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Here is a random sample from this week of many surprises! Tyson Fury, the newly-crowned heavyweight boxing champion of the world and a practising Christian by all accounts, spoke out in rather blunt terms about homosexuality, abortion and paedophilia, giving rise to a demand that he be dropped from the shortlist for the imminent BBC Sports Personality of the Year for holding such "outrageous views". Donald J Trump, a contender for the Republican nomination for the US presidency, suggested all Muslims should be temporarily banned from entering the United States, leading to an online petition calling for him to be banned from entering Britain that has gained over 500,000 signatures, while others said "Good idea!". Parts of the English Lake District have seen severe flooding, and a Muslim charity based in Blackburn sent in its people to help. At the climate-change talks in Paris, agreements are being sought over trying to slow down global warming. The wife and seven children of a Syrian man have been drowned in the Aegean. The number of refugees entering Germany this year has now topped one million. A man shouted at a knife-wielding attacker in a London tube station "You ain't no Muslim, bruv", while others stood there filming as the attacker set about a passer-by with a knife. These few examples, great and small, of the times we are living in tell us much: on the one hand fear, hasty words, callousness and much misery, yet on the other hand good deeds, mutual support and steady resolve.

As those seeking to be Christ's faithful sheep, we turn to the Lord and His Word for some understanding of what is going on around us. We have seen from the findings of those Bible "watchmen", and events such as the return of the Jews to their land and nation, that well-known biblical prophecies are coming to pass before our eyes, suggesting that God is indeed starting to "roll up His sleeves" in judgement, upon God-rejecting mankind, and upon the Jews in particular for rejecting their Messiah.

We see God's limited allowance of natural disasters, volatile weather and now militant Islam, to call the nations of the no-longer Christian West to come to their senses: to stop relying on their precious, secular values, and to return openly, humbly and unashamedly to "the God of their fathers" (eg., I Chronicles 5.25, 29.20 / II Chronicles 7.22, 11.16, 13.12 and 18, 20.33, 28.6, etc). Such scriptural references remind us how closely aligned is human well-being to human reverence for Almighty God our Creator. While these words applied originally to the Jews, now, in this era of the New Covenant of grace by faith in Christ, they apply just as much today to any nation, community or individual.

In answer to the question "But what does this mean in practice?", the classic verse of reply to that question is II Chronicles 7.14 - "If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land". There it is - crystal clear, with the way back wide open, and with the Lord, in His extraordinary patience, still saying "Come".

Now to be frank, there is little chance, humanly speaking, of that return to "the God of our fathers" taking place. It might happen, via a great deal of prevailing prayer from people like us, and a great work of mercy by the Holy Spirit in turning the tide against all the odds - and praise God indeed if it does so happen! But meanwhile we can see many signs that God, acting in love, warning and invitation, is starting to judge this world, by shaking all those trees of human complacency and vaunted independence.

Whatever lies ahead, how we are to live remains largely unaffected, as we seek to love Almighty God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and to demonstrate His loving concern in how we ourselves treat one another.

As a verse of Wesley's great Advent hymn, "Lo, he comes with clouds descending" puts it - "Yea, Amen, let all adore thee, High on thine eternal throne; Saviour take the power and glory, Claim the kingdom for thine own: Alleluia! Alleluia! Thou shalt reign, and thou alone!".

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