

The Glorious Appearing

RECENTLY I've been surprised at the sheer number of Christians in the world who are hoping that their Lord will not return. I would never have predicted this, but there are people who call themselves believers who are actually dreading the Second Coming. I could perhaps understand this if they were worried about the fate of their lost friends or relatives, but from what I have seen many of them want the Lord to stay away simply because they like their life and don't want God to mess it up. "I love you, Lord," they say, "but please don't come back. My life is going really well, and if You return and bring an end to this world it will mess everything up. So please just stay away as long as possible."

I know that many unbelievers think this, and that is to be expected. After all, for them the return of Christ is a dreadful, frightening thing – it is, quite literally, the end of their world. But it astonishes me that *Christians* believe this. The very people who should be longing for the return of their Lord are actively hoping that He won't come back at all! How is this loving God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength? What kind of whole-hearted devotion tells their loved one that they hope they stay away and never come back? Could you imagine telling your wife "I love you, honey, but my life is so much better when you're out of town. Do you think you could arrange to stay out of town indefinitely?" How loved do you think she would feel?

It's worth noting that this attitude is not found in the Bible. In fact, the Lord actually promises a special blessing for those who long for His appearing:

2 Timothy 4:8: "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

In case there was any doubt, Paul makes it plain that the "appearing" he is talking about is nothing less than the return of Jesus Christ:

1 Timothy 6:13: "I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;
14 That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:"

2 Timothy 4:1: "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;"

It is quite clear that the special blessing Paul mentions will **only be given to those who long for the return of Christ**. This blessing – a crown of righteousness – will **not** be given to those who do not want Christ to come back, or who do not care one way or the other. There is a *condition* attached to this blessing. I'm sure that some would interpret this "crown of righteousness" to be something symbolic and therefore of no real value, but the Bible clearly depicts it as a real prize that should be taken seriously. (Paul certainly seemed to value it!) It's worth noting that the same Greek word for crown is also found in the following verse, where the crowns are used in Heaven to worship God:

Revelation 4:10: "The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth forever and ever, and cast their crowns before

the throne, saying,

11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

If these crowns are just imaginary or symbolic then how are people using them to worship God? How could anyone cast a spiritual crown at the feet of the Father? Don't you need something *real* in order to do that?

The Bible clearly teaches that Christians should be longing for the return of their Savior. This is demonstrated all throughout the New Testament. Take this passage from Titus:

Titus 2:11: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,
12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world;
13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ;
14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.
15 These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee."

Paul told Titus that we were to live soberly, looking for our "blessed hope". And what is this blessed hope? The "glorious appearing" of our Lord Jesus Christ! Christians should be longing for this, not dreading it. I have to ask: if you love the Lord with all your heart and are longing to be with Him, then how could you *not* be longing for His return? Isn't a disinterest or dislike for the return of Jesus nothing less than a disinterest or dislike for Jesus Himself? After all, Satan also doesn't want Christ to come back. Should we really be siding with him?

Peter said this:

1 Peter 1:6: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:
7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:
8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:"

The "glorious appearing" is what puts a final end to our trials. It is a source of great joy, for it is when our faith and trials are turned into praise and glory.

In all of Scripture there is no record of any believer wanting the Lord to stay away. There aren't even any instances of apostles asking Jesus to delay His return so that more lost people could be saved! The constant refrain of the people of God is a longing for the One they love to return. In fact, at the very end of Revelation the apostle John said this:

Revelation 22:20: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

This should be the prayer that is on our lips and the longing that is in our hearts. “Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

One day the Lord will return and take His Church home with Him. For unbelievers it will be a time of unimaginable suffering and judgment, but for His saints it will be a time of tremendous joy. The righteous dead will be raised to everlasting life and will forever be with Jesus. It will truly be a glorious time – and something that we should be longing for with all our heart.