

Commanded To Watch: Are You Greatly Anticipating The Lord's Return?

My parents owned a trucking company that began many years ago by catering to farmers with such services as hauling their livestock to the Chicago Stockyards. One of my dad's customers lived in a large two-story farmhouse that had a pinnacle rising above the roof with windows on all sides.

I remember asking my dad about this unusual feature, and he told me that the previous owner of the house built it as a place to watch for the Lord's return. The idea of someone building a room for that purpose impressed me as a small child (I was about eight years old at the time).

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I now understand that although the watchtower might have displayed faith in Jesus' promises, it's not what Jesus had in mind when He instructed us to "watch" for His coming.

A Clear Command

Today, the Lord's command for us to "watch" is perhaps the most ignored of all His direct instructions to His followers. I can't remember hearing a sermon about it, although many pastors stress the necessity of the Great Commission because the Lord commanded us to spread the Gospel to the world.

After the Lord answered the disciples' questions regarding the signs that would mark His "coming and the end of the age" in His Olivet Discourse (Matt. 24:3ff), He gave His followers (us) three specific instructions:

1. "Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" (Matt. 24:42).
2. "Therefore, you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect" (Matt. 24:44).
3. "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Matt. 25:13).

As we see the fulfillment of all that Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24 rapidly approaching our world, is this not the time we especially need to "stay awake," "be ready" and "watch"?

How Do We Watch for Jesus' Appearing?

Although the farmer who built the watchtower may have had good intentions, Jesus had other things in mind than sitting in a room in anticipation of His return. Let's take a look at how watching for His return applies to our day.

Watching begins with believing what Scripture says about the end times. In Luke 18:8, Jesus asked this question at the end of His parable about the persistent widow, "Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

Why would the Lord insert this particular question at the end of a parable about the need for persistence in prayer? Just as it takes faith to persevere in bringing our requests before the Lord, does it not also take the same determination to remain hopeful of His imminent appearing as we wait year after year?

Watchfulness begins with believing what Scripture reveals about Jesus' imminent appearing. Christians who lack such a belief often place all their hope in future aspirations for this life rather than eternity, and as a result, remain blind to how world events point to the nearness of the Rapture.

We watch by paying attention to the many signs of the rapidly approaching Tribulation. The Rapture can happen at any moment and without warning. However, because it occurs before the start of the seven-year Tribulation, we take note of the many signs pointing to the nearness of this time of God's wrath upon the earth. We understand how the news headlines of our day align with how Scripture describes the last days.

As I write, I'm reading about the widespread civil unrest in more than 100 cities across the U.S. The lawlessness that's growing exponentially in American cities at this moment aligns perfectly with what Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-11. The apostle described antichrist as a "man of lawlessness" and noted that the "mystery of lawlessness" was already at work in preparation for his arrival on the world scene. The current and dramatic uptick in lawlessness is but one more sign of the nearing seven-year Tribulation that heralds the soon appearing of Jesus.

Watching leads to serving the Lord. In the parable of the "faithful and wise servant," Jesus said, "Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes" (Matt. 24:46). Believing what the Bible says about His return leads to activity, not passivity.

As believers, we all have diverse gifts and different callings in the body of Christ (Rom. 12:3-8). Knowing that we live in the season of Jesus' appearing should cause us to be all the more faithful in serving the Lord in the way He has gifted us and called us to serve and share the hope we have as the Lord gives us the opportunity to do so.

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Watching implies that we are ready. Of course, readiness for

the Lord's return implies that we have already put our trust in Jesus as our Savior and depend on Him alone for the forgiveness of our sins and eternal life. All those in Christ will participate in the Rapture regardless of what they believe about it.

As New Testament saints, we strive to maintain a close walk with our Savior so we are ready to suddenly find ourselves in His glorious presence (1 John 2:28).

The Rewards of Watching for Jesus' Appearing

Yes, it's been 2,000 years since Jesus commanded His followers to watch for His coming, and yet we are still waiting. Is there any advantage in it for our day? Yes, I believe there's a great blessing in such awareness, in watching for His appearing.

The apostle Paul, who initially anticipated that the rapture might happen in his lifetime, wrote that the Lord will reward all who love Jesus' appearing with a "crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8). There's always been a reward for those who long for Jesus' appearing, the rapture. Not only that, but there's also a temporal reward for our continued watchfulness.

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The encouragement and reassurance that such awareness of Jesus' imminent appearing brings doesn't depend on how soon it might happen, but rather arises from the absolute certainty that someday Jesus will come to take us home to glory, thoroughly destroy the lawless kingdom of antichrist and establish His rule of justice throughout the nations.

Yes, the growing violence in our cities, government corruption and constant rumors of wars distress us at times. However,

calmness returns to our souls as we remember that the Bible said the end times would look like this and that God remains sovereignly in control of all things.

There's a blessedness from knowing that Jesus might appear at any moment that's difficult to describe, yet it constantly restores peace to my soul as I watch for His imminent appearing.

This article originally appeared on Harbinger's Daily, and is reposted with permission.

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