

"Prepare To Meet Thy God"

by Micky Galloway

In Amos 4:12, God said to His people, "*Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel; (and) because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.*" They had failed to respond to God's chastisements to get them to repent. He had sent famine upon them (verse 6), drought (verses 7-8), pestilence (verses 9-10), and even wars (verses 10-11); "*yet have ye not returned unto me, saith Jehovah*" (6, 8-11). The time of God's patience had expired, opportunity was no more, therefore they must prepare to meet God's wrath.

We often sing a song taken from the words of the prophet, "Prepare To Meet Thy God," as an invitation song encouraging someone to make the necessary preparations to meet God in judgment. This song was written by James Henry Stanley (1869-1954). Stanley was partner with W.P. Gardner in the Stanley-Gardner Company, a gospel music publisher in Saltillo, Mississippi. They issued several paperback hymnals. Stanley also ran a music school in Saltillo and served as a Justice of the Peace. In an old songbook, The New Wonderful Songs For Work And Worship by Thomas S. Cobb and G.H.P. Showalter – published by Firm Foundation, copyright, 1933, the song is said to be from a sermon by J. F. Haley, July 1909. The songbook references J.H. Stanley as the owner. Originally, there were four verses.

The words of the song are quite sobering:

The first verse is an invitation.

"Careless soul, why will you linger, Wand'ring from the fold of God? Hear you not the invitation? O prepare to meet thy God." One who is careless is one who doesn't consider the consequences. Lot is an example of such a man. Without considering the consequences he pitched his tent toward Sodom (Genesis 13:12). All Lot could see was the well watered Plain of the Jordan. He then moved into the city (Genesis 14:12). He was told that this wicked city was to be destroyed (Genesis 19:13). The angels urged Lot to "hurry" out of the city saying, "*Arise, take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be consumed in the punishment of the city but he lingered*" (Genesis 19:15-16 NKJV). What carelessness! Even then, the angels took him by the hand and "*brought them forth, and set him without the city.*" Knowing the awful consequences of sin, why do we linger? Will you not hear the invitation, a formal request to leave sin and its awful consequences? Jesus said, "*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28). John wrote, "*And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And he that heareth, let him say, Come*" (Revelation 22:17).

The second verse is a provoking question.

"Why so thoughtless are you standing While the fleeting years go by, And your life is spent in folly? O prepare to meet thy God." How can we stand idly by, as if we had a perpetual lease on life while the years go passing by? James said, "*What is your life? For ye are a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away*" (James 4:14). The Psalmist said, "*The days of our years are threescore years and ten, or even by reason of strength fourscore years; yet is their pride but labor and sorrow; for it is soon gone, and we fly away*" (Psalms 90:10). We might live seventy or eighty years, yet life is soon gone. The song under consideration expresses that some spend their life in "folly." Webster defines "folly" as a "lack of good sense or normal prudence and foresight." How foolish to spend a lifetime serving the Devil, without consideration for meeting God in judgment. This is the highest level of "folly." The wisdom writer declared, "*fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole (duty) of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil*" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

The third verse issues an earnest plea.

“Hear you not the earnest pleadings Of your friends that wish you well? And perhaps before tomorrow You’ll be called to meet your God.” Your friends who care for your soul, plead, they beseech (beg) you to obey the gospel. The apostles who had been given the “*word of reconciliation*” pleaded on behalf of Christ that those who would hear the gospel would be “*reconciled to God*” (II Corinthians 5:19-20). In II Corinthians 6:2 Paul emphasizes the urgency of obedience, “*Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*” Felix, known as a corrupt and evil man, heard Paul preaching about “righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come” (Acts 24:25). Though he was “terrified,” he answered, “*Go thy way for this time; and when I have a convenient season, I will call thee unto me.*” Perhaps we do not realize the urgency of our obedience. The rich fool of Luke 12:16-20 thought he had prepared for “*many years*” (verse 19). But God said unto him, “*Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee...*” (verse 20). He did not have a tomorrow! He was called to meet God today!

The fourth verse gives a stern warning.

“If you spurn the invitation Till the Spirit shall depart, Then you’ll see your sad condition, Unprepared to meet thy God.” To “spurn” is more than to reject, it is to reject with disdain or contempt (Webster). This was the reaction of the Jews to the teaching of Jesus that resulted in His crucifixion. When the message of remission of sins (Acts 13:38) was preached in Antioch of Pisidia many of “*the Jews were filled with jealousy, and contradicted the things which were spoken by Paul and blasphemed.*” Paul said, “*It was necessary that the word of God should first be spoken to you. Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles*” (Acts 13:45-46). They had pushed away, repudiated, rejected, and refused the gospel (cf. Thayer). Certainly, the time will come will come when it will be too late to obey the gospel. “*It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this (cometh) judgment*” (Hebrews 9:27). Then, we would give a thousand lifetimes to have just one more opportunity to obey the gospel. “Then, you’ll see your sad condition, unprepared to meet thy God.”

The chorus: “Careless soul, O heed the warning, For your life will soon be gone; O how sad to face the judgment, Unprepared to meet thy God.” Yes, we are to appeal to sinners on the basis of the love of God and the sacrifice of Christ. Paul said, “*But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8). Yet the same writer said, “*Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men*” (II Corinthians 5:11 KJV). The word “*terror*” (*phobos*) suggests fright, even panic.

Let us invite the lost, let us plead with them and warn them of the awful consequences of facing the judgment “unprepared to meet thy God.”