

Longing For Jesus' Appearing

This text is about the deep longing born-again Christians have for Jesus' Second Coming. This theme should bring us to a point of serious self-examination. In 2 Timothy 4:8 we read; 'Finally, there is laid up for me the Victor's Crown of Righteousness, which the Lord, our Righteous Judge, will award to me and to all those who have intensely loved and yearned for His return'. This Crown of Righteousness is a royal mark of kingship.

Revelation 19:12 tells us that when Jesus appears, He will be wearing many crowns on His head. Because He is the King of all kings, He has a right to wear every crown. Notice that Paul says Jesus is the Righteous Judge. Paul had been tried (2 Timothy 4:16) and sentenced to death by Nero; a very unjust judge who gave him an unjust sentence. But for Paul, that wasn't the last word. There would be another judgement before a totally Righteous Judge; Jesus Himself. So Paul said something really impressive; "The Lord, The Righteous Judge will give to me on that day ... (Judgement Day)." Then Paul adds this phrase: "And not to me only, but also to all those who have loved, yearned for and welcomed His appearing."

This phrase 'loved His appearing' is very important. The 'love' in this context means a very intense love. It describes a settled attitude; a yearning; almost a burning within the soul. You are almost 'in love' with the thought of the Lord's appearing. Within the body of Christ, God sees and recognises a special group of born-again believers who are marked out by the fact that they are yearning for Jesus. For those special believers, God has a special honour which is the crown of righteousness. It is not going to be given to all believers. The crown of righteousness is going to be given only to those believers, who have passionately loved the appearing of the Lord Jesus and who are longing for His second appearing. We all need to ask ourselves this: Do we qualify for that crown of righteousness? Are we longing for His appearing? Do we fulfil the requirements needed to receive that crown? There is a lot written in the New Testament about our attitude towards the coming of the Lord Jesus in His glory.

There are at least three types of believers, the scriptures exclude from receiving the Crown of Righteousness. (1) Some deeply 'religious' people will miss out; Matthew 7:21; "Not everyone who says 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of heaven." The people Jesus was speaking to were certainly believers, but were religious, rather than born-again.

(2) Some believers will miss out because just simply believing is not enough; we must be born-again, and then work in God's service. James 2:19 & 20; 'You believe that God is One? You do well. So do the demons believe and shudder in terror. Are you willing to be shown, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is worthless?' These people James was speaking to were also believers – they had faith – but were lazy in their service to God.

(3) The third type is the lukewarm Christians that make God angry; Revelation 3:15 & 16; "You are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth!" Jesus was speaking to a church, so they were also believers; they were born-again; but they had become complacent in their relationship with Him.

There are other Christians who believe; are born-again but are very carnal and live for the world rather than for God. They will get to heaven, but will receive no rewards, which will cause them great sorrow (1 Corinthians 3:15). They are the type of Christians who persecute, criticise and shake their heads at other, more dedicated Christians; true Christians the carnal ones consider 'too extreme' or follow 'too many rules' because they are rebellious and refuse to listen to the Word of God and be shown the way, as James says in the above scripture. We are to listen to Jesus words; "Enter through the narrow gate." Our actions on earth have eternal consequences and many Christians refuse to see that. We need to examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5). Many Christians believe they

can do whatever they want on earth and it is okay, because they are going to be 'raptured off' anyway.

Remember Jesus' words in John 12:25 & 26; "Anyone who loves his life loses it, but anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me and wherever I AM there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will honour him." Let's look at this scripture in its fullness. 'Whoever has no love for and no regard for his life here on earth, but despises it, preserves his life forever. If anyone serves Jesus; that is to cleave steadfastly; conform wholly to His example in living and in dying, will be honoured by God'. What you sow here on earth, will be what you will reap in heaven. If you want the Crown of Righteousness, many of you will have to change your attitude to the resurrection.

In Titus 2:11 to 13 we see that the 'Grace of God came for the deliverance from sin and the eternal salvation for all mankind. It [grace] has taught us to reject all ungodliness and worldly desires, to live righteous, Godly, holy lives in this present world. We are waiting and looking for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our Great God and Saviour, Christ Jesus, the Messiah'. Did you know grace teaches? It is not something we receive and that's all there is to it. Grace teaches. We receive grace freely. We cannot earn it but once we have received it, it imposes obligations on us. Grace teaches us how we should live. We should not live like the people of this world; we should live lives that are totally different from unbelievers. A lot of God's people are not doing that, but are conforming to this world.

A recent secular marketing survey was conducted to find out how best to sell to Christians. Businessmen wanted to know how best to sell their wares to Christians and the survey was a very penetrating analysis. The disturbing result was; that Christians liked the same things as the world and were just as gullible. They were tempted with the same marketing strategies so the marketing company recorded that the Christians were no different to the outside world. They are motivated in the same way; they respond to the same enticements and impulses; their standards are basically the same. That is not grace. Grace makes people different.

The motivation for the way we live should be the anticipation of the coming of the Lord. It should make us choose to live differently. We need to stand up for righteousness and holiness, and shun all worldliness. If you do that, you will suffer persecution – even from carnal Christians. We read that in 2 Timothy 3:12. All through the New Testament, the direction to live Godly lives leads us to the Second Coming of Christ. In some modern churches, where they do not consider this thought as being important and are not living in that anticipation, their standard of holiness will always be below that of the New Testament. They don't like the 'rules' Godly living imposes on them. As we look horizontally across our lives, instead of vertically towards heaven, Christian life can seem very 'straitened'; that is if we focus on our lives and are living like the world. Jesus said the narrow gate would be 'straitened' and restricted (Matthew 7:14). If we want the crown of righteousness, we are to reject ungodliness and live our lives solely for God.

Notice that Apostle Paul calls Jesus 'the Great God and Saviour'. It is very important that we understand that Jesus is God. Isaiah 12:2 said 'God has become my salvation'. Nobody but God can save you; it takes God in the Person of Jesus to save you. Jesus said in John 14:6; "I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life and no man can come to the Father, but through Me." Hebrews 9:27 & 28 says; 'Just as it is appointed for all men to die once, and after that the judgement, so it is that Christ, having been offered to take upon Himself and bear as a burden the sins of many, once and for all, will appear a second time, not to carry any burden of sin, but to bring to full salvation those who are eagerly, constantly, patiently and expectantly waiting for Him'.

The two special appointments every human will keep – like it or not – is death then judgement. There is no second chance. There is no reincarnation. We all need to live in the light of those two appointments. All will die once and once only – then after death is judgement by God. See the texts

on this website called “The Great White Throne” and “Judgement of Believers.” The next time Jesus appears, it will be to bring full salvation to those who are eagerly waiting for Him.

There are four main reasons why all Christians should be waiting for Jesus. The first is; the coming of Jesus will bring about the consummation of our personal salvation, which is the transformation of our physical body. Our salvation is not complete until we have received our resurrected bodies, which is like Jesus’ new body. That knowledge alone, should give us a new perspective on our salvation. Our death is not the end for us. Death is just one stage but it’s not the end. There is life beyond that.

Philippians 3:8 to 15 tells us ‘I count everything as loss compared to the possession of the priceless privilege [the overwhelming preciousness and supreme advantage] of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord and of progressively becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him. For His sake I have lost everything and consider it all to be mere rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ, the Anointed One; that I may be found in Him, not having any righteousness that can be called my own, based on my obedience to the Law’s demands, but possessing that genuine righteousness which comes through faith in Christ, the right standing with God, which comes from God by faith. For my purpose is that I might intimately know Him and the power of His resurrection, and that I might share in His sufferings as to be continually transformed into His likeness even to His death. That by any means [somehow, if possible] I may attain the resurrection out from among the dead, that for which Christ has laid hold of me and made me His own. I press on towards the goal to which God, in Christ is calling us upwards. So let those of us who are spiritually mature and full-grown have this in mind and hold these convictions; and if in any respect, you have a different attitude of mind, God will make that clear to you also’.

Paul says here, that it is the mature and full-grown Christian who hold these convictions. It takes a very strong Christian to lose everything, count it as rubbish, and accept their share in Christ’s suffering. Everybody wants God’s love, but reject the notion of suffering as Christ suffered. They don’t like it; but if you want to grow up in God and be purified, then you must accept His suffering so you can be transformed into His likeness. There are many things Paul said that people can’t accept (2 Peter 3:16), but if you are willing, God can change your heart so you can accept Paul’s teaching.

Paul said he wanted resurrection from the dead ‘by any means’. That shows us that Paul gave tremendous priority to Jesus’ coming and his own resurrection from the dead. No matter what it cost; no matter what the obstacles; to be part of the first resurrection (Revelation 20:6) was Paul’s aim. Paul had such a conviction of his resurrection from the dead; he wanted it by any means, whatever it took. Paul had real purpose in his life; a positive aim. He united his purpose with the Lord’s purpose for his life. As Christians, we are resident on earth but our citizenship is in heaven. Paul explains what he means in the end of Philippians 3:20 & 21. ‘Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we eagerly await the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who will transform the body of our humiliation to be like the body of His glory’.

Paul’s whole aim was the transforming of his body from the earthly body as we know it, to a heavenly, resurrected body, like Jesus’ resurrected body. We are all going to get a new body. That fact is very important if we are to understand the reason Paul placed so much importance on Jesus’ coming, the first resurrection and the transformation of his body. The ‘lowly’ body or the body of our humiliation came about because of the fall of Adam. Why are we humiliated? Because we rebelled against our Creator but this is not our permanent condition. This body of flesh will die off, but our new heavenly bodies will last forever. We will have a body of glory; we will be released from our humiliation; we will enter into God’s glory and that is what Paul said he was aiming at.

Paul doesn’t just speak of dying and going to be with the Lord, he talks about Jesus’ return and our resurrection and the resurrection body. That is the final consummation of our personal salvation. We died to sin when Jesus died on the cross (Romans 6:2). That is a fact of history we need to believe and really soak up. It is no longer us who live, but Jesus Who lives in us (Galatians 2:20). Colossians

3:2 to 4 says; 'Set your minds on what is above and not on the things that are on the earth; for as far as this world is concerned, you have died and your new real life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, Who is our life, appears, then you will also appear with Him in glory'.

As our lives are hidden with Christ in God, that gives us a sense of deep security. If our lives are hidden in Christ, there is no power of evil. No evil can touch the life that is hidden. It is absolutely out of range from all the forces of evil, so we can ignore the evil one and get on with serving God. If you are struggling with a problem; weakness or sickness, remember what the scripture says. 'Christ is our life'. What more could we need? His life is greater than every problem, pressure or infirmity. When Christ, Who is our life - appears, we will appear with Him in glory and that's when the whole world will see exactly who we are. The world doesn't realise we are God's children already. When Jesus appears in glory, we will appear with Him in glory. How exciting will that be? You're in a safe place and there is no safer place than to be hidden in Christ. Psalm 91:1 says; 'He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall remain safe under the shadow of the Almighty'. Be content to be hidden in Christ for now, for a day is coming when you won't be hidden any longer.

Jesus talks about resurrection being the result of believing in Him, not just eternal life. Jesus says this four times in John 6:39, 40, 44 & 54. "This is the will of the Father Who sent Me: that I should not lose any of all that He has given Me, but that I should give new life and raise them all up at the last day. For this is My Father's will and His purpose, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life and I will raise him up from the dead at the last day." "No one is able to come to Me unless the Father Who sent Me draws him, and gives him the desire to come to Me, and then I will raise him up at the last day." "He who feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day'. In verse 54, Jesus was not talking about cannibalism. He was talking about our 'devouring' the whole of the salvation message by accepting Him, believing in Him, loving Him, being grateful to Him, obeying Him, trusting Him, worshipping Him and suffering with Him.

We need to focus on the completion of our lives which is resurrection. Many Christians can only see the here and now and the things of earth, but that is a mistake for we are to set our eyes, our hope and our lives towards the resurrection. The resurrection is the pinnacle of human history. It is the end of all of the suffering of humanity on earth, and the beginning of our eternal life with Christ; ushering in the thousand years' reign of Christ on earth. There is much more to salvation than just eternal life which in itself is wonderful; but the pinnacle is the resurrection. If you are not so impressed with just having eternal life, then perhaps the thought of being raised back to life on the last day might make you take notice. That's what will happen. Your dead, decayed or cremated body will be raised from the grave, the sea or where ever it may be, and you will be made alive again, in an imperishable, eternal body. We have possibly been truncating the Gospel message, by leaving off the climax of the whole salvation message. Just believing in eternal life without the knowledge of resurrection is like reading a good book missing the last chapter. Death is not the end of the book; there's another chapter and it's called the resurrection. So when you testify to people, remember to tell them about the last chapter of the book; our resurrection at the Lord's Second Coming.

The second reason every Christian should be longing for Jesus' appearing, is it will mark the consummation of our union with our Lord in two ways; (1) with Christ Himself and (2) the marriage supper of the Lamb (Jesus). Our union with Him will not be complete until He appears. In Revelation 19:6, 7 & 9 we read; 'I heard what sounded like the shout of a vast throng, like the boom of many pounding waves, and like the roar of mighty peals of thunder, exclaiming: Hallelujah, praise the Lord! For the Lord our God the Omnipotent reigns! Let us rejoice and shout for joy! Let us celebrate and ascribe to Him glory and honour, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready'. Verse 9; 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb'.

In this passage of scripture there is incredible excitement, but what is it all about? It's about you and me. Notice the 'bride' or the church has made herself ready. God helps us but ultimately, we have to prepare ourselves. When the scripture talks about the marriage supper, there will be a union with

Jesus that we cannot imagine at this time. In human language that union is so wonderful, it is indescribable. As Christians, we are the bride of Christ and if we're not excited about eternity with God, then there is something wrong with our walk with God. There is nothing wrong with being excited about our relationship with the Lord Jesus because on this earth, nothing else can take its place.

Our resurrection will not only consummate our relationship with Jesus, it will consummate our relationship with each other. See 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 & 18; 'The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a loud shout of summons, then with the shout of an archangel, and with the blast of the trumpet of God. And those who have departed this life in Christ will rise first. Then the living ones, who remain on the earth, shall simultaneously be caught up along with the resurrected dead in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so always through the eternity of eternities, we shall be with the Lord. Encourage one another with these words'. We will all be in a state of unity we cannot comprehend at this time, but it will happen and it will be forever.

The shout the Lord Himself will utter, will be to call forth all the believing dead. When Jesus called Lazarus out of the tomb, He was very careful to be specific and call only Lazarus. If He had called "Come out", all the dead would have risen. Then there will be the shout of the archangel; probably Gabriel who announces on earth, the great interventions of God. Then there will be the trumpet of God. The dead in Christ will rise first, and then those who are on earth shall be caught up in the clouds to be with the Lord forever. No born-again believer will miss out. Whether we are dead or alive at the coming of the Lord, we will be caught up to be with Him forever. The resurrection will be a very exciting time!

The words 'caught up' gives rise to the word 'rapture'. Many people think the 'rapture' will be a secret catching away, but that is not what the Bible teaches and we must listen to what the scriptures tell us. Firstly the Lord will shout so loudly, the dead will be able to hear Him. Then there will be a shout of the archangel and a blast of a trumpet. Every eye (that is every person in the world) will see Him, all at the same time (Revelation 1:7). That is not what we could call a secret, quiet departure. When Jesus does come again, He will come very suddenly. In 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 'For you know perfectly well that the day of the return of the Lord will come as unexpectedly and suddenly as a thief in the night'. There is no scripture that says Jesus will come back quietly or secretly. That leaves us with one question. How will every person on earth see Him all at once? Jesus is God and God is omnipresent. That means He is everywhere at once. Since He is everywhere already and we can't yet see Him, it will be an easy thing for Him to reveal Himself to everybody on earth, all at the same time, at the time of His choosing.

The proof that the Holy Spirit can catch us up suddenly is found in Acts 8:39 when Philip was caught away. Elijah was caught up in the whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11) and Enoch was not because God took him suddenly (Genesis 5:24). So we born-again believers too, will be caught up in the same way. It will be a very sudden grab. There will be no warning except for the warnings we have in the scriptures to be ready for it. We will be caught up in clouds and will be forever with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17), just like Jesus ascended in clouds (Acts 1:9 & 11) to meet the Lord in the air. He will come down to get us (Matthew 24:30; 26:64; Mark 13:26; 14:62; Luke 21:27; Revelation 1:7). There are two Greek words corresponding with the one English word for air. One 'air' is the lower air we breathe; contiguous with the earth's surface. The other word for 'air' is the high rarefied atmosphere, where we get our word ether. The 'air' used here is the lower air, so the Lord is going to come very close to earth. We will be caught up in clouds to meet Him and be with Him forever. "And thus we shall always be with the Lord." It will be our final permanent union with the Lord and with one another. It will be a unity that we can not conceive in our minds at this time. Those Christians who obey God and are worthy to take part in the first resurrection, will rule and reign with Jesus for one thousand years (Revelation 20:6) and Jesus will rule the nations with a rod of iron (Revelation 2:27).

The third reason why every Christian should be longing for Jesus return is: it is the only hope for the suffering of humanity. As Christians we need to identify with the suffering and help wherever we can and do whatever is in our power to help them. James 1:27 says; 'Pure religion that is pure in the sight of God the Father is this: to visit and help care for the orphans and the widows in their affliction and to keep oneself pure and unspotted from the world'. When the Lord comes He will abolish war, oppression, famine, disease, hatred and all evils. In the meantime, we have an obligation to reveal His compassion to the world. We can only do what we are able, and it is impossible for the church to meet all the needs of every suffering person throughout the whole world; mainly because many non believers are not prepared to meet the conditions required to have their needs met. If man does not lay down his rebellion against God, he shuts himself off from the mercies of God.

After the first resurrection, the Messianic Kingdom – also known as the Millennium – will last for one thousand years on this earth. In Revelation 20 it says so six times. Verse 2; '...the devil was securely bound for a thousand years'. Verse 3; '...until the thousand years were at an end...' Verse 4; '...they lived again and ruled with Christ a thousand years'. Verse 5; 'The remainder of the dead were not resurrected until the thousand years were completed'. Verse 6; '...They shall be ministers of God and of Christ and they shall rule along with Him a thousand years'. Verse 7; 'And when the thousand years are completed...'

Psalm 72 was initially written for Solomon but looking at Solomon's life, it doesn't really fit this Psalm. Even if Solomon had continued living a righteous life, he never had dominion over the whole earth so this Psalm is attributed to David's Greater Son, Jesus, the Messiah and the setting up of His Kingdom. The Psalm gives a detailed description of what the thousand years will be like. Jesus will govern with righteousness, He will bring justice, He will crush the oppressor, He will have dominion all over the earth, all nations will serve Him, He will banish poverty, sickness, hunger; He will have pity on the needy and save them, He will pray continually, the whole earth will be filled with His glory. During the thousand years, Jesus will bring peace. Many people talk about peace, but peace can only come through righteousness. Everybody wants peace, but how many people want righteousness? In that Psalm, there is also an emphasis on helping the needy.

Psalm 102:16 says; 'When the Lord builds up Zion, He will appear in His glory'. The words 'build up' actually means to restore, so this scripture is saying; once Zion is restored, He will appear. The 20th century saw the restoration of Israel and we know the Lord has two covenant peoples: the church and Israel. The two peoples have been parallel for the past hundred years or so. The early church had Spirit-filled people and worshipped the Lord, laid hands on the sick, spoke in tongues and performed miracles. The church died down considerably for two thousand years and has been restored only in the past hundred or so years. The church has a long way to go before it will be as successful as the early church, but the restoration has begun. Israel too, is in the process of restoration.

Before Jesus returns, there has to be a mental revolution in the Charismatic and Pentecostal churches, just as great as the first events that initiated the first churches. We need to learn to think differently. Charismatics and Pentecostals are the most need oriented people that have ever been. We think we only ought to pray, ask and expect God to drop our requests at our doorstep, and when He doesn't, we become most upset. You can gather a crowd anywhere if you preach; you can have your needs met; you can be healed; you can prosper; you can have all you want, and more. There is a certain truth in that but it is out of balance. We need to focus on the upcoming Kingdom of God and off ourselves. We need to see that when He comes, all our needs will be met. What really matters is; what God wants; His will; His purpose. The first petition Jesus told us to pray is; "Thy Kingdom come." Further down the prayer, we come to our needs. We have to get the order right. We have to lift our eyes from our daily needs and look to the supreme purpose of God which is very simple; it's the coming of His Kingdom. When you're looking for His Kingdom, your own needs diminish. In the meantime we need to get the Gospel out to as many people as possible.

The fourth reason we need to be longing for the second coming of Jesus, is it will bring about the redemption of all creation. Animals are also affected by mankind's sin. Romans 8:18 to 25; 'The sufferings of this present time are not worth being compared with the glory that is about to be revealed to us, for even the whole of creation waits expectantly and longs eagerly for God's sons to be made known. For the creation was subjected to frailty (because of man's fall). Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole of creation has been moaning together and not only creation but we ourselves too, who have the Holy Spirit, groan within ourselves as we eagerly wait for the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. We hope for what is still unseen by us, we wait for it with patience'.

The Lord said to Adam in Genesis 3:17 & 18; 'Cursed is the ground for your sake. Thorns and thistles shall the ground bring forth, etc'. There never were any thorns and thistles until mankind fell. Man had dominion over the whole earth, and when he fell into sin, the whole earth was affected. When Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate, they had put on Him a purple robe and pressed a crown of thorns on His head. Jesus stood there with the thorns on His head and the purple of the thistle on His robe as a testimony that He was bearing the curse of man's sin on the ground. Jesus was made a curse and the earth will ultimately be redeemed from that curse, but only when the sons of God are made known. The whole of creation is waiting for the Messianic age. Not only will we have our new bodies, the whole of creation will be set free.

Psalm 96:11 to 13; 'Let the heavens be glad, let the earth rejoice, let the sea roar and all the things which fill it. Let the field exult, and all that is in it! Then shall all the trees of the wood sing for joy before the Lord, for He comes to judge and govern the earth! He shall judge the world with righteousness and justice and the people with His faithfulness and truth'.

Psalm 98:7 to 9; 'Let the sea roar, and all that fills it, the world and those who dwell in it! Let the rivers clap their hands, let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord, for He is coming to judge and rule the earth; with righteousness will He judge and rule the world and the peoples with equity (fairness)'.

The answer to humanity's problems is righteousness, and righteousness will not be established until the Lord returns. This is the blessed hope laid before the church. It is the consummation of the age and our salvation; consummation of our union with the Lord and one another; the consummation of redemption for this earth and all of creation. A lot depends on the church because we are the body of Christ, and God will do nothing that bypasses His body because it would dishonour the Head, Jesus. We need to rise to our destiny and spend more time in the Bible and in prayer. If you want to be a spiritual giant; if you want to receive the Crown of Righteousness, you only need to spend more time with the Lord; listen and obey.

Amen and God bless you.

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