

## Preparing Ourselves For The Lord's Return

This text is a continuation of 'Longing for Jesus' Appearing'. It is about how we are to prepare ourselves for His coming. Paul speaks in 2 Timothy 4:8 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, and who are longing for the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. God has marked out a special group who are longing for Jesus' appearing, and for that special group, 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. We all need to examine ourselves, to see if we qualify for that crown. No one can force another to ready themselves; all we can do is make it possible by showing the way. It is a matter of choice.

In Revelation 19:7 we read that the Bride (church) has made herself ready; or we can say the church has prepared herself. Further on in verse 8 it says; 'She (the church; the bride) has been permitted to dress in fine linen, dazzling and white – for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints, who are God's holy people'. The righteousness is the upright, just, Godly living; the deeds, the conduct and right standing with God. Verse 9 says 'Blessed are those who are summoned or invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb'. It is clear that not everybody receives an invitation. Many are called but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14). Others are called but are not ready so they miss out. Read the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25:1 to 12. Five were wise and were ready; five were foolish and were shut out because they neglected to ready themselves.

If we are truly longing for Jesus' appearing, what should we do about it? How should it show in the way we live? What will the practical outworking be 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.

The anticipation of the Lord's return, is the basic motive for true holiness. A demand of grace is that we live a certain kind of life. God's grace teaches us how to live a Godly life. In Titus 2:11 to 15 we read; 'For the grace of God (His unmerited favour and blessing) has appeared for the deliverance from sin and the eternal salvation for all mankind. It has taught us to reject all ungodliness and worldly desires, to live discreet, self-controlled, upright, devout lives in this present world. Waiting for our blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of our Great God and Saviour, Christ 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 and enthusiastic about living lives that are good and filled with good works. Tell them all these things. Urge, advise, encourage, warn and rebuke with full authority. Let no one despise you and your teaching'.

Our hearts are to be holy and blameless. It 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. In 1 Thessalonians 3:13, Paul writes; '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 saints, the holy and glorified people of God! Amen'.

We are told in 2 Peter 3:10 to 14; 'The day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will vanish with a thunderous crash, and the material (not spiritual) elements of the universe will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are in the process of being dissolved, what kind of person should each of you be; in consecrated and holy behaviour and devout Godly qualities, while you wait and earnestly long for (expect and hasten) the coming of the day of God; by reason of which the flaming heavens will be dissolved; the material elements of the universe will flare and melt with fire? But we look for a new heavens and a new earth according to His promise in which righteousness will dwell. So Beloved, since you are expecting these things, be eager to be found by Him at His coming, in peace, without spot and blameless'.

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). Also be at peace and free from condemnation (Romans 8:1). We need to have the 'garment' or 'robe' of righteousness which Christ 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 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. We have to be diligent. It takes real attention to spiritual issues, and we need to listen to His direction. Another scripture that tells us God requires personal holiness and purity is 1 John 3:2 & 3; 'Beloved. We are now God's children; it is not yet revealed or made clear what we shall be hereafter, but we know that when He comes, we shall be like Him; just as He really is (we will have the same body). And everyone who has this hope resting on Him, purifies himself just as He is pure'.

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 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. Ephesians 2:10 tells us; 'We are God's own handiwork; His workmanship recreated in Christ 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'.

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 and of course, the most satisfied Christians are those who are walking in their assigned task. We have already read in Revelation 19:7 & 8 that 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 supper. 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. So when you appear in your dazzling linen bridal attire – ready for the marriage supper – you want it to be perfectly clean. Most importantly, you will want to have a garment. Matthew 22:11 & 12 tells us a parable about a person who did not have a wedding garment (righteous acts). The person was bound up and tossed into outer darkness. 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.

An indication that we are anticipating the Lord's return is continuing prayer. Jesus gives some detail about what will happen before His return in Luke 21, then in verse 27 He describes His return. In verse 28, 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 drawing near."

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 in a different light.

Jesus said in Matthew 24:8, these things are like birth pangs. What is coming from this 'birth'? Matthew 13:49 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). 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 Jesus will be ruling for that thousand years (that is when the end of this world will occur). To usher in the Messianic Age, there will be problems the world over – caused by man's rebellion – not caused by God. 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. Jesus continues speaking in Luke 21:34 to 36; "But take heed to yourselves and be on your guard, lest your hearts be overburdened and depressed with self-indulgence, drunkenness and worries of this life, 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."

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. Why is that? 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. The difference between the non believers and the Christian is: our address is in heaven. We just haven't gone home yet. Our citizenship is in heaven. Hebrews 11:16 says; 'But the truth is that they were yearning and aspiring to 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'.

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. 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 to withstand these pressures and to stand before the Son of Man. Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 5:17; 'Pray without ceasing'. Prayer is an essential part of our relationship with God. Jesus said to 'Pray to the Father in My name' (John 15:16 & 16:23).

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 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. If we turn again to 2 Peter 3:12, the full meaning of 'While you wait and earnestly long for, expect and hasten the coming of the day of God ... ' shows us that there are things that we can do, that can hasten the Lord's return – that will bring that day nearer. Possibly, the main thing that we can do to bring that day nearer, is to fulfil the conditions. 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. What is the essential requirement? Read Matthew 24:14; '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'. So to hasten the coming of the Lord, we need to get the Gospel out to all the nations. Revelation 7:9 says there will be people from every nation, tribe, peoples and language in heaven. For that to happen we need to get the Gospel out to every nation, tribe, people and language. Jesus gave us specific instructions in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15 to go and make disciples of all nations; 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 doesn't 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 Gospel. There are – at the last estimation – 2 billion people who have never heard the name of Jesus as our Saviour. That is 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 can see 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 – freely – to as many people as possible. Praise the Lord – He is making the 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 that the Christians who read the sermons 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 throughout the world, 24 hours per day, via this small website.

Summing up: If we are genuinely waiting for the Lord's return we must cultivate personal holiness; without holiness, no one will see the Lord. We must complete our assigned task. We need to constantly pray in order to have the strength we need. Peter challenges us not to merely wait for the day – but to speed its coming; to hasten His return by proclaiming the Gospel to all nations. Until that has happened, the end of this age will not come. Most people are quite ignorant of that fact. We need also to do all we can to help the Jews for they too, are part of the Lord's plan. They are Jesus' biological family. He loves them. He calls them 'My people' (Isaiah 40:1). If we bless them, God will bless us. Do you want the Lord's blessing? Then bless His people. We have to love them. We are told to pray for Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6).

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.

<http://www.bibleabookoftruth.com/>