

Preparing Ourselves For Jesus' Return And The First Resurrection

'I heard what sounded like the roar of a vast crowd of people, like the sound of a huge waterfall, 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 be exceedingly glad! Let us celebrate and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. She has been clothed in fine linen, dazzling and white. The fine linen is the righteous deeds of God's holy people. Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb' (Revelation 19:6 to 9).

This Bible study is about four topics that tie in together: Receiving the crown of righteousness; longing for Jesus' appearing; being ready for the first resurrection and finally, how we are to prepare ourselves for Jesus' return to earth. Apostle Paul was tried and sentenced to death by Nero; a very unjust judge who gave him an unjust sentence. For Paul, that was not the last word. There would be another judgement before a totally Righteous Judge; Jesus Himself. 'As for you, be calm in all things, suffer unflinchingly, do the work of an evangelist and fulfil your ministry. I am ready to be sacrificed (poured out) as a drink offering; the time of my release is near and I will soon go free. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the victor's crown of righteousness, which the Lord, our Righteous Judge, will award to me on that day (Judgement Day) – and not to me only but to all those who have loved and yearned for His return' (2 Timothy 4:5 to 8). That is really impressive; the Lord our Righteous Judge will give the crown of righteousness to all those who have loved (yearned for) His appearing.

The scriptures speak about the crown of righteous that will be given only to a select group of Christians who have chosen to pour themselves out in service to God, from the time they are born-again until they go to be with the Lord, and who are longing for the appearing of the Lord Jesus. God has marked out that special group who are longing for Jesus' return, and for them, God has a special honour; the crown of righteousness. We are very careful not to speak about 'special groups' because that can cause problems, but this group is a group of believers that the Word of God actually authenticates. Born-again Christians should have a deep longing for Jesus' return which extends to our involvement in the first resurrection, and the reward of the crown of righteousness. This theme should bring us to a point of serious self-examination to see if we qualify for that crown. 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. Within the world-wide body of believers that make up the whole church (Messiah's Bride), God sees and recognises that special group of born-again believers who are marked out by the fact that they are yearning for Jesus. The crown of righteousness is not going to be given to all believers, it is going to be given only to those believers, who have passionately loved, 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?

The motivation for the way we live should be the anticipation of the coming of the Lord and the resurrection. No one can force another to ready; all we can do is make it possible by showing the way. It is a matter of choice. It should make us choose to live differently. If Jesus returns and catches us living carnally, then we may well be overlooked. There are several verses spoken by Jesus that strongly indicate many believers will miss out. Jesus said we must be ready because He is coming when we least expect Him (Matthew 24:44). We need to stand up for righteousness and holiness, and shun all worldliness. All through the New Testament, the direction to live Godly lives leads us to the return of Jesus and the resurrection. In some modern churches, where they do not consider this as being important and are not living in that anticipation, their standard of holiness will always be below that of the New Testament. Many don't like the 'rules' Godly living imposes on them. If 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. We must pay close attention to Jesus' words; "Enter (heaven) through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate that leads to destruction (hell) and many are those who are entering it. But the gate is narrow (straitened, restricted) that leads to eternal life and very few are those who find the way through (Matthew 7:13 & 14). Notice this statement made by Jesus; Very few find the way through! He means believers! Very few people who are believers will find their way into the Kingdom of God because they are not living their lives for God, but for the flesh. The scriptures state emphatically, if we live after the flesh then we will die spiritually (Romans 8:13). Many people are born-again, but do not live for God and will forfeit their hard-earned salvation. For one very common example; We frequently see people who attend church every Sunday, then after the service go outside to join others as they stand around smoking. That is not living for God, that is living for the flesh. That is a terrifying thought and in this age of lawlessness and self-indulgence, we must be even more vigilant to keep a check on our own behaviour.

Notice Jesus is called 'the Great God and Saviour' (Titus 2:13; 2 Peter 1:1). It is very important that we understand that Jesus is God. It takes God in the Person of Jesus to save us. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life and no man

can come to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6). 'Just as it is appointed for all men to die once, and after that the judgement, so it is that Jesus, 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 patiently waiting for Him' (Hebrews 9:27 & 28). 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. The next time Jesus appears, it will be to bring full salvation to those who are eagerly waiting for Him.

All Christians should be waiting for Jesus. The coming of Jesus will bring about the final consummation of our personal salvation, which is the transformation of our physical body. Our salvation is not complete until we have all received our new resurrected, heavenly, glorious bodies that will last forever and which will be like Jesus' resurrected body. That knowledge alone, should give us a new perspective on our salvation. Our death is not the end for us. This mortal flesh and bone is not our permanent condition. It is just one stage and there is life beyond that. The scriptures tell us 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 Jesus' suffering. 'For His sake I have lost everything and consider it all to be mere rubbish, in order that I may gain Jesus the Messiah, and that I may be found in Him, not having any righteousness that can be called my own ... but having genuine righteousness which comes through faith in Jesus; the righteousness, which comes from God by faith. 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 transformed into His likeness even to His death. That by any means I may attain the resurrection out from among the dead ... that for which Jesus has laid hold of me and made me His own ... I press on towards the goal to which God, in Jesus 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' (Philippians 3:8 to 15). Everybody wants God's love, but reject the notion of suffering as Jesus suffered. Apostle Paul said he wanted resurrection from the dead 'by any means'. That shows us that Paul gave tremendous priority to Jesus' return and his own resurrection from the dead. No matter what it cost; no matter what the obstacles, Paul had a strong conviction of his resurrection from the dead, and wanted to be part of the first resurrection (Revelation 20:6). As Christians, we are resident on earth but our permanent citizenship is in heaven. 'Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we eagerly await the return of the Lord Jesus, Who will transform the body of our humiliation to be like the body of His glory' (Philippians 3:20 & 21). 'But the truth is that they were yearning and for a better and more desirable country, that is, a heavenly one. For that reason God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a new city for them' (Hebrews 11:16). If we read the first half of that last sentence again, the implications are frightening. 'For that reason, God is not ashamed to be called their God.' The implication here is; for those Christians who are not longing for His appearing, God is ashamed of them. It is our attitude that will catch us out.

Paul's whole aim was the transforming of his body from the earthly body as we know it, to a heavenly, resurrected 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. 'Set your minds on what is above and not on the things that are on the earth; for you have died (to sin) and your new life is hidden with Jesus in God. When Jesus Who is our life appears, then we will also appear with Him in glory' (Colossians 3:2 to 4). When Jesus appears, we will appear with Him in glory and that is when the whole world will see exactly who we are. The world does not realise we are God's children already. We can be content to be hidden in Jesus for now, for a day is coming when we won't be hidden any longer, and then the whole world will know we are God's children. Jesus talks about the resurrection being the result of believing in Him, not just eternal life. We will be raised up on the last day of this age. Jesus said that four times. '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 eternal 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 Me has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day' (John 6:39 to 54). Jesus 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, suffering with Him, then being raised with Him. We need to focus on the completion of our lives which is resurrection. Many Christians can only see the things of earth, but that is a mistake for we need to set our eyes, our hope and our lives towards the resurrection. It will be the end of all of the suffering of humanity on earth, and the beginning of our eternal life with Jesus. If we 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 us take notice. Our old body will be raised from the ashes, the grave, the sea, even victims of wild animal attacks who have been devoured or where ever the body may be, will be made alive again, in an imperishable, eternal body. We have possibly been truncating the Gospel, by leaving off the culmination 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 is another chapter and it is called the resurrection. So when we testify to people, remember to tell them about the last chapter of the book; our resurrection at the Lord's return.

There is much more to salvation than just eternal life which in itself is wonderful; but the pinnacle of human history is the resurrection. Our salvation can be likened to a spiritual 'betrothal' or 'engagement', such as people have preceding their marriage. Our union with Jesus will not be complete until our resurrection. Study carefully the opening verses on the top of page one of this Bible study. In this passage of scripture there is incredible excitement in heaven, 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 feast, 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 the Messiah and if we're not excited about eternity with God with a brand new resurrected body, 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. The resurrection will be a very exciting time! Every eye (that is every person in the world) will see Him, all at the same time (Revelation 1:7). How will every person on earth see Him all at once? Simple! Remember that 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. In the meantime we need to get the Gospel out to as many people as possible.

What do we have to do to prepare ourselves for the return of Jesus? In the above verse we read that the bride (church) makes herself ready; or we can say the church has prepared herself and that verse makes it clear not everybody receives an invitation to the marriage feast of the Lamb. Jesus said, many are called (or invited) but few are chosen to participate (Matthew 22:14). Some are called but feel they are too busy with the things of the world to heed the call (Matthew 22:1 to 10). In this parable, the people were not concerned about the call to serve God and paid no attention. One man went to his farm, another to his business, others persecuted those who did heed the call. Others are called but are not ready so they miss out, like in the parable of the ten virgins (Matthew 25:1 to 12). Five were wise and were ready; five were foolish and were shut out because they neglected to ready themselves. Some people may try to sneak in to the marriage supper but will be ejected because they are not wearing the necessary 'wedding garment' which is life-long righteous deeds (Matthew 22:12 & 13; Revelation 19:8). If we are truly longing for Jesus' appearing, it shows in the way we live; the practical outworking in our daily lives. We should be living lives differently to those who are not eagerly awaiting the appearance of Jesus. The longing should cause us to cultivate personal holiness. That is very important. There is no substitute for holiness and righteousness. As we read the New Testament, we will see that the greatest single motivation offered by the apostles for holiness of life, is the anticipation of the Lord's return and the resurrection. Where Christians are not living in that eager anticipation of the Lord's return, the standard of holiness – in those Christians – is below that shown in the New Testament.

There are at least three types of believers the scriptures exclude from receiving the crown of righteousness because do not fulfil God's requirements. Not only do they miss out on receiving the crown, they miss out on heaven altogether. (1) Some deeply 'religious' people will miss out; 'Not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father Who is in heaven' (Matthew 7:21). The people Jesus was speaking to were certainly believers, but were religious, rather than born-again. Jesus said we must be born-again to enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:3 to 7) and we must be found to be doing His will when He returns. 'Blessed is the servant whom his Lord will find doing so when He comes' (Luke 12:43). (2) Some believers will miss out because just simply believing is not enough; we must be born-again by faith, and then work in God's service obeying His will. '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?' (James 2:19 & 20). The people James was speaking to were also believers – they had faith – but were lazy in their service to God. We must be doers of the Word, not just listeners or we are deluding ourselves (James 1:22). (3) The third type are the lukewarm Christians that make God angry. God sees everything we do. He also sees what we do not do. 'I know your works. 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!' (Revelation 3:15 & 16). Jesus was speaking to a church so they were also believers, but they had become complacent in their relationship with God and their service for Him. These are professing Christians who believe but are very carnal and live for the world rather than for God. Some people will get to heaven but will receive no rewards because their works were worthless, which will cause them great sorrow and loss (1 Corinthians 3:15). Our actions on earth have eternal consequences and many Christians refuse to see that. We need to spiritually examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5). Remember Jesus' words; "Anyone who loves his (earthly) life loses it, but anyone who hates his life in this world (has no regard for his life here on earth) will keep it for eternity. If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me (follow His example steadfastly) and wherever I am, there will My servant be also. If anyone serves Me, the Father will

honour him" (John 12:25 & 26). What we sow here on earth, will be what we will reap in heaven. If we want the crown of righteousness, and be involved in the first resurrection, and also be invited to the exciting marriage feast of the Lamb, many of us will have to change our attitude and live our lives solely for God.

To prepare ourselves spiritually for the return of Jesus, the resurrection, the marriage feast, and to receive the reward of the crown of righteousness, we only need to study the words of Jesus. Jesus is the Word of God (Revelation 19:13). The Lord speaks to us through the Bible which is the Word of God. Every word written is inspired by God Himself for instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16). The Bible is given to us to show us His way of salvation and Godly living. The following conditions are not man-made ordinances, they are conditions clearly laid out by Jesus and His apostles to light up our spiritual path, to lead us and show us the way, so we are able to achieve all that He has for us, both here on earth and in heaven. We can check the scripture references at our own leisure. To prepare us for eternity with God, we must all repent and be baptised (Acts 2:38), be born-again, baptised and filled with the Holy Spirit (John 3:3 to 8). Our baptism should be by full immersion like Jesus did (Matthew 3:16). We should be filled with the Holy Spirit, symbolised by oil (Matthew 25:1 to 12). Five of these believers missed out on the Kingdom of God because they were not filled with the Holy Spirit. We must be holy (1 Peter 1:16). We must behave righteously (2 Corinthians 5:21). We must live by faith (Galatians 3:11). We must not harbour malice (Matthew 5:22 to 26). We must not lust in our hearts (Matthew 5:27 & 28). We must not be hypocrites (Matthew 6:1 to 5). We must not hoard (Matthew 6:19 to 34). We must never judge others (Matthew 7:1 to 5). We must willingly to 'take up our cross' and suffer because Jesus suffered (Matthew 10:38). We must never, ever blaspheme (Matthew 12:31 & 32). We must forgive everybody or we will not be forgiven (Matthew 18:21 to 35). We must not put money before God (Matthew 19:21 to 26). We must be obedient to what God tells us to do (Matthew 21:28 to 41). Jesus was especially hard on religious leaders. He said to do what they said, but not what they did because they did not practice what they preached (Matthew 23:1 to 36). There are many ministers who are exactly the same today. We are warned not to follow false prophets or anyone who claims to be Jesus (Matthew 24:4, 5, 23 to 25). We must use our talents to serve God or He will declare us good-for-nothing (Matthew 25:14 to 30). We must help the poor and needy whenever possible and will be judged accordingly (Matthew 25:32 to 46). Then after learning all these things, we are blessed if we do not balk, take offence or stumble over them, then we will find peace, or rest for our souls (Matthew 11:6 & 28 to 30). We will be judged according to our spiritual fruit (Matthew 12:33).

Our walk with the Lord is very a very narrow path indeed, but the eternal rewards will make it more than worth it. We need to understand it is the Lord Himself Who purifies us with the washing of His Word (Ephesians 5:26). We can make conscious choices to turn from evil and do what is right (1 Peter 3:11) but it is the Lord Himself Who keeps us from falling into sin (Jude 1:24). That is why it is vitally important to read and study the Bible every day so we know what the Lord expects of us, and by His grace, He will help us achieve His purpose for our lives. The anticipation of the Lord's return is the basic motive for true holiness. 'The grace of God came to bring 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 world. We are waiting and looking for the blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our Great God and Saviour, Jesus the Messiah, Who gave Himself on our behalf, that He might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for Himself, a people who are eager to do good works. Tell them all these things. Urge, advise, encourage, warn and rebuke with full authority. Let no one despise you and your teaching' (Titus 2:11 to 15). Did you know 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. God's grace makes people different. A demand of grace is that we live a certain kind of life. God's grace teaches us how to live a Godly life.

Our hearts are to be holy and blameless. Jesus said we should be perfect like our heavenly Father in heaven is perfect (Matthew 5:48). That is a very high standard of life that our Lord demands of us before He returns. The return of the Lord will reveal what level of holiness we have actually achieved. 'That He may strengthen and establish your hearts faultlessly pure, blameless in holiness in the sight of our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His holy people! Amen' (1 Thessalonians 3:13). 'The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, and then the universe will vanish with a thunderous crash, and the material (not spiritual) elements of the universe will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things will be destroyed, what kind of person should each of you be;

in holiness and in Godliness, while you wait and earnestly yearn for (and hasten) the coming of the day of the Lord; which will cause the universe to be destroyed by fire? But we look for a new heavens (universe) and a new earth according to His promise in which righteousness will dwell. So Beloved, since you are looking for these things, be eager to be found by Him at His coming, without spot and blameless, and living in peace' (2 Peter 3:10 to 14). We have to be ready for the Lord. We have to be at peace. As much as is humanly possible, live at peace with one another (Romans 12:18). We can also be at peace and free from condemnation (Romans 8:1). We need to have the 'garment' or 'robe' of righteousness which Jesus has given us. Any sin we have committed is a 'spot' on that garment. It is important not to have any 'spots' or 'blemishes'; so all we need to do is repent, pray and ask for forgiveness for our sin. If our conscience does not convict us, we may be bold before God (1 John 3:21). We need to go to the Lord and ask His forgiveness. We know He is faithful and just and will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness – that is if we confess our sin to Him (1 John 1:9). The wonderful thing about being a Christian is; we know how to get our 'garment' cleansed. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). We must also be blameless. If there is anything we should have done and didn't – or something we should not have done and did – we need to put that right with God. We need to be faithful in every duty that is within our power to fulfil. Being at peace without spot and to be blameless is a challenge, and it is in light of the coming of the Lord. We will be gathered before the Lord very publicly. We will finally be revealed as God's children and as God's children, we need to be like our Father.

Being as holy as God expects will not happen through carelessness, sloppy living or complacency. If we are genuinely waiting for the Lord's return we must cultivate personal holiness. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. We have to be diligent. It takes real attention to spiritual issues, and we need to listen to His direction. There is another scripture that tells us God requires personal holiness and purity. 'Beloved, we are now God's children; it is not yet revealed what we shall be hereafter, but we know that when He comes, we shall be like Him; just as He really is. And everyone who has this hope resting on Him, purifies himself just as He is pure' (1 John 3:2 & 3). Those who truly hope to see Jesus and be transformed into His likeness, purifies themselves. If we can think logically – we are going to be exposed to heaven and the glory of a very holy God, the Holy Son, the Holy Spirit and holy angels so we also need to be holy and have purity. That dazzling Light will reveal any spot on our garment and if we walk closely to God here on earth, that same Light reveals sin in us that can be washed away. The Light will reveal any flaw in our character that has not been covered by the blood of Jesus. That is very challenging. If people do not see the need to purify themselves; then they are not – in reality – expecting to see Jesus. They may have the doctrine in their minds, but the desire to see Jesus is not really in their hearts. The mark of a person who is longing to see Jesus, is someone who purifies themselves.

Another thing we need to do to prepare for the return of the Lord is; we need to complete our assigned task. 'We are God's own handiwork; His workmanship recreated in Jesus, born anew that we may do those good works which God predestined (planned beforehand) for us, taking paths which He prepared ahead of time, that we should walk in them, living the good life which He prearranged and made ready for us to live' (Ephesians 2:10). We don't need to decide what we will do for God; we need to find out what God has assigned for us. He has a prepared task for every one of us. We have already read, we must purify ourselves, and the bride has to make herself ready. God doesn't do that. He provides us with the means, but we have to do it. The righteous acts or deeds of God's people, makes us ready for the marriage feast. When we trust Jesus for salvation, His righteousness is imputed to us. We receive it as a gift but by the time we get to heaven, it has to be confirmed by a righteous life. When we appear in our dazzling linen bridal attire ready for the marriage feast, we want it to be perfectly clean. Most importantly, we will want to have a garment. Remember the parable about a person who did not have a wedding garment (righteous acts). The person was bound up and tossed into outer darkness (Matthew 22:11 to 13). In the parable, Jesus calls the man 'friend' so he was known to the Lord but was thrown out because he had no garment – no righteous acts. We are saved by faith, but after salvation we must serve the Lord in our appointed task and we must complete our assigned task. Too many Christians start a work they know God has called them to, and then because it becomes tough, they bail out.

An indication that we are anticipating the Lord's return is continuing prayer. Jesus gives some detail about what will happen before His return. He describes His return and He encourages us to look vertically to heaven and not horizontally at the events in the world. 'Now when these things begin to occur, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is near' (Luke 21:28). The world is continually agonising over mounting problems, but we as Christians should be at peace knowing God has it all under control. We see the same things, but we should see them from a different perspective. Jesus said these things are like birth pangs (Matthew 24:8). What is coming from this 'birth'? Jesus said the current troubles will bring the close of this present age (it is not the end of the world, it is the end of this age) (Matthew 13:49). A new age in man's history is coming; a new chapter; a new covenant that began with Jesus; a Kingdom age. We have at least another thousand years to go before this earth is burned up and the end of this world will occur (2 Peter 3:10 to 14). To usher in the

Messianic Age, there will be problems the world over caused by man's rebellion. We humans have been made by God as a part of His eternal plan; a plan that far exceeds our very short time on earth. This planet will last approximately 7,000 years from creation to destruction. In the whole of eternity, that is just a quick breath. It is hard for humans to understand that our souls are going to last forever and ever and ever and will never die. Our time on this earth is no time at all, if we can understand life from an eternal perspective. Eternity is God's plan for mankind. Just as the angels will never die, neither will we. But of course just like the angels that rebelled, those humans who rebel and reject God, will spend eternity out of God's presence, in a dark, gloomy, terrifying place called the lake of fire (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 1:6).

Our prayer life determines just how much of a Christian life we really live. 'But be on your guard so your hearts are not overburdened with self-indulgence, drunkenness and worries of this world, lest that day come upon you suddenly like a trap; for it will come upon all who live on the face of this earth. Keep awake and watch at all times, praying that you may have the strength and be accounted worthy to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand in the presence of the Son of Man' (Luke 21:34 to 36). In these verses Jesus is speaking to believers. Believers are not to be self-indulgent; believers are not to participate in drunkenness; we must not worry about things because that shows we are immersed in the cares of this world. Worrying can stop us from being ready for the Lord's return, because worry is making us focus on the things of this life instead of focussing on the things of God. If we allow these things to deaden our spirituality, then that day will come on us suddenly like a trap. That day – the day the Lord is talking about – is the day of His appearing. We need to be on our guard – we need to be ready. If we are ready and praying, then the Lord says we will be accounted worthy to escape the dreadful things coming upon the whole earth. If our attitude is blasé, then we will be caught as though in a trap. The terrible days that lie ahead will demand tremendous spiritual strength – strength we can only obtain from the Lord through prayer. The pressure on Christians will increase as His day draws nearer. It does not become any easier to be a Christian as time goes by. We are going to need strength through prayer to withstand these pressures and to stand before the Son of Man. Prayer is an essential part of our relationship with God. We are encouraged to 'Pray without ceasing' (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

We can know doctrinally that Jesus is going to return, but unless we spend time in God's Word and in prayer, it will seem a very distant event. There is no way we can be constantly filled with anticipation for Jesus' return, unless we shut ourselves in with God's Word and spend time with Him in prayer. We can always maintain the doctrinal stance, but unless we live the life constantly and with the right attitude, we may miss out and be caught. Jesus said to be alert, watch and pray because we don't know when He is coming (Mark 13:33). We need to try to speed up or hasten the coming of that day. That may be a new thought to some people – that we can hasten the coming of the Lord. 'While you wait and earnestly yearn for and hasten the coming of the day of the Lord ...' (2 Peter 3:12). That shows us that there are things that we can do, that can hasten the Lord's return. Certainly God knows the hour when Jesus will return; that is part of God's omniscience – He knows when there will be a generation ready for the return of the Lord, but there are things we can do. The Bible tells us what the essential requirement is. 'This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come' (Matthew 24:14). So to hasten the coming of the Lord, we need to get the Gospel out to all the nations. There will be people in heaven from every nation, tribe, peoples and language (Revelation 7:9). For that to happen we need to get the Gospel out to every nation, tribe, people and language. Jesus gave us specific instructions to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19 & Mark 16:15); to go into the whole world and preach and publish openly the Gospel to the whole human race. Until the church has obeyed those orders, Jesus will not come back, so we are responsible for either hastening His return, or delaying His return. The only way we can be sure of the Lord's return is to do the task allotted to us – preaching the Gospel. He is waiting patiently until the last person has come into the Kingdom because He does not want anyone to go to a lost eternity (2 Peter 3:9).

Many churches keep people tied down to 'serving' God so much so that they don't have time or enough energy to do what God really requires – preaching the Gospel to all nations. Just attending a church will never change the world situation. We need churches to be 'launching pads' for missionaries to go into the whole world – to every nation. What will change the world situation, is our doing our assigned task – that is to proclaim the full Gospel. There are, at the last estimation, two billion people who have never heard the name of Jesus as our Saviour. That is about a third of the world's population. That is the real issue. That is what matters. There are ardent Bible translators trying to get the Gospel into every current spoken language. They don't make headline news, but their work is essential, and God sees what they are doing. This age cannot close until God's program has been completed. To most people that thought is unfamiliar, but it is scriptural. That thought is so real to some of us, it is what we spend our lives doing. That is what this particular, very successful website is for – to get the Gospel out to as many people as possible. Praise the Lord – He is making this website grow and prosper. Potentially, thousands of people around the world can learn about Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. That is our assigned task. That is our motive and we take our job very seriously. We are trying, to the best of our ability, to do exactly what we have been

teaching. We pray the Christians who read the Bible studies the Lord has given us to write, will in turn share the Gospel with as many unsaved people as possible – thus spreading the Good News around the world – hastening the coming of the Lord. We thank God for the privilege bestowed upon us, of being able to share the Gospel message of Jesus to about 170 countries throughout the world, in many different languages, 24 hours each day, 7 days a week, via this small website. When half the world is sleeping, the other half is awake and reading the Bible studies. We labour day and night to get the Gospel out (1 Thessalonians 2:9). We need to do all we can to help the Jews for they too, are part of the Lord's plan. Most people are quite ignorant of that fact. The Jews are Jesus' biological family. He loves them. He calls them 'My people' and tells us to comfort and help them (Isaiah 40:1). The promise God made to Abraham still stands. 'I will bless them who bless you and curse him who curses you; for in you all the families of the earth will be blessed' (Genesis 12:3). God foreknew that through the lineage of Abraham, Jesus would be born, and through Him all families of the earth can be blessed – if they accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. If we bless the Jews, God will bless us. Do we want the Lord's blessing? Then bless His people. We should love them. We are told to pray for Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6). Every spiritual blessing has come from the Jews, including our salvation and the Word of God (John 4:22). May you be challenged to pray and ask God what you can personally do, to hasten the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Amen and God bless you.

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