

WHAT IS OUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE LORD'S COMING?

Revelation 22:20—He that testifies these things says, Yea, I come quickly. Amen; come, Lord Jesus.

The Lord Jesus testifies these things. Then He said: "Yea, I come quickly." This is the response of our Lord Jesus to the cry of the Holy Spirit and the bride who say, "Come." This is the response also from those who hear and say, "Come."

Are You the Faithful and Prudent Servant?

When we hear this word, what is our reaction? Can we also say from the bottom of our heart, "Come, Lord Jesus"? Just as the apostle John said, "Amen, come Lord Jesus." Or is it that we are hoping that the Lord will continue to delay His coming because we have lots of plans and things we want to do.

When our Lord Jesus spoke of His coming in Matthew chapter 24, He said, "Who then is the faithful and prudent bondman whom his lord has set over his household, to give them food in season? Blessed is that bondman whom his lord on coming shall find doing thus. Verily I say unto you, that he will set him over all his substance" (vv. 45-47).

At the coming of the Lord there will be those who are faithful and prudent—faithful to what they have heard and prudent in doing what they are told. And when the Lord shall come, He will set this bondman over all his substance.

Are You the Evil Servant Who Does Not Expect the Lord to Come Soon?

But if that bondman (the same one) has evil in his heart, he will say, "My lord delays to come," and he will begin to beat his fellow bondman and eat and drink with the drunkard. This is the same bondman but he reacts differently. And when the Lord comes, it will be in a day that he does not expect it and in an hour he knows not, because he has many things to do. What will happen to that evil bondman who does not expect the Lord to come soon? He shall cut him in two and appoint his portion with the hypocrites, and there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth which speaks of repentance for the things he had done. It is a very severe punishment. Of course, if he is a bondman of the Lord he is still saved, but he will be disciplined during the kingdom age.

The coming of the Lord is a very serious subject because our reaction will result in a very different treatment during the kingdom age. Those who are faithful to the Lord will reign with Christ for a thousand years; but those who are unfaithful will be disciplined during the thousand years.

Each one of us has to be serious before the Lord and answer this question: What is our attitude towards His coming? Thank God, the Lord Jesus said, "Yea, I am coming soon." But this was said over two thousand years ago. Do you think the Lord has delayed His coming? And what is the reason for His delay?

Why Does the Lord Delay His Coming?

Surely the reason is not with the Lord; it is with us because He is coming for His bride. Therefore, if His bride is not ready, how can He come? He has to wait until His bride is ready. The whole problem does not lie with the Lord. Is there any bridegroom who is not anxious for his bride? So far as I know there was only one.

When the great grandfather of Hudson Taylor was a young man he was careless, loved amusement, dancing and all these things. But on the day of his wedding, when he got up in the morning, he suddenly realized that marriage was a serious matter. So he went out to the field to pray. As he was praying he forgot the time. He kept on praying, confessing, and trusting the Lord. So when he finished praying, he suddenly realized it was the time for his wedding. The bride was waiting, and the friends were waiting. They were wondering where the bridegroom was. So he rushed to the church and got married. That evening before they went to bed, he told his bride they had to pray, and he forced his bride to kneel down and pray. The bride was surprised because she was not expecting to marry a Methodist. However, because of this beginning, generation upon generation of that family have served the Lord. And Hudson Taylor was one whom the Lord used to open up interior China to the gospel for which we are ever grateful.

This matter of the coming of the Lord is a very serious matter. The delay is not because of the Lord; He is anxious and ready to come. The delay is because of His church.

Why Did the Lord Come the First Time?

What was the reason for His first coming? In the Gospel according to John, we find that the Lord Jesus came to this world for one purpose and that was to seek for His bride. However, in His searching, He could not find His bride. As you read the gospels, you may be surprised that while He was on earth, it seems as if all the people that He met were either blind, deaf, crippled or dead. So He really had to save these people first.

Again in Matthew 16 towards the end of Jesus' life, He tells us another reason why He came into this world. He told Peter: "You are Peter, a small stone; I will build My church upon this Rock (Christ Himself, which is the confession of Peter), and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (v. 18). He came to build His church, and on the day of Pentecost one hundred and twenty of His disciples were praying and waiting for ten days. On that day the Holy Spirit came down and they were baptized into one body. That was the beginning of the church.

What a glorious beginning the church had as we find in the book of Acts. The Lord added to them daily, and they persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and prayers. Within thirty years or so, the gospel was preached to the world because Rome at that time was considered the end of the world. We also discover as we read in Acts that there were problems, but we know that as long as we human beings are in the church, there will always be problems. However, problems are not problems if they are handled rightly. On the contrary, they can be blessings. So the church had a glorious beginning; there was a measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ in the bride. But unfortunately, towards the end of the first century the book of Revelation tells us that five of the seven churches in Asia Minor were exhorted to repent.

The Church Is Not Ready

Ephesus was supposed to be a church full of love and because of that the Lord was able to share with them the deep things of God. But towards the end of the first century, everything outwardly was going on as usual, but the inner fire was gone. They had lost their first love.

The Lord can come at any time. If the church had been ready in the first century He could have come then; but here we are in the 21st century and we are still waiting for His return. How do you think the Lord must feel about that? Oftentimes we are only thinking about how we feel, but think how the Lord must feel about His bride. He promised His disciples that He would come and receive them to Himself; yet that promise has been postponed and postponed until now. If we know the heart of our Lord Jesus, how hurt He must be! If our Lord Jesus had to wait for His whole church to be matured before He came, I do not know if He would ever come back. It seems as if the church never grows up.

From the first century until now, if we look at ourselves or if we look around, probably we will be deeply disappointed. I remember once brother Sparks asked brother Nee a question: "What do you think is the most difficult promise of God to be fulfilled? Our brother's answer was: "Ephesians 5—until the body has fully grown to the fullness of the stature of Christ."

Old Testament Remnant

But thank God, man may fail—and man always fails—but God never fails. So we find in God's strategy that He has an emergency measure, and it is found in Revelation, chapters 2 and 3. God is calling for overcomers. Now this principle was not new because in the Old Testament time He had the same principle with another name—the remnant. When the children of Israel rebelled against God, the nation and the temple were destroyed; Jerusalem lay in ruins; but after seventy years of captivity a remnant returned. Now if the royal decree said: "Anyone who wants to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple is free to do that," we would think the whole nation would return; but that was not the case. During the exile they were able to build their own houses, establish trades and businesses. In other words, they were comfortable in Babylonian captivity and did not have God's interest in their heart. By the grace of God a remnant, whose spirits were stirred by God, were willing to be uprooted and go back to Jerusalem, which was a barren place, to rebuild the temple as the testimony of God upon the earth. This is the remnant principle found in the Old Testament.

The New Testament Overcomer

When we come to the New Testament, He used another name; it is the overcomer principle. Towards the end of the first century, as our Lord looked upon His church, He found that it was mostly in ruins. Nevertheless, there were still a few who were faithful to His testimony; but this is when He began to call for overcomers, and this call has been upon the church for the last two thousand years.

The Lord said to us in Matthew 24 that His coming is like the days of Noah when people are eating and drinking, marrying and getting married. Suddenly the flood came, but Noah and his family were rescued in the ark.

The Two Represent the Christians Living When the Lord Comes

The Lord also said that His coming would be like the days of Lot. When Lot left Sodom, the cities around were destroyed. So our Lord Jesus said, “Nobody knows when He is coming; not even the angels.” Only the Father knows the time. Luke 17 tells us that when two people are sleeping, one is taken and one is left. When two people are grinding, one is taken and one is left. When two people are working in the field, one is taken and one is left. That is the coming of the Lord.

What does this mean? It does not mean that there are six people there. Actually, what the Lord is trying to say is that two is the least of the plural number. He says two because these are the Christians such as we who are still living at the time of the coming of the Lord. The earth is round so you find in some places it is night, in other places it is morning, in other places it is noon. Suddenly the Lord comes and one is taken and one is left. Outwardly, these two are not different; they are doing the same things.

In church history, time and again there have been people who said: “The Lord is coming; what should we do?” They left their homes and their business and went to the desert to wait for the Lord to come, but He did not come.

Brothers and sisters, outwardly these two appear to be no different. Maybe, because the Lord is coming soon you dare not go to sleep, but even when we are sleeping, one can be taken. Or maybe you think you should leave your job, but no, you should keep on working as usual. The Lord knows our heart. He knows those who are truly waiting for His return and those who are not. You cannot distinguish them outwardly, but the Lord knows our heart.

The Ten Virgins Represent the Christians Who Have Died

Now we usually say the number of the church is twelve—twelve disciples, twelve foundations; but there are only two here. In Matthew 25 we find ten virgins—five wise and five foolish. The five wise have torches with oil in them and they are burning. It is the same with the foolish. They were all going out to meet the Lord but because the Lord delayed they fell asleep; they were actually dead. Throughout the centuries, thank God there have been people who went out to meet the Lord in their time but because the Lord was delayed they went to sleep; they died.

Suddenly, in the middle of the night the cry was heard: “Behold, the Bridegroom; go forth to meet Him.” They all woke up and those who had extra oil in their vessels were able to keep the light burning. But those foolish ones had put other treasures in their vessels instead of extra oil. While they were gone to buy extra oil the Bridegroom came, and the wise virgins entered the marriage feast with Him. When the foolish ones came back, the door was shut, and they were cast into outer darkness.

These ten virgins here speak of those who have died in Christ Jesus, plus the two who are still living, which makes the full number of twelve. Thank God, there will be some who will be waiting for the Lord's return.

All the prophecies that we find in the Scripture that precede the coming of the Lord have been fulfilled. There are still prophecies to be fulfilled, but they refer to the time of His coming and also afterwards.

We are living in a very thrilling time because we are living at a time when we can expect the Lord to return in our time. Suddenly, all over the world some people disappear because they have been taken by the Lord.

Jesus' Coming Is Like A Thief

We will remember that the Lord Jesus said that His coming is like a thief. I wonder if any thief will announce his coming by blowing the trumpet first, saying, "I am coming." I do not think so. But strangely, some of the hymns give us that thought. When the thief comes, it will be at a time when we do not expect him. He always seems to know the right time to come, and when you wake up he is already gone. Will he come for your garbage? Then welcome him every night. No, he knows where your treasure is and when he comes, he will take your treasure and leave the garbage. That is what the Lord will do at His coming—He will take those who are prepared and are waiting for Him. We are expecting the Lord Jesus to come at any moment, and when some Christians all over the world suddenly disappear, we know His coming has begun.

The word "coming" is *parousia*. Those who know Greek tell us that *parousia* does not mean one time or one event. *Parousia* means a time with a number of events will take place. It also means presence. Today, our Lord Jesus is absent so far as His physical body is concerned although we know He is present with us in our spirit, and we thank God for that. But so far as His physical, resurrection body is concerned, He is absent. However, one day He is coming back; His presence will be with us. So how will He be present?

Jesus Will Come Back In the Same Way He Ascended to Heaven

Acts 1 tells us that the Lord Jesus led His disciples to the mountain and spoke with them: "And having said these things he was taken up, they beholding [him], and a cloud received him out of their sight. And as they were gazing into heaven, as he was going, behold, also two men stood by them in white clothing, who also said, Men of Galilee, why do ye stand looking into heaven? This Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven, shall thus come in the manner in which ye have beheld him going into heaven" (vv. 9-11).

In other words, His return to this earth will be in the same manner as He left the earth. How did He leave the earth and go back to heaven? He began to ascend from the Mount of Olives, and His disciples saw Him going up. Then a cloud came and took Him, and they could not see Him anymore; but they were still looking up. Then two men in white appeared and said to them: "Why do you look up? He will come back in the same way."

So we know that His going was in two stages. The first stage was from the Mount of Olives to the cloud—visible. The next stage was from the cloud to the throne—invisible. How do we know He arrived at the throne? It is because of what happened at Pentecost. When Jesus was enthroned, the Holy Spirit came down and baptized the hundred and twenty believers. So His going was in two stages. The first stage was visible; the second stage was invisible. And His return

will be just the reverse. From the throne to the air will be invisible; from the air to the Mount of Olives will be visible.

His coming like a thief is from the throne to the air—invisible. But His coming from the air to the Mount of Olives is like the lightning from the east to the west, and everybody will see it. Do not expect to hear the trumpet sound and then the Lord comes; for Christians it is too late. We should expect Him to come as a thief not as lightning. So when He comes, suddenly one is taken and one is left.

Isn't that thrilling?—but isn't that terrible? If He should come now, hopefully we will all be taken up, but if any are left, what a pity that will be. We are expecting the Lord to come at any moment. He could come today; He could come tomorrow; we do not know. So how can we be prepared for His coming? I think that is the most important question.

The Bride Will Be Wearing an Embroidered Garment of Fine Linen

In Revelation 19 we read these words: “And I heard as a voice of a great crowd, and as a voice of many waters, and as a voice of strong thunders, saying, Hallelujah, for the Lord our God the Almighty has taken to himself kingly power. Let us rejoice and exult, and give him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. And it was given to her that she should be clothed in fine linen, bright [and] pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints” (vv. 6-8).

In other words, when the bride is ready to be married, she will be clothed with an embroidered garment of fine linen.

In Psalm 45 it says, “All glorious is the king's daughter within, her clothing is of wrought gold: She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of embroidery; the virgins behind her, her companions, shall be brought in unto thee” (vv. 13-14).

We discover here that the bride will be clothed with two garments. In verse 13 her clothing is of wrought gold. Before we believed in the Lord Jesus we were all naked before God. After Adam and Eve sinned they discovered that they were naked and could not stand before God. Likewise, that is what we were—naked before God. But thank God, when we believed in the Lord Jesus, we were clothed with a golden garment. You will remember that when the prodigal son returned, the father clothed him with the best robe. Christ is the golden garment that has been placed upon us; He is our righteousness. And because of this we are able to stand before God. Now that is the golden garment given to us—Christ our righteousness which gives us a standing before God.

However if we are to be married we need another garment, which is the garment of embroidery. Now we know that embroidery is a tedious work, but the Holy Spirit who dwells in each one of us is doing this work stitch by stitch. In our daily experiences He is trying to build Christ within us. Christ is not only our righteousness, He is also building in us, and this becomes the righteousnesses of the saints. As He is righteous, so we too must be righteous. In our daily life we need to live right before God, and that is the work of the Holy Spirit. That is a tedious and daily work. Stitch by stitch He is building that wedding garment in us, and if we cooperate with the Holy Spirit and allow Him to work Christ into our lives, that becomes the righteousnesses of the saints which is the wedding garment.

How can we be ready for Him? In our daily life we have to cooperate with the Holy Spirit and let Him work in our spirit. He is like a still small voice. He is like an ointment which is applied upon us as He speaks to us. And if we respond to Him, then we will be delivered from ourselves and the life of Christ will grow within us until we are matured.

How important it is throughout our life as a Christian that the Holy Spirit is weaving this wedding garment, because without it we cannot be at the marriage feast. Thank God He is working in each and every one of us and nothing is lost.

Are We Living in the Third Thousand Years?

Finally, I wonder and I put it before you whether this interpretation of Hosea 6 is right; I do not know. But it came to me one day that probably this will have something to do with us. Hosea says: "Come and let us return unto Jehovah: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before his face; and we shall know,—we shall follow on to know Jehovah: his going forth is assured as the morning dawn; and he will come unto us as the rain, as the latter rain which watereth the earth" (vv. 1-3).

Now sometimes I wonder if this can be applied to us Christians. We are waiting for The Lord, but for two thousand years He has not returned. This reminds us of what II Peter 3 says: "But let not this one thing be hidden from you, beloved, that one day with [the] Lord [is] as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. [The] Lord does not delay his promise, as some account of delay, but is longsuffering towards you, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (vv. 8-9).

A thousand years is as one day with the Lord. If we can apply it to Hosea, then we find that after two days He will revive us. On the third day He will raise us up and we shall live before His face. If two days are two thousand years, then the third day will be in the third thousand years. So if that interpretation can be applied to us Christians I think we are in the beginning of the third day, and hopefully He will come during our life time. So brothers and sisters, this is a hope and it is a blessed hope. We are hoping that in our lifetime we may meet the Lord. May The Lord bless each and every one of us.

Shall we pray:

Dear Lord, it is such a delight to talk about Your coming. How we long that in our lifetime Thou will return and take us. We do realize we are unworthy. We need Thy grace to work in our lives to stitch and make that embroidered wedding garment, so when Thou shalt come we are ready. Oh dear Lord, may every one of us receive Thy grace and be those who will be taken by Thee. We feel ourselves unworthy, but Lord, Thou art worthy. We give ourselves afresh to Thee. Lord, work in us until Christ is fully formed to the praise of Thy glory. We ask in Thy name. Amen.