, which these instructions are a part of, is a parallel prophecy dealing both with when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman army in the first century, and with the end-times. (See Matthew 24:1-3, and *The Desire of Ages*, page 628.) This is fortunate for us, as we can look back in history at what happened in connection with the destruction of Jerusalem, to get a much better idea of what will happen to us. Jesus told his disciples,

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. (Luke 21:20-21.)

When Jesus spoke these words, the Romans were in charge of Judea and the city of Jerusalem, so there was no reason for their army to surround the city. However, when the Jews revolted against the Romans in the spring of AD 66, everyone knew what would happen next. It would be just a matter of time before the Romans came back to re-conquer the city. And, the way this re-conquest would typically begin would be for the army to first surround the city—which would fulfill Jesus prediction, and be the signal to “flee to the mountains.” So, if you were living in Jerusalem at the time, and you believed what Jesus said, why would you be out working in your field—which would soon be overrun by the Roman armies. Why set yourself up to be hungry, and cold, and uncomfortable, and risk having to “flee to the mountains” without taking anything. Wouldn’t it have been better to trust what Jesus said would happen, and believe the prophecy in Daniel 9 about “the people of the prince who is to come” who would “destroy the city and the sanctuary?” (See Daniel 9:26.) So why not leave before the armies showed up, and take what you would need to survive in the mountains? Or at the very least have your pack ready to go and positioned where you could easily reach over and grab it as you fled.

God has given us reasoning abilities, and He expects us to use them. He has told us where we will be fleeing —“to the mountains.” And, with all the information that is readily available now about wilderness survival and bushcraft we can easily find out what we will need to survive in the wilds. He has also given us time now, before we *have* to flee, to prepare—to gather equipment, to learn skills, and also to practice surviving in the wilderness so when the time comes we will have what we need and know what to do.

The story in Acts 12 shows us that God is compassionate and cares about our physical needs, and doesn’t want us to be unnecessarily uncomfortable. Let’s study the prophecies and believe what they tell us. Let’s take advantage of the opportunities God is giving us *now* to prepare for what we have been “divinely warned” about, and not wait until it is too late. (See Hebrews 11:7.)