

## #229 "The Normalcy Bias"

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*1 Peter 4:7 "The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer."*

I recently learned of a thing called the "normalcy bias." This concept refers to a particular bias of human nature whereby people doubt that a tragedy could occur even despite clear warnings to the contrary. The denial and refusal to believe the clear facts leads people to flounder and suffer the consequences when disaster does strike. Too often people underestimate the potential for a worst case scenario to unfold simply because such an event is abnormal or rare. For example, many refused to leave New Orleans when Katrina was coming onshore despite clear indications that the levees were going to break. They had no escape plan or survival plan, and they suffered great loss. The normalcy bias can also be seen when it comes to the finances of the U.S. government. Just because we have always been able to fund our deficits doesn't mean that we always will. Yet many think that we can keep borrowing and printing money with no concern about the consequences. But these are small tragedies in the scope of eternity, for there is a much larger warning that the world must heed.

Hebrews 9:27 says, "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." One of the hardest things for the human nature to accept or at least act upon in the present is the reality that Jesus will return to judge the world. There will be a judgment day, Armageddon will happen, and the lost will face the wrath of God (Revelation 20:11-15). Christians, too, will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and be judged based upon our faithfulness in light of eternal rewards (2 Corinthians 5:10). This coming event is so much bigger than the Super Bowl, the Presidential elections, the overthrow of dictatorships, and the ups and downs of the stock market. It is so significant that it should affect every decision that we make on this earth. It should radically change the way we operate, Who we serve, and what we value as ultimate priorities. Yet the devil would have us chase after the wind, going from one brand of vanity to the next meaningless flavor of the month.

The normalcy bias makes the world think that Jesus never will come because He hasn't come and hasn't been here for thousands of years, if they even grant that. Why should that change tomorrow or the next day, as the thinking goes? Yet, the Bible says that now is the day of salvation (2 Corinthians 6:2) because we know not the day or the hour that Christ will return (Matthew 24:35-36). As believers, we are called to be sober, alert, and prepared, ready for that day (1 Thessalonians 5:6). The coming judgment of the unsaved and our own experience before the judgment seat of Christ are real events. We cannot afford to block this reality out as the days march onward and we check another week off of the calendar.

In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus told the parable of the talents. Three men are given something of value that belongs to the Master over which they are stewards. Two out of the three invest the talents and earn a double profit. They are rewarded. The third man is content to bury his treasure in the ground. He

doesn't want to take a loss, nor does he want to fail. But according to Jesus, his life is one of faithlessness and indicative of wickedness. There was no obedience and no fear of God, no value of the coming judgment. Jesus calls us all to obedience lest we be like the third servant who was denounced by Christ as wicked. We are called as believers to walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise men, making the most of our time on earth (Ephesians 5:15). The normalcy bias tricks us into forgetting the deadline, and it makes us not value our coming judgment day.

The bottom line is this: God is looking for a return on His investment in His church. Those who walk circumspectly recognize by faith how and where God is at work and how they are to contribute. That is, they come to understand what their talents are, and they use these spiritual gifts for the advancement of the kingdom and the edification of believers. There are things on this earth that can damage us, there are things that can distract us, and there are things that can dull our attentiveness to true spirituality. But as we grow in Christ, we will see the vanity of all that the world has to offer, the impermanence of it all, and the transience of life, money, beauty, and all that the devil loves to market as life. The reality, however, is that those who lose their lives for Christ's sake will save them (Matthew 16:25). We have to be willing to die to self, to serve, and to submit to Christ in order to find all that this life is about. The here and now is not the be-all-end-all, but rather the here and now must be interpreted and understood in light of the life to come. Eternal life is the main event, and this life is our test, our chance to use our talents, to invest them, and to please our Lord. It is not good enough to hide out, to bury our talents, and not live for Christ. In all that we do, in our marriages, with our kids, with our jobs, and with our other activities, we must always do what we do purposely for the glory of Christ and being mindful of kingdom priorities (Colossians 3:17, 23).

Part of shining the Light of Christ is reminding the world of priorities that they consider abnormal. It is not normal to believe in a judgment day, and it is definitely not typical to adjust one's priorities in light of Jesus' return. Yet may we be abnormal in the sense that we are prepared, even eager for Christ's return, saying with the apostles "Come quickly, Lord!" (Revelation 22:20) because we know we have finished the work He has given us to do (John 17:4). May we not get blinded by the "normalcy bias" but rather live with the knowledge that the Lord's coming is near (James 5:8) and therefore labor to bring Him a return on His investment.