

# Be Ready for Christ's Return

by Zac Poonen

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*God's way of dealing with sin is to fix the problem first, and then correct it, and we should strive to be ready for Christ's return by living a life of obedience and growth in our faith and character.*

**Duration:** 42:01

**Scripture:** Genesis 3:15-16, Matthew 7:3-5, Luke 23:41, 1 Corinthians 1:2-3, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Hebrews 3:13, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 2:2, Revelation 20:12

**Topics:** "Second Coming", "Repentance"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of taking responsibility for our actions and sins, drawing parallels between the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and the thief on the cross. It highlights the need to confess our sins, acknowledge our faults, and seek forgiveness from God, preparing ourselves for the judgment seat of Christ. The speaker urges listeners to focus on their own spiritual growth, learning from the thief's humility and readiness to take the blame, rather than blaming others. The message stresses the significance of being prepared for the second coming of Christ, encouraging a life of repentance and genuine transformation.

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## Transcript

For 1,500 years, the people of Israel waited for the coming of Jesus Christ. And when he came, they did not recognize him. They called him Prince of Demons, Beelzebul.

But it was written in the Bible that he would come. Way back when Adam sinned, God said, the seed of this woman will crush the head of Satan, the serpent. So that promise of the coming of Christ was mentioned in the Garden of Eden as soon as Adam sinned.

That's a very, there are many things we can learn from that. You know, when God, when Adam sinned, God didn't ask him, hey, why did you do that? You know, that's how we are when our children do something wrong. Hey, why did you do that? I told you so many times not to do it.

That's not how God dealt with it. He mentioned that later. He punished Adam later.

But before he punished Adam, he said, okay, you created a problem, let's fix it. So I find that our human nature is, when somebody does something wrong, whether in an office or our children at home, we immediately yell at them or say, I told you so many times not to do it, or why did you do it? What I learned from God is, let's fix it now. Okay, you made a mess, never mind, let's fix it.

Then I'll tell you how to deal with it. So he first, it's very interesting. Turn with me to Genesis 3. God asked Adam, did you eat from the tree? He blamed his wife.

She gave it to me. Then God asked the woman, what have you done? And the woman said, this sir snake. Snake did it.

You know, you see something there, the unwillingness to take a blame and responsibility for our failure. That's the first thing you can learn in the Garden of Eden. An unwillingness to take responsibility for our sin and our failure.

And you find that in the entire human race today. We're so reluctant to say, yeah, that was my fault. Put the blame on somebody else.

Adam put the blame on his wife. The wife put the blame on the serpent. And what did God do? Okay, you put the blame on the serpent, let me deal with the serpent.

So God punished the serpent first. Did you know that God punished the serpent before he punished even Adam? There's something we can learn from there. And God told the serpent, Genesis 3, 16, the seed of this woman will crush your, verse 15, sorry, the last part, will crush you on your head.

And that's referring to Jesus Christ, defeating Satan, crushing Satan's head on the cross. So what do I learn from that? And afterwards, he said, okay, now I'm going to punish you, Adam and Eve. You're going to go out of the garden.

So what I learned from that is, I mean, dealing with children, they messed up something. Okay, let me fix it. I fix that.

And then I say to them, this is not the way to do it. I had warned you not to do it like that. But I say that after I fixed it.

But that's not our human nature. So we can learn something from God there. You find that that is how God, even when he finds something wrong in somebody, he appreciates the good that he can see.

I'll give you another example. Turn with me to Revelation chapter 2. The Lord wants to give a message to a particular church. The church in Ephesus, Revelation 2 verse 2. Now just listen to this and see how it is.

The Lord says to this church in Revelation 2 verse 2, I know your deeds. I know your toil. I know your perseverance.

You don't endure evil men. You put to the test all those who call themselves apostles, and you find they are not. And you found them to be false.

And you have perseverance. You have endured for my name's sake. And you have not grown weary.

And you say, wow, what a church this is. The Lord is so happy with it. But he says, hang on.

But I've got something against you. You have left your first love. And this is so serious, that if you don't repent, I will derecognize you as a church.

I'll remove the lampstand. This is such a serious sin. But the Lord doesn't mention the sin first.

He appreciates the good that he can see before he corrects the sin. This is God's way. And there's something all of us can learn from it.

In our dealings with others, we are so quick to see the fault, even in our children. You know, sometimes a word of encouragement, a word of encouragement can help your children much more than a word of correction. I'm not saying we shouldn't correct.

We must correct. But I find generally speaking, we are very slow to encourage others and to say something good. We're so quick to say something bad, which is some evil that is there.

We see it. I remember a story I heard of a teacher who was standing before the classroom students. The teacher took a white sheet, a big white board of paper, a white cardboard paper with one small black dot in a corner.

He had to look carefully to see the black dot. And he told the students, all of you write what you can see. And all the smart students looked carefully and said, everyone wrote, I can see a black dot in the corner.

And the teacher got all the answers and said, all of you wrote, I see a black dot in the corner. None of you wrote, I see a big white board. Why is that? You only saw the black dot? Then he said, that is our human nature.

Even though there's a big white board here, you don't see it. You only see that little black dot because our eyes are like that, focused on something we can pick out. And you find some people are so evil that when you say, supposing you say, you know, so-and-so is a good brother and he's got this, this, this, the other will say, but let me also tell you something else about him.

Human nature is like that. Yeah, there's a lot of white there, but you know, there's a black dot in his life. Why is it like that? That doesn't tell us anything about that man, but it tells us a lot about you.

And those are people who can never see any good in others. And that tells us something about their own nature. They, they are either jealous of that person.

Usually it's jealousy. I'm jealous that that person is so good compared to me, or he did a better job than I could do. And that disturbs me.

I've seen this so much, even in the church among Christians. It shows that even after so many years of being a believer, they've got zero of God's nature. They've got the same old Adam's nature that's ready to find fault.

Something here, something there. See, this is whenever the Lord, for example, he has another church with which he wants to find fault. Just read this, not just one example.

Verse 12, Revelation 2, 12, to the leader of the church in Sardis, in Pergamos, say this. Verse 13, I know where you dwell. Satan's throne is there.

So what? You have held fast my word, my name, and you did not deny my faith. Even in the days that the great servant of mine called Antipas was there, my witness, whom Satan killed. But I have a few things against you.

He doesn't start with, hey, I've got a few things against you. He says, there's some good things I can see in you. So, I find that the Lord is, let's go to another example.

Verse 18, to the church in Thyatira, write, I know your deeds. Verse 19, I know your love, your faith, your service, your perseverance, your deeds of late are greater than at the beginning. You say, boy, this must be a wonderful church.

No, but I've got something against you. You see this pattern, always beginning with a word of appreciation and then going to correction. He doesn't shut his eyes and say, there's nothing wrong with you.

No, that would be a lie. But he always begins with appreciation. In Adam's case, he begins with saying, let's fix this problem now, then I'll tell you how to deal with you.

Now, when a person acquires that nature, a servant of God like Paul, when he acquires that nature, they also become like that. See, I'll show you. Can you all tell me, among all the churches that Paul wrote letters to, which was the worst? Which one? Corinthian church was the worst, right? If you read all the letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, they had so many problems.

You know what all the problems they had? They were taking each other to court. A man was committing sin with his father's second wife and they were fighting with each other and all types of problems. Now, how does Paul write to this church in Corinth? Just listen.

1 Corinthians 1. Verse 2. To the church of God, which is at Corinth, which have been sanctified in Christ, saints by calling and grace to you, verse 3, and peace. I thank God, verse 4, every time concerning you for the grace of God, which is given you in Christ Jesus. In everything, you were enriched in him.

You got so much ability to speak good messages. You got so much knowledge of the word of God and the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you. People know you're Christians and you're not lacking in any spiritual gift.

You're waiting eagerly for the return of Jesus Christ and when he comes, he will confirm you in the end, blameless in the day of Jesus Christ. God is faithful through whom you were called into fellowship with the son Jesus Christ our Lord. You read all that and you say, this must be one of the best churches, right? If you were writing to Corinth, would you write like that? I don't think so.

He says, but he doesn't shut his eyes to the reality. But I exhort you, brethren, you must learn to agree with each other. There shouldn't be divisions among you, verse 10.

For I've been informed that there are so many quarrels among you, verse 11. Where did Paul learn that from? From Jesus. The question is, have we learned it? Have we learned to see something good even in those people who are very bad? Have we learned to see it in our children? Have we learned to encourage? My guess is that the average parent corrects a child 10 times more than they encourage them.

That's the reason we think our children are so evil and stubborn. Yeah, they've got a lot of weaknesses, but I think a lot more will be accomplished by encouragement also. Because when they do something good, you're going to really appreciate that.

Not only children, our brothers. When you see something good, appreciate it. Don't hide your eyes to the wrong.

Correct it. I always tell people, who is qualified to correct somebody? The one who has first learned to encourage that person. He's the only one qualified to correct.

Do you want to correct your husband or your wife? Sometimes it's necessary. We must help one another. And helping one another is by correction.

Because nobody's perfect. But first encourage, then correct. I showed you these examples.

That is to be Christ-like. See how you can fix the problem. Supposing your husband created a problem or your wife created a problem.

See how you can fix it first. Then say, okay, we have got to be careful next time that we don't bungle up like this. There's nothing serious in the world except sin.

This is a favorite statement of mine. The only thing serious is sin. I tell people in my CFC office sometimes when I'm going away for a while, I say, hey, I want you to do these things before I come back if possible.

But if you're not able to do it, or if you bungle up something, don't bother. The only thing serious in this world is sin. Just don't sin.

That's all. The other things can all be fixed. But sin is serious.

So the reason I say that is because we can encourage one another and save them from sin. I like the NASB translation of Hebrews chapter 3, verse 13. Hebrews 3.13 says, encourage one another day after day.

You know, there's the Hebrew word, the Greek word called translate and encourage here. It's got two meanings. One is exhort.

The other is encourage. If you've got a King James version, it says exhort one another. NASB says encourage one another.

Which do you prefer? Tell me which you prefer. Because that will tell me the type of person you are. If you prefer exhort one another, I know what type of person you are.

If you prefer the translation encourage one another, I know what type of person you are. The meaning is you can choose which of the two you want to choose. It's up to you.

And I'll tell you, you'll accomplish a lot more. It says by encouraging one another, you can save them from being hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. We would say that's impossible.

You got to exhort them. Then only they'll be saved from being hardened. That's a human way of thinking.

Encourage them. That's how Jesus and Paul did it. And maybe that is the reason why all your efforts at exhorting your wife and exhorting your husband and exhorting your children have not succeeded after all these years.

Can we try another method from today? A better method? Jesus' method? Paul's method? They don't shut their eyes saying, oh there's nothing wrong with you. Their eyes are wide open. They say there is something wrong with you.

But before I tell you that, let me tell you something, the good things I've seen in you. And see if the results are not 10 times better. And if you don't believe me, I'm hoping to come back here in September.

Tell me what the results are. You'll really see a change. Even in relationships within the church.

It's a tremendous difference. You know, I didn't learn all this when I was a young Christian because I didn't have a spiritual father. I longed to have a spiritual father when I was a young 23 year old Christian, but I never found one.

They were all teachers in the church I attended. They were not good preachers also, but they thought they knew a lot. There's a lot of difference between a teacher and a father.

We've got too many teachers. We've got the spirit of a teacher. We need fathers.

See a teacher doesn't have any patience with children who don't keep up with the class. Supposing there's one student in a class and all the others are brilliant and bright, and one student is always lagging behind. The teacher gets fed up.

Hey listen, I can't keep this whole class at that level, just because you're lagging behind. Get out of this class and go and join some other school. But a father is not like that.

Unless he's a stubborn student and just doesn't want to learn, that's different. Otherwise the father says, okay he'll work on you. If you're not willing to learn, then I can't do anything.

But if you are willing to learn, then I'm willing to be patient with you. So the problem we have in the church is where a person is not willing to learn, not willing to repent, then even God cannot do anything. Jesus couldn't do anything with Judas Iscariot.

He said there's no hope for him. It's better he wasn't even born. It's not because Jesus gave up on him.

Jesus tried for three and a half years. He didn't succeed. Then he had to give up.

But he encouraged him so much. You know, I've heard it said that when Jesus dipped in the last supper, he dipped the bread in the wine and gave it to Judas Iscariot. In one paraphrase of the Bible, it says that was the way in which a person treated an honored guest by giving him the first piece of bread.

That was the way in which he was honoring him. But he went and betrayed him. So encourage one another while it is called today so that people are not hardened around us.

So as I said, when Jesus came the first time, it was all written in the Bible that he was going to come, he was going to come. And when he came, they were not ready. Now today, there's something else written in the New Testament.

And that is that Jesus is going to come again. And just like those Israelites were not ready for the coming of Christ, I believe a lot of Christians are not ready for the second coming of Christ. So I want to say something about it.

Let me show you two types of Christians who will be there at the second coming of Christ. Little children, 1 John chapter 2, and verse 28. Little children, abide in Christ so that when he appears, when Christ appears, there are going to be two types of Christians.

One who will shrink away from him in shame, and the other who will have confidence and boldness. You see that two types of Christians in verse 28? When Christ comes again, some will have confidence. Hey, Lord, we're glad to meet you.

And then there's another group of Christians, shrink away. Lord, we didn't know you're going to come so soon. Why can I go and hide? Believers, because he's writing in verse 28 to children, little children, you are believers.

But you may not be ready for the second coming of Christ. You won't have boldness. See, the Bible says that when Jesus comes, he's going to set up his throne, throne of judgment.

And in that throne of judgment that he sets up, what is he going to do? Turn with me to 2 Corinthians in chapter 5, 2 Corinthians 5, 10. We must all appear at the judgment seat of Christ, that each one of us may be rewarded according to the deeds we did in our body, whether good or bad. If it's bad, we'll get some type of punishment.

If it's good, we get some type of reward. So when Jesus Christ comes and sets up his throne, he's going to evaluate our life. What does it say? According to all that we did in our body.

That means from the time you were born, all that you did is going to be evaluated, whether good or bad. That's what's going to happen at the judgment seat of Christ. And knowing this, he says, verse 11, we fear.

Do you fear? Verse 11, Paul said, we fear. That's why we are persuading men. Hey, fellas, be better ready for the coming of Christ.

So what does it mean to be ready for the coming of Christ? Just sit back and say, oh Lord, great, you're coming back. No. I want to be ready to be able to stand before him at the judgment seat of Christ and be ready because my whole life will be evaluated.

And if you turn to Revelation, I'm trying to prepare you for the final examination. It's very important. This is the final, final, final examination we're all going to have.

And I'm trying to prepare you for that final examination now. In the book of Revelation, we read in Revelation chapter 20, I saw a great white throne, verse 11. And I saw the dead, verse 12, great and small, standing before the throne and the books were opened.

And the dead were judged, verse 12, according to what is written in the books, according to their deeds. Now, even though that's speaking about the great white throne, where a lot of unbelievers will be standing, the principle applies even to the judgment seat of Christ, where believers will be standing. The books will be opened.

Think of that. In those days, when John wrote this episode 2000 years ago, or 1900 years ago, books were not like this. These type of books started only 500 years ago, after printing was discovered, you know, five, 600 years ago.

Before that, there were no books like this. Today, we think of a book is like this. In those days, the book was scrolls.

Maybe you've seen pictures of that in the synagogue and all. A big scroll, they roll up to that, get to the next page and roll up and roll up. It was one big long sheet, the whole sheet, book was one big long sheet rolled up.

You roll up this side, then you read the next page. It keeps on going. The whole book is like that.

That's a scroll was a book. You can say the scrolls were opened. The nearest thing that you can see to that today is a videotape.

You see, the olden days, we have the videocassettes with tapes inside, that wound up on one side and then goes on onto the other side. The books were like that. So, we can call this the videotapes were opened of your life.

From the day you were born, the videotape runs. Everything that you did, everything that you said, everything that you thought, all your attitudes to people are all recorded on that tape. You know where that tape is kept? In your memory.

Your memory has stored up everything that you did and thought and said from the day you were born. Some of it, you may also have forgotten what is there. As we get older, we don't remember everything, but it's all there.

When we die, our soul goes away. But one day, when Christ comes again, that soul will come back into that dust, which was your body. And the Bible says it will be resurrected.

And your body will once again have a mind and a memory, that same old memory that you had. And you know, at the day of judgment, all that God will do is press the rewind button and goes back to the day you were born. And all that you did will be projected on a screen.

I'm not telling a story. This is actually going to happen at the judgment seat of Christ. Everything that you did, everything that you said to anybody, everything that you said behind their back, everything that you thought about people, all the bad thoughts you had, and all the attitudes you had to people, and the wrong motives with which you did things.

This videotape records even your motives and attitudes, not just your actions. And when it's all played back, the Lord says, now I'm going to reward this person according to what he has done. That's what he read, no? Good or bad.

This is what's going to happen when Christ comes again. It's in the scriptures. They'll be judged according to the deeds done in the body, whether good or bad.

So, most of us will feel like running away from there when they play that videotape of our memory, which from the time we were born, because all of us have done a lot of things which we are ashamed of. Even little children, much more adults. The only hope we have is, is, the Bible says in 1 John 1.9. Children, you know this verse? If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse.

Cleanse means to wipe out all unrighteousness. So, when I confess a sin, that gets wiped out from that tape. Every sin that you did, attitude, motive, thought, word, it gets wiped out if you confess it.

If you don't confess it, it's there. Or you blame somebody else, it'll be there. In other words, you don't take the blame for your sin.

You say, Lord, that is because of my wife, it's not my fault. It is my husband or that person did it. Then it'll remain there.

But if you take the blame, that's the meaning of confessing. Lord, that was me. Blot it out.

I'll give you an example. There was a thief hanging on a cross. Two thieves actually.

Both were equally bad. Like Jesus, they may have been 33 years old. Both of them lived 33 years in evil.

Evil, evil, evil, evil. Their videotape was full of evil, murder, robbery, all types of things. There's nothing good in that.

And one thief says, bring us down from the cross. What's the meaning? I don't deserve to be crucified. I'm not so bad.

I mean, maybe five years in jail, but not death. Like somebody said, I don't deserve to be hanged. I just deserve a few years in jail.

I did something bad, but not so bad. That's what he's saying. Bring me down from the cross.

Put me in jail for five years, but don't kill me. But the other thief on the other side says to this man, that's in Luke 23, verse 40. Don't you fear God? We, verse 41, Luke 23, 41, we are receiving this punishment justly.

We deserve this punishment. So different from Adam. Adam blamed his wife, but this thief on the cross says, I deserve this punishment.

I don't deserve five years in prison. I deserve death because I'm so bad. Have any of you ever spoken to God like that? Lord, it's not that other person.

It's me. I'm so bad. I deserve this punishment.

Most human beings are like the other thief. I'm bad, but not so bad. That's what he was saying.

Bring me down from the cross. Put me in jail for five years. Most human beings and possibly some people sitting here, I'm bad, but I'm not so bad.

This guy says, I deserve it. I don't deserve five years in jail. I deserve to be killed because I'm so bad.

I'm not blaming my parents for bringing me up badly. I'm not bringing the bad company I made as a teenager that led me astray. I'm not blaming a single soul in the world.

I am the guilty person. I'm deserving this. And Jesus looked at him.

I'm paraphrasing his words. It's almost as though Jesus says, really? You mean you deserve this? You feel you're so bad? Yes, Lord. Come with me to paradise today.

Paradise is made for people like you who are willing to take the blame completely. Not for people like Adam who blamed the wife or the wife who blamed the serpent. They were kicked out of paradise, but you

can come there.

You got it? Did you get that message? Who entered paradise? The thief on the cross. Who got kicked out? Adam and Eve. They wouldn't take the blame.

You know, God is, I see a message in that thief on the cross. And God is so delighted when somebody is willing to take the blame. Lord, it's me.

I'm not, I deserve this. And there are so few people God finds like that. And can you imagine that day, that same day in paradise, the angels are wondering as they see Jesus who lived in perfect purity for 33 years, walking hand in hand with a thief and a murderer who lived in sin for 33 and a half years.

What a miracle. That is the message of the gospel. There's no religion in the world, no religion in the world that will take a man who lived as a murderer for 33 years into heaven just by repentance.

Only Christianity. That's why it's the true religion. All other religions say, no, you got to deserve, you've lived so many years in sin, you deserve to go to hell.

Or like the Catholics say, you'll be punished for a few hundred years in hell and then you'll come to heaven. Purgatory. No, God says today you'll be with me in paradise.

Take the blame. Everything that you take the blame for 100% and don't blame your wife and don't blame your husband and don't blame this, don't blame other people, it'll be wiped out from the tape. It will not be on your tape.

And in the day when your videotape of your memory is played back, none of the bad things will be there. It'll only be the good things. Because all the bad things will be blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ.

And God says, I will not remember them anymore. So someone who wants to take advantage of God's grace, what will they say? Uh-huh. It's like that, is it? That's great.

Then I can live as I like. And every time I slip up, I'll just say, Lord, forgive me. That's blotted out.

And the final day, only what's good will be seen. But wait a minute. When the whole world sees so many blank spots on your tape, they'll wonder, what were you doing all that time? During all those huge blank spots for so many hours, so many days, blank spots? You're not going to escape.

You'd be pretty humiliated if you have so many blank spots on that tape. In the early days of our life, yes, a lot of blank spots, but after you're converted, those blank spots should be less and less and less and less and less. But after a while, there's hardly a blank spot at all.

Maybe once in a month, or once in a year, one little blank spot. That's the mark of spiritual growth. How many of you are getting ready for the coming of Christ? You don't need to do great things.

You know, there are people who use this expression, I want to sit at the foot of the cross and see Jesus. I say, hang on. You first sit at the foot of the cross of the murderer, the thief, and learn something from him first.

Then we'll go to the foot of the cross of Jesus. Sit at the foot of the cross of the thief and say, oh thief, please teach me something. Teach me how to take the blame without blaming anybody else.

Then I'm ready to go to the foot of the cross of Jesus and see how he died for my sins. Don't go to the foot of the cross of Jesus first. You're not ready for it.

Because most of us are like the other thief. Yeah, I did some things wrong, but not so bad. Really? You'll never be forgiven.

The message on the cross is, you can be saved in the last moment. Because there was a thief who was saved at the last moment. But you also may not be saved at the last moment.

Because there was one thief who went to hell. Have you heard of this expression, the 11th hour? 11th hour means just before midnight. And people say, I want to be saved at the 11th hour.

And there's a saying that if you wait until the 11th hour, you'll die at 1030. You won't reach the 11th hour. So we must confess as soon as we have done it.

Cleanse it. And say, Lord, I don't want huge blank spots on my tape. I want those.

Yeah, in my past life, there were many things. But I want that to be less and less and less and less. I want to come to the life where there's hardly a blank spot.

Day by day goes by and there's hardly anything I have to really confess as serious sin. What a wonderful life. That is spiritual growth.

We're not perfect, because we can still slip up. But it's something like a child learning to walk. You know, a child learning to walk falls down, falls down many times, then falls less and less and less.

And then finally learns to walk. And by the time he's two years old, he's running around. But even if you're 70 years old, you can still fall.

But it's rare. So that's how we are ready for the coming of Jesus Christ. And that may happen anytime.

So let's be ready for the coming of Christ. A lot of people who heard about the first coming of Christ were not ready. I'll tell you a lot of Christians who hear about the second coming of Christ are not ready.

Some people glory in the fact I'm sitting in CFC, which is one of the best churches won't help you. Because the Lord is saying you are sitting in a good church and you still behave like this, then your punishment is greater. If you're sitting in some dead church, and you behave like this, your punishment is less.

But you sit in a good church and you've heard so many wonderful things. And then you live like this. Punishment is greater.

To whom more is given, more is required. So I don't say that to terrify anybody, I say that to encourage you. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to be quick to acknowledge sin.

Quick to blame yourself and not the other person. Don't go around looking for spots of evil in other people. Jesus said that.

Don't look at the specks in people's eyes when there's such a big log in your eye. Just leave it to God to judge all those other people. You mind your own business and judge yourself.

And I'll tell you this, if you take what I say seriously now, believe me, you will thank me in the day of judgment that you heard this message. If you don't take it seriously and say, oh well I know all this, well then all I can say is may God have mercy on you. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you there is grace and truth with you. Not only truth but grace. Not only grace but truth.

Help us to walk in the light. Thank you for the light you've given us in your word. Help us to be ready for your coming, each one here.

None of us will miss out on what you have. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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