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## Getting Ready for the Coming of the Lord

*By David Wilkerson*

February 18, 2008 A dear Christian woman in Louisiana wrote to our ministry: "Last Sunday, our pastor asked for testimonies of what God had been doing during the week. His own five-year-old son stood up and said, 'I had a dream last night. Jesus told me he was coming soon.'" The Holy Spirit used that child to remind God's people of a glorious truth.

Sadly, the present generation knows less about the return of Christ than any generation in the past. Jesus' coming is seldom preached in churches anymore. Indeed, multitudes who call themselves Christians don't want to hear about the subject. Why?

Life is good for most people, including Christians, and the focus is on how to keep the good times rolling on. Like Lot's wife, many are possessed by their possessions. They have become addicted to the things of this world, and in their minds Jesus' coming would be disruptive.

I have heard churchgoers mock the possibility of Jesus' "anytime return." They scoff at the idea he could come back soon. Indeed, there is a doctrine that states our Lord won't return for thousands of years. The idea is the church will be given all that time to evangelize the world and set up a new order before Christ comes back to reign as king.

The apostle Peter addresses these things, saying, "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (2 Peter 3:3-4).

Peter speaks a pointed word to all such willfully ignorant people: "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (3:10).

Moreover, Peter tells us there's a reason Jesus hasn't returned yet. He writes, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (3:9). Our Lord is abundant in patience toward the ungodly.

Personally, I am amazed at God's patience with us in this generation. The rampant moral slide is grievous even to secular observers. Even if you try to keep a clean conscience, your mind is saturated with reports of the evils happening every day. Some things are so vile as to be incomprehensible: murders in schools, vicious rapes, child abuse, militant homosexuality, unspeakable atrocities.

Often our hearts cry out, "Lord, when will there be justice? When will you bring evildoers to judgment?" We wonder why God waits so long to deal with the unspeakable wickedness so rampant today. We picture the scene when evildoers finally kneel before the Lord, facing his holiness.

But Peter says Jesus isn't focusing on judgment right now, even for the worst of sinners. Rather, our Lord is preoccupied with mercy. He is longsuffering toward the worst of evildoers. And he's waiting to show mercy to every unrepentant sinner, wooing and pursuing them.

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, *what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness*, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

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Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (3:11–14, italics mine).

We can spend our days preoccupied with signs of the times, in the Middle East or elsewhere. But God says, "Look to your own heart. Be sure you're diligent to keep my Word." Paul adds, "Every one of us shall give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12). He then warns us not to judge others, and to be careful not to become a stumbling block to a brother and cause him to fall.

We can be sure God is going to judge the wicked. There's no question a payday is coming. When that time arrives, all mockers, God-haters and wicked people will be called to give an account. The books will be opened, and every vile deed will be made manifest, revealing all that these evil ones did against God's authority. Their deeds will be judged severely, and the wicked will be cast out of God's presence eternally.

Jesus assured his disciples, "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?" (Luke 18:7). He was saying, "Yes, God will one day deal with those have mocked, persecuted, jailed and killed his people. The cry of the persecuted church has been heard. And he will avenge them speedily." Yet, Jesus then says in the very next sentence, "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (18:8).

Christ's question at the end of this passage signals his greatest concern. He's saying, "When I come back, I'll be looking for a people who have believed my promise to return for them. The question is, will those people be ready and waiting for me? Will they be weaned from this world, yearning for me to take them home as my bride? Will they be spotless, or soiled with the spirit of the age? Will I arrive to find them crying, 'Come, Lord Jesus'?"

"Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36). Jesus follows this statement with a qualifying word: "But..." (24:37). He goes on to describe what the prevailing conduct of humankind will be like when he returns. He did not give us the date of his coming, but he did tell us what society would be like then.

He then gives a history from Scripture: "As in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (24:38–39). Jesus also mentions Lot's time: "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed" (Luke 17:28–30).

Notice that Jesus doesn't mention a single sin in these descriptions. We all know it's not a sin to eat or drink proper beverages, or to get engaged or be married. Nor is it a sin to buy, sell, plant or build. There's nothing wrong with any of these things. In fact, the Lord has commissioned us to tarry and occupy until he comes. So Jesus isn't condemning these activities. Rather, he's showing us these everyday happenings, as if to say, "That's what life will be like when I return. It will be like any other ordinary day, when nobody's expecting anything to happen."

We do know that both Noah's and Lot's societies were destroyed by God's judgment. So, what is Jesus saying about these ordinary scenes? Simply put, he's describing people who had determined to reject

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God's warnings of judgment. Remember, Noah prophesied to his society for 120 years, warning that total destruction was coming. But, as Scripture says, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

This is exactly what is happening in our society today. There has been a frenzy of buying and selling, eating and drinking, planting and building. Multitudes are obsessed with personal gain, and they turn off any negative message that might hinder their pursuits. Even secular voices that warn of coming financial disaster are mostly ignored.

A godly Christian woman wrote to me about a conversation she had with an elderly Jewish woman. This Holocaust survivor told her, "What is happening in America today reminds me of what happened in Germany during Hitler's rise to power. All the warnings were ignored. Hitler's anti-Semitic remarks were taken lightly. I was but a child, but I still remember the huge parties that continued into the night even after Hitler started jailing Jews and shipping them off to the gas chambers.

"I remember the older Jews saying, 'It can't happen here, not in an educated, civilized society like Germany.' They just danced the night away, the men in their tuxedos, and the women in their expensive cocktail dresses. Just a few weeks later, those same people were being pushed like cattle into rail cars headed for the concentration camps. They had thought the good times and prosperity would last forever. But soon they were shocked, saying, 'Just a few weeks ago, we were dancing and drinking. What happened? How did this come upon us so suddenly?'"

The warning cry has once again gone out to the Lord's church: "Jesus is coming! The bridegroom is on his way. Adorn yourself, and be ready to go out to meet him. Look up, for redemption is nigh!" Yet, even so, Jesus warns that people will ignore the call. It will be like Noah's and Lot's day, with people going about their business, giving no thought to his coming, ignoring all the prophetic signs. And that is the very sign he is coming: we will see a premeditated apathy.

Jesus spoke of a great and sudden disappearance of people from the earth. "In that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left" (Luke 17:34-36). Jesus' disciples asked, "Where will these people be taken?" He answered, "Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together" (17:37). He was saying, "I am the head of the body. And the head is going to be united with the body."

Some scholars say the people taken up are sinners being swept away to judgment. But Scripture suggests otherwise. Isaiah speaks of eagles in reference to the church: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31). Also, God said to Israel, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself" (Exodus 19:4).

In Matthew, Jesus speaks of the elect being taken up by God: "He shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:31). Paul makes this clear, stating: "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the

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clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:16–18).

As dramatic as this great event will be, Jesus' point was that it will happen on an ordinary day. It will be like those past days of judgment, in Noah's and Lot's societies. Men and women will be at their jobs, going about their day as usual. Then everything will happen suddenly, in a mere moment. Paul says: "We shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51–52).

It will be a day like any other. All of humankind will be unaware, but then, in a single moment, Christ will gather his bride.

Are you looking and yearning for his coming? I would never do anything to cause a fellow believer to doubt his or her readiness. Most people reading this message can probably say, "Yes, I'm ready. I've repented and confessed my sins, and I'm forgiven. I have put my trust in Jesus' righteousness. And if he comes right now, I know there would be no condemnation toward me. I know in whom I have believed. I'm sure I am his." I would say the same things about myself.

Yet in re-reading Christ's warnings, I came across something I can't shake off. Jesus commands, "Watch therefore" (Matthew 24:42). Then he says, "But know this" (24:43). In other words: "If you're going to be ready — if you're to be watchful, as I would have you do — there's something you must know."

Jesus then describes a man who thought he was prepared but wasn't. This man's house was "broken up" (24:43). Next, Jesus describes a person who was truly prepared (24:45–47). Finally, he gives an awful warning about evil servants who will be cast into a hypocrite's hell (24:48–51).

The servant who is truly prepared is likened to the head of a household who provides meat for those under his rule. "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season" (24:45). Jesus tells us this servant's reward is to be made a ruler over his master's goods (see 24:47). Evidently, the servant's "giving of meat in due season" is of great importance.

Who are the rulers over households that Jesus refers to here? This speaks of parents. It also includes pastors, who rule over "the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19). So, how does a parent offer "meat in due season"? In biblical terms, meat represents God's Word. The Greek meaning here also suggests "nourishment," from a root word meaning "to bring up." Next, the phrase "in due season" means "at the right time." Christ is saying, "Blessed are those parents who nourish their children with God's Word. They raise them with biblical admonition, while there is time, before it's too late."

American churches send missionaries all over the world to reach the unsaved. Meanwhile, the church is losing a whole generation of youth, and God is going to hold us responsible. When Jesus says, "Give them meat," he's saying, "Stick to the Word." In other words: "Don't compromise my holy commands. You can't let your young one intimidate you into bending truth. I promise to honor those who honor my Word."

May the Lord say of every Christian parent today what he said of Abraham: "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord" (Genesis

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18:19). Such parents will be made rulers over their Master's goods.

Jesus' words here also apply to ministers in the household of faith. Like parents, shepherds in God's house have to feed their flock with meat, not just milk. They're to raise their fold in the fear and admonition of God, calling them to full maturity in Christ. Jesus says of those who do this faithfully: "Blessed is that shepherd who, when I come, is found nourishing my household. He feeds them with pure doctrine from my Word. I say to these pastors: when I return, I will make you a ruler over my goods. And those goods include all that the Father has given me."

When Jesus comes back, he's going to gather to himself every godly pastor whose only agenda was to watch over the souls entrusted to his care. Such pastors didn't rule their sheep to enrich themselves. They didn't build their own dreams on the backs of the poor, or widows, or orphans. No, these pastors stood in the pulpit with fear and trembling, knowing they had to answer to a holy God. To every such shepherd, Christ will entrust all his goods and make them rulers of all he has.

Here is a warning we all must heed. When Jesus uses the phrase, "But know this," he is telling us, "You dare not ignore this word." Then he offers the following statement: "If that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; (he) shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken" (Matthew 24:48-49).

Luke 12 identifies this servant as the same one who, at one time, faithfully served "meat in due season" (Luke 12:45). This servant started out right. He was destined to be rewarded as a keeper of the Lord's goods. But now he has changed dramatically. He is found smiting those around him and getting drunk with the drunken.

What happened? Something took place in this servant's heart — a change perhaps unseen, but one that affected his attitude. What was this change? Jesus tells us: "That evil servant (said) in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming" (24:48).

The Greek word for "smite" in this passage suggests repeated blows. In other words, this servant has now fallen into hypocrisy. I see him as one who provokes his wife, curses freely, listens to dirty stories, gossips. How did he come to this? He has convinced himself his master isn't coming back anytime soon. When he reasons to himself, "My lord," he is speaking of a different lord entirely, not his righteous master. He has conceived a Jesus of his own making, a Christ of another gospel.

This servant doesn't preach his new attitude. Rather, the change has taken place in his thinking. He doesn't have to broadcast his belief that the master has delayed his coming. He is simply living out that belief. And that has made all the difference.

Think about it: do you wonder why so many churches today are filled with unprepared, indulgent, pleasure seekers? Do you wonder why so many Christian couples divorce at the slightest provocation? It isn't because their pastors are teaching them to live that way. No, it's because many shepherds do not believe Christ is coming in their generation. In some churches, if you were to stand and preach Matthew 24:44 — "Be ready, because Jesus is coming at any time" — the pastor would be offended. The people merely follow suit.

How was this evil servant "drunk with the drunken"? Jesus isn't just talking about alcohol here. The Bible mentions many ways of being drunk: with fury, with bitterness, with bloodthirstiness. The main alcohol in our society — the sedative that most people drink from today — is prosperity. And

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Christians indulge freely in this drink.

Jesus is warning us, “What happens to you once prosperity grips you? Your heart gets wrapped up in material goods. Suddenly, you lose your awareness of my coming. Your life spins out of control, because you no longer have a moral compass. And you begin smiting, doing anything you can to get what you want. You become a drunkard, stoned on prosperity.”

Note the judgment Jesus describes for such hypocrites: “The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (24:50–51).

Let me ask you again: Are you ready? Have you begun to love the thought of Christ’s appearing? Paul says, “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, *but unto all them also that love his appearing*” (2 Timothy 4:8, my italics). James urges us likewise: “Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 5:8). “Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:28).

Finally, Paul writes, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority” (Titus 2:11–15).

I pray to become the kind of shepherd Paul describes. Yes, I’m looking for my Master’s return. And, like the apostle, I can say with confidence, “I’ve got a crown waiting for me, because I love his appearing. I am ready. Come, Lord Jesus.”