

Barratt Ministries Challenge

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The Age Of Antichrist

The Kingdom Series Part 15

by Alex Robertson

What comes to your mind when you read the title of this article? What will the days of antichrist be like? A time of terror and anarchy? A time of unprecedented lawlessness in the world, where evil and all that is ungodly is blatantly manifested? A world like Ceaucescu's Romania before the overthrow of Communism, where millions are cowed into submission through fear? Then what I have to say may come as a surprise.

There are 2 points to make immediately. The first is that we are now living in the age of antichrist. That is not a prophetic announcement from me, it is New Testament scripture. John writes in his first letter, "Little children, it is the last time; and as you have heard that antichrist shall come, even now there are many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (1 Jn 2:18).

So in fact we have been living in "the age of antichrist", which is the same as the "last time", or the "last days", for nearly 2000 years. And there have been many antichrists since then. As soon as Christ departed, antichrists arose. The same happened with the apostles. Paul said, "I know this, that after my departing, grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29). As soon as the true teachers, prophets and apostles departed, the false ones came in. The counterfeits arose. And so it is with antichrist, for antichrist is a counterfeit Christ. The Greek prefix anti- means two things: it means against, but it also means instead of. So antichrist is someone who is against and opposed to Christ, but also comes in the guise of Christ – as a false Christ. There is a subtlety and a deceptiveness about antichrist. In other words, he will not come as a blatant and obvious personification of evil.

The days of Noah

The second point is made by Jesus in Luke 17. He is teaching about the last days and his second coming, and in verse 26 he talks about the days immediately preceding his coming: "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." We know that the days of Noah were characterized by unprecedented evil, wickedness so great that God destroyed the entire human race except for Noah and his family. But Jesus does not draw our attention to the wickedness of the age. He draws our attention to the normality of it. He does not say, "As it was in the days of Noah, there was terrible evil, violence, lawlessness ..." He says "they ate, they drank, they married wives ..." – in other words, life went on as normal. Nobody thought twice about it. They didn't think they were living in a wicked world. Their world had become normal to them. And just to emphasize the point, he then says, "Likewise also as

it was in the days of Lot, they ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but the same day Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all" (verses 28-29). Sodom was a city so wicked that God had to come down to see whether what he had heard of it was really true (Genesis 18:20-21). Yet again, Jesus does not draw attention to its wickedness, but to its normality. It was "business as usual". They bought and sold, planted and built; and when the judgement came, they were taken completely by surprise. Not a reign of terror obvious to all. Quite normal, in fact. Very much like today.

A decent society

Antichristian society will not be anarchic and lawless, it will be ordered and 'decent', with values and standards. We understand correctly that God will intervene when evil and ungodliness has reached its height; but we must also understand that the evil and ungodliness are subtle and deceptive, and not by any means blatant. Satan "is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14), and we have no reason to suppose that he will suddenly change this tactic – in fact we have every reason to suppose that he will continue as he has begun.

There is an increase of evil in our world, no doubt about that. When so-called 'civilized' people watch films showing gratuitous violence, horror and sex for entertainment; when there is such a thing as 'sex tourism'; when drug addiction is rife not just on the fringes of society but amongst corporate professionals, lawyers, bankers and in high society – when this is the 'leisure' of civilized people, we know things are going downhill rapidly. Mass murder, genocide and ethnic cleansing continue in many countries. Organized crime is booming; credit card and internet fraud are rife; there is lawlessness and even shootings in schools, and society does not seem to have the answers.

But the subtlety lies here: antichrist's reign will appear to be the answer to many of these problems. Antichrist wants worship, reverence and honour, and Satan doesn't mind wiping out gratuitous and obvious evil if it suits his own ends. He creates the problem, then he solves it. A counterfeit kingdom of Christ, where antichrist is looked upon as a saviour and hero, is Satan's aim, and if he gains that kingdom by getting rid of violence, crime or perversion, that's fine by him. The end justifies the means.

Under Hitler, who has been described as "the almost-antichrist", Germany arose from the chaos and misery of defeat in World War I, and out of a desperately struggling nation, Hitler created an ordered, prosperous, safe society and became a national hero, revered and worshipped. Antichrist's rise will be on similar lines. World leaders only rise to the top because they provide answers for society.

The beginning, not the end

Perhaps as you read this you are asking, "But doesn't the Bible say there will be wars, lawlessness and catastrophes?" Yes, it does, but we need to look a little closer. "You shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that you are not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be

famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows” (Matthew 24:6-8). Jesus says we will see these things, but they do not signify the end. In fact, they only signify the beginning. That is why Jesus tells us not to be troubled by them. We have not been short on wars, famines, plagues and earthquakes over the last 2000 years. They may be on the increase, but they are only “the beginning of sorrows”. What about lawlessness? Certainly the antichrist will be “the man of lawlessness”, but he will be flouting God’s laws, not society’s laws. The man of lawlessness will not be a man of anarchy. To society, he will be a good, decent, law-abiding man, worthy of respect and honour. And yes, there will be catastrophes, but when the book of Revelation lists the judgements of God which are poured out, it notes that “the rest of men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not” (Revelation 9:20). Why do they not repent when these judgements come? Because they don’t see them as judgements. In fact, to call natural disasters the judgement of God is a dangerous move today. You will be called a judgmental bigot, even in some Christian circles, if you hint that AIDS might be a sign of God’s judgement. They will tell you that you are making God out to be not only uncompassionate but evil. So in the name of compassion, many Christians will refuse to acknowledge God’s judgement.

This is all part of the formation of the one world religion – a religion of moderation and peace. It will pull in people from every religion; moderate Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, Jews, Buddhists – not radical people, but ordinary, nice, kind, peace-loving people with standards and moral values. Judgement will not feature in such a religion. Its twin pillars will be non-violence and tolerance. It will foster the idea that God is a God of non-violence, a God who abhors violence. Never mind that God drowned the population of the world in Noah’s day. Never mind that God sent Joshua to ruthlessly annihilate 7 nations (that’s called genocide, and it makes Joshua a war criminal by today’s definition). It will foster the idea that God is only a God of love, not a God of judgement. Indeed many Christians have already abandoned the God of the Bible in favour of this non-violent God, and many more – including evangelicals, charismatics and Pentecostals – will follow.

Anointing for discernment

How do we avoid being sucked in and swept along with the tide? The spirit of antichrist, just like the spirit of Christ, is something that has to be discerned. Just after John tells us that we are living in the age of antichrist (1 John 2:18), he also tells us that we have the means to discern the spirit of antichrist. That means is the anointing (1 John 2:20). There has been so much taught about the anointing, different anointings, corporate anointings, and so on, that we have probably lost sight of the fact that this is the only New Testament scripture that teaches what the anointing really is. Studied in context, it is plain: the anointing, which does not “come down upon” us but “abides in” us, is the gift of spiritual discernment by which we are enabled to tell the difference between the spirit of Christ and the spirit of antichrist. But sensitivity to this anointing, to the presence of God’s Spirit within, does not come automatically. It depends on a closeness to God, a close walk, a prayer life. When Jesus came the first time, many people – the chief priests, the scribes, the Pharisees – had knowledge about where the Messiah would be born. But for all their knowledge, they missed the Messiah. The only ones who recognised the infant Christ for who he was were Simeon and Anna – 2 people who had a close walk with the Lord, and because of their close walk, God spoke to them by his Holy Spirit and gave them discernment at the right moment. And the right moment for us to

discern the age of antichrist is right now; for if we cannot see it now, how can we expect to see it in the future?

EXPERIENCES FROM LIFE

by Joanna Barratt

Wisdom Is Justified Of Her Children

We all love the idea of having the gifts of faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, tongues, but if there is one thing lacking in the Church of Jesus Christ today, sadly it is the gift of 'discerning of spirits'. We shall never be able to combat the trickery of Satan if we cannot discern the difference between truth and lies. This was one of the basic tests Jesus Christ himself had to pass before he was allowed to walk in the ministry God had prepared for him. In Matthew 4 the scripture quoted to Jesus in the desert during his 40 day fast was spoken in the right context – it was referring to him, and the way God would send his angels to take care of him if anything disastrous were to happen to him. But Jesus knew the voice of his Father and could recognise that of a counterfeit. There was nothing wrong with turning stones into bread, after all Jesus fed over 5,000 people later on with just 5 loaves and 2 fishes. But it was the wrong voice telling him to do the miracle. The bible says there are many voices in the world (1 Corinthians 14:10), but Jesus knew the difference between God and Satan, truth and lies.

Later on in Acts 16:18 we read about Paul being followed by a woman singing his praises saying, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." She did this for many days, but Paul being grieved, turned and commanded the spirit to come out of her. She said all the right things but the wrong spirit was behind it all.

Jesus said in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me." Everyone else around can tell us we are acting foolishly but if we have heard the voice of our Master then it will gnaw away at our spirits until we have either obeyed or rebelled against it.

A significant change

When I was in my 20's something happened which significantly altered the rest of my life. Since being 15 years old I had been whole heartedly involved in working for my church. I was the church secretary, organist and was part of a music group. I loved what I did and could sing with meaning the hymn 'It is well with my soul', knowing that I was in the right place with God. I had my fair share of problems and difficulties, I was living alone in the real world. But my free time was spent doing the things my soul yearned after and I was fulfilled.

Out of the 'blue' one day I had a conviction deep down in my spirit that I should give up doing everything I was doing in the church. At first I ignored this thought/feeling, as when I reasoned it out it seemed absurd. But the conviction persisted and made me uneasy every time I continued doing my activities. Eventually I mentioned this to my Pastor whom I respected very much and was told by him that this voice wasn't from God. I had been given a ministry by God and was being used on a regular basis in the church. It seemed ridiculous that God would tell me to stop doing something he had anointed me to do. I was being kidded by Satan and should put the thought out of my head. What he said was right, I totally agreed with his logic, but I couldn't get away from the nagging conviction in my spirit. After days of uneasiness I eventually decided to give up all midweek activities and just play the organ for the Sunday services. I felt that this would be sufficient and show God my obedience. But this wasn't enough. When God had said everything, he actually meant everything!

Frozen out!

At this point in time I had a part time job working on the cash tills in Asda. In those days cashiers were required to remove the items from the conveyor belt and stack the customers' trolleys with the items bought. Because it was almost Christmas, people were buying heavy items like turkeys, tins of biscuits and chocolates, which caused me to strain the muscles in my left shoulder, thus giving me a 'frozen shoulder'. I was in agony and couldn't raise my left arm, let alone play the organ. So, God got his way after all and I gave up doing everything and sat in the congregation.

I was criticised and judged openly by many in the church. The Pastor thought I had been deceived, the congregation thought I was being disciplined for some unruly behaviour. No one, apart from one West Indian lady who had been praying and fasting for me, believed me when I told them God had told me to step down. I had to carry this alone without anyone understanding me. Going to the church, which had at one time been a joy, had now become an ordeal, and I felt I had more enemies there than friends. Within a few weeks of my making this move I was completely out of the church. I just couldn't handle the pressure any longer.

The struggle with anger

For 3 long years after this incident I had to struggle with anger and bitterness for 'Christians' who had so badly treated me, and trying to get back a real personal relationship with God. This trial had been so severe that I had almost given up being a Christian altogether. But it was the 'church' I had fallen out with, not God, and he had to find out what I was serving – him or the church – and why! During this period I neither played nor sang and I feared that God had finished with my ministry and shelved me altogether. It was then that I began to identify a little with Job and said along with him, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Some time after this shattering experience God gave me a vision...

'I saw a silage heap. (When you see these in the fields they are very large heaps of grass covered with tarpaulin. Heavy weights, such as car tyres, are thrown on top of the plastic sheeting to weigh down and compress the grass which will eventually be used as animal feed to see them through the winter time.) I could see a procession of clergymen. They were all dressed in their official robes.

Some looked like cardinals with their tall hats and mitres, some like priests with their white 'dog-collars'. There were many different types of clergy and ministers and each one of them were holding heavy tyres which they threw on top of the silage heap I had seen.

I was standing afar off and viewing this scene from a distance, and God allowed me to see beneath the plastic sheeting and I was amazed at what I saw. Instead of grass, as I had at first imagined, there were people. These people were members of the various churches and they were being crushed and pressurised by the enormous weights which were being thrown on them by the clergy. I was one of these people and I was being squeezed and crushed so much that I ended up on the floor almost suffocating for lack of air. At the bottom of the heap I saw a tiny gap – a mouse hole. I had been crushed so much that I could get through the mouse hole and escape this awful pressure. Once outside in the fresh air I became my normal size again and I scrambled up the hill to view the silage heap from this advantageous place. From where I was I saw the people screaming and hurting under the great weights and burdens being placed upon them, but couldn't do anything about it. God told me not to criticise them, because I was once in that position. What I had to do was pray that they would become small enough to find the little mouse hole at the bottom of the heap and escape to freedom.'

The Master's voice

If we are going to escape being sucked in and swept along with the tide, we need to be able to recognise the voice of our Master. Jesus' sheep will hear his voice and follow him. Other sheep who belong to other shepherds will hear the voice of their masters and follow them. We can only follow the voice we hear. Let those who have ears to hear, hear what the Spirit is saying to them and obey it.