

## All Who Love His Appearing

*II Timothy 4:8—Henceforth the crown of righteousness is laid up for me, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will render to me in that day; but not only to me, but also to all who love his appearing.*

May we have a short word of prayer:

*Dear heavenly Father, as we gather together in the name of Thy beloved Son, we know that Thou art in our presence. Dear Lord, we pray that Thou would speak to each and every one of us. Open our understanding that we may know what Thou art after so that our life on earth will glorify Thy name and accomplish Thy purpose. We commit this time into Thy loving hands, and we trust in Thee to do Thy work that Thy purpose may be fulfilled to the glory of God. We ask in Thy precious name. Amen.*

### The Lord's Desire to Return for His People

We thank the Lord for this special occasion that in this last day He has given us the opportunity to come together to prepare ourselves for His imminent return. Whenever I think of the imminent return of our Lord Jesus, my heart leaps for joy. We do praise and thank the Lord that He has brought us to this time. I do believe that we are living in the last days.

Before the Lord left this earth, He told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for us, and He would come again and receive us to Himself (see John 14:2-3a). This is the desire of our Lord. Even the disciples in the first century were expecting the return of the Lord. As a matter of fact, it is possible that whenever God's people are ready, the Lord can return. But unfortunately, two thousand years have passed, and the Lord has not yet returned. Is it because He does not want to return? If we know the heart of our Lord Jesus, we know how He longs to return, how He longs to come back to receive us to Himself! But why is it that twenty centuries have passed and there is still no sign of His return?

So the question is this: Is He anxious to return to receive His own that they may be with Him forever? Of course, this is it. But why is it that twenty centuries have passed and still He has not come? Is it because He does not want to return? Far be that thought! Our Lord Jesus loves His own. He is so anxious to come back to receive them to Himself. Therefore, it was not wrong for saints in the first century to expect His return. Nevertheless, century after century has passed, and the Lord has not returned.

### Why the Delay of His Return?

I think it is evident that it is not because the Lord does not want to return, but it is because His people have not been ready. It is not we who wait for the Lord, it is our Lord who is waiting for us. He has been waiting and waiting and waiting for two thousand years, and He is still waiting because His people are not ready. As soon as His people are ready, He will return immediately. Deep in my heart, I feel it is very possible that our Lord will return in our day because all the

prophecies that precede His return have been fulfilled. The next prophesy to be fulfilled is the return of our Lord Jesus. In a sense, I feel we are living in a most thrilling time period. I sense that our Lord may return in our time, and He could come back now if His people were ready.

Brothers and sisters, do you sense the nearness of the Lord's coming? All the prophecies that precede His coming have been fulfilled. The next one to be fulfilled is His glorious return. Are we waiting for Him? Will we be the people who have the privilege of receiving our beloved Lord when He returns?

### **Are We Ready for His Return?**

Even before He left His disciples, He said to them, "I go to prepare a place for you, and then I will come back and receive you to Myself." Those who loved the Lord in the first century were expecting the Lord to return in their lifetime. Century after century have passed, and those who love the Lord are still waiting for His return. Now we are in the beginning of the twenty-first century. Do you realize that we are nearer to His return than anybody else has been in the former centuries? His appearing is imminent, but the question is: Are we ready? Our Lord is ever ready, but His church has not been ready.

I do sense however that His coming back may probably be in our lifetime. If this is the case, how thrilling this will be! If the Lord should suddenly return as we are gathered here this morning, praise the Lord! May He come! But are we ready? This is the pressing question.

His appearing is imminent; so the question this morning is: Are we ready? We cannot be as that lazy servant thinking that the Lord will not return now, so he began to beat his fellow believers and to eat and drink and enjoy himself. The Bible says that the Lord suddenly returns and cuts him in two and throws him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (see Matthew 24:48-51).

### **Outer Darkness**

In many places where I visit, people always ask me the question: "What is the outer darkness?" Now I wonder why they are so interested in the outer darkness. It shows that we are not ready. If you are ready, you will not expect outer darkness because when He shall return you will go with Him into the kingdom. Only those who are not ready will be cast out into outer darkness. But strangely, God's people are more interested in outer darkness than the kingdom. People do not ask you about the kingdom, but they ask you about the outer darkness. Usually I say to people that I will not tell them what the outer darkness is.

In all the books I have read, I found only one that spoke of the outer darkness and that was Robert Govett. Now Govett was a person who was very literal in his interpretation, and he is the only one who has told us what outer darkness is. So I know you are interested in knowing what it is. He said, "Within the Lord is the brightness of His glory, but outside of Him there is darkness. So those who do not enter into the kingdom with Christ are cast into some place beyond the region of Christ's presence and light. There is weeping and gnashing of teeth; weeping because of joy lost; gnashing of teeth because of the glory lost through their own folly and sin. This is outer darkness. Now I do not know if his interpretation is correct, but it is an interpretation.

Brothers and sisters, are you anxiously waiting for the return of the Lord or anxiously waiting for outer darkness? Woe to the person who is cast into outer darkness because the Bible says there will be gnashing of teeth which means there will be repentance. So how much better it is that we repent today than repenting in outer darkness!

### **The Parable of the Ten Virgins**

In the parable of the ten virgins, we find that they all went out to meet the Lord with torches that had light in them, but because the Lord had delayed, they all went to sleep. Now in this parable, the ten virgins represent the Christians who have died throughout the centuries. It mentions ten because ten is the number of responsibility, and twelve is the perfect number. These ten virgins went out to meet the Lord, but the Lord had delayed, so they all went to sleep. Now this parable represents the Christians who are living at the coming of the Lord. Throughout the centuries, from the first century onward, those who love the Lord, those who are the Lord's, were waiting to meet the Lord because the Lord may come at any moment. But because the Lord was delayed, they all went to sleep. In this parable, sleep means that they all died. So the ten virgins represent the Christians throughout the centuries.

Suddenly, in the middle of the night, there was the cry, "Behold, the bridegroom; go forth to meet him." Then they all rose up; that means resurrection. The five wise virgins had extra oil in their vessels, and they were able to replenish the light in their torches, but the foolish virgins had filled their vessels with other things which were more precious to them than the Spirit of God. So when the five foolish virgins woke up, they discovered that their torch was going out. They asked the wise virgins to share with them, but unfortunately, that could not be done. So the wise virgins said to them, "Why don't you go and buy oil from those who sell?" Throughout the centuries Christians have been called virgins because they have been saved from this world and they are waiting for their Lord's return. That is what Christians ought to be doing, but through the centuries, because the Lord has delayed His return, they have gone to sleep; they died.

Suddenly, the voice shall be heard: "The Lord cometh!" And all who believe in the Lord Jesus will be raised up in the resurrection. Some will be resurrected to glory and some will be resurrected to shame. Those who have extra oil will be able to fill their torch and go out to meet the Lord. They will enter with the Lord into His kingdom. But those foolish ones went out to try and buy oil, and I wonder whether they were able to buy it. But it did not matter whether they were able to buy it or not because when they came back, the door was shut. The Lord said, "I do not know you; I do not approve of you." And the five foolish virgins were cast into outer darkness with gnashing of teeth which means repentance.

### **The Immense Mercy of the Lord**

Dear brothers and sisters, it is better that we repent today. If we try to enjoy the world, at the coming of the Lord we will be cast into outer darkness in the place of repentance. If we do not repent today, there will be a day when we *will* repent, but it will be a little too late because we will not be able to enjoy the kingdom age and reign with Christ for a thousand years. Instead, we will be in outer darkness weeping and repenting. But thank God, even so, it is the mercy of God. Oh the greatness of the mercy of God! Once His hand is upon you, He will never let you go.

You may want to go your own way, but eventually He will force you, in a sense, to go His way. Outer darkness, on one hand, is a terrible place because it is a place of repentance, but it is also what we will call a second chance. Once God's grace comes upon you, He will never let you go; He will save you to the uttermost. Even though you have to spend a time in repentance, eventually all who are the Lord's, those whom He has foreknown, those He has called, He has justified, those whom He has saved, He will save to the uttermost. Thank God for His immense mercy!

However, a thousand years is a long time to be cast into outer darkness. We do not know how long it will be; whether it will be the full thousand years or whether it will be a short time, but it is a terrible thing. May we all be raptured and not be cast into outer darkness. Even so, God's grace is eternal. Once you are saved, He will save you to the uttermost. Whether you like it or not, it is His good pleasure to save you to the uttermost. Outer darkness is a terrible place, but we may say that it is a second chance. If we do not repent today, we will repent in outer darkness, and we will miss the kingdom. What a terrible loss!

So as long as we are still living today, let us be ready. When the call comes, let us respond with joy. May the time come! If He should come now, may this auditorium be emptied! How glorious that will be! But to be left behind will be the saddest time of a Christian's life. So do not love the world today and miss the kingdom glory. This is the exhortation that the Lord gives each and every one of us. So it is the prayer of my heart that when the trumpet sounds, we will all respond with joy. Where He is, there we shall be. What a glorious time that will be! May the Lord touch our hearts! Do not love the world in these few days we have here and miss the thousand years reigning with Christ! This is the exhortation of this day.

Shall we pray:

Dear Lord, we want to thank You because You love us and love us to the uttermost. Whom Thou hast known, Thou hast called. Whom Thou hast called, Thou hast saved. Whom Thou hast saved, Thou will save to the uttermost. Oh dear Lord, when we think of the great mercy of God, our hearts bow in worship. You are truly our beloved Lord. But dear Lord, do not allow any one of us to love the world today and miss the kingdom because it is Thy will that we should have the kingdom. It is not Thy will that we should be in darkness weeping. We thank Thee for the privilege of coming together this morning to be reminded of what is coming and to prepare for Thy imminent return. It is the cry of our heart, "Come, Lord Jesus, come." We ask in Thy name. Amen.