

What Should We Do While Waiting For Christ's Return?

Biblical Commands in Context of the Second Coming

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 12-Sep-26; Sermon #1893-PM

Please turn to Leviticus 23:23, and we will get a running start into this sermon at the command to keep the Feast of Trumpets. We will read down through 25.

Leviticus 23:23-25 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation. You shall do no customary work on it; and you shall offer an offering made by fire to the Lord.'"

(Bill covered this fairly thoroughly this morning.) We come to this frequently on the Day of Trumpets. We have heard this many times, and we have heard that this phrase, "a memorial of blowing of trumpets," is literally in the Hebrew, "a remembrance of shouting." And the word shouting here in the Hebrew may be a shortened form of the Hebrew phrase "shout of the shofar." At least that is what the scholars have put together, so they have decided upon the rendering, a blowing of trumpets, as this memorial, a memorial of blowing of trumpets.

Well, that is about all we really get from this short three-verse command in terms of what this feast day means. It is a memorial of blowing of trumpets, and as we heard this morning, it is a noisy day. It is a day of a lot of shouting, a lot of trumpet blasts, and we do not get much farther than that. It is this day that is associated with noise, with a sound, with cacophony, with blaring trumpets. I can go on using various synonyms of noisy, or you know, whatever would describe a trumpet blast or of shouting.

But like I said, that is about as far as we get from these three verses about what it might mean. That is far less than we get from the commands here to eat unleavened bread during that time; or what the Day of Pentecost means,

with the firstfruits and the offerings that are given there; and then the Day of Atonement, fasting and afflicting your souls; and Feast of Tabernacles, putting up the temporary dwellings and the boughs of fruit trees and all that stuff that we get. Trumpets, we get a memorial of shouting or blowing of trumpets, and that is it. I think this is the shortest of all the descriptions, all the commands for the feasts.

So what is this day about? Well, God has given us, blessed us with many years of studying into this, many sermons, many articles, many minds looking at this and thinking about it. All those years in the Worldwide Church of God and the years since, and we have come to a bit of an understanding about what this blowing of trumpets, this great noise, foreshadows. What it means, what it is supposed to tickle in our brain about God, about His plan.

So we have come to understand that the essential, or core, the central meaning of the Feast of Trumpets revolves around the *appearing or the revealing of God*. These great noises, this cacophony of sounds, the blaring of trumpets, and such, happens when God is drawing attention, mostly to Himself, that He is there, that He is the central figure of a certain event. Obviously a central figure in our lives. The position of this holy day within the seven holy days shows us that He is central to those too, and central to history and central to prophecy, because this is an axial holy day, if you will, an axial feast, because things that happened before Trumpets have to do with other things in this age of man, and once you get to Trumpets, things turn. It is like a fulcrum, and suddenly things turn to another age. And now you have the things that Atonement looks forward to, things that the Feast of Tabernacles and the Eighth Day look forward to, but they do not happen unless Christ is the central figure of this holy day. *He is the central figure of all time.*

So let us think about some of the instances in the Bible where trumpets or loud noises take a central place. Obviously at Mount Sinai, we could go through Exodus 19 and see the trumpet blasts, and the people were afraid, and I am sure there were burst eardrums or whatever if they were too close, because this was a really loud, noisy occurrence when God came down on the mount. He was right there!

The next one is Jericho. What do we think about Jericho? Well, we think about the Israelites going around the city blasting on trumpets, and then when the time came and the signal was given, "Shout!" they shouted for all they were worth. It was a sign that God had destroyed that city. He was there. He was their warrior-King, and He was defeating the Canaanites before them. He did not need their help.

One you probably would not have thought of, but it is certainly true, is the dedication of the Temple, especially in the II Chronicles version of it. It mentions a great choir singing as the Temple was dedicated, and the cloud came down and God entered the Temple. That was obviously an appearance of God right there among men in Israel. I tried to find one for Christ's first appearance, and there is no mention of a trumpet blast at the time, but there is a host of angels that sing. And I am sure that was not, "Quiet, let's not wake up the baby" type of thing. It was also a loud proclamation that the Savior had been born.

And of course, there are multiple end-time events where trumpets, lightnings, and thunderings and loud noises shake the whole earth. Everybody can hear, and of course the biggest one is when Jesus Christ Himself returns and the firstfruits are resurrected. Now, it is this last event, the return of Jesus Christ, that most church members equate with the Day of Trumpets. Yeah, yeah, that is fine, that is good. There is good reason for doing that.

As I mentioned before, this feast is placed as the hub on which history turns, when Christ intervenes to save, or before He saves things, He ends this Satan-inspired, Satan-ruled world, and then He sits on His throne, setting up the government of God, the Kingdom of God on earth, and He commences to try to save Israel, and on into the Millennium.

Some in the church have taken this meaning of the Day of Trumpets a little bit too far, insisting that Christ must return on the Feast of Trumpets. That is fine, you could have that in the back of your head, but does that not go against the spirit of Christ's warning that no one knows the day or the hour? I mean, if He was slated to come back on the Feast of Trumpets, why did He not just say so? And then we could map it out and say, well, September 12th, 2026 is one of those days. I wonder if He is going to come today?

Well, He said, no, you do not know the day or the hour. God can send His Son back to earth whenever He wants. He will do it in His time according to His will, and we will look back on it and say, oh, I see what He did there. I will only say that it is a possibility that He returns on this holy day. It is one of 365 days of the year that He could come back, so we will know when it happens.

But nevertheless, all of that aside, the fact remains that on this festival, the church usually focuses on Christ's return. But that is still in the future, right? He has not, like the Thessalonians thought, come back already. We do not know how long it will be until that wonderful day. While we hope it will be soon, and we hope He will judge us worthy to participate in it, as firstfruits, its occurrence is completely out of our control.

It is all in the Father's hand. He will say, "Son, now's the time, go!" And when that time comes, you know, hopefully we will be around to see it, to participate in it, to glory in it. But like I said, we have no control over when that happens, how it happens. What *is* in our control is what we think, say, and do in the meantime. Whether that is three years from now, seven years from now, 20 years from now, or whenever.

And that is what this sermon is about. What does the Bible say we should do while awaiting Christ's return? See, that is something you have control over. That is something you can do. We can be all a-twitter, not the Internet a-twitter, we can be all excited about Christ's return, but where the rubber meets the road is what we think, say, and do in the meantime.

Let us go to I Peter 1, please. We will read verses 3 through 9. This is a very uplifting, encouraging paragraph that encapsulates the wonders and the difficulties of our calling, from our baptism to our ultimate salvation at the return of Jesus Christ. Let us just see what Peter has to say. Remember, it is very encouraging, so read it with a smile.

I Peter 1:3-9 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does

not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time [at Christ's return]. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness [or the proven character] of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.

Is that not encouraging how much God has done for you? A wonderful goal He set before us, the inheritance that He says that He will give to us. It is just wonderful! What God has given us and promised us is priceless and truly unfathomable. It is hard to understand, hard to comprehend that we could be given these things and He will do these things for us. And so he rightly says here, Peter does, we rejoice in them, and we give Him all the credit and all the glory for our almost unbelievable election and blessing upon blessing.

But Peter does ground us back in reality here, reminding us that in this little while of our human lifetimes, our time of sanctification, we are grieved now and then by the trials of life which test our faith, which test, as I said as we were going through there, whether we have a genuine character. Sometimes those trials are indeed fiery, but their aim is to mature us, perfect us, to test us like a metal, to see if we are pure, whether our faith is indeed genuine, that we are growing in Christlike character that will not waver under duress.

And it is made all the more difficult, he says, because God is invisible to us. We cannot see Him. We know He is there. We can see the results of His work in our lives, but we are human. Seeing is believing, right? It is not actually true in every circumstance, but we are so fixated on our own senses that we often need to have some tangible proof of something before we will do anything about one thing or another.

But God is invisible. We have to take certain things on faith, we have to believe that the Bible is His word, we have to believe that it has been transmitted to us as His Word, as the pure words that He says it is composed

of. We have to believe what Jesus says about how we should live, and the things the apostles teach and the prophets as well, that it is the truth. And on and on it goes. There are a lot of things that we have to believe even though we do not see things, feel them, hear them, touch them. Things of God that the people in this world without the Holy Spirit reject because they cannot see them.

So it feels like half the time that we are going through life at least partially blinded because we do not see. But if we are in full union with Him, we rejoice, despite all of this, and glorify Him for the salvation He is working out in our lives. If we are sensitive enough, maybe that is not quite the word, if we are thinking enough, if we are in tune with Him enough, we can see more than we think we can, because we, by the Holy Spirit, see connections and understand things more, better as we go through our lives.

What Peter is kind of telling us is that we go through life with this wonderful calling, all these wonderful promises, with the assurance of God that He will save us, that we can be in that first resurrection, that we can rule with Him, we can inherit all things. But in this physical life, because it is a physical life, because this world is still ruled by Satan, that our days are full of joy and grief. We live with hope, and also the painful realities of life. We enjoy the blessings, and we hate the trials, but they are there, both the good and the bad, the positive and the negative.

But we do this, we keep our chin up, we keep hoping, we keep rejoicing, we continue thanking God for the blessings that He has given us, all in expectation that Christ will return and all these things will come to fruition. We say with John in Revelation 22:20, "Come, Lord Jesus!" But we know that that day is not today, it is not even next year, and truth be told, a lot of us are old, we may die before it happens. So we must fill the time with faith and virtue, growth and fruits, to please the Father and the Son. Yes, Christ is coming, thank God for that! So what do you do in the meantime? That is the question for today.

Believe it or not, I have got 10 points and I have given myself five minutes each for each one of these. We will see if I can do that. Now these are things, many of them have already been expressed today in one way or another, but it is good to review them. Also, all of these are in context with some

phrasing of the Lord is coming, or when I return, or the appearance of Jesus Christ, or the appearing of Jesus Christ, or some reference to the Second Coming. And so these are directly from Scripture saying, you do this while waiting for Christ's return.

Let us go first to something Jesus says, always good to start with the Boss, and He says this in the Olivet Prophecy, back in Matthew 24. We are going to read a fairly large section of Matthew 24. Martin read a little bit of this this morning. Let us start in verse 29 and we will go down to 44.

Matthew 24:29-31 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heaven will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet [we are currently observing the Feast of Trumpets], and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

This is the context in which these things appear.

Matthew 24:32-44 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near. So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the very doors! Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things are fulfilled. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away. But of that day and hour no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. 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. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken, the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.

[This is the verse we were getting to.] Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not expect Him."

1. *Watch and be ready* .

His command to watch here can be translated as be alert, be on guard, stay awake, stay vigilant, and of course, as it is here in the New King James, watch. If you want to jot down Mark 12:23, Luke 12:40, Luke 21:34 and 36, there are also commands there that say basically the same thing: watch, stay alert, stay vigilant, be on guard. So He is urging us here to remain aware of what is happening from a spiritual perspective. We can put it negatively if we want: do not fall asleep, like the Ten Virgins do, or as the three apostles did in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is saying, could you not stay up with Me for a little while? Nope, they had to get their Z's.

There is an interesting prophecy of a church going to sleep, essentially, back in Revelation 3, verse 1. We know it as the church of Sardis, they went to sleep, so far as that Jesus called them dead.

Revelation 3:1-3 "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write, 'These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.' [And what does He tell them to do?] Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.

See, they did not even observe the first command He gave in terms of His Second Coming, to watch, to be watchful. Now the watch command in,

Luke 21:34 "But take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that day come upon you unexpectedly."

They were not watching, and they were caught by surprise, because as He shows here, they were distracted by a lot of things that were happening around them in the world, and they joined in. They were not awake spiritually, they were doing what the dead were doing, the unconverted. But this watch command is a little bit different, and it puts a spin on what Jesus means, because the construction of this watch command is what grammarians call reflexive, it comes back on oneself. He says, take heed to yourselves, watch yourselves, be alert to yourself and your spiritual condition. In the ESV it says it more plainly, watch yourselves.

Our watching is not necessarily of world events. It is not watching other people and seeing what sins they commit and then pointing the finger at them. It is watching our own spiritual condition. We are to be careful to maintain a vital, ongoing relationship with our Savior. We are to be, as it says later on, growing in grace and knowledge. We are to be continuing our service to one another, and we are to be producing fruit right up to the end.

So I have to ask a question, and you should ask it of yourself: How are we doing? How are you doing? How am I doing? It is in this way that we prepare ourselves for His use *now*, and also His use in the Kingdom. And we will only be prepared if we keep on watching ourselves, watching our relationship with Him, watching how we are growing up until the very end.

2. *Pray always* .

Luke 21:36 "Watch therefore [He repeats it], and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man."

So in this watch command, He adds pray always. Prayer is a major tool to maintain and grow in our relationship with God, and with Christ specifically

as the Head of the church, and as our Savior and High Priest. So we have to build a habit of regular, earnest prayer, because do you not know it is God's will that we do so? Let us go to I Thessalonians 5, verses 16 through 18. Paul gives this to this church as final instructions here. He says,

I Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

This is one of the things it is God's will that you do: rejoice, pray, give thanks. You could say praise, pray, and give thanks. We need to be in communication with Him frequently, every day, to strengthen that relationship. This is one of the first, well, after chapter 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, but He tackles service, prayer, and fasting as things that we need to do, as His called people, as we go through life. In Matthew 9:15, after the Jews say, why are not Your disciples fasting, He says that when the bridegroom is taken away, His disciples will fast. So we will add that one in this too, that we need to pray and fast, because why will the disciples pray when the bridegroom is taken away? You are obviously praying that He will come back.

Also I Peter 4, verse 7:

I Peter 4:7 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.

It is more important for us to be praying as the end of all things approaches, as it nears.

Let us go on to number 3. We can find this one in I John 3, if you followed me to I Peter, it is two or three pages on. We will read the first three verses.

I John 3:1-3 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 [He is revealed,

when He is revealed, that is His Second Coming], we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. [Now the kicker, in verse 3] And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

3. *Purify yourself* .

That is one of the 10 things you need to be doing in waiting for Christ's return. So if we hope for and desire to be firstfruits of God at His coming, we must work on becoming pure. Peter puts it a little bit differently. Let us go back to I Peter 1, verses 13 through 19. He writes here,

I Peter 1:13-19 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance [do not go back to being bad people, sinful people]; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

So they just use basically two different words for saying the same thing. Becoming pure is the same thing as becoming holy. It is making our conduct align with the Holy One Himself, become like Jesus Christ. Now notice here, he says in verse 13 that it requires sobriety, we have to be serious and in control of ourselves. It requires conviction (Martin was talking about that a little bit this morning). It requires obedience, and it requires us putting off the old man in the fear of God.

We want to get rid of all of those negatives, all of those things that we have absorbed either from our own selfish human nature, from the world, or from Satan's influence. We have got to get rid of all of that. That is the only way we are going to become pure, and then we have to, once that is all swept out, as it were, we have to fill it up with good things. We have to fill it up with the obedience and all those virtues of God that we possibly can, so that when Christ appears, we are going to be like Him. That is what is going to enable us to see Him as He is.

So the Father and the Son gave everything to make our redemption possible, so we must likewise go all out, give our all to grow in righteousness and holiness. What I am saying here is, just to put it another way, is that between now and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, we must participate fully in our sanctification. We cannot wish holiness upon us, we cannot hope that we will be made better without actually participating in the process, getting rid of old habits that are sinful, putting on new habits that conform to the character of Jesus Christ. Paul says this in Philippians 2. I am going to go and read that one.

Philippians 2:12-16 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. [So meet God halfway. He is working, Jesus Christ is working, and so you work too.] Do all things without murmuring and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God, without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Amazing how many of these commands have a reference to Christ's return in them. Peter says something very similar. Let us go to II Peter, chapter 3, starting in verse 11.

II Peter 3:11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved [he is talking about the Day of the Lord], what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness?

Down to verse 17,

II Peter 3:17-18 You therefore, beloved, since you know these things beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked [which is one of the ones we will get to], but grow in the grace and

knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

So number 3 is purify yourself.

4. ***Do not fall for deception*** .

Let us go back to the Olivet Prophecy. Matthew 24, He tackles this at the first part of it. Let us start in verse 4 and go through verse 6.

Matthew 24:4-6 Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled [or alarmed, or panicked], for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet."

Matthew 24:11 "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many."

Let us drop down to verse 23 and go to verse 26.

Matthew 24:23-26 "Then if anybody says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. [I have warned you beforehand.] Therefore if they say to you, 'Look, He is in the desert!' do not go out, or 'Look, He is in the inner rooms!' do not believe it."

So do not let yourself be deceived by false gospels, false prophets, or even horrific disasters that some call signs. This is one reason why we have to watch and pray always. We have to get a hold of ourselves and say, Look, what that guy is saying seems plausible, but on this point, it does not match the truth. *Trust the truth*. Deceivers and deception will ramp up in the last days. Paul tells us in II Timothy 3:13, "evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived."

Make a study of it sometime: go through all the epistles in the New Testament and find all the places where the apostles tell us not to get tricked by false apostles, false gospels, various other ways that they put it, but they all do it in one way or the other, because it is a problem. There are a lot of people out there who are trying to sell you snake oil in the form of religion—do not buy. If we stay close to Christ, if we remain watchful, pray always, and continue in the truth we have learned, we can avoid falling for the numerous lies of the end time. I mean, look at II Thessalonians 2. I am just going to rush through this one. Clyde was here earlier.

II Thessalonians 2:1-3 Now brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means, for that day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.

Let us drop down to verses 9 and 10,

II Thessalonians 2:9-10 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

But *you* have received the love of the truth that you might be saved. That is what you have got to hold on to. What does God's Word say? And when these lying wonders happen, when these unrighteous deceptions happen, you have the source, the truth, to back you up for not believing it, for rejecting it, and staying true to the way of God. So that was number 4, do not fall for deception.

5. *Do not let hype or hysteria turn you aside .*

I Peter 4:7 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. [The ESV has: the end of all things is at hand, therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded.]

Those two words, self-controlled and sober-minded, are the opposite of hysteria and hype, because hysteria and hype are all based on emotions being stirred up and going with the crowd. And a person who is self-controlled and sober-minded thinks things through, he has his feet on the ground, and he looks at those things and says to himself, what are those crazy people doing? That is stupid, that is idiotic. We are supposed to be self-controlled and sober-minded. Peter's worry here is that people will let fear and hysteria get the best of them.

And with the Internet, and influencers, and social media, we are primed to be riled into hype and hysteria by fake news, by dishonest influencers, by over-the-top reporting and the zeitgeist, the spirit of the age. God wants us to be driven by serious consideration of the facts, looking through the lens of revelation—His revelation. Look at Titus, the 2nd chapter, verses 11 through 13.

Titus 2:11-13 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Do not get on the hype train just because it is popular, just because everybody is doing it. No, we have been told to forge a lone way, or a hardly-trodden way, the way of Christ. That is the way to the Kingdom of God, the narrow way. We do not go where everybody else goes, because they go the way of Satan, the way of this world, the way of their own selfish lusts. But we go the way of God, soberly and self-controlled.

I will not go into the Thessalonian problem here, I believe Clyde mentioned this in his sermonette, that they thought the coming of Christ had already occurred, or it was all already in process, and some were quitting their jobs,

and Paul was telling them do not be alarmed, stop giving up, stop being disorderly busybodies and burdensome to the church. He says that in II Thessalonians 3. Jesus says in Luke 12:43, "Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing [that is, working] when he comes." Do not join the rest of the crowd going off here, there, and everywhere. Just keep your head down and keep working on your salvation all the way to the end. That was number 5, on hype and hysteria.

6. *Be patient* .

James 5:7-11 Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until he receives the early and latter rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

But you need to be patient. The Lord is coming, He is standing at the door. He is coming to judge this earth in righteousness, He is coming to reward His saints, but as I have been saying, we do not know when it is. It is soon, it might be sooner for some than others, because some of them will not be alive when He returns. So we have to be patient, and like the farmer, keep on working until the fruit comes in.

Peter adds in I Peter 4:12-13 that we should in this time endure our trials with joy. James, in the first chapter, verses 2 through 4, tells us to endure them, just like Peter said, with joy. Now why would they say that? Even though we are made to suffer occasionally here and now in this life before Jesus Christ comes, we need to rejoice in our trials so that we will know the fullness of joy at His coming. The trials that we go through are necessary parts of our sanctification. We should see them that way. Look on them with

as much joy as you can muster, because you know that when Jesus Christ comes, you are going to receive so much joy for having overcome and grown through those trials.

7. ***Be eager*** .

This was an interesting one. Let us see this in Hebrews 9:28, just this one verse,

Hebrews 9:28 So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.

You cannot wait for Christ's coming with a frown on your face, or trying to put it off, that does not work. In Greek, this word eagerly is an adverb, *ekdechomai*. It is *Strong's* #553. It means expectantly, but it can also mean assiduously. Huh, not the same idea here. And what comes out of it is that this word combines excitement and enthusiasm on the one hand, and care and perseverance on the other.

As we wait, then, we are to cultivate a heart of eagerness for the Lord's appearing, while taking care not to be just emotional, but prepared for the event when it happens. You know the perfect metaphor for this? It is like a bride preparing for her wedding. She is eager and expectant, and wants this event to occur yesterday, but she knows that she has to be careful and plan for the wedding. So on the one hand, she is eager, on the other hand, she is assiduous, she is careful and enduring, so that she can prepare for when that day arrives. Notice what it says in Revelation 19 about the bride, verses 6 through 8.

Revelation 19:6-8 And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude [this is a lot of noise here], as the sound of many waters and the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

She was eager and assiduous, she did her job eagerly, expectantly, and she was ready for the wedding.

8. *Be gentle* .

Another one you might think is a little odd. Let us go to Philippians 4, verse 5 where Paul writes,

Philippians 4:5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand.

It seems strange that he would put those two ideas like that together, but I do not think you will think that after I tell you what it means, or what it implies. Seems like an odd priority in anticipating the Second Coming, but what it deals with is how we relate to other people, especially our brethren. In a sense, Paul is simply restating the second great commandment, love your neighbor as yourself. We know how easy it is to become quick-tempered and harsh and contentious in times of crisis, and it is only going to get worse as the Day nears, the crisis at the close, Mr. Armstrong used to call it. Instead, God's people, the elect, must be gentle with how they deal with others, and forbearing, not letting the stress of the times make the situation worse and devolve into sin. So Paul counsels us, be gentle, because Christ is coming. Show your quality, show that you act like Jesus Christ, who is meeker than Moses.

9. *Go to church* .

Hebrews 10:23-25 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works [that is the one we just saw there about being gentle], not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Go to church. Fellowship with the brethren, and more so as Christ returns, not like what is happening in the world. People are leaving the churches in

droves. The author here says, get back to church every possible time you can make it. We need the teaching and the reminders about God's way. We need each other. We need fellowship. We need to be unified with others of the same mind. We need to be making stronger ties with one another.

Notice what Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 4. You probably know where I am going here. We will read verses 9 through 12.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. And if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

We need to come together, we need to forge those ties with each other in the Body of Christ. And especially as Jesus Christ returns and the world goes into deeper crisis, we can be strong and more stable because we have the rest of the Body, and of course the Head of the body, to depend on. We can encourage, edify, that means build up and strengthen each other, to be ready for that great day of God, and we will not feel alone.

10. *Finish the race* .

We were in Hebrews, let us go back there. Hebrews 12, verses 1 through 2. He has just been talking about the heroes of faith and how they all died not receiving the promises.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy [there is that word again] that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame [and look where it got Him], and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

We cannot rest until we cross the finish line, and do you know that the goal is a rest? It is the rest of God. But we cannot rest until we get there. We cannot rest until Jesus Christ comes and we are born into the Kingdom of God. The author assures us here in the second verse that Jesus Christ, our Savior, is both the author, meaning the starter, and the finisher of our salvation. He starts it, He is there the whole way, helping us along, and He is going to be there running beside us as we cross the finish line.

Our Savior is a God who finishes what He starts, and His people will be those who finish what they start. So Christ will not fail us, only we can fail us, only we could lag behind and fall out of the race. He is in it for the long haul, to the very end, and He purposely set us an example of exactly that, someone who went to the bitter end to complete His course. Yes, He died very painfully, He had to suffer so much, but He *finished*! You know how important that was. He said it, "It is finished." He had finished His course, He did the will of God, and what was His reward? He is very God, King of all, sitting at the right hand of the Father, and that is the same goal we have. So we have to follow Him and His example all the way to the end. He says in Matthew 24:13, "He that endures to the end will be saved."

Let us notice in Revelation 2, starting in verse 8, another of the churches of Revelation, this one is Smyrna.

Revelation 2:8-10 "And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, 'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead and came to life: "I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.'"

Just like He received. He was faithful until death, and He received the crown of eternal life and rulership forever, and that is what He offers us. So we must endure whatever comes, whether we die in our beds or die in

persecution like these Smyrnans. We must continue believing and overcoming and growing to our final breath. God's elect, God's faithful, do not give up. They never surrender, just as He does not give up on them.

Let us conclude in II Timothy 4, starting at verse 6. This is Paul's valedictory, as it says in my Bible here. This is what he says, knowing that he would die soon, and we should apply this to ourselves.

II Timothy 4:6-8 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Therefore [because he had done these things], there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not to me only, but also to all [those] who have loved His appearing [who were eagerly waiting for the Second Coming of Christ].

I ask: may God grant us faithful endurance and loving eagerness for His Second Coming. If we do these things, the Lord will crown us with righteousness at His appearing.