

October 2024

Dear Brethren:

We are already in the midst of another Holy Day season, and in particular, the one picturing the very culmination of God's Plan dealing with the human family. The Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles, and Last Great Day all point to a time coming when God's work with humanity will cease from being "hands off," as it has been for much of the last six millennia.

For reason, God has allowed rebellious human beings to *go their own way* and to try to "prove" the worth of their own foolish notions—that *they know best* how to live and to thrive upon this earth. How has that been working out for them? The time of final reckoning is coming soon, and humanity's report card is about to be released. Perhaps it would be better to say that they will not even be able to complete the school term, and the Master Instructor will have to intervene to prevent these reckless "students" from destroying themselves:

And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved:
but for the elect's sake *those days shall be shortened* (Matthew 24:22)
[emphasis mine throughout].

So, God has been "hands off" with the majority of humanity until now, but you—by comparison—are part of a *very small group* of ones that God has called out and enrolled in His royal school. This privilege permits you to solve the puzzle of Truth and to work to graduate with godly character in His degree program. If, ultimately, you are successful, the end result of your studies will be to rule with Jesus Christ when He returns. The question is, how committed are you to fulfilling that calling and training program?

Thy Kingdom Come

Part of Christ's sample prayer taught to His disciples seeks to have us align our goals with His own:

After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. *Thy kingdom come*. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9–10).

We are to pray for the coming of Christ's rulership upon this earth. This means more than just uttering the words from our lips. It means that we come truly to desire the end of this current world-ruling structure and to relish the promise of a new reigning Sovereign Lord. The point is not that our prayers will help make it happen; God will fulfill His intentions with or without our support. And He has promised that it will be a reality:

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. *Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end*, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. *The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this* (Isaiah 9:6–7).

And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more (Isaiah 2:4).

God does not need our prayers in order to bring this about. That new Kingdom on earth will indeed become a reality. But Christ commanded that those who love Him should *pray for that Kingdom*, to focus our own minds to become *in sync with His*, so that we might have a part of that glorious future.

All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and *thy saints shall bless thee*. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations (Psalm 145:10–13).

Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into *the glorious liberty of the children of God*. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, *waiting for the [sonship], to wit, the redemption of our body* (Romans 8:21–23).

When we pray sincerely for God's will to be done and for Christ to rule upon this earth, we are showing our allegiance to Him and our support for all that He has purposed to accomplish. But do our words match our true intents of heart?

Why Not Desire Christ's Return?

Surely, we all want Christ to return and to begin to rule as King, right? Who among God's called people would not want that? Well, the fact is that the natural desires of our carnal minds contradict the things that we cherish spiritually. A battle is constant within us. The entire history of ancient Israel is a textbook of such failures. Much of the Bible contains God's warning against these very pitfalls of mind. Israel desired to inherit the Promised Land that God had offered to them—Thy Kingdom come—and yet, in the midst of any difficulties, they always sought to return to Egypt (Exodus 16:3; Numbers 11:4–6; 14:1–4; 20:3–5). This is what it means to be *double-minded*. What are two particular challenges for God's people today, mirroring the challenges faced by Abraham's family?

Firstly, the cares of this current world bombard our minds incessantly for dominion of priority. Jesus Christ gave His children of the last days a warning to avoid the very trap that ensnared Lot's wife:

Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and *his stuff in the house*, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. *Remember Lot's wife* (Luke 17:28–32).

That "stuff in the house" often remains very important to us, even though we like to think that we are spiritually minded. It is not just talking about material possessions, but it includes *anything temporal* that takes precedence over God. Lot's wife was likely driven especially by her concern for family members still left in Sodom (Genesis 19:14). Concern for loved ones in peril can be a strong motivation for compromising God's instructions. Was not much of ancient Israel's failure a result from worry about their children?

But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness (Numbers 14:31–32).

Is it not ironic that some who give in to fear and thereby resist the actual salvation of Christ's Kingdom are ones who are trying to "save" their families physically? Israel refused to cross the Jordan River in fear for their families. Christ warned us to remember Lot's wife, who was a mother seeking desperately to save her own "little ones." On one hand, they wanted salvation—like for God's Kingdom to come—but on the other hand, they wanted to hold on to the physical things of importance left in this world. There is an old country song

that croons, "Oh, I wanna go to heaven, but I don't wanna go tonight." We can laugh at that sentiment, but is that not exactly what Lot's wife was feeling? Even Lot himself "lingered" and had to be *thrust out* of the city by those angels sent to save him (Genesis 19:16). It is easy to say, "Thy Kingdom come." It is more difficult to actually mean it under pressure.

Jesus warned also about this very proclivity, regarding those who profess to be eager to follow Him, but then come up with excuses:

And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, *I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest*. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. . . . And another also said, Lord, *I will follow thee*; but *let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house*. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, *and looking back*, is fit for the kingdom of God (Luke 9:57–58, 61–62).

This man could have been singing, "Oh, I wanna follow you, but I gotta go do some important stuff at home first." Jesus is warning about the very tendency to desire the coming of His Kingdom, but just *not quite yet!*

How many times in God's church have members with a life-threatening health crisis, for instance, ended up compromising *their own personal conviction* to trust God, because they became afraid of leaving dependent family members "too soon"? The rationale goes, "It is not that I am afraid of dying. I am not really trying to save myself, but who will care for my family if I go right now?" We are not talking about people just doing what "the church" teaches against their own will. We are talking about ones who have *embraced those teachings and made them their own*, but then later compromise under pressure. It is exactly like Israel seeking to turn back to Egypt to solve a problem. They want Christ's Kingdom, but they want to *buy more time* before that Kingdom comes.

Hard to Get the Vision

Secondly, we might not fully desire the coming of Christ's Kingdom because we simply cannot summon enough excitement about it. We can read about it, hear about it, but it still just seems to be distant and unattainable—unreal. It is understandable that the magnitude of what God has in mind is beyond our ability to comprehend:

For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him (Isaiah 64:4).

The Apostle Paul quoted this passage and referred to it as "hidden wisdom":

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even *the hidden wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. *But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit:* for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:7–10).

God hid this wisdom from the world intentionally, but it can be understood and appreciated *at least in part* by those called of God, by the action of His Spirit upon our minds. But that still does not mean that we automatically get excited about God's future promises. Some seem to relish the hope of that future more readily, while others of God's people struggle to "get the vision." None of us can ever attain full appreciation right now for the future that awaits. Paul said that, at best, we all see as if through a darkened glass (1 Corinthians 13:12).

It requires *faith* to trust that the Kingdom of God will be worth any sacrifice required of us today, especially when those promises seem so fantastic and impossible to fathom. And yet, we are told that a certain amount of vision is essential. Proverbs 29:18 says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." This is because we will never truly sacrifice things that we value in this world today unless we can come to desire the promises of the future much more. But only with the love of God's future promises can we truly find spiritual fulfillment:

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept (1 Corinthians 15:19–20).

God wants us to relish that hope of salvation in His glorious eternal Family. He wants us to become so excited by it and so determined not to be left out, that we become willing to make any sacrifice in this present life in order to be there:

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence [aggressive striving], and the violent [aggressive ones] take it by force (Matthew 11:12).

Christ is not talking about someone who is breaking God's law and taking something that is forbidden. No, He is speaking of those called—with a God-given right to inherit the Kingdom—valuing that calling enough to fight hard to obey and to please Him. These, likewise, are ones who can never truly fathom, in the flesh, how rich and how glorious will

be that reward. Yet, by the help of God's Spirit they *see enough* to become motivated. They show aggressive action to overcome their natural human nature and to take hold of God's promises. Even if it is God's will for them to die prematurely, they will submit to His will without seeking to bargain for "an extension" in the flesh.

Wherefore do I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in mine hand?
Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways [faithful obedience] before him. He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before him (Job 13:14–16).

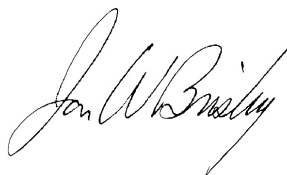
Job—someone who had faithfully obeyed God's Laws—describes the orientation of the person committed to obeying no matter what. This is the very opposite orientation of one who turns back to Egypt when the going gets tough. It describes someone who has his vision firmly set upon the coming Kingdom of God, is praying fervently for that Kingdom, and then keeps fighting day by day to maintain his walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

Keeping these upcoming Holy Days—and especially overcoming every obstacle to ensure that we *show up* to meet God at His Feast of Tabernacles—is another way to prove that we truly desire for His Kingdom to come. Do not be like those who asked to be excused from the wedding feast because they had more pressing matters (Luke 14:16–24). If we are sure to keep in mind that the symbolism of these Holy Days will be realized one day, we can be strengthened with the motivation to step out in faith, and to trust God no matter what.

And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore *we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved*, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:27–29).

Much love and very sincere appreciation for every one of you fighting to enter that Kingdom of God.

Yours most humbly in Christ Jesus,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jon W. Brisby". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned centrally below the typed name.

Jon W. Brisby