

They follow the Lamb wherever He goes (1)

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Ready for the Lord's Return

Hebrews 12:4—Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, wrestling against sin.

I Peter 1:18-21—Knowing that ye have been redeemed, not by corruptible [things, as] silver or gold, from your vain conversation handed down from [your] fathers, but by precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, [the blood] of Christ, foreknown indeed before [the] foundation of [the] world, but who has been manifested at the end of times for your sakes, who by him do believe on God, who has raised him from among [the] dead and given him glory, that your faith and hope should be in God.

May we have a word of prayer:

Dear Lord, we praise and thank Thee wholeheartedly. In Thy sovereignty and grace, Thou hast granted us this opportunity to gather together in Thy name. We praise Thee because Thou hast promised us that where two or three are gathered in Thy name, Thou wilt be among us. Lord, we know Thou art here. May Thou give us a godly heart towards Thee so all may be humbled before Thee. We open our hearts to Thee; may Thou enlighten us and get rid of all uncleanness. May we quietly listen to Thy words. May Thy Word fall upon good soil and bear fruit hundredfold to the glory of God. We wholeheartedly commit this time into Thy hand. May Thou bless and use this time. May Thy name be glorified and all Thy children be blessed. We commit this time into Thy hand that Thou mayst bless it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The Lord is Waiting for His People to be Ready

We thank God for gathering us together. I often think it is a most blessed thing that we can gather together in His presence. We do not know how much time we still have, but we are conscious that our Lord is coming soon. He may come at any moment—even while we are meeting here. He may come this afternoon; nobody

knows, only God. But we are pretty sure that we are living in the last days. These are amazing days because our Lord may come at any moment. I want to emphasize again that *our Lord may come at any moment*. If it is His will to come this morning, He may. If it is His will to continue to wait, we know it is His long patience.

While He was still on earth, before He left He told His disciples that He would be coming to receive them to Himself. So from the first century until now, those who love God have been waiting for His return. Now we are living at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and our Lord is still waiting—He is waiting for us because we are not ready.

I remember a story of a bride who once waited for her bridegroom. When Hudson Taylor's great-grandfather was a young man, he was careless; he loved dancing and worldly things. But on the day that he was to be married, he suddenly remembered this important day that was to be his wedding day. So he went to the field to pray, and as he prayed, he was so burdened that he prayed on and on and on, forgetting the time. When he finished praying, he suddenly remembered it was the day of his wedding. His bride and friends were waiting for him to come, and they were wondering where he was. So he hurried to the church building where he was married.

That evening, before they went to bed, he asked his wife to kneel down and pray with him. His wife was really surprised and said, "I did not know that I had married a Methodist." But she knelt down on her knees and Hudson Taylor's great grandfather led in prayer. From that day onward, they began to serve God. For four generations, until Hudson Taylor, that family served God. We also know that Hudson Taylor served God, and I knew his third generation. When I was in Chungking, I saw him on the street shouting the gospel to the people. He loved the Lord. Generation after generation that family served God. So it is an important lesson for us. If we and our family serve God, we will give them a good example that our children may follow. But if we do not leave a good example, how can we expect our children to follow?

Are You Ready?

We are living at the end, so the Lord may come at any moment. While we are meeting here He may come. Hopefully He will, and maybe this auditorium will be emptied because by His grace we all will have been raptured to the third heaven. This is our expectation. So we gather here this morning with expectation because we are waiting for the imminent return of our Lord Jesus. The problem is: Are we ready? We

need to think seriously about this, for it is not a light thing. If the Lord should come this morning, are we ready? Would we be raptured to the third heaven to receive Him? Woe to us if we are left behind. *This is as urgent as it gets.* We cannot afford to be careless anymore, for there is no more time for us. We have to be prepared. Do you think the Lord will not come this morning? I believe He can.

Even in the first century, before He left, He promised His disciples that He would come back to receive them to Himself. We know that the people in the first century were waiting for the Lord's return. Their hope was not in vain because the Lord could have returned in the first century if His church had been ready. The problem is not with Him; it is with us. Because of His long suffering, He does not want anyone to perish; He wants all to be saved. Therefore, He is waiting for us.

I want to impress upon you that we are living at a very thrilling moment. What can be more thrilling than the coming of the Lord? If the Lord should come now, are we ready for Him? This is something we need to be exercised about. We cannot afford to be careless anymore, for the Lord is coming. Are we ready? Where are we? If He should come, are we ready to go to the third heaven to receive Him? Or will we be left behind because we are not ready? This is an important question for each and every one of us to answer.

If the Lord should come this morning, and it is very possible, are you ready? Is there anything of the world in your life that you still love so much that you hope He will delay His return? The bad servant thought that his lord would not return so quickly and he began to drink and beat his fellow believers; but at an unexpected time his lord returned. This is why I say we are living in a very thrilling time. Are we ready? This is a serious question, and the reason we are gathered together.

In the Beginning

The Bible tells us, "In the beginning God ..." Before God, there was nothing. God is the beginning. The Bible tells us that God is a triune God. He is three in One: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. They are in complete harmony with one another.

We will use a human expression to tell what happened. During that time there was a conversation among the Trinity. The Father loves His Son so much that He wanted to create all things for His Son. But being God and knowing the end from the beginning, He knew that if He created there would be a problem. So He was

wondering what He should do. Then His Son stepped forward and said, “Father, if it is Your will to create, go ahead. I am willing to offer Myself to be the Lamb.” So in I Peter chapter 1, we are told that even before the foundation of the world, the Son offered Himself to be the Lamb, and because of this, God began to create.

Who is Lucifer?

In the beginning God did not create man; He created angels. Among the angels, there was one called Lucifer, the bright and morning star. He was created almost perfect. In Ezekiel 28 there is a description of him that tells us that he was not only highly gifted, but he was also the leading angel. He was the one who covered the throne of God, and he led the angels in worshiping God. In the beginning, everything was good, but gradually, he began to look into himself which is always dangerous without God. When he looked within himself, he began to be proud of himself and be dissatisfied with what God had given him.

In Isaiah 14 we are told that he said to himself five times: “I will.” “I *will* ascend into the heavens. I *will* exalt my throne above the stars of God. I *will* sit upon the mount of the assembly. I *will* ascend above the heights of the clouds. I *will* be like the Most High.” He was not satisfied with what God had given him. That is always the problem. Are you satisfied with what God has given you? Are you satisfied with what He has provided in your environment? Maybe you want to be higher, but God knows best. Whatever He has prepared for each and every one of us is always the best. Are you willing to learn the lessons and be satisfied with what God has provided for you?

Lucifer said five times: “I want to be equal with God.” In other words, he wanted the position of God’s beloved Son. God will never allow such a thing to happen. No one can take the place of His beloved Son.

So this Lucifer, the bright and shining star, was dismissed from the throne of God. Most likely, the earth that we know today belonged under Lucifer's control; therefore, when Lucifer was thrown down, the earth entered into a time of emptiness and darkness. It was covered with water, and we know it as the ice age. So this fallen situation of the earth lasted for a long time. We do not know how long this age continued, but we do know it lasted for thousands of years until one day the Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the deep and began to work. In six days He restored the earth to be habitable which was the beginning of the new creation.

Man was Created to Defeat the Enemy

He put man into this new creation. Hopefully, man would understand and cooperate with God and be used by God to defeat God's enemy. From one lower than the angels to defeat the highest of the angels is the wisdom of God.

Why did God do that? It would have been easy for God to destroy Lucifer; His breath could have completely annihilated him. But God did not do that because it would not have given God glory. There is no glory in a man beating a baby. Our human thinking is that if God destroyed Lucifer, which would have been easy for Him, then everything would be all right; but God had a higher plan. He wanted to create man a little lower than the angels. The angels are spirits and can go anywhere; but man has a body which is restricted and cannot go anywhere. If we are here, we cannot be there; we are limited. But God created man in such a condition because it is the glory of God for "one lower than the angels to defeat God's enemy," the archangel, and this is the reason why man was created.

However, God foreknew what would happen. After He had created man, He put him in the garden of Eden, a garden of pleasure. In the garden God planted all kinds of fruit trees that were good for food because man only ate fruit at that time. So this was God's provision for man. He told man to do two things—till the ground and guard the garden. Because it was a garden there was no wall. God wanted man to be that wall for He knew Satan was outside the wall, and he was anxious to get in. So God made man the wall. He was not only to till the ground to improve it, he was also to guard the garden as the wall. God's command to man was to be on guard.

Eve was Tempted and Caused Adam to Sin

Unfortunately, we do not know how Adam and Eve were separated. Eve wandered towards the middle of the garden and saw the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It looked beautiful, and its fruit was tempting. She was wondering why God did not allow them to eat of that tree. And because man and woman were separated, she did not have the protection of her husband. Adam knew God's command directly; she only knew it indirectly and it was not deep in her heart. The more she looked at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the more she desired it.

Where was Adam? He was supposed to guard the garden, but somehow he neglected his responsibility. Adam allowed Satan to slip into the garden in the form

of a serpent, and he began to question Eve: “Did God forbid you to eat any fruit in the garden?” Of course, she knew better. She said, “No. God allows us to eat all the fruits in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” God knew if they ate the fruit of that tree they would die; therefore, God warned them. Eve knew that, but the more she looked at that tree, the more she was attracted to it. What a blasphemy because it meant that God wanted them to die without giving them anything to eat! Of course, it was not so. Satan said, “God knows that if you eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you will have knowledge in yourself. You do not have to depend on God; the knowledge is yours. God has forbidden you to eat it because He is jealous of you.”

Eve was tempted, and she took the fruit and ate it. Not only that, when her husband came, she gave it to him and he ate. Eve was tempted, but Adam was not. He was fully aware of what had happened, for he knew the command of God so clearly. But he had to make a choice of whether he would choose God or choose his wife. And sad to say, he chose his wife. So Adam ate the fruit deliberately; he knew what he was doing. In that way, man fell into sin. This is the story of the garden of Eden, and we thank God that He knows everything from the beginning to the end. And we also thank God that His Son had offered Himself to be the Lamb as a sacrifice for the whole world.

Why are We Here?

We are not here by chance. God deliberately created us with a definite purpose. He wanted to use us to defeat His enemy, and this will give glory to God. So this is the purpose of man and why we are here. We are to be used of God to defeat the enemy of God that God may get all the glory. Are we doing it? Or are we falling into the trap of God’s enemy? Which side are we on? Are we with God or are we with God’s enemy? This is a question we need to decide. Who is on God’s side? Who will stand together with God against God’s enemy? Who will be used of God to defeat His enemy—not for our glory but for God’s glory? How marvelous is God’s plan for salvation!

Supposedly, all who are here are saved by grace and have the life of Christ in us. Do we realize why we are here? We are not here for ourselves; that would be selfish. We are here for God who has created us for His purpose. Are we standing with God against God’s enemy? Or are we standing with God’s enemy against God? This is a question before every one of us. If you are not for God, then you are for the enemy. If

you are for God, then you will be used by God to defeat the enemy. The enemy is not only outside of us; he is within us. He has already come into our life; therefore, our life has been contaminated.

Why is it that the Lord did not take us as soon as we are saved? I often think that if the Lord had taken me as soon as I was saved, how good that would be! That would save me from all the struggles of life; but God has a better plan. He did not want us to be barely saved; He wants us to be saved to the uttermost.

In Romans 8, we are told whom God has foreknown, He has predestinated that we should be conformed to the image of His Son (v. 29). Whom He has justified, He has also glorified that God's will may be done in our lives (v. 30b).

Do you have such an idea? Why is it that God did not rapture us immediately after we are saved? How much better we think it would be for us! But God knows better. After we are saved, He has left us on earth in order to give us opportunities to defeat the enemy in our lives and glorify God. Our enemy is no longer outside; he is also within us, in our flesh. So the Bible says, "The Spirit wars against the flesh and the flesh against the Spirit" (see Galatians 5:17). Where are you this morning? Are you standing with God against the enemy? Or have you surrendered to the enemy and are against God? Which side are you standing on? Let us ask ourselves.

Oh, that all of us here may give ourselves totally to the Lord. If there is anything in our lives that is not of Him, we pray that the Spirit will reveal it to us. We are willing to get rid of all of these things. We want to be totally His and be prepared for His imminent return.

The Lord is coming back. Are you ready? May the Lord have mercy upon every one of us that we may give ourselves totally to Him! May we ask Him to search our hearts to see if there is anything evil in us and lead us in the way everlasting. May the Lord bless every one of us here.

Let us pray:

Dear heavenly Father, we thank Thee for Thy wonderful salvation. Even before the foundation of the world, Thou hast already known us. Whom Thou has foreknown, Thou has called. Whom Thou has called, Thou has justified. Oh dear Lord, we want to give ourselves totally over to Thee that only Thy will shall be done in our lives. Reveal Thyself to us that in our daily life we may learn how to submit to Thee until the day when Thou shalt call and we can respond. Hear the cry of our hearts! In the name of our Lord Jesus. Amen.