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Brother Stephen Kaung

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Simon Peter, bondman and apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have received like precious faith with us through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ; Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. ... For we have not made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, following cleverly imagined fables, but having been eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, such a voice being uttered to him by the excellent glory: This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found my delight.

(II Peter 1:1- 2, 16-19)

Waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, ...

(II Peter 3:12a)

In the Chinese translation, it says that we earnestly wait for the day of God. But in the original language, and in many English translations, we know that our Chinese version has actually translated only a half. It conveys only the idea of 'earnestly waiting for'. It has missed the 'hastening'. So we would like to read it once again. 'Waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God.'

Brothers and sisters, we know that in the New Testament, there are several books that are related to the end days. For example, II Timothy, Hebrews, II Peter, Jude and Revelation. These books are, in particular, closely related with the end days. In the past, in this series of conferences, we have mentioned II Timothy. We have also

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mentioned the book of Hebrews. By the grace of the Lord, this time together we will share on II Peter.

The central thought of II Peter is chapter 3 verse 12, which is to earnestly look for and hasten the coming of the day of God. We know that Peter has written two letters: I and II Peter. When he wrote II Peter, he told us himself he knew that the day for him to depart is close. So he wished that before he left the world, he wanted to use diligence to remind brothers. We can say that this is Peter's parting words, or his last will. He shared with his dear brothers and sisters the things that touched his heart the most.

We know that Peter faithfully followed the Lord throughout his life. Although some time he failed, we see that towards our Lord he always had an attachment. The trust that he got from God especially is about the kingdom of God. So in his last letter, he wanted to remind brothers and sisters especially to see the kingdom of God, that they can enter into the kingdom richly and that they can be the people that wait for and hasten the coming of the day of God. We remember our Lord once spoke to Peter: When you turn around, you shall strength your brothers. So, according to this trust from the Lord to him, he wants to solidify his brothers. This is the heart of Peter when he wrote this letter.

Peter showed us that he wrote this letter to those who believed the Lord, had obtained this righteousness and also had obtained this precious faith. If we read I Peter, he says that he wrote to the sojourners of the dispersion of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the fore-knowledge of God the Father, by sanctification of the Spirit, unto the obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. So we know that he wrote to these people. Those were the Jewish believers who had been dispersed to various places. They had been chosen by the fore-knowledge of God, and they were sanctified of the Spirit, and they were obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ and they had been sprinkled of His blood. Now they also obtained the same precious faith because they had relied upon the Lord Jesus.

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We know that the whole Bible is written for us. Although when Peter wrote these letters, his object was those Jews that had been dispersed to various places, but we know that these two letters were written to us. Spiritually speaking, we are also sojourners dispersed to various places, because our homes are not here. Because we believe in our Lord, and when we are on this earth, we are sojourners and foreigners. God has chosen us before the foundation of the earth in Christ. It is the Holy Spirit that sanctifies us. He has separated us to God. Not only have we believed in Lord Jesus, but we are also obedient to Him. We have been sprinkled by the blood of Lord Jesus. We have the same precious faith. Therefore we know these two letters were written to us. When we read II Peter, we have to see that these letters were written to us. Every word is spoken to us. If we have this heart and this attitude when we read II Peter, then I believe we can get God's own words from Him.

When Peter wrote this letter, he knew that the time for him to depart from the earth was near, because the Lord had revealed to him previously. To-day here we probably have not received such grace. The Lord has not told us the time for us to leave. But there is one thing the Lord has told us. Although He has not told us when to exit, He told us when He is coming. So when we think about the day of the Lord's return so near, how should we prepare ourselves before God so that we can be joyful and in peace when we see Him? How should we be used by God so that in these last days we can not only wait for him but we can also hasten His coming? For Peter here told us that we have to earnestly look for and hasten the coming of the day of God.

This term, the day of God, is used only once in the New Testament. In the New Testament, we have seen the day of Christ, the day of Lord Jesus Christ, the day of the Lord, which is equivalent to the day of Jehovah in the Old Testament. But this term, the day of God, is used only once in the New Testament. We know these terms, the day of Christ, the day of Jesus Christ, and the day of Lord Jesus Christ, have a special meaning to the Church. The day of Lord Jesus Christ refers to His second coming, when we will gather together before His throne. All the believers, like a big family, will have to meet the Lord. So that day is the day we all long for and hope for. Today, even if we have not seen Him, we love Him. We long for the

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day when we can see Him with our own eyes. And this is the day of Christ. This is the day that we are also glorified. But that is also the day when we shall be judged before the throne of Christ. But the day of the Lord, or the day of Jehovah, especially has to do with the world. It refers to the day when the Lord comes and He shall judge the world. He shall conclude the age.

But what does the day of God refer to? If we look into the context of II Peter 3:12, then it seems that the day of God includes the day of Christ and the day of the Lord. This shows us that the day of God includes all these: When the Lord comes and when we meet Him, from that time until the world is judged, bringing in the millennium, and when at the end the old earth and the old heaven is going to perish, there will be the new heaven and the new earth, wherein dwells righteousness.

Dear brothers and sisters, we can say today is the day of man. People on earth today do whatever they wish to do, as the day belongs to man. But we know the day of man is about to finish. We remember in the Old Testament, if we go back to Genesis chapter six, the Lord told Noah that the day of man was only 120 years. For man was really corrupted. Albeit the patience of God, finally His judgement shall come. So likewise, brothers and sisters, we know one thing: the day of man is about to close, because the day of God is just to come. This is the day that we wait for earnestly. Not only we are waiting, but we shall also hasten. If we truly love our Lord, we cannot just wait passively for Him: we have to rise up positively to hasten His coming. This is not only our duty; this is our privilege. When we think about us who have been saved by grace, to what extent that we can hasten the coming of the Lord? In these last days, we really hope that God will give us mercy. On the one hand we wait; on the other hand we hasten.

How do we know that the kingdom of God is at hand? We know that in the world, in the thoughts of man, men have an ideal, hoping for a day when a unified, good world shall come and a golden age shall come to the earth. But we know that it is just an ideal of men. Men think and hope. This is just like a castle in the air. It will never become a reality. This is the thoughts of men. But in the word of God

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we see indeed there is the kingdom of God. When the kingdom of God comes, there is righteousness dwelling in it. The special trust that Peter has received from God has to do with the kingdom of God.

We know that Peter is the Apostle of Hope. He was hoping for the coming of the kingdom of God. He told us that when he talks about the kingdom of God, he was not talking about fables. It is not even the ideal of man. When he shared the kingdom of God to us, it is well founded. First, it is according to his own experience. He said, 'I am an eye-witness of the arrival of the kingdom of God.' Of course he was referring to the day when the Lord brought the three disciples onto the mount of transfiguration.

Philippians 2 tells us that, when our Lord came to this world, although He was equal with God, He did not consider that as something to be grasped. For He is God. All the fullness of God dwells in Him bodily. But He has emptied Himself. Of course He cannot empty His deity, because He is forever God. But He has emptied all His characteristics, His omniscience, His omnipresence and His omnipotence. He has also emptied His honor, His glory, His power and all these things having to do with the majesty of God. He came to this earth as a humble man. He was born in a manger. He grew up in Nazareth. According to men, He is the son of a carpenter. He learned the skill of carpentry. When He came out to preach at the age of 30, He told us that He had no place to lay His head. Isaiah the Prophet says: He has no comely appearance for man to admire Him. Although He traveled everywhere to do good things and to preach the gospel of the kingdom of God to reveal His Father to the world, He was rejected by men. All through His life, He has hidden His glory within Himself. But once in His life when He brought His three disciples to the mountain to pray, the glory within Him broke out of His body. That time He expressed His glory. Even Moses and Elijah appeared in His glory.

What kind of glory is this? Of the four Gospels, three mention this. Matthew Chapter 17 mentions this. At the end of Chapter 16, these words are given: 'There are some of those standing here that shall not taste of death at all until they shall have seen the Son of man coming in His kingdom.' Mark 9:1 also says that 'they shall have seen

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the kingdom of God come in power.' Luke Chapter 9 also says that this is the kingdom of God. So the scene on the Mount of Transfiguration is a preview of the kingdom of God. Men are constrained by time, but God is not restricted by time. According to God, the kingdom of God is already there. So here God showed the glory of the kingdom of God in advance to the three disciples before Him. So, the scene on the Mount of Transfiguration is the advent of the arrival of the kingdom of God.

Moses and Elijah also appeared sharing with the Lord Jesus. What did they talk about? They talked about the exit of Lord Jesus. We know the Lord came to this earth as the Word becoming flesh. Now they were talking about how the Lord Jesus shall exit from this earth. According to the thirty odd years of life of our Lord Jesus on this earth, He could have exited from the Mount of Transfiguration to heaven. But if that is the case, there will be only one man in heaven until today. There shall be only one man until eternity. But we thank God. When our Lord Jesus was sharing with Moses and Elijah about His exit, He did not talk about His exit from the Mount of Transfiguration. He would exit from Cavalry, and He would die on the cross. He would complete His work of redemption before His exit from this earth. The kingdom of God is according to the exit of the Lord Jesus, not only according to His coming to this earth, but also His exit through the cross. So the kingdom of God would appear on this foundation.

In the glory of the kingdom, God said, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found My delight. Hear Him.' What is the kingdom of God? The kingdom of God is: seeing nobody but Jesus. The kingdom of God is not hearing the voice of Moses or Elijah, nor the voice of Peter. We hear Him only. This is the essence of the Kingdom of God. This is the glory of Lord Jesus. So Peter now says, 'In the mountain, we have seen and we have heard.' This is Peter's personal experience.

But Peter also says, 'Beside my personal experience, there are also the pure words from the prophets, as a bright light shining in an obscure place.' Here, Peter talks about his personal experience. But he shows us that all his personal experience is not sufficient; there has to be also the word from the Bible. On the one hand, experience; on the

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other hand, truth. On the one hand, it is Peter seeing with his own eyes and hearing with his own ears; on the other hand, it is the prophetic word made surer. So when we see the appearance of the kingdom of God, it is according to these two aspects.

Last night our brother already mentioned that a quarter of the Bible refers to prophecies. The majority of the prophecies have already been fulfilled; only about 20 have yet to be fulfilled. We know the word of prophecy is very accurate, because prophecy is what is uttered by the holy men of God under the power of the Holy Spirit. The prophecies in the Bible tell us that the kingdom of God is about to come. Many things testify that the day is near. Peter tells us that we have to take heed of these words of prophecy.

Have we paid attention to the words of prophecy in the Bible? When we say 'to take heed', do we just study or analyze the prophecy in the Bible and then go out to look for the things about to happen to this earth? Do we then arrange these things in array, and then when anything happens on this earth we try to match it with a particular prophecy in the Bible? Then when we check one against the other, at a certain point we then say, 'Uh, this is about time.' Is that what we say 'to take heed'? Today, there are people who study prophecy. I remember when I first believed in the Lord, I was particularly interested in prophecy. I believe young people are all very interested in prophecy. We want to know what is going to happen in the future. So I spent a lot of time to study the prophecy. I thought that if my study of prophecies will reach a certain extent I can arrange them in such a way to form a system. But, do I have a heart to wait for the Lord? Many people may become experts of the words of prophecy, but do they wait for, and do they hasten the coming of the Lord? Is this what Peter called 'taking heed'? Peter said: You have to take heed regarding the prophecy until the day dawn and the morning star arise in your hearts. We know the morning star appears before the sun rises. If you could not sleep at night, or if you wake up really early, before the sun rises, you will be able to see a very bright star in the sky. Those who sleep late and get up late will not be able to see the morning star. So here Peter says we have to take heed of the prophetic word until the morning star arises.

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What does this morning star refer to? In Revelation 22, it says the Lord Jesus is the bright morning star. Not only is He the sun of righteousness but He is also the bright morning star. People only see that Lord Jesus is the sun of righteousness. They do not see Him as the morning star. We know that one day those who wait for the Lord diligently will see the morning star. They shall be raptured to the Lord when all others are still sleeping. They will not see that the Lord has come. For He shall come as a thief and swiftly He is gone. Only those who keep themselves awake will see Him. But here, the morning star does not refer to that. He says, 'The morning star will arise in your hearts.' Brothers and sisters, we shall read the prophetic word until the morning star arises in our hearts. In other words, you have to read the prophetic word to an extent that you can touch the spirit of prophecy.

Revelation 17 says: The spirit of prophecy is the testimony of Jesus. So when you touch the spirit of prophecy, the testimony of Jesus will arise in you. Not only will you be able to see when this or that shall come, but you see that the Lord behind all these matters has become your attraction. The morning star is extremely beautiful. If you have seen the morning star, you will know that its light is very pure. So we shall read the prophetic word to the extent that the beauty of the Lord shall attract our hearts. So we cry out, 'Lord, come. We are waiting for you, Lord. Lord, we want you to come soon.' No matter what, whatever the price is, it cannot compare with this. Brothers and sisters, when we read these prophetic words, there has to be a longing in our hearts to see our Lord. And that is good.

We praise our Lord. We know the kingdom of God is at hand. Not only was there Peter's own testimony, but there was also prophetic word made pure. Those who really read the prophetic word and truly love the Lord, the morning star has arisen in their hearts. They already know that the coming of the Lord is very near. These are pure words. Brothers and sisters, when we are in this time and age, this is a most critical time when we need hope most. This is also the time when God has given us the heaviest trust. He wants us to be a people who will wait for Him and hasten His coming. Brothers and sisters, are we such people?

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Let us see the condition when Lord Jesus came the first time. Galatians 4:4 says, 'When the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, come of woman, come under law, that He might redeem those under law, that we might receive sonship.' It says, 'the fullness of the time'. When you see when the Lord came the first time, the Bible says that is the fullness of the time.

But did this fullness of time satisfy man? For 400 years, God did not say a word to His people. The last prophet was Malachi. After God spoke through Malachi, He did not say anything more to His elect people for 400 years. That day was more miserable than the day when Eli was the judge. The Bible says that when Eli was the judge God's word was rare and God's appearance was rare. But at this time, God did not speak at all. He did not appear. That was the time when God's people was the most corrupt. God was not able to speak to them, not one word. God could not appear to them.

At that time, who was sitting on the throne of the Jews? It was not the son of David. It was Herod who was the king. Herod was an Edonite. He was the enemy of Israel. But he was on the throne under the Roman Empire.

What about the condition of religion? They had the Temple and they had the priests, but who was the chief priest? All these who had power among the priests were the Sadducees. Although the Pharisees were hypocrites, at least on their appearance they looked good. But the Sadducees were different. They openly disbelieved in the resurrection. They openly disbelieved angels. They are just like the modernists in Christianity today. Even though they are in Christianity, they do not believe in Jesus. They do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God. They do not believe that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. They do not believe that the blood on the cross cleanses our sin, just like the Sadducees at that time.

Brothers and sisters, no matter from what angle you look at it, how could that day be called 'the fullness of the time'? That was the darkest time. But thank the Lord. When the night is deep, the day is near. So, from the view of God, it was the fullness of time. This is the darkest time, but the day is starting.

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In the darkest hour of night, and before daybreak, among the God's elect there were a few who waited earnestly for and hastened the coming of the day of God. In Luke Chapters 1 and 2, we see a few people there. Both Zacharias and Elizabeth were the descendents of Aaron. Zacharias was a priest. But we know in the priest system, those in power were the Sadducees. But here was a priest; he and his wife were both righteous in the eyes of God. They were obedient to all the commandments of God and were blameless. This was rare among the priests, a couple so Godly before God. But they had no child. According to the Old Testament, if a man fears God and is obedient to the commandments of God, he shall have a multiplicity of children. For this is a blessing from God. In Deuteronomy 28:4, God says, 'Blessed shall be the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the offspring of thy kid, and the increase of thy sheep.' Psalms 128:1 says, 'Blessed is every one that feareth Jehovah, that walketh in His ways.' Then verses 3 and 4 go on to say, 'Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine in the inner part of thy house; thy children like olive-plants round about thy table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed that feareth Jehovah.' So according to the promises of God in the Old Testament, this couple should have many children, because they feared Jehovah and were obedient to all the commandments. But they did not have any child. So you can say that before men they had shame. Men would guess that on the outward they looked pious, but probably inside of them they may sin. They might think that the couple was not blessed but cursed. The couple must have prayed hard for that. But God did not seem to hear their prayers, as if God did not fulfill His promise on them.

But this couple did not stumble before the Lord. The fact that God did not seem to fulfill His promise did not make them stumble. Not only did they not stumble, but they abandoned themselves. They wholeheartedly lived for God. They no longer prayed for children; they no longer prayed for their own reputation. They had only one heart to pray for the arrival of Messiah and for the benefit of God. So, in this way, an angel appeared to Zacharias, saying, 'Your prayer is answered. You shall have a son. He shall be a vanguard of the Most Holy.'

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Brothers and sisters, here you see a couple whom the Lord considered to be worthy of being treated not in an ordinary way. Ordinarily, if a person fears God, he will then surely be blessed with many children. But God considered them to have reached a certain level that God had a special leading on them. God could bring them into His own heart as they could cast away their own selves. As a result, God could bring in His Christ. This couple truly waited for and hastened the first coming of the Lord.

Another couple was Mary and Joseph. Although they were the descendants of David, they were not on the throne in Jerusalem, only sojourners in Nazareth, an uncultivated place. People would say, 'What good can come out of Nazareth?' But here was a virgin who was single-hearted towards God. So, out of thousands of virgins, God found this one, Mary, so that His son could come to this earth through her womb. Nobody knew her, but God knew her. She was greatly blessed. The angels greeted her, for the Lord was with her. Brothers and sisters, the Lord's presence is a greater honor than sitting on the throne. She was a woman greatly blessed. Brothers and sisters, we are all blessed. According to ourselves, there is nothing we can show to our Lord and be praised by Him. But if our hearts are towards God, His grace will come upon us. So the angels said to Mary, 'You shall conceive with child and will bear a son.' Mary was a person with thought. We know that whenever something happened to her, she would put the matter in her heart and think about it repeatedly. She was also a very thoughtful person. She said to the angels, 'I am not married. How could this happen?' The angels said, 'The spirit of the Lord shall overshadow you, so the Holy One shall come out of you.' So Mary said, 'I am your maid servant. May your word fulfill in me.'

According to man, if a virgin gets pregnant before she is married, she must have committed sin. According to the Old Testament, her closest kin should be the first one to throw the stone at her and she will be stoned to death. Not only her reputation but also her life will be endangered. But Mary did not spare herself. She was willing to lay herself down so that the will of the Lord could be accomplished. What a price to pay! But her heart was towards God. This is one who waited for and hastened the coming of the Lord.

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But oftentimes we forget Joseph. Joseph was a righteous man. When he heard of this, he knew that, according to the law, he should be the one to stone Mary to death, because he was to marry her. But he was not willing to put her to shame. He had a heart of compassion. So he was thinking to put her away secretly. But the Lord appeared to him in a dream, telling him that it was God's word. Joseph obeyed God without reservation. He gave up his own benefit. He protected Mary until her first born Jesus was born. So, Joseph was also one who awaited and hastened the coming of the Lord. If not for Joseph, Jesus could not have been able to come to the world.

There are two other persons: Simeon and Anna. They also feared the Lord. Simeon lived before the Lord so closely that he received a revelation from the Holy Spirit. He knew that, before his death, he would see the coming of the Comforter of Israel. Because he prayed and waited, the Holy Spirit revealed to him. When Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to the temple, he was moved by the Holy Spirit and entered into the temple. He took the baby into his arms and blessed God, saying, 'I have seen the Comforter of Israel. Now You may let your servant depart.' On this earth, he had no other hope. He only hoped that the Comforter of Israel would come quickly. So when he saw this Comforter, he said, 'I can leave now. My work is done.' He is one who hastened the coming of the Lord.

Anna is another example. Although the Lord had not spoken to His people for four hundred years, it does not mean that there was no prophet. Anna was a prophetess. How come there were prophets and yet there was no word from the Lord. Then what did the prophets have to say? Probably the prophets did not have any fresh messages to give. They could only repeat what God had said before. And we see that God no longer spoke to the whole Israel. God only spoke to the very few who waited for and hastened the coming of the Comforter of Israel. Anna devoted her whole life to God in fastings and prayers, never leaving the temple. She lived for the Lord. She was one of the few who waited for the Lord.

Besides these people, we see also a group of shepherds in the field outside Bethlehem. They were not ordinary shepherds. They were shepherding the flock which would be offered up as sacrifice to God.

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So their hearts were towards the Lord. So God told them the good news through the angels. Why did God tell them only? It is because they were people who were waiting. They would say, 'We are tending the sheep that would be sacrificed. Thousands and thousands of sheep have been, and will be, offered up as sacrifice. When will the Lamb of God arrive?' This is their prayer. So the angels told them of the good news of great joy, because there was one born in the city of David, and He was the descendent of David. When they heard the news, they ran and saw the baby lying in the manger. They praised God. They were also people who awaited and hastened the coming of the Lord.

Today we are in the darkest hour of the night. No matter from what angle you look, we see darkness. But God is looking for a group of people who are awake, praying, waiting, longing for and hastening the coming of the Lord. They pray, 'Lord, come quickly. Come quickly.' This is not just something we say with our mouth; our whole person will act in such a way which will hasten the coming of the Lord. When the Lord sees some people who have such pure hearts towards Him and follow Him faithfully regardless of the price to pay, crying out and longing for His return with their hearts so totally geared towards Him, He will say, 'I cannot but come.' These people are the ones that hasten the coming of the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, we pray that, in this darkest hour, we do not stumble because of the Lord. Can we give up our own interest and our ambition so that we may solely live for the Lord? People on the earth do not understand us, but God sees us and He knows that we fervently want Him to come back. We long to see the arrival of the day of God. We have seen enough of the days of man. We desire the coming of the day of God. This is our prayer; and this should also be our life. Brothers and sisters, I believe God gathered us here together for this very purpose. We can forget all the preaching as long as our hearts are gained by God. May the Lord have mercy on us.

Let us pray.

Our God, we praise You. For out of the thousands You have chosen us and saved us. You have not only saved us but also revealed Your heart's desire to us. How fervently You desire to come back!

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God, make us a people who truly wait for and hasten Your return. We are willing to live for Your kingdom. We are willing to live for You. Have mercy on us. In the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.