Are we ready for action?

The Lord Jesus seems to be asking me, "Are you ready for action?" I would like to share with you some of the things He has been speaking to me about. The first is that the things that can defeat us are not external attacks and problems such as our circumstances, physical troubles, political developments and military action in one form or another as in the Middle East or even religious disputes. These things are prompted by the enemy, but I believe it is the absolute truth that they cannot, of themselves, defeat us no matter how great they are, no matter how severe, no matter how humanly impossible.

Of themselves they have no power to defeat us, the children of God. We need not fear external attack. But we need to be aware of and on our guard against the attacks from within. ***"This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."*** (1 Jn. 5:4) We know the Biblical teaching on faith. We have talked about it and preached about it. We remember when we first came to the Lord Jesus and put our trust in Him taking hold of His promises. We don't need new truth, we need to appropriate and obey what we know. Since we are in action, we need to be 'ready for action'. Being 'ready for action' will mean different things to different people in different locations. God's Word doesn't give us a universal pattern. I would like to look at four things I believe God has shown me concerning how to be 'ready for action'.

1. Renounce the unessential

You are in a battle where you are – in action! This started when you arrived and it won't stop when you get home. How close are you to the battle against our demonic enemy? Do you see yourself as on the front lines? That is the question. In fact, we are in a crisis situation of life and death on the front lines. It is very helpful to sit down periodically before the Lord and quietly review everything we have including our relationships and then say to the Lord, "Lord Jesus, please show me if there is anything I need to renounce."

How easy it is to be disappointed and upset with trivial things and not be so concerned for the souls of lost people. I love books and I easily get attached to them. If I lend one and don't get it back, I easily get frustrated and angry. It is very healthy spiritually to get rid of things we are really attached to as God leads just to make sure we are 'ready for action'. I can ask the Lord Jesus to show me if I am getting too attached to my radio, my relationships and my work (even if it is God-given) or whatever the attachment may be. I can ask His help to renounce it to be sure that I am 'ready for action'.

2. Keep a clear conscience

This is the second absolute necessity. We must keep a clear conscience. Near the end of his ministry, when he was an experienced spiritual leader, the apostle Paul said, ***"So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man."*** (Acts 24:16) We might have thought that this great apostle would have got beyond that! So often we strive to get on a kind of higher spiritual level and when we do, we let ourselves down by getting a defiled, unclean conscience. God tells us to put something right with somebody – to write a letter, make a phone call or take some other action. But we procrastinate and say, "I will do that, but it will be easier when I meet him/her in person." So we put off making things right and eventually forget all about it. Our conscience is not clear. This is one of Satan's wiles to get us to twist our thinking and lower our spiritual level so it doesn't matter to us that we are ignoring the prompting of the Holy Spirit to bring something to the Lord and ask for cleansing.

If we don't have a clear conscience – what we used to call 'walking in the light' in the 60s – we can't exercise faith. We don't trust God and we can't lay hold of His promises with a defiled conscience. That is a spiritual law! We may hope to lay hold of the promises, but our grip on them is negligible. I believe that if we are going to be 'ready for action', one of the first things we must do is to be very careful to keep a clear conscience before God and man.

We might ask ourselves, "Isn't it bondage living like this and having to confess our sin over and over again?" The answer is 'No'. Bondage is in the sin that requires confession. However big or small the sin, confession is the only way to liberty. Perhaps there is bondage to a bad temper or some other habit. I believe one of the wiles of Satan is to convince me to think I have to keep confessing my sin and failure over and over again and that leads me into deeper bondage! I need to recognise that I am already in bondage and the only way to freedom is by dealing with things and letting the Lord Jesus cleanse me and completely deliver me.

Isn't there a better way? Is this the only way to keep a clear conscience? The answer is certainly, 'Yes'. In 1 Jn. 2:1 we read, ***"My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have one who speaks in our defence – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One."***

So it is not God's will for us to sin. God has made provision in His Word that when temptation comes there is a way of escape. But if I have sinned, I must not deceive myself and keep on talking about "the victorious life". I must seek God's remedy for a cleansed conscience, ***"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*** (1 Jn. 1:9) There is no substitute for a clear conscience and there is no way to spiritual power and effectiveness without it.

Have you noticed in reading the history of revivals and great spiritual breakthroughs that in nearly every instance the first step happens when the 'spiritual people' start opening their hearts and confessing their sin? Why is this so? It is obvious that they have not been keeping short accounts with God. When God visits us in power the 'crust cover' of unconfessed sin comes off. There is a new sensitive conscience so when the smallest wrong thought comes into our minds we quickly turn to the Lord Jesus and say, "I am sorry Lord, cleanse me." Then we are 'ready for action'.

3. Be transparently honesty in fellowship

The third thing I believe God is saying is this: if I am to be 'ready for action' and stay in that state of readiness, then there must be spiritual honesty and transparency in the fellowship on our teams and in committees. A lot of pretence can build up between us. This must be stripped away. Why any pretence? I think the logic goes something like this. We know a life of victory is our standard. It is taught to us in the New Testament and we must maintain that standard. Especially as leaders, we know we should be living as an example to others – both believers and unbelievers. However, if we are not, we don't say anything about it because that would be 'letting down the standard'. Sadly we don't think this is deceitful!

How easy it is to pray in a prayer meeting with great fervour, "Lord I want a deeper prayer life". We are giving the impression to everyone hearing us that our prayer life is real and that we really want to go to a deeper level in our walk with God. Yet perhaps I know I have had an empty prayer life for weeks!

Even when we speak of our weaknesses, we can do it in such a way that it gives the impression of humility leading to more honour and respect. Why do we do this? It is usually because we want to appear to others better than we are. It is spiritual dishonesty! May God forgive us for thinking this when others are praying. May He show us where this is true of us personally.

When a worker sins, do we say, "How could you possibly do that?" In reality we are saying, "I could never do that!" Usually such a reaction of shock is because we don't know our own hearts and are not prepared to admit what is there or – even worse – because we think that if we show shock people will think of us as 'holy'. Sincerity means that outside I am revealed as what I am inside. If I am willing to be known for what I really am, I am sincere. Do we fail to be ready for action because we don't want to be known for what we really are?

There was an occasion when a local worker was fighting in his own heart concerning his thought life. He often felt defeated when the whole team of expatriates and local workers met together. He thought that the expatriate workers were such holy people and if they knew the battle he was fighting they would despise him. But during one prayer session one of the expatriate workers stood

up and confessed that he had been having a battle in his thought life. Finally he had given it all to the Lord Jesus who had cleansed him. He asked the group to pray for him. The local worker then felt the liberty to speak about his own needs and to ask for prayer.

At this point the fellowship on the team became much more real. What kind of fellowship is there if one team member thinks others on the team are so 'holy' that they have no temptations or problems? Can it really be considered a team at all? Sadly when there are teams of nationals and expatriates, the nationals often have false ideas concerning the expatriates and the other way round. As we share together about our needs and bring one another to the Lord and to the Cross there is new victory. There is a new honesty. There is an honest testimony of what the Lord is doing in the lives of the team members. If all I share is answers to prayer, the peace God has given, the victories etc. and I don't share failures God has shown me and how I have dealt with these and received cleansing, then I can question whether it is an honest testimony.

Perhaps it would be good for each expatriate worker to ask God to give him a local counterpart who is a national believer with whom he can be absolutely transparent. Don't rush into this. Only do this after prayer and on the direct leading of the Lord. I think it would bring a new reality in fellowship between local believers and expatriates. This is a very precious thing when it works well.

The opposite of this is when either expatriates or nationals project an artificial spiritual "front", but their backs are exposed. Nationals often read us well and they see our failures, but what they don't see is our recognition of failure or our acknowledgement of failure. They just hear pious prayers and they have little confidence in our spirituality. Are we ready for effective action? There must be confidence in our spiritual integrity. If this is not the case there will be no willingness for open fellowship.

4. Realise that prayer is fighting

The fourth area is <u>getting ready</u> for action. We all know the Ephesians passage about the whole armour of God that we are to put on – Eph. 6:10-18. The various pieces of armour are listed – the helmet, the breastplate, the belt, the shoes, the shield and the sword. Perhaps we would have expected Paul to say, 'Take the armour, put it on and go and fight'? But he doesn't say that! He says we should put on the armour piece by piece and pray. So prayer isn't a piece of armour. We can't use the 'weapon of prayer'. Prayer is the actual fighting which uses the various pieces of armour for defence.

We know that prayer should have priority. The challenge to me is what place do I give to prayer? Once again Satan's wiles come in. He will try to keep us so busy with other things that prayer is squeezed out. When we do get down to prayer, he interrupts us. Perhaps somebody comes to the door and one interruption follows another. If Satan attacks us anywhere, he attacks us on prayer and making prayer a priority. We start to pray for revival. We pray for the Lord to work in our situation. We pray for conversions. We get discouraged, but we keep praying. But often the reality is that discouragement has made us stop <u>in our hearts</u> and that is a wile of the devil. We continue praying, but we don't obey. Often when we start to pray, God says to us, "write a letter" or "go and be reconciled with that friend" or "make that visit" or "speak to that person, he is in need". But we don't want to do it. We put it off and say we will do it later. Someone has said, "Five minutes of obedience is worth hours of prayer". Sometimes prayer can be a bypass for obedience.

So are we 'ready for action'? If we are, we will make prayer a priority in our lives. Often I have not done this. I have gone reluctantly to prayer meetings, but I have been convicted and determined to seek God's help realising that when I make a resolution, I have no ability to keep it. I must look to the Holy Spirit to help me make prayer a priority.

We can't isolate prayer from a cleansed conscience or from fellowship with others in truth. Prayer can only be isolated as an exercise in filling up time. A wile of the devil is that he tries to get our eyes on faith, on the act of praying rather than on the Lord Jesus. Satan reminds us of our failures and we dwell on this rather than keeping our eyes on the Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus said to the woman, ***"O woman, great is your faith!"*** It was great in contrast to others who had none. (Mt. 15:28) It was great because it was simple and it was real. The Lord Jesus explicitly said that we don't need "great" faith. He said, ***"If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed …."*** That was about the smallest thing He could have chosen. We don't need <u>big</u> faith we just need <u>real</u> faith. Don't let us get our eyes on faith, on prayer or on thinking that somehow we can get a grip on these promises and then things will happen. They won't! We must just keep our eyes on the Lord Jesus as a soldier keeps his eyes on his commander and faith will be there.

This is too serious for half measures. The magnitude of the attack is growing. It is serious because of what the Lord Jesus has said He will do through ordinary people who are abandoned to Him and filled with the Holy Spirit. We don't need to remain in defeat. We can know the power of God and the working of God. But we must be serious.

Let us be stripped ready for action and prepared to let God do anything He wants to do. We need to fight the fight of faith. He has already won the victory! He has told us to enter into that victory and to be 'ready for action' in the great and glorious things before us. With the working of the Holy Spirit within us this can be gloriously true for us all!