

# A.W. TOZER

*Compiled and Edited by James L. Snyder*

# PREPARING FOR JESUS' RETURN

DAILY LIVE THE BLESSED HOPE



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14 15 16 17 18 19 20                      7 6 5 4 3 2 1

# C O N T E N T S

Introduction: Living the Blessed Hope . . . . .	5
1. The Season of the Blessed Hope . . . . .	11
2. The Blessed Hope and the Curse of Curiosity . . . . .	23
3. The Blessed Hope Clearly Defines Christianity . . . . .	33
4. The Shining Light of the Blessed Hope . . . . .	43
5. The Divine Imperative of the Blessed Hope . . . . .	55
6. The Glorious Sign of the Blessed Hope . . . . .	69
7. The Mystic Shroud of the Blessed Hope . . . . .	81
8. The Authority of the Blessed Hope . . . . .	91
9. The True Hope of the Blessed Hope . . . . .	101
10. The Nature Behind the Blessed Hope . . . . .	109
11. The Sound of the Blessed Hope . . . . .	117
12. The Triumph of the Blessed Hope . . . . .	125
13. The Eternal Blessedness of the Blessed Hope . . . . .	135
14. The Manifestation of the Blessed Hope . . . . .	147
15. The Warning of the Blessed Hope . . . . .	157
16. The Little Book of the Blessed Hope . . . . .	169
17. The Holy City and the Blessed Hope . . . . .	181
18. Daily Live the Blessed Hope . . . . .	191
Excerpts from <i>Inspired by Tozer</i> . . . . .	201



## INTRODUCTION

# LIVING THE BLESSED HOPE

No biblical truth drew closer to the heart of A. W. Tozer than the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ. This focus on our Blessed Hope dictated much of his passion to encourage believers to rise above the times and fix their gaze on Jesus, our soon-coming King. He taught that for those who are ready for Jesus' return, there is no calamity raging around them that can shake the quiet assurance and confidence that Jesus Christ *will* return.

Tozer was not known in his day as a Bible prophecy teacher, and yet he did his share of teaching on the subject. He referred to Bible prophecy as “prehistory,” and he created this series of messages on the book of Revelation to spur every believer on to get ready and stay ready in this season that leads up to the Lord's return. The Blessed Hope is what Tozer looked for and what he lived for.

Tozer believed that an important reason why prophecy should be pursued today is because of the abuses down the years. Almost every generation has had its share of “the End is Near” people claiming to know the time and day of our Lord's return, despite the clear teaching in the Bible that “of that day and hour knoweth no man” (Matt. 24:36).

Some headline-seeking preachers, it seems to me, hope that Christ will give them some leeway or at least enough time so

that they can write a book and become known as the one who accurately predicted the return of the Lord. Thankfully, our Lord does not give credence to such absolute nonsense.

Right up front, Tozer points out the difference between the evangelical mystic and the evangelical rationalist when it comes to the book of Revelation. Here is where some will probably find occasion to pause and wonder which side they are going to be on. Tozer explains, “The evangelical mystic, like John, stands in the presence of the awesome God and cries ‘holy, holy, holy,’ and falls down at His feet as dead. But the evangelical rationalist figures it all out and says, ‘We can understand it, we know how it is,’ then writes a long book about it, telling exactly what it is like.”

As you might well know, Tozer aligned himself with the evangelical mystic. This is how he approached Bible prophecy—not to fit in every little piece and person, but rather to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ as coming again. It is, after all, the revelation, or unveiling, of Jesus Christ.

I think an important emphasis in this book is that no matter what your beliefs are about the timing of the coming of the Lord, you *should not* make your particular view of Bible prophecy the litmus test for believer fellowship. We can disagree without being disagreeable. We can hold different views without disrupting our fellowship. This is the ploy of the enemy—to get God’s people to fight about their particular slice of Bible prophecy and not realize it as part of the whole pie.

Instead of Bible prophecy being the great divider, it should unite us all around our risen and glorified Lord who will soon appear. No matter which angle you are looking from, the center of your focus is Jesus Christ. So let us not argue over the right sleeve of Christ’s robe in contrast to the left sleeve. We need both sleeves to make a robe, and we need the whole of Bible prophecy to bring the focus onto the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tozer's message does not offer speculation, but hope. In the midst of our times, we need to look up, for our "redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28). We are almost out of time, but in the meantime, we are to occupy until He comes. We are not to be occupied with trying to figure out the exact day or time. Rather, we are to daily live with the knowledge that He could come at any moment, while at the same time we continue to accomplish the work He has given us to do.

When Tozer started his ministry, he was a fiery evangelist. He held evangelistic meetings in churches, campgrounds and wherever he could get an audience, which sometimes meant on street corners. As he grew older, his emphasis began to change toward the deeper Christian life. Even though Tozer preached these sermons during the last two or three years of his life, there is still a strong evangelistic element to them. No matter where he starts, no matter what his topic, he always brings a person to bear upon these thoughts: *What will you do with Jesus Christ right now?* and, *Are you ready for His coming?*

The best compliment Tozer could ever receive from this book is that it created within your heart an overwhelming passion for the Lord Jesus Christ, our Blessed Hope.

"Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

Rev. James L. Snyder





# PREPARING FOR JESUS' RETURN



# THE SEASON OF THE BLESSED HOPE

*Heavenly Father, I bow before You in humble expectation  
of Thy grace and goodness. May my heart be prepared in  
righteousness and holiness to receive Thee when Thou comest.*

*I live each day in the expectation of Thy soon return.*

*May I daily live the Blessed Hope. Amen.*

Bible prophecy is a subject that carries a great deal of religious baggage. Eliminating that baggage and getting to the core is the aim of this book. To do that will require two things: *caution* and *courage*. We must cautiously take care not to allow the focus of our study to stray from Jesus Christ; and we must courageously keep the central purpose of the Blessed Hope—our Lord’s return—in view so that we don’t get stuck in the quagmire of religious trivialities. As I have prepared this teaching, I have prayed for wisdom to know the difference.

The purpose of Bible prophecy is not to alarm us but rather to alert us to the times so that we can prepare for the return of Jesus—one of the great themes in the Bible and one that brings comfort and encouragement to the believer; hence the phrase “the Blessed Hope.” In a world filled with all kinds of uncertainty, the believer possesses the comfort of the Blessed Hope, which means Jesus will soon return.

I readily acknowledge that Bible prophecy is a fertile field for religious cults and scams and has been the downfall of much in Christianity today. Heresies associated with Bible prophecy, especially the book of Revelation, have caused many to turn away from the subject altogether. Although heresies abound in this area, I will not deviate from what the Bible teaches, because prophecy is the Blessed Hope of the believer.

After reading many books on prophecy and revelation, I have concluded that some prophecy teachers think they know more about prophecy than the apostle John who wrote the book of Revelation. How they came upon their knowledge is more than I can understand. They know more than Daniel; they are wiser than Isaiah; and they see further into the future than the beloved apostle John. These pseudo-prophetic teachers make predictions that these wise old men of God never would have made. They understood the purpose of Bible prophecy, while many of these modern prophetic teachers do not; consequently, they major in surface incidentals.

I shall not spend my time or yours focusing on the outer shell of Bible prophecy. Rather, I will delve into the deep core of what it is all about. The supreme purpose of prophecy is to alert us to the fact that Jesus is coming. By looking at what the Bible has to say about prophecy, we begin to understand the nature and character of the one who will soon return, even the Lord Jesus Christ.

## His Coming Is Sure

During His public ministry, our Lord taught His disciples that He would return to earth again. Consequently, all of the apostles taught that Jesus would return. Down through the years, the church fathers held to this truth that Jesus Christ will come

back to earth again. Even the very angels dressed in white that saw Him go off into heaven said, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

For the serious Bible student, there is no question that Jesus will return. To read the Bible and not come to that conclusion is the epitome of hypocrisy. When I talk about the Second Coming, I realize that a variety of views are tossed about by some of these so-called prophecy experts.

In trying to understand and explain the Second Coming, some have said that it was death. Of course, that would mean that every time a Christian died it was the return of the Lord again to earth. The Scriptures teach that Christ came and will come for two events: the first was to die and the second is to reign. Therefore, if Christ came every time a Christian died, it would mean Christ’s return had to be repeated every time a Christian died. This is a misunderstanding of Christ’s return.

I am not sure how these “prophecy experts” got to this point of view, but it undermines the whole concept of the Blessed Hope. Our hope is not in the fact that one day we shall die, but that Jesus Christ, in all of His glory, shall return to earth to rule and reign. This is what I am looking for; it is what I live for.

Based upon my understanding of Scripture, I firmly believe that we are living in great days that are grand and dramatic. I refer to this as the season of the Blessed Hope. Not even the ubiquitous news media can possibly have a true concept of how great, grand and solemn the times are in which we are now living. The very atmosphere of our times is conducive to the Blessed Hope. “Look up, and lift up your heads” (Luke 21:28).

Although we know for sure that He is coming, we know not when. There is the twist. We are helpless to predict when He is actually coming back. Since the apostolic days, nobody has been smart enough or educated enough in the Scriptures to know the exact day and time and hour that Jesus will return. Some offer their suggestions, but all have failed, because nobody can know for sure.

The Bible does not give us a prophetic schedule that, similar to a train schedule, gives out the name of every stop, the time it will arrive and when it will leave. Therefore, to rigidly interpret what the Scripture says is to dishonor the integrity of the Scriptures. The Bible is a book of majestic outlook, telling us of the future in great brush strokes much like an artist painting a picture across the sky. The size is so tremendous that you have to stand back to take it all in. The fine details are lost in the grandeur of the Blessed Hope that Jesus is coming. Even though I am not sure of the time schedule, as long as I am on the train, going in the right direction, it does not really matter what the schedule is.

I do not know what tomorrow will be like. Nobody knows, not even the angels; only our Father who art in heaven knows. If we common people feel helpless to predict tomorrow, do not lose heart, because the great leaders of the world are helpless as well.

And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand? (Rev. 6:15-17).

These great men of the earth will cry out for the mountains to fall on them to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb. They are great men all right, but their greatness hid from them the marvelous truth of the Blessed Hope. While they were all about being great, they missed the one true great thing—Jesus Christ.

To give any kind of prediction about world events apart from the Scripture is to practice a form of religious insanity that serves only to confuse people who then finally give up and say, “I can’t understand prophecy; I guess it’s not for me.” Any prediction of our Lord’s return that relies on education or technology is sure to be wrong and leads only to discouragement, and finally to abandonment of what the Bible has to say about Jesus’ return. The Blessed Hope is for the believer, and it brings comfort, assurance and confidence to the heart of the believer in the midst of this world’s turmoil. Our focus is not on the calamity around us, but on His glorious coming. Prophecy is not for the critical or curious eye, but for that eye focused on and looking for the Lord Jesus Christ, the Coming One.

Therefore, the point of Bible prophecy is not to alarm us but to alert us to the circumstances leading up to the Lord’s return. This alertness is to spur us on to be ready; and the Bible says a lot about how we can be ready for His return.

## Signs of the Lord’s Return

Our Lord, in Matthew 24, outlined for us the characteristics of the times leading up to His return. While not divulging the days or the times, He has outlined compelling evidence for those who are worthy to receive it and believe it. There are five characteristics of this season leading up to the return of Jesus Christ.

## Messianic Delusions

Jesus pointed out, "For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. . . . And many false prophets shall rise, and deceive many" (Matt. 24:5,11). Further on, He explained, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (v. 24).

Since the time when Cain killed Abel, there has never been a time when some wild-eyed fanatic did not think he was God or attempt to be the Messiah and redeem the world. This messianic delusion has always been on the earth. But Jesus taught that there would be a season prior to His coming when there would be a high peak season for such delusions. I cannot help but believe that we are seeing some of that right now.

Every generation has had somebody saying, in effect, "I am the Messiah, and I know how to bring peace to the world; and I can lead everybody into the Promised Land." Some of these people have been political, but a great many have been religious. It seems to me that politics and religion have quite a few things in common, particularly when it comes to controlling people and their destiny. The fact of the existence of false Christs is proof of the near coming of Jesus. The counterfeit always argues the real thing. If there is not something real, it could not be counterfeited. The fact that there are a growing number who are claiming to be Christ today is proof that we are coming near to the return of Jesus. And each year seems to get more intense.

## Military Prominence

Jesus also indicated that in the last days we should hear of wars and rumors of wars. "See that ye be not troubled," He warned, "for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against king-



dom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places” (Matt. 24:6-7). In our generation, we are seeing an increase of military power like never before.

Right after the First World War, there broke out in our country antiwar movements and the rise of the pacifist. Many preachers were pacifists then and declared, “We outlaw war.” They even produced manifestos, and according to them, there could be no more war. War was outdated. All of their arguments pointed to the fact that “war will be no more.”

A person only has to read history and discover that there has not been a five-minute period from that day to this when there has been peace in the world. The military has taken over little by little. In our country, we had to have an Army but did not care much for it. Basically, we were civilian, and the people ruled. Slowly, this shifted, and more and more we are hearing the military speech of generals and great men telling us which way we are to take and what we need to do. “Wars and rumours of wars. . . . nation shall raise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (Matt. 24:6-7).

Try listening to the current news media that does not, in some way, focus on some war around the world. This increase of military activity, Jesus said, was one of the evidences of His soon return.

## Malicious Domination

Another characteristic of the season of the Blessed Hope is that many shall betray one another to the point of actually hating one another. It is a proven fact that totalitarian control has been a technique controlling whole nations, and we witnessed that in Russia and China under the Communist rule.

The whole purpose of that depended on subverting the individual so that he did not think in terms of his family or his

church, but in terms of world conquest, so that he would sell out his aged mother to get in good with those in charge. It has always been men betraying men: Cain slew Abel in an awful act of anger; Judas betrayed Christ; and men have betrayed each other down through the years. But I believe this is the betrayal season, and the philosophy of betrayal is everywhere throughout the whole world.

### Martyrdom of Believers

Jesus said, "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" (Matt. 24:9). I need not remind anyone of the persecutions throughout the world, since the day when Hitler rose and turned his hatred against the Jews down to this present hour. The news media tells us what is happening all around the world and how Christians are suffering and even martyred. Persecution is one technique of totalitarianism both in the church and in the state. The closer we get to the return of Jesus, the more persecution will increase and focus on believers around the world.

### Moral Decline in the Church

Nobody would question the fact that our city streets are unsafe, and no matter where you go, there is always some threat of violence. The times are getting increasingly wicked, and we now live in the generation of locked doors. When I was a youngster, there was no such thing as locking our doors. Today there is no such thing as an unlocked door.

The iniquity I am referring to here is more than just the world; it has everything to do with the Church. In this generation, we are facing a backslidden Church. I am talking about individuals in the Church, and I want to press two very important questions.

The first question is, How would you describe your passion for the person of Christ? The Scriptures teach that one of the evidences of the last days is this: "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24:12). So, how ardent is your love for the Lord Jesus Christ?

The second question is simply, What has your Christianity cost you? We have become a bunch of well-groomed showpiece Christians behind glass. Our Christianity has cost us nothing. David, that mighty man of God, said, "Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing" (2 Sam. 24:24).

Since last week, what has your Christian faith cost you? The man of God says, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25). Many, I am sad to say, are forsaking the assembly of believers.

We come to church when it is convenient. We serve the Lord at our convenience. The center of our entire life is "convenience." This was not so with the Early Church fathers or with the martyrs down through the years, or with the great Reformers and revivalists. Their Christianity cost them dearly. We who are benefiting from the high cost they paid do not appreciate the cost and have trampled underfoot the preciousness of their sacrifice.

What has our faith cost us? Are we offering to God a bloodless sacrifice like Cain, who offered to God that which cost him not one ounce of blood or sweat or tears? Evangelical American Christians allow missionaries to do all the suffering today. We let them leave their homes and go into the jungles and pagan cities around the world. We let them stay away years at a stretch and sleep in thatched roof huts in dangerous neighborhoods.

On the other hand, we who stay behind have big bank accounts, drive expensive cars and somehow believe that thus were the prophets that came before us. What we need to do is fall on our knees and search our hearts; I believe we will be shocked at what we find. As for me, I want my Christianity to cost me something right down to the last gasp. I do not want an easy road or a convenient ministry or something that costs me nothing.

I want to sing along with A. B. Simpson (1843–1919), who wrote a wonderful missionary hymn called “The Regions Beyond”:

To the hardest the places He calls me to go,  
Not thinking of comfort or ease;  
The world may pronounce me a dreamer, a fool,  
Enough if the Master I please.

Signs abound that the evangelical Church, especially in America, is falling away. Today's evangelical Church is being inundated with activities galore. Not even the apostle Paul had as many irons in the fire as many Christians do today. I believe we ought to be working right up to the very end; but many of our activities are simply done for activity's sake. Our activities are not tied in to the Blessed Hope, and they in no way prepare us for the return of Jesus Christ. Our activities are to please ourselves and court the acceptance of the world.

We also need to watch out for the modern moral code. This has infiltrated the Church in this generation as never before. I see a frightening similarity between the world and the Church today along the lines of morality. The average Christian today accepts the world's standard to live by. Yet, our standard is the Bible, and only the Bible prepares us and enables us to live daily in light of the Blessed Hope.

We must get on our knees before our open Bible and allow the Holy Spirit to break our hearts and create a passion for Christ as we've never had before. We must ask for a passion of such a nature that the things of this world will begin to diminish in their attraction for us. A passion for Christ will enable us to rise above our culture and look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.

As Bible-believing Christians, it is imperative that we stay fully alert to the times in which we live. Our enemy is a master deceiver and a con artist of the highest order, diverting our attention from the Blessed Hope with the problems we face every day. Understanding Bible prophecy will create a passion for holy living. To know the Blessed Hope is to live in full expectation of Christ's imminent return. All signs today point to this being the season of the Blessed Hope. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

## Come Then, Lord Jesus

Horatius Bonar (1808–1889)

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The church has waited long  
Her absent Lord to see;  
And still in loneliness she waits,  
A friendless stranger she.

How long, O Lord our God,  
Holy and true and good,

Wilt thou not judge thy suffering church  
Her sighs and tears and blood?

We long to hear thy voice,  
To see thee face to face,  
To share thy crown and glory then  
As now we share thy grace.

Come, Lord, and wipe away  
The curse, the sin, the stain,  
And make this blighted world of ours  
Thine own fair world again.