

Series: Last Words for the Next Generation

Those Who Love His Appearing

2 Timothy 4:6–8

When I first got saved in 1987, I soon began to hear predictions that Jesus would return on a specific date. People like Harold Camping, through Family Radio, gathered a following with calculations that named the year and later the very day of His coming. Some sold possessions, left jobs, and rearranged their lives around the calendar.

When the dates passed and nothing happened, the excitement turned to disappointment, and some were left disillusioned. I too was intrigued by the elaborate charts and detailed prophecies. They seemed to offer a map of what was coming. But by the grace of God I was not pulled in. I was so taken with the reality of knowing Christ now, and with the call to make Him known, that I did not get sidetracked. But others were drawn in.

Over the centuries many have been led astray. Despite Jesus' clear word that no one knows the day or the hour, people have repeatedly named dates, stirred excitement, and then watched the prediction fail.

The early church didn't live that way. They expected the Lord's return, but they didn't set dates. Their hope shaped how they suffered, served, and stayed faithful. They loved His appearing because they already knew and loved Him in the present.

It is possible to be fascinated by prophecy charts and calendars and still have little affection for Jesus now. Those who truly long to see Him face to face are the ones who already know and love Him.

People can become dogmatic about whether they are pre-millennial, post-millennial, or a-millennial—arguing over charts and timelines as if the details of the calendar are what matter most. These labels come from different interpretations of the thousand-year reign of Christ described in Revelation 20. I appreciate what Jim Cymbala said about his view. Though he has his own convictions, as I do, he said he is pan-millennial—because what he's most confident about is that in the

end it will all pan out. He would see the Savior he already loved in the present.

Paul is writing his last letter. He knows the time of his departure is at hand. He is in a Roman prison, largely alone, writing to Timothy—his beloved spiritual son, a next-generation leader facing pressure and false teaching.

These are a father's final words. Near the close of the letter, Paul does not offer a survival plan for the institution or a chart of the end times. He gives his own testimony as a man who has loved the appearing of the Lord Jesus, and he holds out the same hope to everyone who believes the promise of His return.

Main Idea: Those who truly long to see Jesus face to face pour themselves out in service, stay in the fight, and finish what they started—because their confidence rests on the reward the Lord Himself will give, not on the approval of a crowd or the accuracy of a calendar.

As we unfold the text, we will consider three marks of the life that loves His appearing.

1. A Life Poured Out

The first mark is a life poured out. Paul has already told Timothy to preach the Word and endure hardship; now he turns to his own life and shows what that endurance has looked like for him.

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come.” (v.6)

In the Old Testament sacrificial system, the drink offering was the wine poured out completely at the base of the altar. Nothing was held back. It was spent. Paul uses that same image for his own life. He is not preserving himself for a safer season or a more favorable hour. His life is being spent for the gospel. The time of his departure—literally his

“loosing,” like a ship casting off—has come. In Paul’s mind this is not the end of life, but release from this world into the presence of Christ.

When Paul says that his life is being poured out, he is using the language of a living sacrifice. In Romans 12:1 Paul had already urged believers to present their bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is their spiritual worship.

Worship is not only a Sunday event. It’s a life poured out.

True love for the Lord’s appearing does not mean liquidating ordinary responsibilities because someone has named a date. It means being found at the post the Master left you, doing the work He assigned, until He comes or until death comes first.

Jesus also spoke plainly on this in Mark 13. After refusing to give an end times date, Jesus tells the parable of the master who leaves his house and puts a doorkeeper in charge. In it He lists every watch of the night. He says; *“Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning— 36 lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”* Mark 13:35-37

The point is not that we become experts in signs. The point is that because no one knows the hour, there is no shift we can assign to someone else and no hour when sleep is safe. Wakefulness means staying at the door and being found doing the work the Master left, not solving the timetable He said no one knows.

Again, all throughout the church age, Christians have tried to set dates and predicted that Jesus would come in their life time. I pray that He would come in our day. But I think what is more certain than whether Jesus will come in our lifetime is that many will not be found faithful or awake when He does come, not just because the days are hard, but because their faces are in their phones and their energy is spent on conspiracy theories and predictions.

Some people think the problem is that Christians do not agree on the timeline of end-time events, or that they are not seeing the signs that point to His soon return. I think the real problem is that many do not love and long for His appearing, because they do not have a close relationship with Jesus in the present. What many Christians, with various end-times views, are not doing is looking forward to seeing Jesus, either in death or when He returns, and spending their lives serving His cause until they meet Him.

I'm not saying that knowing what the Bible says about these things doesn't matter. I'm saying that you can be a prophecy expert and still not love Jesus. The evidence that you love and long for Him is a life poured out for Jesus, not doing everything you can to preserve it.

Many today are trying to solve the book of Revelation when the call of the book is to keep it. When you read Revelation, be careful not to miss the forest for the trees. The book is meant to do for believers today what the book of Daniel was meant to do in his day.

Daniel was not written so exiles could build a chart and then sit out the empire. It was written so they could see that the God of heaven rules the kingdoms of men, and that His people can refuse to bow because the Son of Man receives the kingdom.

Revelation does the same for the church. The seals, the trumpets, and the bowls are in the book. They are the trees. The forest is the Lamb on the throne, worthy to open the scroll, and a people called to worship Him, endure, and overcome until He comes.

Daniel kept a generation from being swallowed by Babylon. Revelation keeps a church from being swallowed by the age. The blessing is not for the one who solves it. It is for the one who keeps it. Those are the very words used at both the opening and the close of the book (Revelation 1:3; 22:7).

To keep it is to remain faithful, especially in difficult days, as the saints in Revelation remained faithful because they treasured the blood of the Lamb.

Paul also shows what it means to keep it. He is poured out. He stays awake even in prison. He does not leave the wall to sound a false alarm. The early church, under pressure, met together, cared for the weak, and confessed Christ. Their wakefulness was mission under pressure, not a prophetic calendar or a compound. That is the life that loves His appearing.

2. A Race Run with Endurance

The second mark is a race run with endurance. *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (v.7)*

These are not three separate achievements. They describe one life spent for Christ—fighting the right battles, running with endurance, and finishing well—all in reliance on the Spirit, not self-effort.

The good fight is not about coming out on top in a theological debate. Paul’s goal is not winning arguments in a comment thread. Earlier in this letter he has already shown the nature of the fight:

“And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.” 2 Timothy 2:24-26

The fight is spiritual. The weapons are the Word and prayer. And the aim is to set captives free, not to dominate the conversation. Paul is shining the light not cursing the darkness.

The race is a marathon, not a sprint. It requires endurance. Endurance is not gritting your teeth. It’s reliance on the grace that is Christ Jesus. Paul has run in such a way that he finishes the mission. And the mission is not merely arriving at the line with his own agenda intact. It includes passing the baton. What Timothy has learned, he is

to entrust to faithful people who will teach others also. The race is fulfilled when the faith continues in the next generation.

Keeping the faith means guarding the deposit of the gospel and remaining under the Scriptures. It's holding fast to what has been entrusted.

This is what it actually looks like to love the Lord's appearing when you don't know the hour. It is not a matter of scanning the sky or scrolling for the next sign. Rather, it is fighting the right fight, running the long race, and keeping the faith in the ordinary places of life—marriage, parenting, work, friendship, and your witness—even while impostors go from bad to worse and many turn away.

Paul wrote the prison letters from a cell and still told the church to stand firm and keep speaking the word. That's what it means to be at your post.

3. Eyes Fixed on Christ's Appearing

The final mark is eyes fixed on Christ's appearing.

"Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing." (v.8)

What was driving Paul to run his race with endurance? It was not fame or fortune. It wasn't a bigger following or more likes on social media. It was a crown not a crowd.

The crown is not awarded based on the size of the room or the admiration of the crowd. It's awarded by the Lord, the righteous Judge, on that day. It's the crown of righteousness—the reward of a life that has been made righteous in Christ and has lived in light of that righteousness. And Paul does not claim it as unique to the apostles. It's for all who have loved His appearing.

Loving His appearing is more than mental agreement that Jesus will return. It's longing for that day, living as one who expects to give an account, and refusing to arrange life around comfort.

Again, it shows itself in the poured-out life of verse 6 and in the fight, the race, and the faith of verse 7. And the same crown is for the unknown saint who stayed at an ordinary post and for the apostle who wrote from a cell.

Augustine stated the matter with clarity: "The person that loves the coming of the Lord is not the person who says it is imminent or the person who says it is far off, but it is the one who, whether it be imminent or far off, awaits it with all his or her heart."

The mark of loving His appearing is not a particular scheme about the timing. It's a heart that awaits Him either way.

The early church endured persecution not primarily because they were certain the Antichrist was about to be revealed and they would soon escape, but because the promise that they would see the Savior they already loved—whether in death or when He returned—made every cost worth it.

Tim Keller has noted that anyone who truly yearns for the second coming "hates the same things that God hates, and wants the same things that God wants," and works toward those things with the confidence that in the end everything will be put right. That is the heart of loving His appearing. It's not first the desire to be removed from tribulation. It's the desire to see the One we love and to see His kingdom come.

I was at a conference a couple of weeks ago where Alistair Begg spoke on this same text. Similar to Jim Cymbala, when people ask him about his view of the end times he says, "I'm Pro-Millennium." He continued: the endurance with joy that Paul experienced did not come from an a-millennial, pre-millennial, or post-millennial view. It came from looking to Christ and His return. The indication that we really long for the appearing of Jesus is not tied to our view of the millennium. It is

tied to the purity of our lives and to the reality of our hope—the settled confidence that the One who saved us by His grace will keep us and will one day appear to award the crown of righteousness to all who remained faithful in the waiting, even when it cost them.

An old gospel song still says it plainly: “Little is much when God is in it. Labor not for wealth or fame. There’s a crown, and you can win it, if you go in Jesus’ name.”

The crown is awarded for faithfulness, not for size. Many today judge the health of a church by its size. But there are unhealthy small churches and unhealthy large ones. What matters is whether the people of God are remaining faithful to the gospel and to the Lord who gave it.

The danger, whether the church is large or small, is measuring success by what is visible rather than by what only God can see. The power to advance the cause of Christ is not found in numbers. It is found in dependence on God, and that dependence shows itself in devotion to prayer. Scripture makes this clear: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.”

What keeps this focus right is not a clever strategy. It is communion with Christ. We do the work for His eyes alone and leave the results with Him. Our eyes are not on the approval of man but on the day when every hidden act of faithfulness will be brought into the light. The crown is for those who go in Jesus’ name and keep going even when the place seems small and little known. It is for those who loved His appearing enough to be poured out until that day.

Think of a couple in a long-distance relationship. They talk by phone, FaceTime, and message one another day after day. Because they have come to know each other that way, they look forward to the day they will finally be in the same room. The anticipation is not imaginary; it is the fruit of the relationship they already have. In the same way, we can know Christ now through His Word and by the Spirit. As that relationship deepens, the promise that we will one day see Him face to face becomes personal and compelling. We live faithfully in the

meantime—not because we have figured out a timeline, but because we love the One who is coming and want to be found ready when He appears.

Conclusion

Paul's last words do not leave us with a prediction. They leave us with the marks of faithfulness and a promise.

Are you living as one who loves that day? Is your life being spent, or are you still arranging it around comfort or self-presentation? The next generation will not be strengthened by better predictions. They will be strengthened by people who stay at their post, pour out their lives, fight the right fight, and look to the crown.

May we love His appearing enough to be found faithful when He comes.