

“PREPARE YE THE WAY OF THE LORD”

(Matthew 3.3)

CONTENTS

1. Introduction

The Need always to be Ready

2. How did the Lord Prepare the People for the 1st Coming?

The Messenger

His Message

The Effect of the Message

The Reception of the Message

Was his Ministry a Failure?

3. Preparing for the 2nd Coming

What are we Preparing for?

Why is there a Need to Prepare?

4. The Danger of Complacency

The Jews warned of presuming at the 1st Coming

The Church warned of presuming before the 2nd Coming

Do not be lifted up with pride, but fear

Two Sobering Parables

To conclude

5. Prepared by the Word and the Spirit

Cleansed by the Power of the Word and the Spirit

The Cleansing Power of the Word and the Spirit illustrated by the Laver

Restored by the Power of the Word and the Spirit

6. Conclusion

A Closing Appeal

Let Us Go On To Perfection

These notes were initially prepared for those attending conferences on this topic. Their purpose is to summarise the key points and provide Bible references for further study.

John L Birkin

www.endtimerestoration.com

1.

INTRODUCTION: THE NEED ALWAYS TO BE READY

The general need to always be ready

- Not only the ungodly: *this night your soul is required of you* (Lk 12.16-20)
- But also the godly: *Thus says the Lord, Set your house in order* (2 K 20.1)

The specific need to be ready in this day in the light of the 2nd Coming

- When God had something urgent to say to Israel, to prepare and catch attention He sent a prophetic voice like a trumpet. Why a trumpet? Because its sound is:
 - The most piercing in the ancient world (Isa 58.1).
 - Pure and clear (1 Cor 14.8).
- All through Church history also God has sent the piercing, clear voice of the Spirit to His people (e.g. Rev 3.22).
- In this day a piercing, clear voice is sounding to prepare. It is the last voice of the Spirit to the churches. To prepare for what?
 - The nearness of the Coming of the heavenly Bridegroom, *Behold, the bridegroom is coming* (Mt 25.6).
- Why is the voice so loud?
 - Jesus spoke more of ***the need to be ready*** for His Coming than of ***the signs*** of His Coming (e.g. Mt 25.13; 24.36).
 - He warned of unpreparedness by those invited to the wedding. Only they who were ready/prepared went in. Then the door was shut (Mt 25.10).

In fact, conditions before 2nd Coming identical to those before 1st

- In fact, the Bible solemnly prophesies that just as the Jew was not ready for the 1st Coming, so the Gentile Church will not be ready for the 2nd.
- How is the Church unready? Just as the Jews at the 1st Coming, she also will be:
 - ***Rebellious*** against Christ, the Word (Jn 1.11), so shall the end time Church be at the 2nd Coming (Rev 3.20; 2 Th 2.3; 2 Tim 4.3-4; Lk 18.8).
 - ***Adulterous*** (i.e. lovers of the world, Jas 4.4) (Mt 12.39; 16.4), so shall the end time Church be before the 2nd Coming (2 Tim 3.1-5; Rev 3.15-16).
 - ***Spiritually blind*** (Mt 15.14), so shall the end time Church be before the 2nd Coming (Rev 3.17-18).

So, let us ensure our house is in order, and that we are ready for the Bridegroom's soon coming.

Conclusion: Two real life examples of young women awaiting their bridegrooms

Two young American women ready & waiting faithfully for their bridegrooms:

- The despised orphan girl on the cattle ranch
- The young art student in Rome

Just as ***the condition*** of professed believers before the 1st and 2nd Comings is identical, so also is ***the manner of preparation*** for each coming. The need and manner of preparation for both comings are the same.

So, to better understand how to prepare for the 2nd Coming, let us see how the Lord prepared the people for His 1st Coming.

2.

HOW DID THE LORD PREPARE THE PEOPLE FOR THE 1st COMING?

A man sent from God, whose name was John

How did God prepare the people for the 1st Coming? He sent a man with a message.

- Like Paul (Gal 1.1), John's **calling and commission** was direct from God (Jn 1.6). His ordination was from above, not of man. He was **God's** messenger (Mk 1.2), not the messenger of any man-made religious organisation.
- Like Paul (Gal 1.11-12), **his message** was direct from God (Lk 3.1-2), bypassing the highest political and religious dignitaries.

The Messenger

What kind of man?

- Not carnal or materialistic
 - **Did not love money**, like many religious leaders of his day (Lk 16.14; 20.47; Jn 2.14-16), and of earlier times (Jer 8.10; Ezk 22.35; Mic 3.11).
 - Simple **clothes** (Mt 3.4; 11.8).
 - Simple **food** (Mt 3.4; 7.33).
- Separate and holy
 - Touched no wine or strong drink (Lk 1.15; 7.33). From the womb, he was probably a Nazarite, someone separated to the Lord (Nu 6.1-4).
 - Separate not just from drink, but from men and their ideas (Lk 1.80).
- Fearless, no respecter of persons.
 - Did not seek honour or adjust his preaching to please man. He had a message from God. It must be delivered in full.
 - Even hardened **soldiers** cried out with conviction (Lk 3.14).
 - Spoke sharply to hypocritical **religious leaders** (Mt 3.7-10).
 - Fearlessly rebuked the despotic **political leader** about his disregard of the Word (Mt 14.3-4). In fact, John was feared by the king (Mk 6.17-20).

A man of the Spirit

From birth John was different. Why? The Holy Spirit.

- His birth was supernaturally announced (Lk 1.15-25).
- He was filled with Spirit from the womb (Lk 1.15, 41).
- He was raised by Spirit-filled parents (Lk 1.41, 67).
- As a child the hand of the Lord was with him; he grew strong in spirit (Lk 1.66,80).

In his years in the wilderness, he heard the voice of the Lord. He told him that:

- His ministry was to baptise, and how to recognise the coming Christ (Jn 1.32-33).
- He was the prophesied voice of Isa 40.3 (Jn 1.22-23).
- He was the prophesied messenger of Mal 3.1 sent before the Lord (Jn 3.28).

When about 30, he began his public ministry.

- He came in the power of the Spirit (Lk 1.17).
- He was more than just a messenger, he was a prophet (Lk 1.76; 3.2).
- Furthermore, he was more than a prophet (Lk 7.26).
- In fact, there had been no greater prophet than John (Lk 7.28).

A burning and a shining light

- John was the last voice of the Spirit to the Jew. There had been no (recorded) prophetic voice since Malachi for 400 years.
- The absence of a prophet is serious (1 S 3.1; Ps 74.9; Pro 29.18; Am 8.11-12).
- The prophetic voice brings light (2 P 1.19).
- In earlier times, David was seen as the light or lamp of Israel (2 S 21.17). Why?
 - David was a prophet (Acts 2.30), anointed with the Oil of the Spirit.
 - As a lamp sheds light in the dark through its oil, so did he through his Oil.
- Likewise, at the end of the Jewish age, John shed light in the darkness (Lk 1.79).
 - He was a flaming, shining torch (Jn 5.35).
- Despite the abundance of religious observance, it was still a time of spiritual darkness. Despite the expectation of a Messiah, there was no sure word of prophecy (2 P 1.19), only different denominations with different interpretations. A clear, authoritative, shining light was needed.
- John was that light. He was:
 - A clear, bright, blazing light (Lk 1.76; Jn 5.35).
 - A loud, piercing voice (Isa 40.3).
 - A man with a message (Mk 1.2), the last voice of the Spirit to the Jew.

What was that message?

His Message

Its essence, a call to prepare

The essence of John's ministry was to prepare:

- To prepare ***the people*** (Lk 1.17) to receive their coming Lord.
- To prepare ***the way*** of the Lord (Mk 1.2-3; Lk 1.76).
 - In the ancient world, a forerunner was sent ahead of someone important to announce his coming and clear away all hindrances.

Why the need to prepare?

- John proclaimed with great urgency that the time was very near (Mt 3.2).

Prepare for what?

For His coming as Bridegroom for His bride

- John was the friend of the Groom, sent to prepare all for the wedding (Jn 3.29).
 - To alert the bride that the time was near.
 - To ensure she was fully prepared, washed and clean, with undefiled, unspotted garments (Compare Rev 3.4; Ju 23).
- His ministry was very necessary. Many invited were not ready (Mt 22.1-14).

For His coming as Farmer for the fruit of His field

- From his fruit trees
 - The fruit will be gathered
 - But unfruitful trees will be burned (Mt 3.10).
- From his crops
 - The grain will be separated from the chaff, then gathered to the barn.
 - But the chaff will be burned in the fire (Mt 3.12).

How prepare? (a) By the power of the Word

John's Word was not of man or by man. It came direct from the Lord (Lk 3.2). And His Word has great power (Heb 4.12).

What was that Word?

Don't put your trust in your religious heritage

John strongly warned **the people** against complacency trusting their religious history.

- Where was the fruit, the evidence, to support their claims? (Mt 3.8-9).

Jesus later gave similar warnings:

- The Jews claimed to be children of Abraham. If they truly were, they would do the works of Abraham (Jn 8.39). Get the real thing!
- Many who expected to enter His kingdom would not, even some who had attended His meetings (Mt 8.10-12; Lk 13.22-30).

Even **the religious leaders** were rebuked very solemnly by John. Their status was no guarantee of their preparedness (Mt 3.7).

Repent

How did John seek to fulfil his ministry of preparation?

- By an urgent and strident call to repentance (Mt 3.1-3).
 - His baptism was a baptism of repentance (Mk 1.4; Acts 13.24; 19.4).
 - His haircloth/sackcloth clothing symbolised his message (Mt 3.4; 11.21).
- What is repentance? To change the mind, to turn away from one thing to another.
 - They were to **turn away from** what was not good (Lk 3.10-14).
 - They were to **turn back to** the Lord and to His Word.
- By doing this, they would be prepared for His Coming (Lk 1.16-17).

How prepare? (b) By the power of the Spirit

- John's message was not in word only but in power and the Holy Spirit (Lk 1.17).
 - Just like Jesus (Lk 4.14-15) and Paul (1 Cor 2.1,4; 2 Cor 6.6-7; 1 Th 1.5).
- But there was something distinctive about his anointing. It was the Spirit of Elijah.

Why the Spirit and power of Elijah?

- Why does the angel refer to Elijah in Lk 1.17? Was John Elijah?
 - John said **he was not** (Jn 1.21).
 - Why, then, did Jesus say **he was** (Mt 11.13-14; 17.12-13)?
- Though not Elijah **in flesh**, he was anointed with **the Spirit** of Elijah (Lk 1.17).
 - Just like Elisha (2 K 2.15).
- What does the Spirit of Elijah have to do with preparing the people for the 1st Coming? He lived many years before it, and never prophesied about it.
 - Because like John, at a time when the people of His day had turned from the Word, Elijah's ministry was to turn their hearts back to the original.
- At a time when the altars of the Lord had been thrown down (1 K 18.10, 14) and the people had turned from the Lord and His Word, Elijah,
 - Turned the people's hearts back to what they had turned from (1 K 18.37).
 - Repaired and restored the altar of the Lord (1 K 18.30).
- This is exactly what the prophecy of Mal 4.5-6, referred to by the angel in Lk 1.17, says about the Elijah ministry.

- Its purpose was to turn the hearts of the people.
- John fulfilled this prophecy in part. He turned the hearts of the fathers (those raised in the old ways) to the children (i.e. to the new age being introduced by John), at the 1st Coming.

(As we shall see later, the final fulfilment (turning the end time children back to the original fathers) would come just before the 2nd Coming.)

The Impact of the Message

Was John's ministry to prepare the way and the people for the Lord's coming effective?

The deep urgency, authority and spiritual power of his preaching was:

- **Strongly convicting:** It cut through the hindrances preventing the Lord gaining entrance to many hearts (Lk 3.10,12,14; Mt 11.12).
- **Cleansing:** It was the Spirit of his words, not the waters of baptism, which cleansed the penitent. The external washing only symbolised the inner. (Compare 1 Cor 6.11; Eph 5.26; 1 P 1.2, 22.)
- **Far reaching:** Despite the perilous, inhospitable site of his preaching (Mt 3.5),
 - Multitudes came to be baptised and become his disciples (Lk 3.7; Jn 4.1).
 - As well as in Judea and the surrounding region, he had disciples in far distant places (e.g. Acts 19.3-4).
 - He taught his disciples spiritual practices (Mt 9.14; Lk 11.1; Jn 3.25).

His word was so powerful and authoritative that,

- The people considered him a prophet (Mt 14.5; 21.26).
- In fact, they even wondered if he was himself the Messiah whose soon coming he proclaimed (Lk 3.15; Jn 1.19-21).

The Reception of the Message

So, John's message was certainly powerfully effective. But, although the people regarded him as a prophet, what was the reaction of the leaders of the religion divinely established by Moses and the prophets?

When John began baptising, they came with questions (Jn 1.19-25). But their motive was not clean. In fact, even though, like his father (Lk 1.5), John was also a priest, they: Their reaction was not surprising. John gave them no honour nor respected their offices and titles. He saw through their religious hypocrisy and spoke very strongly to them (Mt 3.7-10)

- **Disbelieved** the man sent from God to prepare the people for the coming of the prophesied Messiah (Mt 21.23-27; Mk 11.30-31).
- **Rejected** a man filled with the Spirit from the womb, anointed with the Spirit of Elijah, and the greatest of all the prophets. Yet in so doing they rejected the voice of the Spirit for their day (Lk 7.29-30).
- **Blasphemed**, calling the last voice of the Spirit to the Jewish age, the greatest prophet till that day, the voice of a devil (Lk 7.33).

Their reaction was unsurprising. John gave them no honour nor respected their offices and titles. He saw through their hypocrisy and spoke to them very strongly (Mt 3.7-10).

- He called them snakes.
- He demanded they repent and bring forth fruit to prove them to be true Jews.
- He warned without that fruit they would be burned in the fire of the coming wrath.

Although it may seem surprising, the response of the religious leaders to the voice of the Spirit before the 1st Coming was quite normal throughout the history of Israel:

- Jeremiah, For example, also a priest, had a similar reception from his fellow priests (Jer 11.21-23) (Anathoth was a town of priests) and the religious leadership (e.g. Jer 20.1-2).

In fact, Jesus warned that no **true** prophet would be well received (Mt 5.11-12; Lk 6.26).

And it will be no different before the 2nd Coming.

Was his ministry a failure?

So, was John's remarkable ministry a failure? After all,

- He was rejected by all the leaders and denominations of the true religion.
- His ministry seemed to be cut short. When only about 30, he was imprisoned and a year or two later beheaded by the king, at the instigation of his wicked wife and her daughter (Mt 14.1-12).
- Whilst in prison, he was assailed by doubts. Although he had clearly proclaimed earlier that Jesus was the Christ (Jn 1.29-34), when in prison he sent his disciples to Jesus to ask if He was indeed the coming Messiah (Lk 7.18-19).

What an apparently tragic end to such a promising ministry. Was it indeed cut short and unfinished? Did he fail?

No!

Despite rejection and a seemingly pitiful end, he fulfilled his God-given ministry. How?

- Even after being imprisoned for reproving the king for adultery, John still spoke fearlessly to him (Mk 6.17-20).
- Even at the very time he was attacked by doubts and sent disciples to Jesus, Jesus said there was no greater prophet than John (Lk 7.24-28).

No, his ministry was not cut short. Like Paul (2 Tim 4.7-8), also awaiting execution, he triumphantly finished his course and the work he was given to do (Acts 13.25).

In what way did John complete his God-given course and work?

- By preparing the bride of the end of the Jewish age for presentation to her coming Bridegroom (Jn 3.26-29).
- He was the friend of the Bridegroom, responsible for preparing the bride for Him.
- When told all were now going to Jesus, his joy was fulfilled. His work was done.
- Like Jesus later (Jn 4.34; 17.4), he had finished the work he was given to do.

And that is also the purpose of the message to the end time **Gentile** Church just before the 2nd Coming, to prepare a bride for the coming Bridegroom.

3. PREPARING FOR THE 2nd COMING

What are we Preparing for?

For the same things as at the 1st Coming.

For His coming as a farmer for his harvest

At the 1st Coming, John told the Jews the Farmer was coming to harvest His fruit and crops. But he solemnly warned that,

- Trees without good fruit would be cut down and burned (Mt 3.10).
- The chaff would be separated from the grain and burned (Mt 3.12).

Jesus later gave similar warnings (Mt 7.19; Lk 13.6-9).

Likewise, at His 2nd Coming the Lord will be seeking the fruits of His fields.

- The Church is His field (1 Cor 3.9).
- He has waited patiently for His harvest to come to maturity (Jas 5.7).
- The fruit He seeks is seen in the lives of His people (Jas 1.18).
- The consequences of unfruitfulness are serious (Jn 15.2,6).

For His coming as a bridegroom for his bride

At the 1st Coming John was sent as the friend of the Bridegroom (Jn 3.29) with a message,

- To ensure the bride herself was fully prepared and that her garments were undefiled and unspotted (Compare Rev 3.4; Ju 23).

Likewise at the 2nd Coming,

- The bride must prepare herself (Rev 19.7; 21.2).
- The consequences of being unprepared are serious (Mt 25.10).

Why a Need to Prepare?

Before the 1st Coming John proclaimed with great urgency that the time was very near (Mt 3.2). Why such urgency? Because many invited to the wedding were,

- Not ready (Mt 22.11-14).
- Indifferent and even hostile (Mt 22.1-10; Lk 14.16-24).

Just as John was sent to prepare the Jews for the 1st Coming, so the Church needs an urgent message to prepare for the 2nd Coming.

Why?

- Jesus often spoke of an ***unexpected*** Coming.
- He repeatedly warned of being ***unprepared*** for His 2nd Coming.
- He illustrated this unpreparedness by comparing His coming to that of a thief.
- In fact, the Bible ***prophesies*** that, like the Jews at the 1st Coming, the Church before the 2nd Coming will be unprepared.

Repeated warnings of an unexpected coming

On the Mt of Olives, shortly before His arrest, Jesus spoke much of His ***unexpected*** coming:

- **Mt 24.36-41**, of that day and hour **no one knows ...** But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of man be. ... **they ... did not know** until the flood came and took them all away.
- **Mt 24.40-44**, be ready, for the Son of man is coming at an hour **you do not expect**.
- **Mt 24.45-51**, the master of that servant will come on a day when **he is not looking for him** and at an hour that **he is not aware of**.

Repeated warnings of being unprepared for His coming

In the parable of the faithful and the evil servant, as well as coming **unexpectedly**, Jesus warned of being **unprepared** for His coming:

- **Lk 12.35-48**, that servant which knew his master's will, and **did not prepare himself** (See also Mt 24.50).

Jesus listed many signs of His 2nd Coming in Matthew 24 and 25. But He put more emphasis on warnings of unpreparedness and the need to be ready than on the signs. One of those warnings is the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt 25.1-12).

- All were virgins. None were fornicators, adulteresses or prostitutes.
- All were waiting for the coming bridegroom.
- But, when he came some were not ready. They had no oil in their lamps.
- Only those who were ready went into the wedding, then the door was shut (Mt 25.10)

His coming compared to that of a thief

When warning of being unprepared for His coming, Jesus sometimes compared it to that of a thief (Mt 24.42-44; 1 Th 5.2,4). Why? Because a thief,

- Comes unexpectedly, unannounced.
- Usually comes at night when his victims are least prepared and asleep.

In Rev 16.15, Jesus graphically describes the consequences of not watching, staying alert and being ready for the thief.

- But why is being alert for His coming connected with guarding our garments?
- And how is it possible to lose garments if asleep? People would be sleeping in them.

It is a reference to a custom of the Jewish high priest.

- At night, unannounced, he sometimes went around the temple with his lamp, to see if the guards were awake and alert, fulfilling their ministry to protect the house of God.
- If asleep, he would set their garments alight!
- They awoke and quickly pull their garments off, leaving them naked and ashamed.

What is the spiritual significance?

- Jesus is our High Priest. He checks that His servants are fulfilling their ministry.
- Those who are asleep are at serious risk of losing their garments.

What is the spiritual significance of being naked?

- Adam was originally clothed with glory (1 Cor 11.7),
- But he sinned and lost it (Ro 3.23). He was now clothed with shame (Ps 132.18).
- Fig leaves could not cover the shame of his nakedness (Gen 3.7).
- The only way to cover the shame of sin is by the shedding of blood (Heb 9.22).
- So the Lord clothed him with garments requiring the shedding of blood (Gen 3.21).

So, the implications for those who are naked is very serious. And as we shall soon see, this is exactly what Jesus said would be the condition of the Church before the 2nd Coming.

Prophetic warnings of the unpreparedness of the Church at His coming

Jesus not only **warned of the possibility** of being unprepared for His Coming. He **prophesied of its certainty**. In fact,

- Just as the Jews were not ready at the 1st Coming, the Bible solemnly prophesies that the Gentile Church will not be ready for the 2nd Coming.
- Not only so, but the details of the Church's condition before the 2nd Coming would reflect that of Jews at the 1st Coming.

Some of the prophetic warnings of the condition of the Church before His Coming are:

- Lk 18.8
- 2 Th 2.1-12
- 2 Tim 3.1 - 4.5
- Rev 3.14-22

Let us look closely at the latter, the letter to the church of the Laodiceans. It will highlight how the Church's condition before the 2nd Coming mirrors that of the Jews at the 1st Coming.

The Letter to the Laodiceans: The Condition of the End Time Church

The letters of Jesus to the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3 are prophetic. They describe the condition of the Church from her beginning to His return. In the last letter, to the church of the Laodiceans (Rev 3.14-22), He warns of her wretched spiritual condition. And she does not even know it!

Poor

- In what way is Laodicea poor (Rev 3.17-18)? The clue is the exhortation to buy gold. The gold is the gold refined in the fire (1 P 1.7), true faith. So, she is **lacking in faith**.
- She not only lacks faith. She lacks **the** faith, the **original** faith (Ju 3).
- This is precisely what Jesus warned about at His 2nd Coming (Lk 18.8).
- So, just as Jesus said the Jews at the 1st Coming were a faithless, unbelieving generation (Mk 9.19), so also He says that the end time Gentile Church lacks the true gold, the original faith. And she does not even know it!

Blind

- How can you be blind and not to know it (Rev 3.17-18)? See Gen 19.11; 2 K 6.18-20.
- Just as Jesus said the Jews at the 1st Coming were blind (Mt 15.14; 23.16,17,19,24,29), so He also says the end time Church is blind.
- Even worse, they are not just blind but judicially blinded. How? By the Lord Himself.
- They are given over to believe the lie and turned from the Truth unto fables (2 Th 2.10-11; 2 Tim 4.3-4).
- Just as the Jews were blinded at the 1st Coming (Jn 9.39-41; 12.37-40; Ro 11.7,10), so the Bible warns the same thing would happen to the end time Church.

Naked: In what way?

- **No garment of salvation or robe of righteousness** (Ps 132.9,16; Isa 61.10). We have already seen the spiritual significance of being naked. Sin and the shame of nakedness are not covered by garments requiring the shedding of blood (Gen 3.21). The implications are extremely serious. And she does not even know it!
- **Not clothed by the Spirit** (Ju 6.34; Lk 24.49). How terrible! Like Samson, Laodicea thinks she has the Spirit, but she does not realise she has lost It (Ju 16.20).

- **Not having a wedding garment** (Rev 19.8). Just as Jesus warned the Jews at the 1st Coming of those at the wedding feast apparently unaware of their lack of suitable clothing (Mt 22.11-12), so He says the Church before the 2nd Coming will be naked and lack a wedding garment. Like the man in the parable, she will be speechless.

Rebellious: Jesus outside His own Church

- Notice, Christ is seeking admission to His Church, not to the heart of the unsaved, as is often said (Rev 3.20). Christ is outside His own Church.
- What does this mean? Rebellion! Christ is the Word (Jn 1.1,14; Rev 19.13). So if the end time Church puts Christ outside, she has mutinied. She refuses to obey the orders of her Head, Jesus, the Word.
- Paul warned this would happen in the last times.
 - Before the 2nd Coming, there will be a falling away. This does not mean a departing, a desertion, but a rebellion. His Church would mutiny (2 Th 2.3).
 - She would turn her ears from the Truth (2 Tim 4.3-4), the Word (Jn 17.17). But she would not leave the Church. She would remain in it, running it according to her own will.
- Just as the Jews rebelled and refused to receive Christ at the 1st Coming (Lk 19.14; Jn 1.11), so it will be with the Church at the 2nd Coming.

Adulterous: Vomited out of His mouth

- Ephesus left her first love (Rev 2.4). But Laodicea is far worse. Her love is not fervent, she is lukewarm (Rev 3.15-16). Even worse, she is adulterous.
- Why adulterous?
 - What is spiritual adultery? To love the world (Jas 4.4).
 - To love the world is not to have the love of the Father (1 Jn 2.15).
 - The Bible prophesies that the Church in the last times would be worldly. Professing believers would love money, themselves and pleasure more than God (2 Tim 3.1-5). In other words, they would be spiritual adulterers.
- Because she is lukewarm, she will be vomited out of His mouth.
- So,
 - Just as Jesus said the Jews at the 1st Coming were adulterous (Mt 12.39; 16.4), so the Church before the 2nd Coming is prophesied to be adulterous.
 - Just as Jesus warned the Jews at the 1st Coming that they would be cast out of the kingdom into outer darkness (Mt 8.12), so He warned the Church at the 2nd Coming that she would be vomited out of His mouth.

4.

The Danger of Complacency: Do not Presume you are Ready. Be Certain.

One of the most important ways to prepare for the 2nd Coming is to identify and put away all false hopes. To presume we are ready is very dangerous. We must be certain. Remember,

- Mary and Joseph presumed Jesus was with them. But He was not (Lk 2.44).

The Jews warned of presuming at the 1st Coming

At the 1st Coming, John warned the Jews of complacency and misguided trust in their religious history, privileges and heritage as descendants of Abraham (Mt 3.7-12).

- **The religious leaders** were strongly rebuked. Their religious status was no guarantee of their readiness (Mt 3.7).
- **The people** were warned against trusting their religious history. Where was the fruit, the evidence, to support their claims (Mt 3.8-9)?

Jesus also solemnly warned those who boasted of being the chosen people not to take their privileges for granted.

- They claimed to be the children of Abraham. If they truly were, they would do the works of Abraham (Jn 8.39).
- Though in the days of Elijah and Elisha there were many Jewish widows and lepers, it was Gentiles who believed His prophets that God blessed (Lk 4.23-27).

Even more solemnly, Jesus warned that there were Jews expecting to enter the coming kingdom of God would be deeply shocked to find how badly mistaken they were.

- Expecting to be welcomed to the wedding feast, they would be greatly embarrassed, taken away and cast into outer darkness (Mt 22.12-13).
- Despite being in His presence, attending His meetings and calling Him Lord, they would be shocked when excluded from and thrust out of His kingdom (Lk 13.22-30).

The Church warned of presuming before the 2nd Coming

Such warnings apply not only to the Jews, but also to the Church before the 2nd Coming. Speaking of His 2nd Coming, Jesus warned of,

- Behaving like **the evil servant**, who said in his heart that his lord was delaying his coming. That would mean a future inheritance with unbelievers (Lk 12.46).
- Being like **the foolish virgins** who presumed they were ready for the coming bridegroom. They realised too late they were not. Only those who were ready went in to the wedding. For the foolish virgins, the door was shut (Mt 25.7-10).

Such warnings only raise the **possibility** of being refused entrance to the kingdom or thrown out of the wedding feast. Far more seriously, Jesus also spoke of it as a **fact**.

- Just as Jesus plainly told the chosen people, the Jews, at His 1st Coming, that many would be cast out into outer darkness, even though they considered themselves children of the kingdom, potential heirs of the kingdom of God (Mt 8.10-12).
- So also He said He would vomit out the Church before the 2nd Coming (Rev 3.16).
- Even some who performed supernatural ministries in His Name would cry out in shock when the Lord said He never knew them (Mt 7.22-23).

Do not be lifted up with pride, but fear

Paul warned the Church against the same misplaced confidence as the Jews, of being conceited and lifted up with pride, thinking too highly of themselves and assuming all was

well when it was not. Despite all their religious privileges, Israel was blinded by God because of unbelief and disobedience (Ro 11.17-22).

Paul illustrated his warning from Israel's journey to the Promised Land. The Church should beware of behaving like Israel, fearing lest she should suffer the same fate and fail to enter her promised inheritance.

- Just as Israel was not guaranteed entry into the natural Promised Land by its heritage, privileges or supernatural history,
- So the Church cannot presume that she will enter the spiritual Promised Land.

Although for 40 years Israel experienced the visible Presence of God and many miracles,

- God was not pleased with the behaviour of the vast majority. They died in the wilderness. (1 Cor 10.1-12).
- They grieved and provoked the Lord and so failed to enter the Land. (Heb 3.7-4.1).

Sadly, Paul's warning to the Church would not be heeded.

- In Romans 11 he **warned** the Church **of the possibility** of being lifted up with pride, thinking too highly of herself and assuming all was well when it was not.
- But later, in 2 Tim 3.1 & 4, he **prophesied as a fact** that the Church in the last days would be heady and high-minded, conceited and lifted up with pride.

Two Sobering Parables

In the light of these sobering facts, let us who live at the time of the 2nd Coming learn well the lesson of what happened to professing believers at the 1st Coming. This is graphically portrayed in two parables of the rejection by the Jews of their end time message and of its solemn consequences.

The first describes the response to invitations sent out to a great supper (Lk 14.15-24).

- Jesus invited many to a great supper (probably a wedding supper) (14.7-8,16,24).
- At evening time, a messenger was sent telling those invited that it was time to come. Everything was now ready.
- The message was met with indifference and excuses.
- The master was angry. To ensure the feast was full, he sent the messenger firstly to the city streets and lanes, then outside the city into the highways and hedges.
- None of those originally invited tasted the supper.
- Jesus then warned that salt that has lost its flavour is thrown away (14.34-35).

What does this parable mean?

- The ones in the city who were first invited were those Jews who considered themselves righteous. But they turned down their opportunity.
- Those in the streets and lanes, not in the central part of the city, were the lost sheep of the house of Israel, unrighteous sinners not considered fit for religious service.
- Those in the highways and hedges, outside the city, were Gentiles, those outside the promises and privileges of the chosen people. This was a prophetic warning of the kingdom being taken from the Jew for unbelief (Mt 21.43) and given to the Gentiles.
- The chosen people were meant to be the salt of the world (Mt 5.13). By turning down their opportunity, they were in danger of becoming useless and being cast out.

The second parable describes the response to invitations sent out to a wedding feast (Mt 22.1-10). It is another prophecy of the Jews' rejection of the 1st Coming end time message and of the solemn consequences.

- Those invited were the children of the kingdom, the Jews for whom Jesus came.
- When a message was sent to call those invited, they were unwilling to come.
- Another message was sent telling them dinner was prepared and everything was ready, but the messengers were met with indifference and even hostility.
- The king was furious. He sent his armies to burn their city. (This was prophetic of the terrible sufferings of the unbelieving Jews when Rome destroyed Jerusalem.)
- The king said that those first invited were not worthy. (Compare Acts 13.46.) A messenger was then sent to the highways to invite outsiders to the wedding. (Another prophecy of the Gospel turning from the Jews to the Gentiles.)

To conclude

So, let us be diligent to make our call and election sure (2 P 1.10). Let us proclaim loudly,

- The need to be truly born again.
- The need to ensure we are in the true original faith.

You must be born again

We must be certain professing believers are truly born again. There is no other way to enter and see the kingdom of God (Jn 3.3-5,7).

How can we be certain? What is the evidence of being born again?

- The nature of a natural seed is revealed by its fruit (Mt 7.16-20; 12.33; Jas 3.12).
- The proof of being born again is to reveal the life of the seed which gives new birth.

What is that seed? How are we born again?

- By the seed of the Word of God (Lk 8.11; Jas 1.18; 1 P 1.23).
- By the Spirit, which is the life, the breath in the seed (Jn 3.5; 2 Tim 3.16; Ti 3.5).

So, if a man is born again of the Word and the Spirit, his life will reveal the Word and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5.22-23). To be born again is to be a new creation (2 Cor 5.17). It is to reveal the attributes of God (1 Jn 4.7).

Examine yourselves whether you are in the faith

So, let us be certain we are in the faith (2 Cor 13.5). Which faith?

- Not the worthless faith of those who vainly trusted in their religious experiences (Lk 13.24-28) or their supernatural works (Mt 7.22-23).
- Not the vain faith which does not save (Jas 2.19), but true saving faith (Eph 2.8-9).
- Not the faith of the impoverished end time Laodicean church (Rev 3.17-18; Lk 18.8), but the original faith once for all delivered to the saints (Ju 3), the full counsel of God (Acts 20.20,27).

Let us,

- Strive and contend for the original faith (Phil 1.27; 1 Tim 1.18-19; 6.12; Ju 3).
- Finish our course like Paul, having guarded and kept the faith to the end (2 Tim 4.7).

Is the house of the Church in Uganda in order? Does she have oil in her lamp? Is she ready for the Bridegroom's soon coming?

Get the real thing!

5.

Prepared by the Word and the Spirit

Today there is much talk of His Coming. But, there is also much need to prepare. We must be ready! Jesus is coming for a bride who is prepared, with oil in her lamp. Only they who were ready went in. Then the door was shut (Mt 25.10).

How prepare? The same way as before the 1st Coming. How? By the Word and the Spirit.

- The Jewish bride was prepared by the prophetic Word of John. It both cleansed and restored her to the original. It was a Word not of man or by man but of God, delivered in the power of the Spirit.
- The present day Church needs an equally clear, loud, piercing, prophetic voice like a trumpet to prepare her for the 2nd Coming (1 Cor 14.8).

That voice is crying out now.

- It is calling to prepare for the coming of the heavenly Bridegroom (Mt 25.6).
- It is loud and piercing because of the indifference and unpreparedness of those invited to the wedding.
- It is the last voice of the Spirit to the churches (Rev 3.22).

It will cleanse and restore the true Church before the 2nd Coming, just like the Jews at the 1st.

Cleansed by the Power of the Word and the Spirit

To prepare a bride for an earthly king was a serious matter (Es 2.12). How much more, then, for the King of kings.

The Bible says His wife has prepared herself (Rev 19.7; 21.2). Paul describes how she is made ready for presentation to the Bridegroom (Eph 5.25-27).

- She is cleansed and sanctified, and every spot and wrinkle removed.
- How? By the washing of water by the Word.

The Word of God is extremely powerful (Ro 1.16; 1 Th 2.13; Heb 4.12-13). What is the secret of its power? The breath, the Spirit of God (Jn 6.63; 2 Tim 3.16).

The Word and the Spirit are the most powerful cleansing agents in heaven and earth.

- Firstly, the **mirror of the Word** (Jas 1.22-25) **reveals** impurities, defilement or spots.
- Then those impurities are **removed** by the cleansing, sanctifying,
 - **Water of the Word** (Ps 119.9; Jn 15.3; 17.16-17; Eph 5.26).
 - **Water of the Spirit** (1 Cor 6.11; 2 Th 2.13; 1 P 1.2).
- This water not only cleanses the **external** but purifies the **innermost** parts.
 - Faith in the Word purifies the **heart** (Acts 15.9).
 - Obedience to the Word purifies the **soul** (1 P 1.22).
- It even removes wrinkles and spots.
 - One of the most effective solutions to **natural** spots and wrinkles is honey. It smoothes wrinkles and draws out spots and blemishes from the pores.
 - The Word is the honey (Ps 19.10; Rev 10.10).
 - It smoothes **spiritual** wrinkles.
 - It removes spots of the **world** (Jas 1.27) and of the **flesh** (Ju 23).

The Cleansing Power illustrated by the Laver

The power of the Word and the Spirit to cleanse is beautifully illustrated by the Old Testament priests washing at the laver before entering the house of God.

- Entrance was forbidden unless the priests first washed at the laver (Ex 30.17-21).
- There they would see their reflection. Why? It was made from mirrors (Ex 38.8).
- The mirrors were made of bronze. This is a symbol of judgement (e.g. Dt 28.23).
- So, the laver both gave a **revelation** of the need of cleansing and brought a sense of **judgement/conviction** because of their defilement.
- But the laver not only **reveals** defilement and convicts. It also contains the remedy for defilement. Its cleansing water **removes** it.
- And where did its water come from? It was supernaturally provided by the Spirit from the abundance streaming from the smitten rock (Ex 17.6; Dt 9.21; 1 Cor 10.4).

How does this illustrate the cleansing power of the Word and the Spirit?

- New Testament believers are priests (1 P 2.5,9; Rev 1.6).
- Like the Levitical priests, before we enter the Presence of God we too come to **the mirror of the Word**. This **reveals** and judges any defilement, impurity or spot.
- But it does not stop there. The impurity is then cleansed and **removed** by the power of **the supernatural water of the Word**.
- The secret of the power of that water is the Spirit.

Restored by the Power of the Word and the Spirit

So, the Church before the 2nd Coming will be **cleansed and purified**, like the Jewish bride, by the end time message of the Word brought in the power of the Spirit.

Likewise, as with the Jews, the Church will in the same way be **restored to the original Word** ready for the 2nd Coming, by the Word and the Spirit.

By the Word

What was the message of John which prepared the Jews for the 1st Coming?

- An urgent and piercing call to **repentance** (Mt 3.1-3).

Jesus has exactly the same message for the end time Church before the 2nd Coming:

- Repent, go back to what you have turned away from (Rev 3.19).

What is repentance?

- To **turn away from** what is not good.
- To **turn back to** what is good.

What does the end time Laodicean Church turn away from? The Word!

- Christ is outside His own Church (Rev 3.20).
- Since Christ is the Word (Jn 1.1,14; Rev 19.13), the Word is outside.
- There is a rebellion against the Word (2 Th 2.3; 2 Tim 4.3-4; Lk 18.8).

This is extremely serious. By rebelling against the Word, the end time Church rejects the very thing that can make her ready for the coming Bridegroom.

- Jesus died to present to Himself a holy Church, washed sanctified and cleansed.
- How is she cleansed? By the Word (Eph 5.25-27).
- But it is the Word that she has turned away from.

By the Spirit

How else are we made ready for the 2nd Coming? By the Spirit.

At the 1st Coming, John's Word of repentance was not in word only but in power and in the Spirit (Lk 1.17).

- Just like Jesus (Lk 4.14-15).
- Just like Paul (1 Cor 2.1,4; 2 Cor 6.6-7; 1 Th 1.5).

But there was something distinctive about John's anointing. Something very relevant to his message to turn the people back to the Lord and His Word. He was not just anointed with ***the Spirit***. Although he was not Elijah in the flesh (Jn 1.19-21), he was anointed with ***the Spirit of Elijah*** (Lk 1.17).

Why did John come in the Spirit and power of Elijah? To equip him for a ministry similar to that of Elijah.

How? At a time when the altars of the Lord had been thrown down and the people had turned from the Word, Elijah:

- Repaired and ***restored*** the lost altar of the Lord (1 K 18.30).
- ***Turned their hearts back*** to what they had turned from (1 K 18.37).

This turning of the hearts is exactly what the angel told his father that John would do.

Referring to Malachi 4.5-6, which says Elijah would come before the great day of the Lord turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and those of the children to the fathers,

- The angel said John fulfilled the first part of the prophecy at the 1st Coming (Lk 1.17).
- How? By turning those raised in the old ways (the fathers) to the new Messianic age (the children) at the coming of Jesus.

But John only fulfilled the first part of the prophecy. There was a second part. That will be fulfilled before the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Mal 4.5), just before the 2nd Coming.

- The Spirit of Elijah will again be at work doing the same things as in the days of Elijah and of John, i.e. turning hearts and restoring what has been lost.
- This time the hearts of the end time children will be turn back to the (early Church) fathers, to the original, to the beginning.

And this is exactly what Jesus said. When asked why the religious teachers said Elijah would first come before Jesus' Coming (Mt 17.10-13), He said that,

- Elijah ***had come*** already (referring to John the Baptist).
- But also, Elijah ***would come*** and restore all things.

So, just as the Spirit of Elijah upon John prepared the Jewish bride at the 1st Coming, the same Spirit will again be at work before the 2nd Coming, to do the same things,

- ***To turn the hearts*** of the children back to the fathers (Mal 4.5-6).
- ***To restore*** all things (Mt 17.11), bringing them back to their original state.

Clearly, however, although all ***things*** are restored, not all ***people*** are restored. As seen earlier, the majority of the Church will rebel against the Word and turn their ears from the Truth. But those who turn back to the original will experience the original.

Amen!

6. CONCLUSION

We have seen the serious condition of the end time Church.

- ***Just as at the 1st Coming***, at the end of their age, the Jews rejected the Word, were blind and blinded, were cut off and cast out having their kingdom taken from them, and went into great tribulation,
- ***So before the 2nd Coming***, at the end of her age, the Church also will reject the Word, be blind and blinded, be vomited out of the Lord's mouth and go into the great tribulation along with the unbelieving Gentile world.

A Closing Appeal

What should be our reaction to such a solemn picture?

Go back to the Word! In everything, let the first question be, "What does the Bible say?" Bring all things into line with the Word!

- In every aspect of church life.
- In every aspect of personal life, whether family, home or work.

If it is not in line with the Word, then change it. The Word is the highest authority. It is above every man, every organisation.

In this last day, the voice of the Spirit is crying out, the last voice of the Spirit to the Church, sent to prepare her for the coming Bridegroom (Rev 3.22).

What is its cry? Repent. Go back. Back to what? To the Word, the Word as it was at the beginning, the Word once and for all delivered to the saints.

The name of the Bridegroom is the Word of God (Rev 19.13). He is coming for a Word bride.

- One who shows her love by her attitude to His Word (Jn 14.15; 1Jn 5.3; 2 Jn 6).
- One who only speaks His Word.
- One who not only loves and speaks His Word, but manifests and incarnates It, being a living revelation of His Word (2 Cor 3.2-3; 1 P 3.1).

What will be the Bridegroom's reaction to a bride prepared in this way?

- The king will greatly desire your beauty (Ps 45.11).
- You are all fair, my love, and there is no spot in you (SoS 4.7).

Not only is the bride making preparations for her Bridegroom. He also is preparing for her.

- A prepared place for a prepared people (Mt 25.34; Jn 14.2-3; Heb 11.16).

Let us go on to Perfection

So, then,

- Let us draw near with a true heart, looking for the day when we shall see His face (Heb 10.22; Rev 22.4).
- Looking forward to these things, let us be diligent to be found by him without spot and blameless (2 P 3.14).
- Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us (Ps 90.17).

Let us,

- Go on to perfection (Heb 6.1).
- Press on to perfection, laying hold on that for which Christ Jesus has laid hold of us (Phil 3.12).
- Be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect (M 5.48).

What is the nature of this perfection?

- Perfect **holiness** (2 Cor 7.1).
- Perfect **faith** (1 Th 3.10; Jas 2.22).
- Perfect **love** (1 Jn 2.5; 4.12,17-18).

But these things are only attributes of perfection. They are not perfection itself. What is the true nature of perfection? Jesus!

- Paul aimed to present every man perfect **in Christ** (Col 1.28).
- He spoke of a time when the Church would come to a perfect man. How did he describe a perfect man? **A man measured by nothing less than the full stature of Jesus Christ Himself** (Eph 4.13).
- So, to have perfect love, for example, is **to be as He is** (1 Jn 4.17).
- In other words, it is to be perfect as our Father in heaven (Mt 5.48).

This is true Christianity. This is full salvation. This is what Jesus died for, a bride who would be as He is.

How can such perfection be attained?

- By trials (Jas 1.2-4).
- By prayer,
 - Of fellow believers (Col 4.12).
 - Of our great High Priest (Jn 17.23).
- By the Holy Spirit,
 - The Spirit of holiness (Ro 1.4).
 - The Spirit of faith (2 Cor 4.13).
 - The Spirit of love (2 Tim 1.7).

We are at the end of the Church Age. Yes, the professing Church will go into rebellion. But the true Church will come unto the full stature of Jesus Christ, unto perfection.

Let us, then, go on to perfection.

Amen.

2 visions of Wm Branham

- "It will be worth it all." (Transported beyond the curtain of time, at a time when opposition was growing.)
- "Stay in step." (A vision of the end time bride, with some being distracted by the modern church.)