

BEYOND TODAY

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Be ready to meet your God

How prepared are you for Christ's return?

Towards the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus Christ stressed the importance of being ready at all times for His return (Matthew 24:42-44). Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden chose to reject God's guidance, thus setting the course for their offspring. As the prophesied outcome of that choice approaches with its final frightening fulfilment at "the end of the age," it becomes even more expedient for Christians to prepare to meet their God.

Meeting God can be experienced on several levels. Firstly, direct access to the Father through personal prayer was made possible through Christ and His sacrifice (Hebrews 10:19-20). The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). We are encouraged to go "boldly before the throne of grace" in prayer (Hebrews 4:16), building a family relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Secondly, a group of faithful followers referred to in Scripture as "the elect" shall literally meet God at the return of Jesus Christ to begin His reign on the earth. This is prophesied to be at a time of great trouble when, if God did not intervene, all life on earth would end (Matthew 24:22).

Also, it could be said that the survivors of the Great Tribulation and Day of the Lord will also "meet God" in the sense that they will see Christ's glorious return to rule on earth (Luke 21:27; Zechariah 14:9).

Christ in us

While we cannot earn our salvation, those who have

neglected to build a relationship with God based on trust and obedience will find themselves unprepared on the day Christ returns to the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:9-12; Zechariah 14:1-4).

Those who claim to be Christian, yet neglect or refuse to allow God to work with them to mould them into the image of Christ could find themselves rejected. Our Saviour explained, "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness!'" (Matthew 7:22-23).

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It is quite simple. Is Jesus Christ in us? If not we fail the test and are disqualified (2 Corinthians 13:5). If we are not developing Christ's character and following His way of life, then there is nothing in us worth saving.

A major part of the apostle Paul's labour was geared towards this goal. In his letter to the Church in Galatia, he wrote, "My little children, for whom I labour in birth again until Christ is formed in you . . ." (Galatians 4:19). This is the purpose of the Church of God – to make disciples and to support them as Christ is being formed in us all.

Striving for perfection

The aim of each Christian is to become like Christ. As Paul put it, “Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” and that we may “grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ” (Ephesians 4:13, 15).

This requires effort on our part. Again, in Ephesians, Paul wrote: “That you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (chapter 4:22-24).

Similar instructions are found in Paul’s letter to the Colossians: “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry . . . put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you

have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him . . . Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Colossians 3:5, 8-14).

Without pursuing this goal, we will find ourselves unprepared to meet God.

Measuring up to Christ

Preparing to meet God demands a plan of action, and as we also need His help and support to effect these changes. It means we must build a close relationship with Him.

The first step is to harness a desire to change enough that we actually make a start. Next, we must see in ourselves the sins and bad habits of the “old man.” These must so appal us that we repent and throw ourselves upon

Under the Almighty’s shadow

God will provide protection from Satan’s influence on our lives if we stay close to Him and avail ourselves of His help.

Our Heavenly Father is calling those He chooses out of a world that “lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John 5:19). Satan the devil is the “god of this age” who “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (2 Corinthians 4:4, 1 Peter 5:8). True followers of Christ need protection from him, and that is why Christ prayed to His Father, “that You should keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15).

The same sentiment occurs in the model prayer, where Christ gave us the example of praying for deliverance from the “evil one” (Matthew 6:13).

Through God’s Spirit at work in us, we can find refuge in the “secret place of the Most High” (Psalms 91:1). Here we are safe and protected from Satan’s intentions to destroy us. For “He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalms 91:1). Here, as the psalmist wrote, the Lord “shall cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you shall take refuge.” (Psalms 91:4). We can liken a mothering bird who protects her helpless young to

the protection God provides us from the one seeking to devour us. The “secret place of the Most High” is a safe place for us; it is secure from the things that befall the world. Inside it is nourishing; here we thrive. From the outside, it is impenetrable from the enemy’s attacks.

We are engaged in spiritual warfare, and we must not let the enemy win the battle over our hearts and minds by leaving the place of God’s protection. If we go out from under His shadow, we are vulnerable. The enemy is lurking there, ready to kill his prey. He would be pleased if we left God’s protection by giving in to the temptations of this world and the pulls of our flesh. For once Satan sees a weak place to enter our minds, he will exploit it. But God says, “Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Therefore brethren, let us always stay within “the secret place of the Most High” (Psalms 91:1). Let us keep our defences strong by ensuring the word of God is living and stirred up within us. Do not give in to the desires of our enemy to overcome and destroy us. Let us always abide under the shadow of the Almighty!

Andy Diemer

God's mercy, asking for the blood of our Saviour to cover those sins. We must be prepared to change all our ways to fit in with the image of Christ that is to be formed in us.

To learn the qualities that will make up this new person, we need to study the scriptures and amend our thinking to comply with what they actually say and not the "traditions of men" so often taught in their place. We need to compare our thoughts and actions with those of Christ, and if they do not measure up, we need to cry out to Him and our Heavenly Father for help in changing and overcoming.

The hackneyed question "What would Jesus do?" is well worth asking when we find ourselves faced with enticements to sin. As we become more aware, we can learn to recognise temptation for what it is, then cry out to God for help to remove ourselves from it before it engulfs us.

Prayer, studying God's word, meditation and occasional fasting can help keep us on track and build the necessary close relationship with God. Christ's half brother James advised, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8). We need God to be involved in our lives if we are to achieve the required spiritual growth.

Christ's return and beyond

God has promised a glorious future for those who, with His help, achieve this goal. Scripture refers to it as "overcoming." It is only having Christ formed in us that gives us any hope of future glory (Colossians 1:27). Those who overcome will meet Christ as He returns to this earth, and in the process of time will also meet the Father (Revelation 21:1-7).

The effort we put in, with God's help, will pale into insignificance when we appear with Christ (Colossians 3:4). The apostle John put it this way, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:1-2).

For more information on how to strengthen or to begin building a vibrant relationship with God, please request or download our free booklets *Transforming Your Life* and *Tools for Spiritual Growth*.

David Fenney

Paralleled: Noah and our time

Past events shed light on the future.

Jesus Christ used the example of Noah's day to reveal the attitudes that would predominate near the end: "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24:37-39).

Here we see history and prophecy working together. The meaning is clear: The attitude of people in Noah's day would prevail again just before Christ's second coming. As in the former case, God would be deemed as far away, uninterested in human activities on Earth, with life appearing to go on as always (2 Peter 3:3-6). Just as it was then, people would be unconcerned as to their true spiritual condition and blind to God's impending judgement.

The key to the example Christ gave is to understand

that people can be so concerned about the cares of this life that they ignore their Creator (Matthew 6:33; Luke 21:34-35). It happened before, and it is happening again.

The apostle Paul similarly foretold the overall self-seeking mindset that would dominate people's thinking in the last days: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:1-5).

This perfectly describes the overall attitude and outlook of our age. Such thinking will prevent the vast majority of humanity from believing God and the biblical warning signs indicating Christ's imminent return. Like the people in Noah's time who laughed and mocked as he built the ark, the end of this age will come when the overwhelming majority are unprepared.

Discerning the signs of the times

Changes in the state of the sky can indicate threatening weather systems. Similarly, events in today's world can alert us as to what lies ahead.

About 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ said to a group of religious leaders, “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’ and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times” (Matthew 16:2-3, New International Version).

Most of us will have seen severe weather warnings. Sometimes the state of the sky and the meteorological reports have forecast a heavy rainstorm and it simply did not materialise. True, all the signs were there and the black cumulus clouds threatened. But suddenly the clouds began to dissipate and the predicted storm failed to occur.

Sometimes this is mirrored in world events. Men and women look into their Bibles and they begin to correlate certain prophecies with apparent patterns on the international stage. It may look as though the end is approaching, but then the signs slip into remission and the war clouds

or other precursors of disaster simply dissipate.

This transpired during the Second World War. At one point European armies seemed on the brink of fulfilling end-time biblical prophecies concerning Europe and the Middle East, but it did not happen at that time and the danger receded. To study these prophecies in more depth, please request or download our study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*.

Another time of crisis

We have moved from one century in turmoil to another. Today's specific crises are easy to identify. The

The Bible warns that a great time of trouble is coming on planet Earth. Several prophets speak of this unprecedented period of world chaos.

Cold War may be over but nuclear weapons still exist, and Russia, having invaded Ukraine, remains a threat to the stability of Europe. There are new dangers in Sudan and as far away as China. Displaced refugees seem to wander the face of the earth. Besides war, there are ongoing environmental and health concerns, not to mention an increasing attitude of lawlessness involving drugs, sexual abuse and exploitation, theft and murder. Different from previous generations is the anti-God culture where simply voicing traditional values is now considered by some to be hate speech.

The Bible warns that a great time of trouble is coming on planet Earth. Several prophets speak of this unprecedented period of world chaos.

Daniel, who was in effect prime minister under kings spanning two successive world-ruling governments, wrote the longest, most detailed prophecy in the Bible. It commences with the first year of Darius the Mede, the first king of the Medo-Persian Empire, and comes right down



An approaching storm cloud, with its classic anvil shape, heralds the threat of severe weather. Similarly world events and societal changes herald the events culminating in the return of Christ.

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to “the time of the end” (Daniel 11, verses 1 and 40). Verses 40 through to 45 centre on a future power struggle in the Middle East.

Verse one of chapter 12 brings us to a crucial passage in this long prophecy. “Michael, the great prince [an archangel] who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of the nations until then.”

The prophet Jeremiah warned: “Ask and see: Can a man bear children? Then why do I see every strong man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labour, every face turned deathly pale? How awful that day will be! No other will be like it. It will be a time of trouble for Jacob, but he will be saved out of it” (Jeremiah 30:6-7).

All life endangered

Until the 20th century, humankind could never have fully grasped the awful portent of these frightening words, made even more ominous by the warnings of Jesus Christ Himself. In what is known as the Olivet Prophecy delivered on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem, our Messiah declared, “For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equalled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:21-22, New International Version).

It is almost impossible to exaggerate the awesome force of this prophecy. Were it not for this promised divine intervention, human life would cease on earth. The worst fantasy movie nightmares would come to pass. These are not our words, but the very expressions of Jesus Christ Himself. Mark 13:19-20 repeats Matthew’s seriously worded warning. Luke, however, puts it a little differently. He expands Christ’s quote by saying, “For this is the time of punishment in fulfilment of all that has been written [in the Old Testament prophecies]” (Luke 21:22).

These predictions herald a unique time in the future for our crisis-charged world – hurtling inevitably towards what theologian James Moffatt labelled “the crisis at the close.”

Why Christ delays

When will Christ return? His disciples posed the very same question. Tell us, they said, “When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your [second] coming and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3).

Jesus did give them some general signs, but refused to be precise. He said, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only

the Father” (verse 36). Even after His resurrection and just prior to His ascension, the disciples were told: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by His own authority” (Acts 1:7).

Historically, many have been so anxious for the return of their Saviour that they have refused to accept Christ’s plain words and attempt to set dates, leading to much confusion and misunderstanding about biblical prophecy. Yet these end-time prophecies remain in the Bible – and they will happen!

Many have been so anxious for the return of their Saviour that they have refused to accept Christ’s plain words and attempt to set dates.

Our world seems so permanent. We get up in the morning, we take the familiar route to work, and get absorbed in the day’s routine. None of this is forever. It is not permanent. It will all come to an end sometime in the future. The question is, “When?” Conditions seem bad enough today. The plight of humankind seems to worsen relentlessly.

So why does the Lord appear to delay His coming? Why does it sometimes look as though the end could come, then conditions change and it simply does not occur? Events seem to ebb and flow like the tide, although the progression is usually in the direction of deterioration.

The reason is primarily spiritual. The apostle Peter sums it all up in one verse: “The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness, He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). Whilst it seems many are interested in the “signs of the times,” fewer discern the next step – that of repentance. God instructs us all to call on Him while He is near (Isaiah 55:6-7).

However, there will come a point where God says, in effect, “Enough is enough!” The last few words of Revelation 10:6 are variously translated “there will be time no longer” (KJV), “no more delay” (RSV), “time was up” (The Message). Long before that day arrives, we need to be sure our relationship with God is on a secure footing and that we will not be found wanting like those whom Christ will not recognise (Matthew 7:21-23).

For more information on these prophetic topics please request or download our booklets *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy* and *Seven Prophetic Signs Before Jesus Returns*.

Combatting compassion fatigue

Lawlessness at the end of the age will cause the love of many to “grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). How can we continue to convey the love of Christ?

The British have a reputation for generous responses to charitable appeals. Such compassion is driven by a love that includes feeling pity, mercy, sympathy and empathy towards those that are suffering. Many realise, however, that whilst money may temporarily alleviate some of the misery, it will rarely solve the underlying issues. Sometimes this can result in compassion fatigue.

What can we do to prevent such fatigue?

Only the most hard-hearted could fail to be moved by the horrors we see unfold in news broadcasts – refugees braving miles of sea in unsafe boats, the unspeakable violence and murderous activities of terrorists and criminals across the planet. Add to this those left homeless or bereaved by natural disasters and we can feel overwhelmed and helpless, perhaps to the extent that we want to switch off and put such distressing images out of our minds.

Time and money

Money may not be the ultimate solution to humanity's problems, but that does not absolve us from giving financial help as and when we can. Christ advised several times that His followers should “give alms” to those in need (Luke 11:41; 12:33).

Cornelius, the first recorded gentile convert to Christianity, was declared to be “a devout man and one who feared God . . . who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2). Indeed, the angel he saw in the vision told him, “Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God” (Acts 10:31).

Christ stated: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends” (John 15:13). One's life consists of every second sustained by every breath we take. To “lay down one's life” for another can mean giving of our time in whatever way we can without detriment to our other duties and obligations. There are many ways to support others, such as visiting, phoning or writing to the sick, elderly or bereaved, arranging a collection of items for a food bank or similar activity, or assisting a local charity. Everyone needs encouragement sometimes – a

kind word or a listening ear is often appreciated.

Whilst helping others is a wonderful way of giving of yourself, it is possible to take on too much and become weary in well-doing (2 Thessalonians 3:13). We need to be balanced in our approach.

Keeping focused

Returning to Cornelius, it was not just his alms that were highlighted but also his prayers. None of us can help everyone. Seldom can we directly aid more than just a handful of others. However, we can all pray for God's mercy, and for His Kingdom to come soon (Matthew 6:10).

As Christ's disciples much of our prayer life is likely to involve fervent intercessory prayers for each other and for the world at large (James 5:16). Such prayers are so

(Continued on page 7)

Tips to reduce risk

Compassion for others can endanger the benefactor. Avoid placing oneself in unnecessary risk. If you decide to help out within a charity follow their guidelines; they exist for a reason!

Be especially careful if required to help strangers in one-to-one settings. Beggars on the street often present a conundrum. Are they genuine? Will they spend what you give them on drink or drugs, leaving you wondering if you are aiding their addictions? Opening a wallet or purse could draw attention from potential muggers. Think ahead. Maybe have some small change accessible in a pocket, or a packet of biscuits for someone genuinely homeless and hungry (James 2:15-16). If safe, perhaps buy them a meal.

Donating to charities can be a practical way to help, but be wary of scams or those organisations with top-heavy administrative costs.



Q Why is there so little peace in the world?
Reader from Leicester

A War has been studied, no doubt, since the first conflict erupted among human beings. The ancient Greeks felt human behaviour was guided by fear, self-interest, and honour – characteristics that cause war and instability. When these aspects of human nature create a crisis, the normal course of events leads to a breakdown in order, and either anarchy or strife results.

Relations among nations are likewise generally guided by self-interest. When nations' interests are jeopardised, the instinct for self-preservation takes over. War often follows.

The apostle James wrote quite pointedly on this subject: "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war" (James 4:1-2).

James identifies lust, desire and covetousness as the primary sources of strife among people who cannot focus on the right relationship with God. He goes on to say: "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4). Again, we see that self-interest plays a dominant role in human aggression.

Left to itself, without a spiritual relationship with God, the human heart is the seat of conflict. The prophet Jeremiah the prophet observed that "the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick . . ." (Jeremiah 17:9, New American Standard Bible).

Jesus Christ confirms that "out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matthew 15:19). The apostle Paul tells us that the natural, human way of thinking "is

hostile to God" and "does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:7, New International Version).

But the Bible reveals that the real source of this hostility within human beings is Satan the devil. In a heated discussion with the Pharisees who were challenging Him, Christ labelled Satan as the source of human hostility. "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44).

Paul describes Satan as controlling the "power of the air," swaying people to disobedience without their conscious awareness. Until man's nature undergoes a fundamental change, he follows after the natural "lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." He is a child "of wrath" caught up with the rest of humanity in a spirit of conflict (Ephesians 2:2-3).

It will take a change of heart along with the addition of God's Spirit to turn the human mind from pursuing pure self-interest to following the lead of God. When the world comes under the covenant in which God writes His law of love on the human heart through His Spirit, we will see the end of war. Until then, we will see wars continue – and escalate in ferocity and devastation as mankind uses technological advancements to introduce ever-more-deadly means of killing other human beings.

A number of our booklets cover this topic and how peace will come. Perhaps you would like to request or download *The Horsemen of Revelation* and *Are We Living in the Time of the End?*

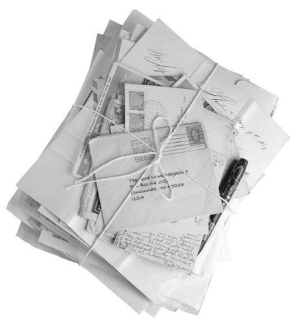
Compassion (Continued from page 6)

important to God that He likens them to incense (Revelation 5:8). Keeping this correct focus can help our love remain strong.

Jesus Christ had great love and compassion for the people with whom He came in contact. His followers should be emulating Him. Active love is less likely to grow cold than a passive love, so we should be praying for each other and the rest of humanity, helping out practically where we can and doing all we can to bring the good news of the Kingdom of God to as many as possible.

Our first duty is to provide hope through the preaching of the gospel concerning the Kingdom of God and our entrance into it through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That will ultimately bring blessings to all mankind.

Barbara Fenney



Letters From Our Readers

Profitable read

I enjoy this magazine. It is full of truth and knowledge.

Reader in London

I really enjoy this literature. It is well written and understandable. It helps me grow in my faith.

Reader in Barnsley

Enjoyed the magazine, although I don't agree with it all.

Reader in Newhaven

Beyond Today has been a tremendous blessing to me. It has helped me get a deep understanding of the Bible and helps my spiritual growth.

Reader in Dagenham

Subscribers renew

Very good publications. Thank you for all your efforts.

Reader in London

Great spiritual food for the soul. I have learned a lot from reading *Beyond Today* magazine. Please renew my subscription.

Reader in London

Beyond Today magazine covers important topics like end times. It helps me understand what is happening in the world and why.

Reader in London

Thank you. I very much enjoyed the latest issue of *Beyond Today*. I hope you keep sending it.

From the Internet

I am very grateful to God for using believers like *Beyond Today* so I can hear the word of God.

Reader in Telford

Please continue to send [the magazine]. I find your articles so very accurately explain the truth of what is happening in this world and why.

Reader in Colchester

Please renew my subscription. I'm looking forward to receiving the 12-lesson *Bible Study Course* and the booklets I have requested.

Reader in London

Let the Bible answer...

What does the Bible teach about comfort?

God comforts: Psalm 23:4; Isaiah 51:12; 61:1-3; 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17.

God's Holy Spirit comforts us by bringing Christ's words into our minds: John 14:16, 26 (King James Version uses the word "Comforter" for "Helper"); 15:26; 16:7-15; Acts 9:31; Romans 15:4-6.

We can also comfort one another: 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Colossians 4:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 5:11,14.

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