

Complete Your Assigned Task



Longing for His Appearing (Part 7)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again sharing with you precious insights out of scripture that have made the difference between success and failure in my life and can do the same in yours. This week I'm continuing with the theme which I commenced last week, "Longing for His Appearing," a theme that can radically affect your whole way of life.

This week I'm sharing with you five practical ways in which we should be preparing for Christ's appearing, that is, five things which we will be doing if we really are longing for His appearing. We may say that we're longing for his appearing but that's not enough. It has to show in the way we live, in our priorities, our motives, our lifestyle.

Yesterday I shared with you the first of these ways, by cultivating personal holiness. I pointed out throughout the New Testament God's requirements for holiness and the exhortation of the writers of the New Testament for holiness are nearly always linked with the anticipation of the Lord's return. In other words, this is the strongest single motivation in the New Testament for holy living and if we are truly motivated that way then we will live holy lives.

I quoted at the close of my message yesterday the words of the apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3: "Since you look for these things, [beloved], be diligent that you may be found by Him in peace, [without] spot and blameless." That's the standard of holiness which is set before us in the light of the coming of the Lord Jesus, in peace (no ruptured relationships), without spot (no sins that are unconfessed and unforgiven), and blameless (no duties that we have omitted).

Now today I'm going to speak about the second main way in which we should be preparing for the Lord's return. In Revelation 19:7-8 John vividly depicts the church, the bride of Christ, as she will appear at the marriage supper of the Lamb, that is, prepared for her final, eternal union with Christ as her bridegroom. This is what John says in Revelation 19:7-8:

> "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him [to the Lord], for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. And it was given to

> her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints." (NASB)

I'm always impressed every time I read those verses by the statement, "His bride has made herself ready." When the Lord comes, the bride will be ready, she will not be making herself ready, she will have made herself ready. The preparation must be done in advance.

And in describing how the bride has made herself ready John focuses on her clothing. He says her clothing will be fine linen, bright and clean. And then he interprets the meaning of the fine linen. He says the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. It is all the deeds of righteousness that they have performed in their lives since coming to know the Lord Jesus.

We need to distinguish between two related but distinct things in the language of theology: imputed righteousness and outworked righteousness. When we come to Jesus and receive him as Savior and enter into His salvation, the Lord gives us righteousness as a gift. In Romans 5:17 Paul speaks of those who receive the "gift of righteousness." The first way we become righteous is receiving a gift and if we don't receive it as a gift we will never have it any other way. We cannot earn it, we cannot achieve it, we cannot work for it. It is a gift of God's sovereign grace given to us through faith in Jesus. That's what we call imputed or reckoned righteousness. We're reckoned righteous with Christ's own righteousness.

However, that's not the end. Once this righteousness has been imputed to us then it has to be worked out in our lives. It's not enough to remain unchanged and just the same as we were when we received Christ. There has to be an ongoing process of total change in every area of our lives which is the outworking of the righteousness which we receive by faith. In Philippians 2:12-13 Paul says this:

> "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (NASB)

Notice there are two works that go on, we work out of the righteous that's been imputed to us and as we work it out God works in us. But the proportion in which God can work in us is the proportion in which we work out. If we do not work out God cannot work in.

So when John pictures the bride of Christ clothed in this fine linen which is the righteous acts of the saints, he's not talking any longer about imputed righteousness, he's talking about outworked righteousness. You could say, in a sense, that the bride will be clothed in the righteous acts that she's performed in the service of her Lord. Our clothing in eternity will be the expression of our righteous acts in time. I think I'm going to say that again. Our clothing in eternity will express our righteous acts in time.

In this light we can understand Paul's intense desire which he expresses in 2 Corinthians 5:1-4:

> "Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, [that's speaking about our physical body] we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked."

Paul uses two metaphors together, being, having a dwelling and having clothing. Then he says:

> "For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." (NIV)

That's a picture of how we will be adorned, arrayed, clothed throughout eternity. And Paul is very well aware that it's possible that we might have no clothing. Our clothing depends on the way we've lived and served Christ in this present age. Our faithfulness in this life will determine our clothing in eternity.

You see, God has good works prepared for each one of us. Paul states this so clearly in Ephesians 2:10:

> "For we are God's workmanship..."

And that word means a creative masterpiece. We, created anew in Christ Jesus, are God's creative masterpieces. We are:

> "...created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." (NIV)

That's so important for all Christians to understand, that when we receive Jesus as our personal Savior, when we're born again, when we become a new creation in Jesus Christ, God already has prepared in advance the good works for which he has recreated us. There is a task laid ready for each one of us. There is a plan of service. We do not have to

improvise. We do not have to sit down and work out our own plan for our life. What we have to do is pray and wait upon God an find his plan. We need to ask him to show us what are the good works for which he created us anew in Christ. And you see, this is how the bride is going to be attired. The bride will be attired in the good works which God ordained for her to do and which she has faithfully accomplished. This is so important because I fear that so many of us could be in danger of having no material for our wedding garments. You see, as I see it, every strand in that beautiful linen garment is a righteous act and so if we're to be fully attired, if we're to have all the glory and the beauty that God intends us to have, we have to carry out in time the righteous acts which God before ordained for us to walk in. In other words, we cannot afford to squander our time, our strength, our energy, our talents, because we are missing out on something that is eternal. We have to view every duty, every Christian act, every act of service as a thread in that linen garment with which we're going to be clothed throughout all eternity. No wonder Paul said he didn't want to be found unclothed. He wanted to know that he had clothing waiting for him in eternity.

To me, that's such a beautiful picture. In my mind's eye I can almost see at times that bride in that linen which is like no earthly linen. It's not merely clean, it's resplendent, it's radiant, it shines. But if you analyze it, if you look carefully at it, you'll see that each gleaming thread is one act of righteousness.

Brothers and sisters, we cannot afford to be lazy. We cannot afford to be negligent. We cannot miss out on our Christian duties. We have to be faithful in the small things as well as in the great things. As a matter of fact, if we're not faithful in the small things the Lord has told us we will not be faithful in the great things. Do not wait for some great task and say, "When God gives me that I will be faithful." Because He'll never give it to you. But be faithful in the small things, regard each little act as a thread in your garment and you'll be promoted. But, more important still, you'll be radiantly attired in glory.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this same time. In my talk tomorrow I'll be sharing another practical way in which we should be longing for Christ's appearing.

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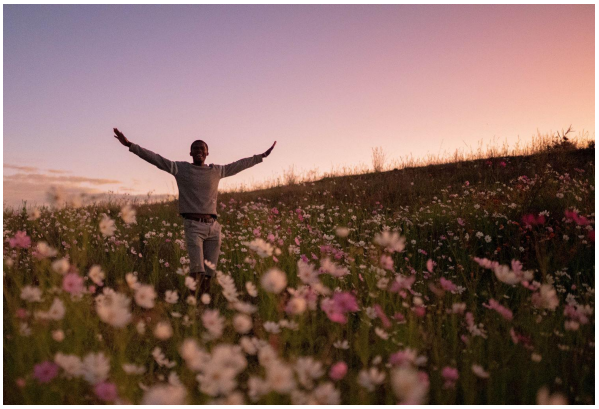
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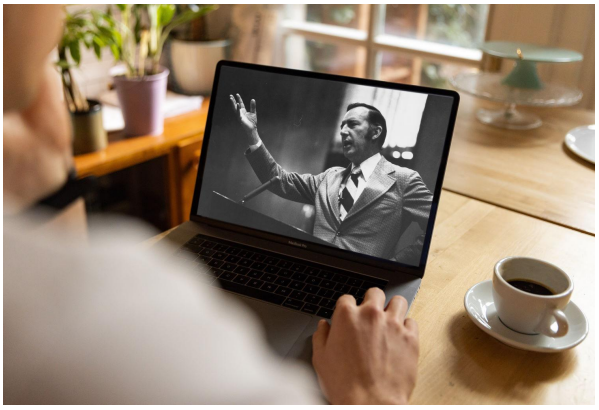
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