

WHY DOES THE LORD TARRY?

Luke 21:28—But when these things begin to come to pass, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws nigh.

Matthew 24:14—And these glad tidings of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole habitable earth, for a witness to all the nations, and then shall come the end.

Psalm 103:7—He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

Dear Lord, how we praise and thank Thee that in this perilous time Thou hast gathered us together before Thee, to prepare us for Your imminent return. Oh dear Lord, we do pray that there will be real preparation in each one of us that we may not only prepare to meet our dear Lord but we may be used by Thee to prepare the way for Thy return. What a privilege, what an honor Thou hast called us to. Oh Lord, we look to Thee for only Thy grace can enable us to answer Thy call and be truly the link that Thou art looking for in these last days. We commit this time into Thy hands and pray that Thou would bless this time. Deliver us from mere mental acceptance but enable us by Thy Spirit to enter into the reality of Thy calling. We give Thee all the glory. In Thy precious name. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters, I believe every one of us who are here is looking forward to the coming of The Lord. From all of the indications we can see in the world, we know the end is near—and maybe nearer than what we think. Even the world realizes that doomsday is coming. So far as the world is concerned, it is true that it will be a doomsday. But so far as we who are the Lord's, this is the time that we can look up, lift up our heads, for our redemption has drawn nigh.

Knowing God's Ways

When God is doing a work, especially in changing the times or ages, we discover that He has a principle. In other words, when we think of the first coming of the Lord, outwardly speaking the whole nation of Israel was waiting for the Messiah. Every day in their temple a special prayer would ascend to God saying, "Messiah, hear." The whole nation seemed to be waiting for the Messiah. But strangely, when the Messiah did come, the people were disturbed and troubled. Why is it so? Their waiting for the Messiah was for personal and private reasons. They thought that when the Messiah came He would deliver them from the Roman rule and make them the first among the nations. That is what they were looking for in the Messiah, not knowing that God has a higher purpose. The nation even rejected the Messiah.

But thank God, in Psalm 103, we find that God made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel. So far as the children of Israel were concerned, they had to wait until God acted. When they saw the action God had taken, they began to realize it and to thank The Lord. But Moses was different, because the Bible said God made known His ways to Moses. When God is working, He has His way and His principle. If you know the way of God, you can foresee what God will do. Not only that, you will even be used by God to bring in the act. So we

are here looking to the Lord that by His grace, we may know His ways. This is not just a mental understanding of something we can boast of, but this is very practical because in His ways we will find He is calling us to cooperate with Him.

We can liken it to a locomotive which has a powerful engine, but it needs rails. God is looking for a people to lay the rails for the locomotive to run on. It is a high honor and privilege, but thank God, it is something God is looking for.

THE CHANGE FROM THE AGE OF LAW TO GRACE

As we look back in history, we discover that God was going to change from the age of Law to the age of grace, and it was a tremendous change. When the people were under the Law, they promised to keep it but they could not. We know that for four hundred years after Malachi, God was silent. He did not speak to His people even though the temple was restored, the temple service continued on, and prayers were raised up every day. Outwardly speaking, the nation was ready for God, but God was looking at the heart and He knew exactly what the situation was. And for four hundred years God was silent.

As we read the Bible, we thank God that He is a God who speaks. If God should be silent, nobody could know Him because He is far, far beyond us. We know Him today to a certain extent because of what He has spoken. The speaking of God is revelation to us. But God could not speak to His people because of their heart condition before Him. But thank God, He is gracious. In spite of the situation of the nation of Israel, after four hundred years of silence, God began to speak—not only to speak, but to bring in the Messiah.

GOD RAISED UP VESSELS TO BRING IN THE MESSIAH

ZACHARIAS AND ELIZABETH

How did it come about? Unknown to the world, God had raised up some people whose hearts were totally committed to Him, and it was through these few that God was able to move according to His heart. As you read the Gospel according to Luke, you will find a couple, Zacharias, who was a priest, and Elizabeth. Both of them were righteous and they served God faithfully. But unfortunately, they did not have a son. In the Old Testament time, one who was blessed by God would be surrounded by sons and daughters. Only those who were cursed by God would be deprived of children. In spite of the piety of this couple, in spite of their constant prayers to remove that shame from them, their prayers were not answered. It was not because God did not hear them, but God wanted to use them to do something far beyond their personal need; it was for the need of the nation. I personally believe that after this old couple had prayed year after year for children and it seemed as if God was not listening, do you think they gave up that prayer? I think not; instead the direction of their prayer was corrected. Instead of praying for a son for their own benefit, they began to pray for a son that would be useful to prepare the way of the Messiah.

So the Bible tells us that when Zacharias was in the temple, the lot was cast, and he had the privilege of burning incense in the holy place. That was a high privilege among the priests. Sometimes the priests may have been serving the Lord for years and never had that privilege. If you had that privilege once, that would be all you could have. Thank God, the lot was cast, and

he was privileged to burn incense in the holy place. While he was alone in the holy place, the children of Israel were standing outside praying for him. When the incense was burning, it typified prayer, and it was the prayer of the nation: "Oh, that Messiah would come." I believe Zacharias was praying that prayer instead of praying his private prayer. But strangely, when the angel appeared and said, "Zacharias, your prayer has been answered," he was not praying for his own son but for the Messiah. Yet the Lord said, "Your prayer has been answered." His prayer was in tune with God's heart. They desired an heir but not for their own enjoyment. They desired an heir to be used to prepare the way of the Lord. So we see an old couple unknown to men, as it were, but secretly they were praying for God's interest. God used them as a link for the change of the age.

Mary and Joseph

At the same time, we find another couple, Mary and Joseph. Even though they were descendants of David, they were unknown in the village of Nazareth, a hidden place. They were engaged, but they were not married. The angel appeared to Mary and said, "You are blessed of the Lord. The Lord has chosen you to give birth to His Son." Of course, Mary was surprised and said: "How can I give birth to a son if I do not know a man?" The angel said, "The Spirit of God will come upon you so what is born is of God, the Son of God." It was a real challenge to Mary who was a devout person. She loved God; but now she was asked to do something far beyond what any human being could do because it would mean her destruction. Anyone who gave birth without being married would be considered an adulteress. The Law demanded that she should be stoned and the first stone was to be cast by the one whom she loved. It was such an unusual demand. Yet Mary knew God and she was submissive to the very end. She was willing to sacrifice her life for God's purpose. Thank God, He used that woman to bring in the Messiah.

Let us not forget Joseph. He was a righteous man; therefore, he had to follow the Law. He did not want to shame Mary publicly, so he was thinking of leaving her quietly. It was at that time he was told that it was God's doing. He knew the Lord so well and loved Him so much that he was willing to sacrifice himself to cover Mary. Through these two, the Messiah was brought in and the change came.

Simeon and Anna

Then we think of Simeon and Anna. Even though the account is very small that we have in Luke we find that both Simeon and Anna loved God and gave their whole life to Him. Because of that, Simeon received a revelation from above that before he died, he would see the Messiah. In other words, he was living for the Messiah and not just praying for Him. His whole life was for the Messiah, and thank God, he saw Him. When he saw the Messiah, he said, "Lord, You can take my life." He was satisfied. And so was Anna, who had devoted herself to prayer. She was also given the revelation when the Messiah came.

The Shepherds

Throughout the world there were different people hidden and unknown to the world but known to God and were used by God to prepare the way for the change. Also, we should not forget the shepherds who were not ordinary shepherds. They were temple shepherds and were

shepherding the lambs that would be sacrificed to the Lord. They lived for God and not for their own interest. The angels appeared to them to announce the glad news of the coming of the Messiah.

As we observe these few, unknown to the world but known to God, they offered their lives to be the link for bringing in the Messiah. That is the way that the age of Law turned into the age of grace.

GOD LAYS THE FOUNDATION

We can see from these ones that whenever God was going to do something on earth, He would first touch a few people to agree with Him to prepare the way for Him. It is through these ones that the change came. If this is the case when the age of Law was changed to the age of grace, in like manner we can expect it to be the same way that God will change from this age of grace into the age of the kingdom. We do thank God for the age of grace which began with the first coming of our Lord Jesus. But thank God, even while He was on earth, He promised us that He would come back again.

In His first coming, He was laying the foundation. Now we often feel that our Lord Jesus' first coming was to seek and save the lost. That is very true; He did that. But this is not His full purpose. So far as we are concerned, to seek and save the lost seems to be the best. That seems to be our desire or our wish. What a privilege it is to be found and brought back to the heavenly Father! We thank God for that. But salvation is not according to human need; it is according to God's purpose.

GOD REVEALS HIS PURPOSE

God has a purpose. He did not reveal that purpose until towards the very last. When He was rejected by the nation of Israel, He retreated to the border of Caesarea-Philippi which was a Gentile city. After being rejected by His own country, almost at the last minute, He revealed to His disciples why He came into this world. He asked His disciples: "Who do men say that I am?" It was not that He was interested in what the world thought about Him; He was merely trying to draw out His disciples. Of course, they would not tell Him about every wicked thing that people said about Him but only the good things. However, He was not satisfied. He said, "You who have been with me, who do you say that I am?" Thank God, Simon Peter, moved by the Holy Spirit, confessed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." The Lord said, "Simon Bar-jona, this is not something shown to you by man. Man can only see so far as you are one of the great prophets, but only the revelation of God will show you that He is the Christ, the sent One of God for a special mission, and He the Son of God." Thank God, He revealed it to Peter and Peter was able to confess it. And it is on that confession that our Lord Jesus said, "You are Peter, and I will build My church upon this rock, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

After the Father revealed the Son, the Son then revealed the Father's heart. He was sent for His church. He came to build His church upon the rock even though people in this world misunderstood it. They thought Peter was the rock; but Peter was just a tiny stone, a piece out of the rock. The rock is our Lord Jesus Himself, the rock of our foundation. On this rock, that is on Himself, He will build His church. The church is the outgrowth of The Lord Himself and is to

bear the testimony of Jesus. She is to complete, as it were, what Christ has done by proclaiming the victory of Christ. But of course, we are also told of the tremendous conflict that is coming. The gates of Hades will be opened, trying to prevent the church from being built. But the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it; it shall be built.

WHY DOES THE LORD NOT RETURN?

Seeing this in the word of God, the question is: After so long a time, why does the Lord still tarry? What is the reason behind it? So far as our Lord Jesus is concerned, there is no question about His return to the earth. Even when He was on earth, before He died, He told His disciples that He would come again to receive them to Himself. He went to prepare a place for them, even mansions, then He would come back and receive His people. And when you read the book of Revelation which foretells the coming of the Lord, at the very end in Revelation 22:20, He said, "Behold I come quickly." That expresses the heart of our Lord Jesus. He was anxious to come back. That is why, even in the first century, those who really loved the Lord were waiting for the coming of The Lord. Were they wrong? No. They were right. The Lord could have come even at the end of the first century because He was anxious to receive His bride. Now if the problem does not lie with our Lord Jesus, then where does it lie? It has to be with us.

We recall in Matthew 24:14 that the Lord said, 'The message of the kingdom of the heavens shall be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to the nations, and then the end shall come.' To whom did our Lord Jesus commit this preaching of the kingdom of the heavens to the world? Actually it is not just a matter of preaching; here it means more than that. It means they live out the kingdom of the heavens on earth to the nations. Their testimony will bring in the King.

THE OLD TESTAMENT REMNANT

So we cannot help but see that all around us things are changing so rapidly. It seems as if something drastic could happen at any time; but the Lord is patient and long-suffering, and He has waited and waited. Why is it so? Whose responsibility is it? What is it that our Lord is really looking for? We know that as it was in the Old Testament time, so it will be in the New Testament time. The children of Israel failed to keep the Law. Finally, the nation was destroyed and exiled to Babylon; but God in His mercy raised up a remnant. And this remnant who was in Babylon heard God's call. They were willing to be uprooted from their well-established businesses and houses and brave the danger of the road into Jerusalem which was in ruin. They went back, not for themselves, but to rebuild the temple that the name of the Lord would still be on earth. We read in the Bible that during the Babylonian captivity, God was never called the God of the heavens and of earth. He was only called the God of the heavens because on earth, He had no testimony. These people, who were just a remnant, went back. They rebuilt the temple, restored all of the temple services so that God would not only be the God of the heavens, but also of the earth. That is the remnant principle in the Old Testament.

THE NEW TESTAMENT OVERCOMER

However, in the New Testament, it is the overcomer principle. Revelation tells us that towards the end of the first century, John the apostle, the last of the twelve apostles living, was

exiled to the island of Patmos. Before that he was serving in Asia Minor among the churches there. But he was exiled to the island of Patmos for the testimony of Jesus. There on the Lord's day, he was in the Spirit and he saw a heavenly vision. We know that among the apostles, John was the closest to our Lord Jesus. He was the one who laid on the bosom of Christ. He knew Christ so intimately on earth, yet he was ignorant of the ministry of our Lord Jesus in heaven. Oftentimes, we think the ministry of our Lord Jesus on earth was all that He did. After He said, "It is finished," He ascended on high and sat at the right hand of the Father. You do not sit until a work is done. So here we find our Lord Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father waiting for all that He had accomplished to be realized on earth. He is as busy in heaven as He was on earth, not because the work of redemption was unfinished; it is finished. It is because in heaven He is ministering to His people, to His church, so that His church will be matured and fit to be the bride. He was one like the Son of Man in the midst of the seven churches in Asia Minor. And to every church He wrote a letter which He began with a revelation of Himself to that particular church. This was the testimony committed to the church. Everything in the church was to be judged according to the testimony of Jesus which had been granted to them. Were they faithful or did they fail? If they failed, He called them to repent. To every church at the end, we find the call: "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He that overcomes will be rewarded with something in the kingdom."

So we find the same principle but with a different name. Instead of the remnant principle, it is the overcomer principle. When the church as a whole fails, God does not give up. He still tries to restore His testimony but through a few, through the overcomers. Whatever the overcomers have accomplished, it is considered as for the whole church. This is the principle of the overcomers.

The overcomers are not someone outside of the church. They are in the church, maintaining the testimony of Jesus which has been entrusted to the church. What they have done will result in the whole church coming to maturity. That is the principle of the overcomers.

THROUGHOUT THE AGES GOD HAS HIS OVERCOMERS

In the whole book of Revelation we find how God has His overcomers in different ages or different centuries. In Revelation 2 and 3 we see the overcomers at the end of the first century, and when we come to Revelation 7, we will find them from verses 9-17:

"After these things I saw, and lo, a great crowd, which no one could number, out of every nation and tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palm branches in their hands. And they cry with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb. And all the angels stood around the throne, and the elders, and four living creatures, and fell before the throne upon their faces, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and strength, to our God, to the ages of ages. Amen."

And one of the elders answered, saying to me, These who are clothed with white robes, who are they, and whence came they? And I said to him, My lord, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they who come out of the Great Tribulation, and have made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple, and he that sits upon the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. They shall

not hunger any more, neither shall they thirst any more, nor shall the sun at all fall on them, nor any burning heat; because the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall shepherd them, and shall lead them to fountains of waters of life, and God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

In chapter 7 there are two parts. Verses 1-8 tell us what happens with the nation of Israel. Before Jacob’s trouble comes, God will seal those of the twelve tribes that are faithful to Him, and that will keep them through Jacob’s trouble. Verse 9 to the end refers to the church and it is a picture of the overcomers throughout the centuries. Chapters 2 and 3 show us the overcomers at the end of the first century. Chapter 7 shows the overcomers through the twenty centuries, a number that could not be numbered out of every tribe, people, and tongue. They stand before throne and before the Lamb clothed with white robes, palm branches in their hands, giving glory to God.

In spite of the failure of the church, God is always successful in every century, for He has His overcomers standing for the testimony of Jesus. These countless overcomers were there standing before the Lamb.

From there we come to chapter 12. The manchild represents the overcomers at the verge of the turning of the age. Chapter 14 is a view of the overcomers as a whole. In contrast they are the first fruits of the harvest. Chapter 15 tells us of the overcomers in the Great Tribulation. In chapter 19 we find the bride of the Lamb.

TWO MARRIAGES OF THE LAMB

It seems very strange that as we read the book of Revelation, we find two marriages of the Lamb. One is in chapter 19 and the other is in chapters 21 and 22. Chapter 19 is the beginning of the age of the kingdom of heavens on earth and chapter 21 and 22 is eternity. I personally believe that the wife in chapter 19 will be represented by the overcomers of the church of the ages. But in chapters 21 and 22 there is the consummation of all the work of God in the Old Testament and New Testament time summed up. God’s work is always complete; nothing will be lacking. Through all time, all the work of God will be summed up in the new Jerusalem.

May we be open to the Lord that we would be those not only praying as a routine, but really looking forward to the coming of our dear Lord.

Dear Lord, how we praise and thank Thee that we are living at the very end of the great change that is coming. Even though it is the most difficult time, as it were, yet in ways it is the most privileged hour. Oh Lord, we do not want to live just for ourselves, we want to live for Thee. We want to be useful in Thy hand that we may be those who will bring in the King. Our cry to Thee is, “Come, Lord Jesus; come quickly.” We ask in Thy name. Amen.