

Q 8.5 Should we wait until Jesus returns or should we prepare for the kingdom now?

Jesus taught to make ourselves ready for His kingdom now, so that when He returns He will find us being the good stewards He instructed and designed us to be from the beginning. We are to embody His character and live according to His kingdom ideals in everything we do, including in the way we steward His created world and all the creatures living therein.

Introduction

Most Christians acknowledge that there will be no killing in the kingdom of God¹, nor will there be any harming or destroying of animals². They admit that our diet will return to what God had established from the beginning³ as we exercise peaceful dominion over the animals in the Christlike image of love⁴. Nevertheless, instead of preparing for the kingdom by doing these things now, many hold to the position that it is not important to prepare in this way since

¹ "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4, NKJV).

² "They will neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the sea is full of water" (Isaiah 11:9, BSB).

³ "And God said, 'See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.'" (Genesis 1:29, NKJV).

⁴ "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them" (1 John 4:16, NIV).

Jesus will take care of all this when He returns. They therefore continue massacring God's creatures, destroying the earth⁵, and in many ways living in opposition to these kingdom ideals they expect Jesus to re-establish upon His return. Is this the proper attitude to have, or is there a wiser and more faithful way to anticipate the return of our King?

Wholehearted devotion to God and His kingdom

Jesus taught that the kingdom of God should be prioritized above everything else in life⁶. One is unworthy of the kingdom if one values anything above it, even one's own life⁷. One must seek it first and foremost, faithfully trusting in God and His kingdom providence: *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you"* (Matthew 6:33, BSB). One must count the cost⁸, understanding that God and His kingdom require one to deprioritize everything else by comparison⁹ and be wholeheartedly devoted to pursuing Him: *"You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart"* (Jeremiah 29:13, BSB).

⁵ "The nations were enraged, and Your wrath has come. The time has come to judge the dead and to reward Your servants the prophets, as well as the saints and those who fear Your name, both small and great—and to destroy those who destroy the earth" (Revelation 11:18, BSB).

⁶ "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and in his joy he went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he found one very precious pearl, he went away and sold all he had and bought it" (Matthew 13:44-46, BSB).

⁷ "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and anyone who does not take up his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 10:37-39, BSB).

⁸ "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it?" (Luke 14:28, ESV).

⁹ "'Look,' said Peter, 'we have left all we had to follow You.' 'Truly I tell you,' Jesus replied, 'no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times more in this age—and in the age to come, eternal life.' " (Luke 18:28-30, BSB).

Jesus taught to be ready

Jesus taught to be ready for His return because He will return soon¹⁰ and unexpectedly: *“Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect”* (Matthew 24:44, ESV). Those who adequately prepare for His return are deemed wise and those who do not are foolish: *“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps”* (Matthew 25:1-4, NIV). This preparation involves putting the teachings of Jesus into practice: *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock”* (Matthew 7:24, BSB). When Jesus returns, He wants to find us faithfully living in accordance with the instructions He has given us: *“And the Lord answered, ‘Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their portion at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.’”* (Luke 12:42-43, BSB).

The foundation for kingdom readiness

When Jesus returns, it will be for the purpose of marrying His bride. His bride will have made herself ready by clothing herself with the appropriate wedding garment: *“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him the glory. For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His bride has made herself ready. She was given clothing of fine linen, bright and pure.’ For the fine linen she wears is the righteous acts of the saints”* (Revelation 19:6-8, BSB). This wedding garment, representing the righteous acts of the

¹⁰ “Behold, I am coming soon, and My reward is with Me, to give to each one according to what he has done” (Revelation 22:12, BSB).

saints, is elsewhere described as being baptized into Christ and His Holy Spirit: “*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ*” (Galatians 3:26-27, NIV). The righteousness is therefore not the effort of the saints but rather the righteousness that comes through their giving up all to wholeheartedly live by faith in Christ¹¹. One who is baptized into Christ is inwardly transformed and becomes clothed with the character traits of Christ: “*Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience*” (Colossians 3:12, NIV). Anyone found at the wedding not clothed with Christ will be cast out of the kingdom.¹² But those who are clothed in Christ will live forever with Christ in His kingdom.¹³

Expressing kingdom readiness

Being clothed in Christ is the foundation¹⁴ for being ready for God’s kingdom, and the Bible describes a variety of ways in which this readiness ought to be expressed in one’s life. Be ready by repenting¹⁵, which means turning away from

¹¹ “More than that, I count all things as loss compared to the surpassing excellence of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God on the basis of faith” (Philippians 3:8-9, BSB).

¹² “But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” (Matthew 22:11-13, NKJV).

¹³ “For it is My Father’s will that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40, BSB).

¹⁴ “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24, NKJV).

¹⁵ “From that time on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’” (Matthew 4:17, BSB).

wickedness and instead doing the things God commanded from the beginning¹⁶. This includes abiding by the very good diet of peace that God designed us to eat: “*And God said, ‘See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food’*” (Genesis 1:29, NKJV). Be ready by watching and praying, to avoid succumbing to temptation¹⁷. Be ready to defend one’s hope in Christ and His kingdom¹⁸. Be ready by separating from the ways of the world: “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*” (Romans 12:2, NKJV). Be ready by knowing and doing the will of God¹⁹. Be ready by being sober-minded and action-oriented, hoping in and laboring for the kingdom of God: “*Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*” (1 Peter 1:13, ESV).

Applying kingdom readiness to stewardship of His creation

In the kingdom of God there will be no killing, harming, or destroying of God’s creatures: “*They will neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the sea is full of water*” (Isaiah 11:9, BSB). All creatures, including humans, will return to the very good diet of

¹⁶ “Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place” (Revelation 2:5, NIV).

¹⁷ “Then He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, ‘What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.’” (Matthew 26:40-41, NKJV).

¹⁸ “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (1 Peter 3:15, ESV).

¹⁹ “And that servant who knew his master’s will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating” (Luke 12:47, ESV).

fruit and vegetation that God designed to be our food from the beginning.²⁰ Jesus says to seek the kingdom above all else, which includes prioritizing it over the desires of the flesh and the violent customs of the world²¹. Jesus says to be ready such that when He returns, He will find us being the good stewards in His image and character that we were designed to be from the beginning. His character is that of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.²² And we are told to put these values into practice, turning away from the opposite characteristics. So when it comes to how we steward God's created world, we ought to make ourselves ready for the kingdom by adopting the kingdom mindset and embodying these character traits of Christ in how we rule over His creation, no longer destroying it but instead leading it in His way of peace.²³ This includes no longer killing, eating, wearing, or otherwise harming His creatures.

Make straight the way for the Lord!

John the Baptist was a voice crying in the wilderness to make straight the way for the Lord in His first coming: "*John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way for the Lord'*" (John 1:23, NIV, referencing Isaiah 40:3). The church is intended to be that voice making straight the way for the Lord in His return. Regarding stewardship of

²⁰ "The cow will graze with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox" (Isaiah 11:7, BSB).

²¹ "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh, the desires of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not from the Father but from the world" (1 John 2:15-16, BSB).

²² "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Colossians 3:12, NIV).

²³ "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them" (Isaiah 11:6, NKJV).

animals, we are to be the voice of God's very good will²⁴ that accords with His righteous kingdom ideal of peace, abstaining from violence that causes animals to be afraid.²⁵ As theologian Andrew Linzey puts it, *"The truth is that human beings can now approximate the peaceable kingdom by living without killing sentients for food."*²⁶ We are instead to sit at the table of the Lord,²⁷ wearing our marriage garments of righteousness and peace. Describing the table of those arrayed in these marriage garments of the Lamb, Fourth Century Archbishop of Constantinople John Chrysostom says, *"No streams of blood are among them, nor cutting up of flesh, nor heaviness of head, nor dainty cooking, neither are there unpleasing smells of meat among them... their sumptuousness consists of fruits, and greater is the pleasure there than at royal tables. There is no fear there, or trembling... the table is an angel's table free from all such turmoil."*²⁸

The kingdom mindset

Having the kingdom mindset means aligning our perspective with God's eternal perspective, praying as Jesus prayed, *"Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven"* (Matthew 6:10, BSB). The righteous live by their faith²⁹, and their faith is accompanied by action: *"faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead"* (James 2:17, NIV). Animals are presently

²⁴ "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2, NKJV).

²⁵ "For the violence done to Lebanon will cover you, And the plunder of beasts which made them afraid, Because of men's blood And the violence of the land and the city, And of all who dwell in it" (Habakkuk 2:17, NKJV).

²⁶ Linzey, Andrew. *Animal Gospel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000, page 31.

²⁷ "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot partake in the table of the Lord and the table of demons too" (1 Corinthians 10:21, BSB).

²⁸ John Chrysostom. *Homily 69.3*. T.r. by George Prevost and revised by M.B. Riddle. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 10. Edited by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888.

²⁹ "For the gospel reveals the righteousness of God that comes by faith from start to finish, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" (Romans 1:17, BSB, quoting Habakkuk 2:4).

suffering at our hand³⁰. They, along with the rest of creation, are groaning in anticipation of the coming kingdom³¹, and for the appointed stewards over creation³² to reflect God's mercy³³ and compassion³⁴ over it. Throughout His life in the flesh, Jesus didn't reveal every detail there is to know about the kingdom, but He gave His Holy Spirit to guide us into all things: *"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth"* (John 16:12-13, NKJV). The main thing we need to know is that God's kingdom will be a return to the eternally very good life God established from the beginning³⁵ before sin and death³⁶ entered the world: *"For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive; The last enemy to be destroyed is death"* (1 Corinthians 15:21-22;26, NIV). Let us therefore make ourselves ready for eternal life in God's very good kingdom by henceforth no longer taking the life of any of His creatures or destroying His created world. Let us instead choose love.

³⁰ "The violence you have done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and your destruction of animals will terrify you. For you have shed human blood; you have destroyed lands and cities and everyone in them" (Habakkuk 2:17, NIV).

³¹ "We know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until the present time" (Romans 8:22, BSB).

³² "Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it" (Genesis 2:15, NKJV).

³³ "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36, NIV).

³⁴ "The LORD is good to all; His compassion rests on all He has made" (Psalm 145:9, BSB).

³⁵ "In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Revelation 22:2, NKJV).

³⁶ "but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die" (Genesis 2:17, NIV).