

God's Expectations For The Last Days Church

'Jesus loved the assembly (church, His Body of believers) and gave Himself up for it so He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the Word so He could present the church to Himself gloriously, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing but that it should be holy and without blemish' (Ephesians 5:25 to 27).

When Jesus came to earth 2,000 years ago, He came to bring the Kingdom of God to earth and establish a new covenant in His blood (Mark 14:24). Jesus said, "The Kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matthew 12:28). He broke many aspects of the curse on mankind brought about by Adam's sin. Very suddenly, as Jesus began His ministry, the Kingdom of God with blessings such as widespread healing and deliverance came to the earth, first to the Jews then to the Gentiles. After Jesus died and was resurrected to new life, the heavens were opened and salvation came to all people; the Jews first then the Gentiles. Suddenly, genuine believers could live a new Kingdom life here on earth and the glorious Christian church was born with signs following; healing, deliverance from evil spirits, speaking in tongues, protection from venomous animals and other miracles (Mark 16:17 & 18). That was known as the 'former rains'. Over the ensuing years the church fell into disarray and unbelief but God is restoring the church to its former glory. The new outpouring of the Holy Spirit is called the 'latter rains'.

'Repent, so your sins may be blotted out so there may come times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord God, and so He may send Jesus Who was ordained for you before Whom heaven must receive (and retain) until the times of restoration of all things, which God spoke long ago by the mouth of His holy prophets' (Acts 3:19 to 21). There are some expectations the Lord has for the last days church that must be fulfilled before Jesus comes again. Jesus will stay in Heaven until these things have happened. Five events must take place first ... The restoration of the church, the preparation of the true church to meet the Bridegroom, the restoration of Israel, the preaching of the full Gospel of the Kingdom all over the world, the identification of the false church and then Jesus will come to establish His Kingdom.

Almost everything that is done in agriculture is done in anticipation of the harvest. The same is true in the spiritual realm. All the activities of God are directed at the final harvest of mankind. 'The harvest is the end of the age' (Matthew 13:39). The beginning of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the end of the age of the Law as a means of righteousness (Romans 10:4). That was the end of the Old Covenant. The early rains, the New Covenant, or the age of grace began with the new church as the Lord had promised (Hebrews 8:13). From the establishment of the church in the nation of Israel 2,000 years ago, then from there, all the activities done in the church for the past 2,000 years, have ultimately been directed at the final harvest; the end of this age; the latter rain (Joel 2:23). Before this final harvest can be gathered in, many things have yet to happen. 'Be patient Brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it, until it receives the early and the latter rains. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near' (James 5:7 & 8). The final harvest of believers synchronises with the return of the Lord. The two are united. The Lord will come at the completion of the harvest. We have to be patient. James points out, the harvest cannot be gathered in until we have had the former and the latter rains. In many parts of the world, it takes both the former and the latter rains to make the harvest abundant and fruitful. If either rain fails to come, then the harvest is greatly diminished and sometimes destroyed. This is also true in the spiritual. Before this harvest can be gathered in, we need both the former and the latter rain. These rains are symbolic of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The age of grace began with a major outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and this age will close with another major outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Until that major outpouring has taken place, the harvest cannot be gathered in. This brings out one very important point that runs throughout the Bible; the 'rain' is given for the sake of the harvest. If we do not comprehend the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is given for the sake of the harvest, we may miss the purpose of God.

'Let us rejoice! Let us celebrate and give Him glory and honour, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His Bride (genuine believers) has made herself ready. She has been permitted to dress in fine linen, dazzling and white, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of God's holy people' (Revelation 19:7 & 8). The believers in the church who want to be included in the Kingdom of Heaven have to make themselves ready for His return. The first necessity for the church is to prepare herself for the coming of Jesus the Lamb and Bridegroom. We have to consciously make ourselves ready before He comes. If we wait until He is here it will be too late and the door to the Kingdom of Heaven will be shut (Matthew 25:1 to 13). If the church is not aware it has to be ready, how can it prepare? Believers of all denominations must prepare themselves for the Kingdom of Heaven by living within the narrow constraints of the Kingdom of God that Jesus set up on earth, and the requirements are: repentance, baptism, being filled with the Holy Spirit, total loyalty to Jesus, a heart relationship with Him, holy living, obedient service and reverence towards the Lord. Jesus has to take first place in our lives. Jesus said, "Enter in (to heaven) by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction (hell), and many are those who enter in by it. How narrow is the gate and

restricted is the way that leads to (eternal) life! Few are those who find it' (Matthew 7:13 & 14). We cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven without fulfilling these requirements.

Repentance: 'Jesus came into Galilee preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God saying, "The time is come and the Kingdom of God is at hand! Repent and believe in the Gospel"' (Mark 1:14 & 15).

Baptism: Jesus said, "They who believe and are baptised will be saved, but they who do not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). 'Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:38).

Be filled with the Holy Spirit: Jesus said, "Most certainly I tell you, unless one is born of water (baptism) and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God!" (John 3:5).

Loyalty to Jesus: 'That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings becoming conformed to His death. If by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead' (Philippians 3:10 & 11).

A heart relationship with Him: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength' (Mark 12:30).

Holy Living: 'Just as He who called you is holy, you yourselves also be holy in all of your behaviour because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy"' (1 Peter 1:15 & 16).

Obedient Service: 'Therefore I urge you (believers), by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable Spiritual service' (Romans 12:1). 'This world will pass away and with it the sins of it, but they who do the will of God will live forever' (1 John 2:17).

Reverence towards God: 'Therefore, receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us have grace through which we serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe' (Hebrews 12:28).

Jesus must be first in our lives: Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not love Me more than his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers and sisters, and yes, their own life also, they cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26).

Two purposes for the last days 'rains' is the restoration of the church to its former glory and for the true church to prepare herself for His second coming. Another necessary event is the restoration of Israel. 'Behold, in those days and at that time (the last days) I will restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem' (Joel 3:1). There are seventy-six places in the New Testament where the word Israel is used and not one of them refer to the church. Israel is Israel and the church is the church. The only word that refers to them both in a collective sense is Zion. God has a plan for each of His chosen peoples, Jews and Gentiles together, as 'One new man' in complete unity and harmony. 'You who once were far off are made near in the blood of Jesus, for He is our peace Who made both (Jews and Gentiles) one, and broke down the partition, having abolished in the flesh the hostility and the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so He might create in Himself one new man of the two, making peace to reconcile them both in one Body to God through the cross, having killed the hostility between them' (Ephesians 2:13 to 16).

There is a great source of confusion in the church today and that is the Replacement Theology. The church will never replace Israel. The Bible says to think that is to be proud and conceited. 'If the first fruit is holy so is the lump. If the root is holy, so are the branches. If some of the branches were broken off, and you being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the root and of the richness of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. But if you boast, it is not you who support the root, but the root supports you. You will say, "Branches were broken off so I might be grafted in." True, by their unbelief they were broken off and you stand by your faith. Do not be conceited but have respect, for if God did not spare the natural branches, neither will he spare you. See the goodness and severity of God. Severity toward those who fell, but goodness toward you, if you continue in his goodness, otherwise you too will be cut off. The Jews also, if they do not continue in their unbelief will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. If you were cut out of that which is by nature a wild olive tree, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree, how much more will these, which are the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery so that you will not be wise in your own conceits. A partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in and so all Israel will be saved. It is written, "There will come out of Zion the Deliverer and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Romans 11:16 to 26).

When the very last Gentile whom God knows will be saved, has to come into the Kingdom of God, then all Israel will be saved before He comes again. We need to understand the special position the Jews occupy in the purposes of God. Gentiles are not the root of Christianity, the Jews are. 'Salvation comes from the Jews' (John 4:22). God gave us our only hope of salvation on a Jewish foundation! God is going to judge the nations on the basis of their attitude to the Jews. The Jews did not choose themselves; God chose them. 'You are a holy people to the Lord your God. He has chosen you to be a people for his own possession above all peoples who are on the face of the earth' (Deuteronomy 7:6). If anyone has a problem with the Jews they really have a problem with God. He chose them and we cannot spurn God's own choice. God Himself will judge the nations and individuals who deal harshly with Israel and the Jews. God said, "I will gather all nations and will bring them down into the Valley of Jehoshaphat (that means 'God judges'), and there will I deal with them and execute judgment on them for their treatment of My people and of My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations and because they have divided My land' (Joel 3:2).

God made a covenant with Israel as a nation when they were all gathered together in one place, and He dealt with them as a nation from then on until they were scattered all over the world. He restored Israel as a land for the Jews again so He could restore Israel as a complete nation. In order to deal with them as a nation, they have to be gathered in one place like a nation, and that place is the land He originally gave them; Israel. God is calling Jews from all over the world back to Israel. His chosen people – the children of Israel, are being restored to His chosen land – the land of Israel. The Lord Himself even chose the name. 'God said to him, "Your name is Jacob. Your name will not be Jacob any more, but your name will be Israel." He named Jacob, Israel' (Genesis 35:10).

Here is written proof, we will be judged according to the way we treat Israel and the Jews. "When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, He will sit on the throne of His glory. All nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate the people from one another as a shepherd separates his sheep from the goats. He will stand the sheep at His right hand, but the goats at His left. The King (Jesus) will say to those at His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. I was hungry and you gave Me food. I was thirsty and you gave Me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed Me. I was naked and you clothed Me. I was sick and you visited Me. I was in prison and you came to see Me'."

Then the righteous will ask Him, "Lord, when did we see You hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave You a drink? When did we see You a stranger and welcomed You, or naked and clothed You? When did we see You sick or in prison and came to visit You?"

The King will answer them, "Truly I tell you, in so far as you did it for one of the least of these, My brothers (His blood family, the Jews), you did it for Me."

Then He will say to those at His left hand, "Begone from Me you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels! For I was hungry and you gave Me no food, I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome Me, I was naked and you did not clothe Me, I was sick and in prison and you did not visit Me."

Then they also will ask, "Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not help You?"

He will answer them, "Solemnly I declare to you, in so far as you failed to do it for the least of these, you failed to do it for Me." Then they will go away into eternal punishment, but those who are just, will go into eternal life' (Matthew 25:31 to 46).

If we study those verses carefully, we will see the basis of division is how they have treated the family of Jesus. God has chosen to make the basis of His judgement, the way the nations have related to the Jewish people and Israel, and His judgements are severe. Jesus said, "Begone from Me, you cursed!" Where does the curse originate? The Lord told Abraham thousands of years ago, "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you" (Genesis 12:3). If we bless the descendants of Abraham, we will be blessed; but if people curse, ignore or disregard Abraham's descendants they will be cursed. God meant exactly what He said, and that blessing or curse still applies today. So in the above text, the 'sheep' are the genuine believers who have a heart for Israel and the Jewish people, and the 'goats' are people who profess to be Christian but disregard the Jews as the Lord's people. There are many Christians who profess to love Jesus Who was Jewish but continue to dislike His people. If they were genuine believers they would love the Jewish people as much as Jesus does. We must pay attention to what Jesus said several times, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." One expectation of the church today is to comfort the Jews in their time of stress and uncertainty. "Comfort, comfort My people", says the Lord. "Speak kindly to Jerusalem and call out to her that her warfare is accomplished and her iniquity is pardoned" (Isaiah 40:1 & 2).

Jesus said the sheep enter into the Kingdom of Heaven but the rest are cursed. The gathering of the Jewish people into their own land is a preliminary to His restoration of Israel. Israel is being restored, first to their land and secondly to God. 'Thus says the Lord God (to the Jewish people), "Surely in the fire of My hot

jealousy have I spoken against the rest of the nations and against all Edom who have given to themselves My land for a possession with wholehearted joy and with uttermost contempt, so that they might empty it out and possess it ... I (God) will take you from among the nations and gather you out of all countries and bring you into your own land ... I will put my Holy Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will heed My ordinances and do them. You will dwell in the land that I gave to your forefathers, you will be My people and I will be your God" (Ezekiel 36:5, 24, 27 & 28).

Another expectation for the last days church is the preaching of the whole Gospel with signs and miracles following. 'While Jesus was seated on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately and asked, "Tell us, when will these things happen and what will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" ... Jesus said, "This Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come"' (Matthew 24:3 & 14). What is THE SIGN of His second coming? The preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom. We need to be preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom like they did in the early church, not the frothy, carnal, self-centred Gospel most churches preach. Churches preach prosperity and people can have whatever they want – Jesus taught people to deny self. Pastors tell their congregations God does little but meet our needs and He does, but that is not His whole purpose. That incorrect teaching leaves the impression God is there solely to meet our needs and that is the attitude of many Christians today. The truth is God does not pander to us and He does not have to obey us. We exist to worship, obey and serve God. Churches preach 'Israel has been replaced by the church' – Jesus commanded Christians take care of His people and His land. Many churches say it is unnecessary for people to be repent, be born-again, baptised in water and filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus called all people to repent, be born-again, baptised in water and filled with the Holy Spirit before they can enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Many churches do not accept speaking in tongues, healing or deliverance are for today. Jesus said we must do these things until He comes again. Many churches have rock music played by their musicians but that only conjures up evil spirits. Some churches go to the other extreme and have no praise and worship. Many churches tolerate sexual promiscuity within their assemblies. Many churches have a mocking spirit in the churches where they make fun of the Gospel, they often make fun of Jesus' suffering, they slander the Bible characters, they make up stories to fit their mode of preaching, twisting the scriptures to suit their own desires, just as is written in the New Testament. 'The time will come when they will not listen to sound doctrine, but having itching ears will heap up for themselves teachers after their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and turn aside to fables' (2 Timothy 4:3 & 4). Are doing these things showing reverence towards God and living a holy life? Is that kind of carnality preaching the Kingdom message Jesus was so adamant should be taught before He comes again? No to both questions. It is no wonder Jesus said only a few would find their way through His Narrow Gate. If believers are genuine about entering the Kingdom of Heaven, then many people are going to have to rethink their relationship with God and change their ways or they will be knocking on His door in panic and He will say to them publicly, "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who act wickedly" (Matthew 7:23). For the church to make herself ready for His second coming, there will have to be many changes to the attitudes of many Christians, the church will have to be restored and live without spot or wrinkle, and they will have to preach the full Gospel of the Kingdom.

The coming of the Kingdom of Heaven to earth will be for one thousand years. 'Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven' (Matthew 6:10). What is God's goal? To bring His Kingdom and His will done on earth as His will is always done in heaven. His goal is the coming of His Kingdom under God's chosen King the Lord Jesus our Messiah. God will one day have an earthly Kingdom on earth. Mankind cannot resolve our own problems; we need God to resolve our problems for us. God's will, will never change. If there is to be any change it has to be our will. If we make God's will, our will in life we will live forever. God's ultimate goal is the establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. God will establish His Kingdom on earth and that Kingdom will stand forever. It will consume all other kingdoms on earth. 'In the days of the final ten kings, the God of Heaven will set up a Kingdom which will never be destroyed, nor will its sovereignty be left to another people (it will always be Jewish), but it will consume all the kingdoms and it will stand forever' (Daniel 2:44). Of course we know after a thousand years the devil will be released again to deceive many (Revelation 20:7 & 8) and the whole earth will eventually be burned by fire and we will end up living on a newly created earth with a new heaven (2 Peter 3:10 to 13), but before that happens, Jesus will come to establish His Kingdom on earth.

'After this I (Apostle John) looked and a vast host appeared which no one could count, gathered from every nation, from all tribes, peoples and languages. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb wearing white robes with palm branches in their hands. In loud voice they cried out saying, "Our salvation is from our God Who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb' (Revelation 7:9 & 10). Notice there were people in heaven from every nation on earth, every country on earth, every spoken language that has ever been and every tribal background. Some people alive today will never hear the full Gospel unless someone is prepared to preach. 'Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved. How will they call on Him if they have not

believed? How will they believe in Him if they have not heard? How will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good news!" (Romans 10:13 to 15). It is not the job of a few individuals to share the full Gospel, it is the mandate for all those who are saved by the blood of Jesus. The first priority of all believers should be to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom throughout the entire world. In many Christian churches, that is a very low priority. People preach about Jesus, the cross and other things but they must preach the Gospel of the coming Kingdom. Many Christians are not even aware it is on God's top priority list and others are completely indifferent. Many Christians know about Judgement Day, but do they tell others about it?

'Do you not know that the unrighteous will not have any share in the Kingdom of God? ... Some of you once were unrighteous but you were washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and in the Holy Spirit of our God' (1 Corinthians 6:9 & 11). 'I am zealous for you with a godly eagerness for I have betrothed you to one Husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Jesus our Messiah, but I am fearful lest even as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, so your minds may be corrupted from pure devotion to Jesus' (2 Corinthians 11:2 & 3). That is a great testimony to the power in the blood of Jesus. The people in Corinth who were the dregs of humanity were changed into holy people fit for the Kingdom of God. We cannot allow ourselves to be turned away from the Kingdom.

'In her (the false church) was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on the earth' (Revelation 18:24) ... 'I (Apostle John) heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation, power and glory belong to our God, for true and righteous are his judgments. He has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth, and he has avenged the blood of His servants at her hand' (Revelation 19:1 & 2). The two churches mentioned in the Bible are the Bride and the false church. The difference between them, is the Bride maintained the love of Jesus. The false church is made up of all those who say Jesus was only a prophet, all those who never accepted Him as their Saviour and all those who turned away and stopped loving Him, making a mockery of His suffering and crucifixion. 'Concerning those who were once enlightened, who tasted of the heavenly gift, who were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, who tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away. It is impossible to renew them again to repentance, seeing they crucify the Son of God for themselves again and put Him to open shame. The land that has drunk the rain that comes on it and brings forth a crop suitable for them whose sake it is ploughed, receives blessing from God, but if the land bears thorns and thistles it is rejected and cursed, whose end is to be burned' (Hebrews 6:4 to 8).

The false church is also made up of people who have a religion but have never believed in Jesus as their Messiah at all. There are thousands of people who attend churches every week, yet never commit their lives to Jesus, preferring to hold on to their religious beliefs without wanting God to 'interfere' in their lives. They do not want God to tell them what to do, preferring instead to 'run their own race' or 'do their own thing'. They choose to heap scorn on committed believers by saying they are 'too extreme'. They are the churchgoers who persecute genuine believers and often have an anti-Semitic attitude. Millions of true, genuine believers have been persecuted to death by the luke-warm Christians. The Lord hates the rebellious attitude of the luke-warm Christians so much He said He would vomit them out of His mouth (Revelation 3:16). Other examples of false religions that make up part of the false church are the Hindu religion, Armstrongism, Buddhism, Islam, Scientology, Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses and many other false religions that never accept the blood of Jesus as being the one and only saving power. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). If you want to get to heaven, the only way is through Jesus – the greatest Jewish Man Who ever lived.

There are ways to reveal those who are part of the true church; the true Body of believers. Here are just three. (1) Luke-warm Christians recoil when we mention Israel, the Jewish people and our unwavering love and support for them. Many Christians are subtly or openly anti-Semitic. How can they love Jesus yet reject His family? Jesus said, "Go to My brothers (other Jewish people) and tell them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God'" (John 20:17). (2) Many luke-warm Christians or 'religious' people will criticise us for living a narrow and straightened life for Jesus' sake and we realise our time on this earth is so short, giving up worldly things does not matter because our focus is on eternity and bringing as many souls into the Kingdom of God as we can. Carnal Christians cannot understand that concept and become angered by it. Jesus said, "You will be hated by all men for My name's sake, but he who endures to the end will be saved" (Matthew 10:22). (3) The true believers know the Lord intimately. We breathe in His Word and it becomes alive to us. The Bible is not just a book; it is Jesus, the living, breathing Word of God (Revelation 19:13). We walk in His footsteps, we obey His every command and we pray as though we are speaking to a very close and intimate Friend. The Lord is close to those who draw close to Him. He speaks to us, He reveals His secrets to us, He reveals His plans to us and will sometimes speak to us face to face – literally with His face near ours, so close we can feel His breath on our cheeks. We know in our hearts we are

nothing without Him and we can do nothing without His help and guidance. 'His breath is as an overflowing stream that reaches even to the neck' (Isaiah 30:28). We surrender to Him because He is our Lord, our Sovereign, our Saviour, our Leader and our King. No matter how long we pray and worship, it is never enough. We want more of Him and can be in His presence for hours at a time and yearn to be in His presence again – not always asking for things but to be close to Him. 'You will show me the path of life. In Your presence is fullness of joy' (Psalm 16:11).

It is important for the true church to have a heartfelt yearning for the coming of Jesus. 'Jesus, having been offered to take upon Himself the sins of many once and for all, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to bring to full salvation those who are eagerly waiting for Him' (Hebrews 9:28). Are we longing for the return of Jesus? Not just waiting but eagerly waiting? We need to have the appropriate clothing to get into the Kingdom of Heaven. If we do not have the righteous acts that clothe us in fine linen, we could be rejected. 'The King's servants went out and gathered together as many as they found, both bad and good. The wedding was filled with guests. When the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man who did not have on a wedding garment and the king said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here not wearing wedding attire?" The man was speechless. The king said to the servants, "Bind him hand and foot, take him away and throw him into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:10 to 14). For our righteous attire we need to have righteous acts. Jesus said to the seven churches – I know your works (Revelation chapters 2 & 3). He watches us closely, and He knows what we are doing and not doing all the time, and that is what is going to provide our wedding garment. Loyalty to Jesus, heartfelt yearning and righteous acts are signs that show we are preparing ourselves for His return. We need to consider how closely we are aligned with the purposes and expectations of God in the last days and give ourselves wholly to His service. We do not have a lot of time to get His Gospel message out to the unsaved. Next time we pray 'Thy Kingdom come' we need to mean it and understand what Jesus was really saying.

There are many Christians who do not understand why the Holy Spirit is given and they tend to be busy doing rather un-spiritual activities; but those who understand why the Holy Spirit has been given, tend to be busy doing more to increase the harvest for the Kingdom of God. They are certainly in a minority and their workload is immense because there are not enough committed Christians to do all that is needed. Western Christianity tends to be rather self-centred. 'What will God do for me?' or 'What can I get out of this relationship with God?' That is a total distortion of the Gospel. We need to ask ourselves, 'What can I do for God?' 'What can I do to hasten His coming?' 'What does God expect from me?' Certainly God will meet our needs, but He does not always give us what we want. A need, and a 'want' are vastly different. Giving us what we want is not the main purpose of the Gospel. The purpose of the Gospel is to show the way of salvation, leading up to the Kingdom of God. People who have the correct attitude are the people who are most successful in their work for God. Most of the time when we speak to new converts, they are told how wonderful life will be, and that God will do wonderful things for them. God will definitely meet our needs, but the disciplined and obedient life of a committed 'Kingdom builder' can be extremely hard indeed. Many people do not like to put God in His rightful place – as Chief of our lives. There are professing Christians who believe that Jesus revolves around us and our needs; then there are the Christians who have realised that it is we who revolve around Him. Most people have got their focus wrong. They have a blurred vision of God, of the Gospel, and of the Kingdom of God. We must change that blurred vision if we are to be effectual. We need to accept that the 'rain' is given for the sake of the harvest and we need to toil greatly to reap that harvest. We need to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him (Luke 9:23).

If we study the Book of Jeremiah, we can see he was a prophet in a time when his nation was in a spiritual decline that led to eventual disaster. How many professing Christians can conceive that could be possible? Can we identify a nation in spiritual decline? Can we identify the signs leading to total disaster? There were many false prophets in Jeremiah's day who insisted everything would be all right. They kept on saying they had the temple and as long as they had that temple, then they would be fine. In this day, there are many professing Christians who keep on saying, they are born-again so they will be fine. There was only Jeremiah who spoke the truth in that time of decline and the false prophets so far outnumbered him, nobody would listen to him. That could be true in any nation. The people who are prepared to speak the truth about the Gospel are relatively few. Jesus said, "The harvest is indeed plentiful but the labourers are few. Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest, He may send out labourers into his harvest" (Luke 10:2). Just as Jeremiah was severely criticised for daring to speak the truth, so are those in this day who dare to speak words of rebuke; who dare to speak out what the Bible really says. Jesus said several times, "Those who can hear – let him hear." In other words, listen to and obey the Bible.

We can equate the words of the Lord to Jeremiah, to many Christians today. What is conspicuous in the church today is a lack of respect for the Lord. People could never say and do the things we see if they had fear of the Lord. The biggest promises are for those who fear the Lord. 'These people have a defiant and a

rebellious heart. They have revolted, quit His service and have gone away. They do not say in their heart, "Let us now fear the Lord our God Who gives rain, both the former and the latter in its season. He reserves for us the appointed weeks of the harvest" (Jeremiah 5:23 & 24). What was the rain given for? The harvest. The infilling of the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the fruits of the Holy Spirit, are all given for the sake of harvest. They are to equip us to go out into the harvest. They are not given just for us to enjoy ourselves so we can be 'super-spiritual' and prophesy over one another. That is not the whole purpose of the Gospel, and if we cannot understand that, then we are missing part of God's plan for our lives.

There are two scriptural harvests. There is the 'grain' harvest and the 'grape' harvest. The grain harvest is the harvest of salvation; the grapes are the 'grapes of God's wrath' or His divine Judgement. 'I looked and behold, I saw a white cloud and sitting on the cloud, was One like the Son of Man with a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. Another angel came out of heaven calling with a mighty voice to Him who was sitting on the cloud, "Put in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So He Who was sitting on the cloud swung His sickle on the earth, and the earth was harvested. Another angel came out of heaven and he also carried a sharp sickle. Another angel who had power over fire called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Put forth your sickle and reap the fruit of the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe." So the angel swung his sickle and stripped the grapes from the vines of the earth and cast it into the huge winepress of God's wrath. The winepress was trodden outside of the city and blood came out from the winepress up to the bridles of the horses, as far as one thousand six hundred stadia (about 320 kilometres or 200 miles)' (Revelation 14:14 to 20). The harvest of the judgement (grapes) follows immediately after the first harvest of the righteous (grain). God is a God of mercy and loving kindness, but He is also a God of severe judgement and wrath.

Jesus said, "Do you not say that there is still time before the harvest? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields for they are already ripe for harvest ... he who sows and he who reaps rejoice together' (John 4:35 & 36). Jesus always spoke about spiritual matters as though they were in the natural realm so the hearers could understand what He was really saying. We are reaping the latter harvest and we must get the job done while there is still light, because one day the window of opportunity will close. 'We must work the works of Him Who sent Me when it is day, for the night is coming when no one can work' (John 9:4). Once that door closes then the angels will take over from us. The last preaching of the Gospel is actually done by angels – not by people (Revelation 14:6). 'He who gathers in summer is a wise soul. He who sleeps in harvest is a son who causes shame' (Proverbs 10:5). As children of God, which of these are we? Do we want to be wise or a source of shame to our heavenly Father? 'We must all appear before the Judgement Seat of the Messiah so each one may receive the things done in the body according to what he has done whether good or bad; knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men' (2 Corinthians 5:10 & 11).

We have a mandate to bring as many people to the harvest and into the Kingdom of God as we possibly can. It is what the Lord expects of us and we must work towards the final harvest, to hasten the coming of the Lord (2 Peter 3:12).

Amen and God bless you.

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