

What Is Your Incentive For Living?

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Incentives are important for living. For students, the incentives are certificates, diplomas and degrees. For working adults, they are increments and promotions. For athletes, gold medals become their motivation so for every group of people, there are incentives for living. It is not easy to accomplish something that requires hard work, commitment and discipline if there is no incentive to motivate us. Likewise for Christians, it is not easy to walk with Jesus and do the will of God, but God said that He will be our strength to help us. “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of Hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).

As Jesus related what was going to happen before He comes back, He warned His disciples saying, “But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake. But it will turn out for you as an occasion for testimony. Therefore settle it in your hearts not to meditate beforehand on what you will answer; For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. And you will be hated by all for My name’s sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost. By your patience possess your souls. But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written will be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the time of the Gentiles are fulfilled. And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s heart failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth. For the powers of the heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:12-28).

The incentive for the disciples to pursue living for Jesus and to keep trusting and believing God was the promise of Jesus, “Your redemption draws near”. What does this mean? Paul says in Titus 2:13-14, “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” The reason why we can keep on in our Christian walk is because Jesus is coming back for us. He is our incentive. The Bible says that this is a blessed hope, which means confident expectation. It is not the kind of hope that the world has. It is not “Hope so” or “think so” or “may be so” that He is coming back, but it is an affirmation that He is coming back. It is the imminent, personal and pre-millennial return of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matthew 25:13).

We have an incentive for living because Jesus is coming back very soon! Worldly people look for worldly incentives, such as fame and fortune but at the end of it all, they discover that there is only emptiness and hopelessness. Judas thought that if he had thirty pieces of silver, he would have found his purpose for living. This became his incentive to betray Jesus. When he finally got what he wanted, he was full of guilt and emptiness. The Bible tells us that “he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:5). When we seek after worldly incentives we will end up in dissatisfaction. Think about Elvis Presley, the popular rock star whose incentives were fame and fortune. He ended up dissatisfied and he died a miserable and hopeless death. On the other hand, the incentive for a Christian is satisfying and fulfilling. Polycarp, one of the early church bishops, who was threatened with death and burning unless he denied Christ, said these words, “Four score and ten years, Christ has done me no wrong, why should I deny Him?” Polycarp not only found an incentive to live for the Lord and serve Him but he even found a reason to die for Him.

Hebrews 11:24-27 says, “by faith Moses, when became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.” Moses made a commitment and he had an incentive for living. He had faith in the Living God. He believed that it was worth suffering affliction with the people of God.

How is our service for Jesus Christ? Are we suffering for Jesus? The Holy Spirit is asking us to lift up our heads because Jesus is coming back soon. Why is this blessed hope a confident expectation? How can we be sure of this blessed hope? There are three reasons.

Firstly, Jesus Himself said that He was coming back again “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again to receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3).

Secondly, the angels confirmed that He is coming back again as recorded in Acts 1:9-11, “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.’”

Thirdly, the apostles also proclaimed the soon return of Jesus Christ. “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18).

Jesus is coming back for us. Therefore, it is worth living for Him. The blessed hope gives us the incentive to live a holy life. “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age” (Titus 2:11-14). John says, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

Do we have the right incentive to live, to give, to go and pray? How are we managing our time, finances and work in the light of eternity? “And this Gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14). We must live in obedience to the Great Commission; evangelism must go on till Jesus comes again. Let us live our lives as the salt and the light of the world in view of the soon return of Jesus.