*Introduction*

Allow me to start by wishing you formally, a belated Happy New Year. It is the first time this year that you have seen me in an official capacity.

2011 was, for many a hard year. I am sure that none of us were happy with the Governments austerity proposals, with increased taxes, no pay rises etc. bringing a down turn to many peoples lives, if not all of us.

We also saw on the news many middle eastern countries involved in civil wars and unrest, with many governments being overthrown. There has continued to be wars with Nation rising against Nation.

We still see it today with the build up of forces by Iran and Israel and America in the middle east, sabre rattling.

We saw many natural disasters throughout the world, claiming many lives.

We could say, well it has always been that way. Of course you would be right. Jesus spoke of these events in Matthew 24, calling them the beginning of Birth pains.

The one thing we can say for sure is that these wars and disasters are becoming more frequent and more devastating.

In 2011 alone:

1/1/11-21/2/11 – 12 Nations hit by earthquakes

11/3 – Japan Tsunami killing 15,500 people and started the nuclear reactor meltdown.

Thailand had its worst floods in 50 yrs

China its worst drought in 60 yrs

2011 called the year of the tornado with USA receiving over 1600 devastating tornados.

Also known as the “Year of too much or too little water” with Australian floods covering an area the size of France and Germany put together, which ended up as Tropical storm WASHI that killed 1000 people and made 300,000 homeless in the Philippines.

Perhaps we in the UK think it will never happen to us, but a report in the GUARDIAN dated 6th Jan 12 states:

*The UK could stand "at most a week" of disruption if a natural or man-made disaster struck before severe problems, economic and social, that would bring chaos to the country,*

*The authors blame a complacent reliance on the globalised economy and the widespread adoption of "just-in-time" business models that stress lean, ultra-efficient operations with little slack built in for any unforeseen circumstances or stock held in reserve.*

*With public services and businesses being run as if constantly in crisis mode, even in normal circumstances, there is little flexibility when a real crisis strikes.*

*The problem is compounded as national and local governments are underprepared for disasters, despite a growing range of intensifying threats and recent experiences around the world, from the Icelandic ash cloud to the nuclear crisis in Japan.*

*Many of the world's fall-back systems are now stretched even in good times – for instance, food stocks and particularly grain stores globally have in recent years fallen to historically low levels under the impact of heightened demand and rising prices.*

*In the UK, these vulnerabilities are increased by the country's consumption habits and infrastructure. The UK is heavily dependent on imports of food and of energy. Britain's gas supplies in the North Sea are in rapid decline, but for the UK it is a key fuel, both for heating and for electricity generation, forcing far more to be imported. If these pipelines were disrupted, chaos would not be far away: despite pledges to build new gas storage infrastructure, there is often only a few days' worth of extra capacity stored within the system.*

*Petrol supplies too would be under threat after only a few days of disruption, and the vulnerability of transport networks means getting food and vital services to people affected by disasters becomes difficult very quickly. Even water supplies could be threatened in a prolonged disaster, as water storage networks are under strain and building new reservoirs – which utilities warn are needed – is extremely hard because of planning restrictions.*

But Jesus says “Do not be alarmed” – these are the beginning of birth pains. But it does seem that we are getting very near to the delivery date as these things get more painful and more frequent.

The Apostle Peter wrote in his second epistle:

***2 Peter 3 3-14 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this `coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.***

***But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.***

***But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.***

***Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness***

 ***So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.***

I believe God would have us look at 2 things this day:

1. What kind of people ought you to be
2. You have a choice.
3. **What kind of people ought you to be**

Peter answers the question partly straight away by saying “***You ought to live holy and godly lives”***. He also gives us our inspiration for this type of living as he says “***as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming”***

What does it mean “to live a holy and godly life?”

R T Kendall states in his Volume 1-Understanding theology that holiness (Greek – *hagiasmos*) a term used ten times in the NT means to reflect what God is: clean or pure.

The word Holy (Greek *hagios*), used 229 times in the NT. It is used as the main adjective for the Spirit; it is sometimes translated “saints”.

Therefore when Peter says we should live holy and godly lives he is saying we should live as Jesus did. We should be clean, pure – or what we would probably say today – transparent lives, nothing hidden, nothing dirty or sinful.

Peter also goes on in v14 to say that we should be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.

Is it achievable to live a holy life?

In his first epistle Peter states

***1 Peter 1:14-16 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."***

Jesus himself said – Follow me

Therefore it must be achievable in this life to live as obedient children of God.

Being holy means being honest in all our dealings, that means honest dealings in our finances, in the things we speak by telling the truth.

The psalmist says

***PS 58:3 Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies.***

We are all liars by nature because of sin, but we as Christians are to tell the truth.

We should live in peace with all men and not be bitter, forgiving those that hurt us. We should control our tongues, be people who do not judge, who do not say things about people that we shouldn’t.

Jesus gives a sobering word about what we say:

***MATT 12:36-37 But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."***

We should walk in the light

***1JN 1:5-7 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.***

We don’t become holy overnight, we are in the process of being sanctified – made holy. But we have a responsibility to walk as Jesus walked and ask the Holy Spirit to guide our footsteps.

In the meantime we should be able to say with John Newton:

I am not what I ought to be.

I am not what I want to be.

I am not what I hope to be.

But thank God I’m not what I used to be.

Peter also states that when we live like this, holy lives, we speed the day of his coming. This does not mean that if we act unholy we will delay his coming. No, what this means is that when we live holy lives, we draw men towards Jesus and therefore towards salvation, and so speed His coming.

Do you want to live like this?

1. **We have a choice.**

When the Israelites were coming to the promised land God spoke to them, saying:

***DT 30:19-20 This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.***

Nothing has changed in that God gives us a choice – to serve him or reject him, to be obedient or disobedient. There are no half measures.

Just before they entered the promised land Joshua said to the Israelites:

***JOS 24:14-15 "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."***

Jesus said:

***MT 6:24 "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.***

*Conclusion*

Making the choice to live God’s way is not easy. It will mean hardship and persecution, it will mean that we may not be liked. But the end will be worth it.

The one thing we cannot do, is to carryon trying to fit into the camp of God and the world’s camp.

We cannot do both, we have to choose.

The world’s way is easy, you will have pleasure and a good time perhaps, but at the end it leads to eternal death.

OR

You can choose to follow Christ and walk with him in obedience.

It is not enough to make a commitment at the cross and then do your own thing. We have to make a commitment at the cross and then follow him.

Jesus did not say to the fishermen “Hello, my name is Jesus, I am the savior of the world, now carry on fishing” HE SAID “Follow me”.

He calls us to look at our lives and the things that are worldly in our lives, and he says get rid of them and follow me.

Paul said

***Phil 3:10-14 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.***

***Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.***

What sort of person ought YOU to be?

It’s your choice.

Let us pray.