1 Thessalonians - Commentaries by Christopher James Davis

Basics for Believers, Chapter 1: The Personal Return of the Lord Jesus

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1 Thess. 4:13-18

Preface

Desiring to be a servant of Jesus Christ to all who own a common Saviour, I dare not refuse to give, in my feeble testimony, the truth respecting the coming of the Lord as that which should be the proximate hope of every believer.

To many of my readers the theme will be not only new, but contrary to former notions. Let me advise such just to “Search the Scriptures whether these things are so;” and, if so, let the simplicity of faith accept them with gratitude to Him who has borne so long with our ignorance.

As regards many truths we have had to exclaim, “Why did I not see them before!” So if you avoid debating and argument—as children of faith should do—your proper hope will be made plain to you, and the name of the Lord magnified by you.

The question is one affecting the glory of the person of the Lord Jesus. To have His redeemed with Him in bodies of glory like His own—to rule this world now in rebellion—to gather Israel, now scattered and peeled—to execute judgment on rejecters of His grace—to swallow up death in victory—to bind Satan, our common foe—to judge the wicked dead—Scripture says HE must do all these. Into these secrets He has led His saints. Do we grudge Him His glory in those things?

Then let us turn from our own thoughts to things concerning Him. May He deign to use the following finger-posts as guides for my dear readers to His own truth!

May Himself be abundantly ministered to the souls of all that search His Word, in which to His saints He says, “Surely I come quickly.”

C. J. DAVIS.

The Personal Return of the Lord Jesus

The converts at Thessalonica to whom Paul preached “turned to God from idols to serve the living and the true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:9-10). They looked back at the past when they were against God; they believed at the time Paul wrote them that they were children of God; and they were looking forward to and hoping to see Himself in person who loved them and gave Himself for them.

Having the Blessing They Longed to See the Blesser

No truth could be more solemnly affecting than this—solemnly affecting to every one of you, beloved friends, that now listen to me.

If saved now, if sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty now, what can be more calculated to draw out worship, adoration, and praise than to be reminded that He who appeared once to put away sin, and who appears now before God for us, will once more come to take us soul and body, fashioned like His own, to be with Himself forever! Do we not rejoice in the hope of seeing one we love? (Read Heb. 9:24, 26, 28; and Phil. 3:20-21). And this is our hope.

But if found rejecting Christ, whom God offers for your righteousness, let me ask you—how shall you meet those eyes of fire? (Rev. 1:14.) For soon after the saved ones are caught up to be with the Lord forever, the Lord will then be revealed in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1:7-8). While I put this blessed theme forward tonight as the hope of believers, and that which should be effective in shaping our walk in the present scene, let us desire earnestly that the Holy Ghost may use it to allure to the blessed Lord some that are not saved; and to alarm from their supine condition of calm indifference such as are asleep—it may be just a moment before their execution. Each of us, every man from Adam to the last born in this world must—I say again, must—have to do with Jesus, either as those that, knowing He has washed them from their sins in His own blood (Rev. 1:5), can say to Him, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev . 22: 20); or must be connected with Him, like those that shall say to rocks and mountains, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb”(Rev. 6:16), for the word is emphatic.

“Every Eye Shall See Him” (Rev. 1:7”)

You see, therefore, how differently the blessed Lord will stand related to men when He rises again from the throne. In the days of Noah eight persons were calm and peaceful before the flood came, and were so during all the time it lasted; but who can imagine the horror of the shut-out ones when the flood came! “Noah, Noah, open to us,” many of the carpenters of the Ark, and others of Noah’s neighbors, might cry. But he could not, for God had shut him in and them out. So if the Lord came now, some would know Him as Saviour, some as Judge! Those that are one with Christ in resurrection will go up in their order at His coming. God’s plan is

(1) Christ the first fruits—that is passed;

(2) then they that are Christ’s at His coming—of this, our hope, I am speaking now; and

(3) then the end (1 Corinthians 15:23-24, compare with v. 20).

The saved living ones will be taken away with the raised “dead in Christ” (or the Christian dead), but the world will continue with its business; that wicked one1—Antichrist—will then be revealed. Judgments on living nations will be poured out, and so terrible indeed will they be that men will seek death, but death will flee from them (Rev. 9:6). Men shall then be scorched with fire, and shall blaspheme the name of God (Rev. 16:8-11). Shall any of you be among the number, beloved? God forbid! Do come to the Saviour now, ere He comes in judgment to you. The rest of the dead (that is, the wicked dead) shall not be raised for 10002 years (Rev. 20:5), and when raised, it shall be to stand before the great white throne to receive sentence of eternal banishment. The book of life will be opened to show that their names are not in it (Rev. 20:11-15). The saints of God are exhorted to be found “waiting” for the Lord—“looking for that blessed hope” (Titus 2:13); but to the world, to the ungodly, to the rejecters, He will appear as a thief in the night. He will find them, as in the days of Noah, eating, drinking, marrying, and doing everything that men seek happiness from—who are not owning Christ, who are rejecting Him and His truth, “as in the days of Noah.” I dare say that some of you think that we believers are the biggest fools in Christendom. So did the neighbors of Noah regard him as a madman for building such a huge ship on dry land, and his preaching was laughed at; but the flood overtook them notwithstanding. The fact is solemnly recorded, and I lift up my voice and warn you (Luke 17:26-27).

The heart of man has not been changed since Noah’s time—men scoff now as men did then. I wish I could so show these truths, as to alarm such as are at ease on the verge of the dispensation of grace. Think of a man being fast asleep at the bottom of a coal pit while the fire was approaching him! A friend wakes him up, and offers to lead him to the “lift,” which is being quickly let down to carry up the poor miners in danger. He says, “Don’t trouble me; leave me alone. I don’t believe you moreover.” His almost broken-hearted friend goes up himself on the “lift,” and just reaches the top as the fumes, rushing up the shaft, declare that the whole of the pit is delivered to the flames which consume one who for the first time then believed—when it was too late.

What say you of such a man? “That he is a fool.” Is this your calm and sober judgment? Thou art such a man. Yet I say to you the last gospel lift has not yet left you. You may be saved now by believing in Jesus. Another opportunity may never be afforded you. I do, in the stead of Christ, beseech you. “Turn and live” NOW (2 Cor. 5:20-22).

The personal return of the Lord Jesus is necessary too for the bringing into blessing in this earth, Israel, the nation now scattered and peeled, and with them the nations. Such is God’s counsel. Israel must be the first among the nations (Deut. 28:1; Zech. 8; Isa. 2:2; Mal. 3:12), notwithstanding the unbelief of the boasting Gentiles. There shall come the Deliverer out of Zion, and all Israel shall then be blessed. (Compare Rom. 11:20 with Isa. 59:20, 60-61, etc.) Jerusalem is to become a praise in the earth, and over Israel is to reign “the Lord God Omnipotent,” to whose reign all nations shall bow. His kingdom shall be from sea to sea—from the river to the ends of the earth. Before His reign over the earth commences, those terrible judgments of the Book of Revelation (chaps. 6 to 19) are to be poured out, when, I judge, that ploughshares shall be turned into swords, and pruning hooks into spears (Joel 3:10).

Of course THE SAINTS SHALL ALREADY HAVE BEEN CAUGHT UP. In 1 Thessalonians 4, we read of the catching up of the believers, and, in the fifth chapter, of the judgments coming upon Israel and upon the nations—as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape.

Again, we find the Lord promising those that have an ear to hear, in Revelation 3:10, that He will keep them (lit., take them away) from the hour of trial which shall come upon all the world. This sweet reminder of the blessed Lord is so very preciously given, in the last, but one (Philadelphia), of the seven-fold view of the church for testimony in the earth, just before He spews the empty shell-like professing thing (Laodicea) out of His mouth. The word is to us today; may our ears be open to hear it. These are the Philadelphian days, and the shadow of Laodicea is already casting. May this word awaken us, and lead us, in much dependence, to Him who is holy, and Him who is true, who hath the key of David. But again, see the order in the book of Revelation.

1. The Lord is presented as the Judge (Rev . 1) in the midst of the seven churches; and, as such, He now graciously approves of what the individual members do in His name, and will manifest them at His coming. He also marks what has a name to live, but is dead, and what admits Balaam, Jezebel, etc.

2. In Revelation 2 and 3 we see the history of Christendom—the outward testimony in this world, with the hims “that have ears to hear,” from the Apostolic (Ephesus) times to Laodicea, when it shall be wholly removed. In the midst, as I said before, the Lord is Judge.

3. In parenthesis, so to say, the church is seen up in glory praising in chapters 4 and 5, removed from the judgment which commences in Revelation 6, and continues to Revelation 19. These judgments occupy Daniel’s seventieth week—this is prophecy, and not our hope.

4. Then the Lord is seen reigning a thousand years (Rev. 20).

5. The judgment of the wicked dead, before the white throne, is brought into view; and

6. Lastly, the eternal state (Rev. 21:1-8).

Believers in the Lord Jesus, who will bow to the authority of His word—notwithstanding all that is taught to the contrary—will see that these terrible judgments are to be executed, after the rapture of His saints, by the LORD HIMSELF,3 of whom the Jews said, “His blood be on us, and on our children”; and these blessings to be introduced by Him whom men rejected, but whom the heavens received until—mark that adverb—until the times of the restitution of all things. For such restitution then He must leave the place He now occupies. And this is just what the Holy Ghost teaches. And would less than this be worthy of Him? Let such as love Him answer.

Let those that refuse to own these truths, and read the blessings in Isaiah, etc.—as “blessings to the CHURCH”—continue to covet their neighbor’s goods; which (goods) are all for an earthly people; while believers in Christ are “blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). Believers in Christ, as children of Abraham, get the heavenly side of the promise—“stars of the heavens”; Israel (and with them the nations) get the earthly side—“sand of the seashore” (Heb. 11:12).

Despite their foolish skepticisms, the Lord will accomplish His purposes, “as it is written.”

How persons will be so bold as to spiritualize such a chapter, for example, as Isaiah 18, I cannot say. There we read of a people—the Jews—scattered and peeled, whose lands are trodden down. This people is to be carried as a present to the Lord of Hosts to Mount Zion. (Mount Zion is as literal in Isaiah, as Moab, Assyria, Babylon, etc. If you spiritualize one, you must ALL, and where will you stop?) Swift vessels

of bulrushes (literally steamers, such a word the translators had not in 1604) are to be sent to pick them up, and the Jews now found in all climates are to be found in Canaan; and over them is to reign, on the throne of David, “The Lord our Righteousness.” This is what the Holy Ghost declares, and faith need not pry into the how or the when. It adds its hearty “amen,” and leaves the manner and the time to Him to whom all power is given in heaven and on earth.

It was necessary; perhaps, that I should, in this introductory manner, help some to see the way in which the personal return of the Lord Jesus is connected

1. with His saints for whom He will descend into the air (1 Thess. 4);

2. with rejecters of the gospel, to whom He will come with His saints to execute judgments (Jude 14-15);

3. with the nations generally, whom He shall rule with a rod of iron, and break in pieces as a potter’s vessel (Psa. 2);

4. with Israel, over whom, the judgments being passed, He shall reign as king, when the opposite prophecy to that in Joel 3 shall be fulfilled—when the swords shall be beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks (Isa. 2:4). And why? Because the Lord is reigning in His holy mountain. “The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth” (Rev. 16:6).

This is the time of grace; now He beseeches, allures, and woos by the Spirit through the preached word; now He sympathizes with His loved and oppressed ones, walking with them in their furnaces of trouble and opposition for His name’s sake. Because this—the true place of the believer now in the world—is not seen, we talk about “sending troops and men-of-war to protect our missionaries.” Has the Lord changed the normal relationship of His saints to the world since He said, If they have persecuted ME, they will persecute you?

And has the heart of man changed since Paul and other disciples were hunted for their lives, because they preached Jesus? Not a bit of it. Worldly Christians will not understand this. The true followers of the “despised Nazarene” have His sympathy now.

“All that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). But, lo! “I am with you.” is comforting. Then it will be to exert, to put forth His power, and make all feel it. But please note, “at His appearing.”

Those that love Him must truly desire the exhibition of His glory, His power and strength in this scene where He was rejected—they will “love His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). All said of Him in Isaiah 61:1-3—every iota of it—every jot—must be made true in Himself, by Himself.

Now, when we compare that Scripture with Luke 4:18-19, we see at once—at least those must see whom Satan hath not blinded—that the gospel is preached to the poor; Christ heals the broken-hearted; gives freedom to captive ones; sight to the blind; liberty to the bruised; and declares “the acceptable year of the Lord.”

In a word, all that meets the need of the sinner and saint is brought out most blessedly. And then He closed the book and said to His hearers, “This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.” Mark, beloved, “this Scripture.” But is that all said of Him in the portion from which He quoted? Look back, and see—“And the day of vengeance of our God: to comfort them that mourn in Zion,” etc.

In grace He permits a long space to intervene between this Scripture, so far as He quoted it, and that which remains to be fulfilled. But though heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or tittle of His word shall, till all be fulfilled.

Hence All This Awaits His Personal Return

Moreover, the earth itself is to be blessed by Him; groaning creation—the animals now subject to man’s vanity—are to be brought into the liberty which the glory introduces. As another has said, “The creature has not part in the liberty of grace; it will in that which glory gives” (Compare Rom. 8:19-24, and Isa. 41:1-9). But Himself must do this. I am just reminded of a Christian gentleman who saw once, for the first time—after many years of fruitless attempts to spiritualize all the prophecies about Israel and the earth—that this Scripture was to be literally fulfilled when the Lord Himself reigned King over the earth. He said to me, “I hope that may happen in my time, for then it will be pleasant to live in this earth.”

He may not be the only one with such language. Some of you, my beloved hearers, may, like him, wish to be alive when God does this.

But, as saints, your portion is heavenly; you will have already been caught away to be with the Lord, and you shall be with Him—not upon the earth—when He comes with you to do these things. 4

If not saved, I am pained at the recollection of the judgments through which you shall have to pass in your bodies. This may happen in your time. There is no prophecy to be fulfilled before the Lord comes for His saints; and that coming may be NOW. Yes, before I finish this sentence the shout may be heard. His word is “quickly”—“a little while” (Rev. 22:20, Heb. 10:37). And soon after He comes to the air for His saints, He Himself will come with His saints; and the seven years of terrible judgments—the pouring out of the vials—will commence upon the nations, upon Israel, and upon the false, the spurious, empty, professing Christendom. O do not trifle, my dear hearers. The Lord Himself is a reality; His coming a divine fact soon to be accomplished. Your souls are immortal. Do not let this hour pass away, and another find you without the knowledge of Himself as “my Saviour, my Lord, my God, my all.”

But the coming, as the hope of the believer, is what I desire specially to bring before you that love Him, and to this I now address myself. Let us look to Him that the truth may not be a subject merely to add to, or improve our stock of Scripture knowledge; but that which shall practically connect us in everything we do, say , and plan, with the object with whom the truth deals. It is a truth of immense power when allowed to act. No lever so effective for raising us up out of “earthly things” as the knowledge that our commonwealth is in heaven, from which we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile bodies {body of humiliation} and make them like his own (Phil. 3:20-21).

No cure of care so mighty as the truth, “I come quickly.” In the midst of sorrow, with these words, we are to comfort one another.

It must be evident, from all I said before, that there are various aspects of the coming, but there is only one coming referred to. When the Lord comes, however, for His saints, He will halt so to say, in the air. From that halting place He will shout, and the dead in Christ shall rise

first, and those of us that are alive at the time shall be changed, and they and we shall go up together and meet Him in the air to be ever with Him. This is evident from 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

This I shall, for simplicity's sake, denominate the first or rapture aspect, called (in Titus 2:13) "that blessed hope." This is for the saints. Of the other aspect, the appearing, with its numerous sub-divisions, I shall say no more just now, although it may come in occasionally. In Titus 2:13, it is referred to in the words, "appearing of the glory." In Jude 14, it is referred to when we read, "The Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints (previously caught up) to execute judgment."

I am not ignorant of the existence of many who would rob God's people of this their proper HOPE. Hence they will twist and turn—at least they try to do so—all the Scriptures that teach it. But it is such an integral part of the whole plan of salvation that the detraction of it is just like the removal of one of the stones of an arch. So interwoven is it with the wondrous fabric wrought by Christ, that the shape, color, and beauty of the whole design are lost, and the adorable Architect robbed of much praise—the enemy rejoicing that God's people are left to "mind earthly things," having nothing to look for but that which is common to men, death, should it be given up.

I shall endeavor, therefore, to be as simple as I can be, that the most illiterate may understand me.

Turn with me to John 14. Let us notice

(1) that it is a person speaking. "I go," says the Lord to the disciples, "to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). Can there be any so ignorant, or so presumptuous as to assert that any, beside the Lord in person, was addressing the disciples? Surely not. Then this very person goes on to say,

(2) "and if I go and prepare a place for you, I (not death) will come again (when He does not say) and receive you unto myself; that where I am, ye may be also." The practical truth, from this, the first announcement of the Lord's return after leaving this earth, is, or ought to be of the most profound moment to us that love Him. It reminds us of that love of Him which does not get its full satisfaction till every blood-bought one is sharing the place He has with the Father "in the Father's house." A place in the mansions {abodes} is prepared for me, faith says, and no one shall have that place but me; for my Lord says so. But the place is with the FATHER. Quite new was this to Jews that never looked above Canaan. But so it is. Cast out by Israel, as the Lord is, grace triumphs, as it always does. And, in so doing, it brings out a people for mansions {abodes} with the FATHER—brings out a heavenly people. 5 Oh, what heart can enter into the amazing love that links up believers thus with the Man at God's right hand, and with His Father!

I need hardly remind you that this is fruit of His death and resurrection. Incarnation has its place; for it was necessary that as a man He should live in this scene, and declare in it what a man should be for God; while at the same time He manifested God before and unto men, defeating Satan withal. But He Himself declared that He must stand alone if He died not (see John 12:23-24). The corn of wheat must go into the ground and die, that fruit (the ear) might be borne. Only as result of His death, and of course the inestimable worth God puts upon it, could He say, "Go and tell my BRETHREN, I ascend to My Father, and to your Father; My God, and your God" (Compare John 20:17 with Psalm 22:21-22).

You will, from these remarks, see the blessed connection of these latter chapters in John. In John 12, the Lord announces His death, and shows how as a result believers should be united to the risen Man. In John 13, He keeps us clean; so that He might always see us without a spot. The word (water) applied by the Spirit should keep the feet clean of those that are bathed. In John 14, the saved ones, for whom the word is given and by which they are kept clean, are to wait for Himself. But while He tarries they are to be His witnesses in a world that cast Him out. They should be the branches of the vine (John 15) to hear fruit for His praise, such as would be of sweet savor to Himself, success for which depending on abiding in Him. The Holy Ghost should be the person here, whose very presence should be a reproof to the world for rejecting Jesus (John 14 and 16), and the power by which we should be true witnesses to the Lord. And lastly, the desire for the manifest oneness of those who are saved is expressed in John 17.

Now, when the Lord told the disciples not to be with troubled hearts, what did He mean? When persons are in sorrow, because of troubles of various kinds coming upon them, how apt are they to take the truth here, "Let not your heart be troubled," as that applicable to their case. Well, beloved, I would be the last to tell them not to get consolation from it. The Holy Ghost can use—for He is God—any portion of the Word for the child of faith. To the intelligent soul, however, there is a special word for every special need; but who can question that just a few portions, known to the simple ones, may be specifics for all their ailments? Souls in affliction or sorrow, therefore, may use this scripture as a cordial for their case, although such special truths as 1 Peter 5:7 are not wanting.

Here, however, the Lord saw some who wept because their Lord was leaving them. They loved Him. Surely, beloved brethren, you and I shall be covered with shame at the contrast between the love of those poor disciples and our own. The Holy Ghost, as fruit of the glorification of Jesus, had not yet been given (John 7:39), and hence the fullness of blessing into which you and I are now brought was not yet entered into by them. Indeed, as I said before, it could not be till the grain of wheat died and rose again {John 12:24}. Yet see the affection for the person manifested by those dear disciples.

There is a great tendency among us to be engaged with our blessing, while Him who blessed us we forget. But, as I said on a previous occasion, ours is such a perfect emancipation, complete deliverance from sin, Satan, and SELF, that we are left quite free to enter into God's thoughts about the person of Jesus—to be, in fact, taken up absolutely with Himself. Bring hither the fatted calf, and let us eat. "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ: whom having not seen we love."

A most touching example of attachment to the person is seen in Mary (John 20). "The disciples went away again to their own home" after the Lord was put into the sepulcher. Is loud boasting Peter among those that could find a home, while the Lord, whom men rejected, lay in the sepulcher? And is loving John, too, at home in the scene without the Lord? Let your cheeks be covered with blushes as you learn that "Mary (only) stood without (outside a home) at the sepulcher weeping." She is attached to the person. I would fain rebuke her ignorance (shown in her question); but I must first question my love. Are there any of us that can desire to be somebodies in this poor, Christ-rejecting world? Do we want a place here without Him? Then to us the portion (in John 14) has no application. But to such as long to see their once-rejected Lord taking His true place, asserting His supremacy, and rejoicing in having His Bride with Him—to such as for His name's sake are hated and cast out as the Master was—He says, "Let not your hearts {heart} be troubled." My resurrection is the ground of your faith (1 Cor. 15:17), as it also is to be of your hope (v. 19), and of your hope you shall never be ashamed (Rom. 5:5). He who by the Spirit leads us now to cry, Abba

(Rom. 8:15-16), assures us that He Himself will “quickly” come, and take every blood-bought one and introduce them, in bodies like His own, to His Father and our Father.

(3) Again, in this portion the Lord challenges our confidence in His truth: “Ye believe in God” {John 14:1}. You have not seen Him, and yet you cannot doubt Him. Even so, “Believe also in Me.” Soon I shall to you be invisible, as God is now. Nevertheless, take My word, as you do not doubt His, that I will come and take you unto Myself, that where I am ye may be also. This is our present hope. Why will you be robbed of it?

(4) Again observe that the Lord does not put the thinnest partition between His coming and our faith. Tell me one passage in Scripture to hinder me expecting Him now. You will search in vain for one. Many there are who cannot doubt that the Lord is to come at some time, but they are expecting “the fulfillment of certain prophecies first,” or, “the conversion of the world”; others expecting the millennium, or some other such thing first. If any of these were to be before our hope was realized, would the Lord have overlooked the present opportunity to put in such ideas? Surely not. Now, He is indeed wiser than all the learned of this earth put together, and faith prefers what He says to men’s theories, be the men ever so learned. Prophecies will be fulfilled, as I said before, in God’s time and nothing shall hinder them; and there shall be a millennium for this earth {Rev. 20:4, etc.}. But the efforts of men to bring about that which awaits the person of Christ will be as futile as are all the plans of Satan to rob the Lord Jesus of His glory. Meanwhile such believers, however, are losing the joy, and will miss the reward of those “that love His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). I repeat, therefore, that our proper hope is the Lord’s coming for us. 6 Let each of us ask ourselves, “Am I longing to see, in His glory, Him whom men—unrighteous men—rejected? Am I concerned about His absence, or am I so linked up with things in this scene, ay, even my service, that I should prefer Him to delay His coming to some indefinite period?” This is a solemn poser, beloved. But let us not shrink back from the closest scrutiny. Do I want the Lord and His glory, or am I preferring this world, with its short-lived pleasures and its evanescent joys? Do I know I am for heavenly mansions {abodes} and not for earth? The world prefers Him not—it would rather not have Him. What sayest thou, O my soul?

Respecting the Lord Himself, I may add, and surely this ought mostly to occupy us, He is waiting to display before this world, before heaven, and before everything, what He is as the exalted Son of Man. Fruit of the work on the cross, all power is given unto Him in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18); and all things ARE PUT in subjection to Him (Psalm 8; Colossians 1:18-20). But we see not yet all things SUBJECT to Him (Heb. 2:8). Subjection is their normal condition according to God; for every knee shall bow to, and tongue confess the Lordship of Jesus (Phil. 2:10-11, with Isaiah 45:23). But we do not see it yet, says the Apostle. Then is it never to be? Let those that would keep out the Lord Himself answer it. In grace He tarries, for He is long-suffering; not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9). O who can estimate the patience of Him whose desire is to have His Bride with Him in glory? Who has any idea of the long-suffering that can bear with a world whose judgment lingers till He comes? In the full knowledge of His infallible might He waits in grace. He “bides His time,” as we say; for He knows what awaits His rejecters. So the Holy Ghost exhorts us to wait with Him (see 2 Thess. 3:5; read the margin, “patience of Christ”). But if any are tired of waiting, and thus exhibiting their unwillingness to have kindred thoughts with their Lord, they are not here rebuked by this loving One. No; He cheers and comforts their hearts by renewing the old promise, which He does not forget, and which quickly He will fulfill, “Let not your heart be troubled.” O thrice happy are those to whom these words are applicable! Yea, blessed are those hearts which, in the unclouded communion which is theirs to enjoy with the Father and the Son, can even now have mansions within them for the abode of the Father and Son by the Spirit; till in soul and body they enter the mansion prepared for them above. And, indeed, beloved, such is unquestionably the portion today of those that love Him and keep His words. “If a man love Me he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him”—or make a mansion of him (John 14:23). What words could be more salutary? In glory we cannot desire more than the communion of the Father and the Son. Of course, in glorified bodies we shall fully understand them and enjoy them. But, may I ask, what is it that is to occupy us at that time? The overpowering sight (I speak after the manner of men) of the millions of glorified saints? Will it be the gates of brass and streets of gold? 7 Will it be the holy angels, the ministers of His that do His pleasure? Will it be the crown worn by the Lamb who was slain? No, beloved, it will be Himself none less than Himself. Can any need more?

The person who shall engage us then, is the one that should be uppermost in our affections now. Is it so, beloved friends? Is His glory so concerning us as to lead us to desire His entering upon it? Into it all, I need hardly remind you, we shall be brought; for He graciously makes us His joint-heirs (Rom. 7:17). That is, He will not assume that glory without us. Oh, how does the soul bend under such inimitable love! To Him now be praise, and forever. Amen.

A view of the person of {the Lord} Jesus, in His glory, is given us in Matthew 17:1-9. Let us glance at it for a minute or two. Note, that in the previous chapter the Lord was speaking of His rejection. He was to go to Jerusalem to suffer and to die for the church which He would build on the rock (Himself), owned and confessed by Peter. Well, this is very precious; for it reminds me that He who can touch the Rock of Ages can shake the steadfastness of the soul that is perched thereon. But who can? Surely not the gates of Hades; nor all the powers of hell marshaled under Satan, their much experienced chief. I say no one can, in the least, damage your security, when for once, by faith, you entrust your all to Him who gave His all for you.

Thus seated, O, my dove, let thy chirps be the sweetest; thy songs the loudest; thy notes the earliest; thy tunes the latest; thy praises the most constant that heaven e’er could hear. It pleases Him who placed thee there to hear His blessed name sung. Indeed, for what did He nestle thee but to hear thy voice mingling with the millions that sing

There I end with what I get as the fruit of His sufferings.

But is the Blessed One not to have His full reward for glorifying God in this earth? Refuse to own His coming, beloved, and you deny Him that which you are persuaded He merits. Now, in this chapter we get a picture of the Son of Man in His glory. Moses is there representing the raised “dead in Christ” out from among the general dead. The living saints who, at His coming in the clouds, shall be changed in a moment without tasting death, are figured by Elijah; while Israel, and others with them, to be blessed on the earth, are represented in Peter, James, and John. But note, dear brethren, that the faces of all that occupy these concentric circles are turned towards the exalted center. He only will attract. How soon? Quickly. All in the glory there shall shine, but with the light of the glorious sun; but for whom darkness—yea, the very blackness or eternal despair—would be the lot of all. The bride, His body, shall lead the praises, in which all the glorified shall join. Angels shall not withhold their song. Israel, on earth, shall magnify their King, and nations all shall own His sway; the earth, His inheritance, too, shall rejoice and be glad. Not one opposer shall be found in all His vast domain. But for all this He waits in patience, and much is His heart gladdened as you and I are, even in this scene, praising and adoring Him, in a measure, as then most fully, and perfectly, we shall. But more than this; He looks to see those that love His appearing. Owning these truths, beloved, can our hearts not say to Him

I shall now glance at other Scriptures that refer to this truth, either as the hope of the believer, or as the subject of prophecy.

After the Lord’s resurrection, the truth of His personal return is again presented to the disciples, as we find in Acts 1.

The restoration of the kingdom still occupied the hearts of the disciples. Hence their question (Acts 1:6). Well, we would be astonished at their ignorance if we did not remember that in many things we do not exhibit more intelligence, although the Holy Ghost (v. 8), whom they had not yet, is now freely given to us (1 John 2:20). Had not the Lord spoken of His going away to the Father, and of His coming again from thence to take them up to the Father? (John 14) Yet we see where their thoughts are. The “earthly things.” instead of Christ and the heavenly—Christ and His thoughts—are apt to occupy us too. And nothing delivers us from them but an entire engagement of the soul with CHRIST and HIS thoughts. To be somebodies in this scene; to be “great men” and “honorable” where the Lord was and is rejected, will be the insatiable longing of everyone, till “My will” and “My thoughts” are wholly swallowed up in “His will” and “His word.” He and His must be first; I and mine nowhere. This is the secret of happiness and of successful testimony for Him. Only thus may we expect a “well done” at His coming. The Lord intimates without scolding—oh, what a patient teacher!—that the Holy Ghost would give them power to be martyrs—“witnesses”—for the rejected One in the very sphere where they preferred to rule with Him.

LET THE TRUTH BE DISTINCTLY LEARNT THAT THE REDEEMED OF THE LORD ARE NOW APPREHENDED BY THE HOLY GHOST, AND ENDUED WITH HIS POWER TO BE SUFFERERS IN, AND NOT THE RULERS OF, THE WORLD THAT CAST OUT THE TRUE KING. The reigning time with Him—not without Him—is future. Saints are to judge the world in the future (1 Cor. 6:1-8). Hence now they are to suffer wrong, but not to go to law. But while we are here for Him, He has His hands up in blessing, and is Himself before God for us—succoring us in our troubles. And this was the last look which the disciples had of Him (cp. Luke 24:50-53). Our highest privilege is to suffer here in the path of faithful witnessing to Himself. Those of us that prefer confederacy with His enemies, and for ease are in league with His foes, those, I say, that know not practically what it is to “go forth to Him without the camp bearing His reproach” (Heb. 13:13), must lose the blessing of those uplifted hands. But need the Daniels shrink back from the lions that oppose their path of devotion? Shall the Shadrachs, Meshachs, and Abednegos be tempted for once to shun the furnace with the Son of God for the approbation of a world without Christ? These are trying questions. Let them cast us upon Him whose love, like His patience, tires not.

But are the days of trouble never to end? Is my Lord always to be rejected? Let the word in Acts 1:11 answer: “THIS SAME JESUS ... SHALL SO COME.” He who went to the Father then, despite the ignorance of the disciples in A.D. 33, shall so come (the year He gives not, but “quickly” is the word), the unbelief and selfishness of Christians of the 19th century notwithstanding. And blessed are they that wait for Him.

I must not dwell on every phase of this blessed truth as presented in the different epistles; but for the sake of any one that has lost sight of such a gem, covered up as it has been for 1700 years by not a few strata of men’s rubbish, I must just point to the many spots over which it is scattered in rich profusion and for various purposes.

(Rom. 5:3-5). The partakers of grace shall share the glory; of their “hope” they shall not be disappointed, for the Holy Ghost, now shed abroad in their hearts, retains them for the day of glory.

And lest the hope should be dimmed—lest saints should settle down in this scene—they must go through the school of tribulation, which will work for them patience; and this endurance—will being broken—gives experience concerning Him whose grace is perfected in our weakness. Need I say that this school is practically unknown to those of us who are “Hail fellow, well met” with a world—pagan or religious—that hates HIM “who was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification.” W ell, such a path leads onwards to Him who trod it—to Him who now succors the travelers on it, and those on it are in fellowship with the despised One, who is coming for them. Cheer up, you that are scoffed for the name of Jesus. Don’t forget that it was the most religious, the loudest professors, the most sanctimonious, who, once enemies, became friends, and formed a conspiracy for killing the Prince of Life, whom God raised from the dead. And think you that a distinct and clear, unmixed standing forth for HIM will not evoke today for the poor and feeble confessors of the despised Nazarene the same hate from the same world! O, but what an exchange when He comes—a crown for a cross!

In Romans 8:18-25, groaning creation is to partake of the liberty which glory shall introduce.

(1 Cor. 15). The resurrection from among the dead of the bodies of those that are Christ’s at His coming is here treated. This truth the gathering at Corinth had lost through the philosophy of some of their teachers, and the result was the evil ways which this epistle was sent to correct. Note that all are not to sleep (to die). People say all must die; the Holy Ghost says not (1 Cor. 15:51). We shall not all sleep, but be changed in a moment at the last trump. This is consistent with 1 Thessalonians 4, “We that are alive and remain.” Even Paul puts himself among those in whose day such an event might have occurred. So does the Holy Ghost present the truth of Christ’s coming now, that not the faintest shadow should intervene between our hope and its fulfilment. Yes, and if we sleep ere its accomplishment—I say, suppose that we do die—shall death cause us to relinquish our hope? I ask, shall anything hinder the Lord from having His redeemed with Him in the glory, and from occupying His rightful place in connection with Israel, the nations, and the earth, as I before showed? Certainly not. Then, should I be called away through death, I shall only have had my “waiting-room” exchanged. “Present with the Lord” though “absent from the body.” I shall wait with Him for His glory, of which I am co-heir—a joint-heir (Rom. 8:17). He will not assume His without us. Paul, and others who were waiting 1800 years ago, are in the upper waiting-room, waiters still. But though He tarry, the truth remains, and shall soon be verified—“The dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we who are alive shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:52). The thought about a “general resurrection” is not found in this chapter. Indeed, persons may go begging to every verse in the Bible, but will not succeed in obtaining one contribution to such a dogma of clever men. I may here remark that the expression “Resurrection of the dead” should in every case be “Resurrection out of, or from among, the dead.” At His coming they that are Christ’s “shall be raised,” but the rest of the dead shall not be for 1000 years after.

(2 Cor. 4:14). Here the hope so occupies the Apostle, as in 2 Corinthians 1:9, that though persecutions should end in death, he fears not. He looks forward to resurrection by Jesus, and to being with the Corinthian saints when all are presented by the Lord, as God, to Himself (cp. Gen. 2:22, and Eph. 5:37) as Son of Man. Was it not for this hope, today, beloved, many who are evil spoken of for the sake of Christ, and are treated as the off-scouring of all things, would be of all men the most miserable (1 Cor. 15:19). Here, then, the hope cheers the martyrs (witnesses) for the rejected Jesus. They will take care of His honor here, assured that five minutes in the glory into which He will soon introduce them will more than repay “the sufferings of the little while.” But to be in bodies of glory like unto His FOREVER, yes, forever, who

with this prospect would shun the troubles for Him in the brief fleeting space of eighty years or so? To walk in the path He trod before us, to have Him in the path with us, who will have us to share His everlasting glories by and by. Is this enough, beloved? It is more than enough. Then let us bid farewell to sloth; let us seek devotees elsewhere; let the worldly have the world; but may the interests of Christ be our concern, as ours have been and are His still. To suffer, and even to die for Him, is truly nothing when contrasted with the glory that awaits us at His coming.

In the epistle to the Galatians nothing is written concerning this blessed truth. And why? Because the converts in Galatia had been removed through Judaizing teachers from Him who had placed them in grace to a sort of law-gospel, which the Holy Ghost designates “another gospel.” Law and grace are quite opposed; they never go together. The Law was given by Moses; but coming to Jesus Christ we get grace and truth (John 1:17). Persons who put themselves under it would have no taste for the truth of the personal return of {the Lord} Jesus; and, indeed, it is so now. Look for the standing of such as refuse this “blessed hope,” and you will find them at the base of Sinai, doing their best to keep the law, and just failing every moment. Of course the judgments for its breach they do not like. But can such be at peace? Certainly not. Hence the Holy Ghost cannot engage them with the PERSON coming; they must first learn the value of the WORK He accomplished. “If righteousness come by law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal. 2:21). This is plain enough for faith. Reasoning won’t get it. If any of you, dear hearers, are in this position, you must wait for another Christ to die to bring you out of it, or you must look for the judgments awaiting transgressors. But, beloved, I am persuaded better things of you though I thus speak. If you know Him, who is full of grace, you may rejoice in hope of glory.

The Ephesians, on the other hand, needed not to be told this truth respecting the “coming,” for they are viewed as seated in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus (Eph. 2:5-6). So instructed they must have been in that to which all saints in their time looked forward, that the Holy Ghost can occupy them with what their normal state before God is.

The hope, however, must have been very consoling to Paul while he was confined in the prison at Rome, whence he penned the Epistle to the Philippians. Nero, the emperor, might at any moment have given commandment concerning his death. Truly Paul was dying daily. How can you account for such exhortations, then, as “Rejoice in the Lord,” and “Rejoice in the Lord always”? What was it that placed Paul above his difficulties; that raised him superior to his afflictions? Just that, beloved, which should raise us, if we are not scared out of it by philosophy and vain deceit and tradition of men—namely, the truth about the coming. Those “who mind earthly things,” might well be miserable when their best plans are thwarted, and crosses lie in their way. But the language of such as know their union with a risen Christ, and look forward to being with Him is, “Our conversation—commonwealth or citizenship—is in heaven; whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ; who shall change our bodies of humiliation, and transform them to His body of glory, by the power through which He will also subdue all things unto Himself” (Eph. 3).

The Colossians have a hope laid up for them in heaven (Col. 1:5). Of it they had been before instructed in the gospel preached to them. Being risen with Christ, they were to seek HEAVENLY things, and not be as earthly men. In their measure they were to be practically identified while on earth with a risen Christ in heaven, for when He comes again in glory they shall co-appear with Him (Col. 3:1-4).

The catching up or rapture is not brought out directly here; but the appearing in bodies of glory with Christ, our life, is. For He comes with, who has already come for, His saints. And that for which they were waiting was so to occupy them that their hearts should be where the treasure was. Christ is hid from the eyes of men. He is linked up with nothing of this vain world. So our life with Him is hid. This is not the time to seek to display ourselves. Soon He who is our life shall appear, and that will be the season for our manifestation too. What a truth, beloved! How weaning! Refuse to accept it and we will become as worldly as the most ungodly. The ball, the theater, the concert, or wealth on the one hand; or a worldly religion with all that pleases fancy, imagination, or human will, or that suits the progress of the day on the other, will command its admirers from the ranks of believers. And such are they in this day whom Satan would keep in ignorance of this blessed theme, which, like the magnet, points always to the person of Christ, and consequently detracts from everything beside.

But it is in the first epistle to the Thessalonians that the Holy Ghost develops the truth respecting the COMING, and shows the difference between Christ’s coming for His saints and His appearing for judgment to the world.

It is worthy of remark that this subject was placed before the young converts of Thessalonica as part of the glad tidings which Paul preached. So you see, it is truth for the youngest. It is said of them (1 Thess. 1:9-10) that “they turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son (not death) from heaven.”

I find then that these late idol worshippers to whom Paul preached eighteen hundred years ago were far in advance of some of the “divines” of the nineteenth century.8 Take it as a fact that now as ever these things are hidden from the wise and prudent—from the learned and self-willed—and revealed to babes; made known to those who, owning their ignorance, receive in all simplicity what God declares.

To enter deeply into that which every chapter in both of these Epistles deals with, would be the work of many evenings. Indeed, they are so plain that to argue on them would be to darken counsel by a multitude of words. See the plainness of speech as we run over a few passages. In 1 Thessalonians 2:12, the saints are to walk worthy of the God who had called them to His kingdom and glory; v. 19, Paul hopes to see them “in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming,” though Satan may hinder his visiting them in the body; and in that he “boasts.” The desire of the Apostle’s heart for them is that practical holiness may constantly characterize them—“unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints” (1 Thess. 3:13).

In 1 Thessalonians 4, the question is answered, “How shall all the saints—seeing that some die—be ever with the Lord.” Naturally enough the Thessalonians, who had been converted to wait for the Son “from heaven,” were sorrowing for such saints as had fallen asleep; presuming that they would miss9 the Lord at His coming, for which they were waiting. And was it not for their ignorance, we would not be told how it is to be brought about, as in this special revelation. But so it is. God uses every occasion of short-coming, whether of practice, as at Corinth, or ignorance of doctrine, as among the Galatians and here, to unfold more of His mind to us.

A great fact is stated in 1 Thessalonians 4:14. “If we believe that Jesus died and rose again; even so God will, with Him, bring those that fall asleep in Him” (cp. 1 Cor. 15). And here faith reposes in God. He raised from the dead Him who gave His life for us; and He will also raise up those who are forever linked up with Jesus. They shall have bodies of glory like His own (cp. Phil. 3). And not only shall the living ones not hinder (prevent)10 the departed; but as regards the order, “the dead in CHRIST shall rise first.” “The LORD HIMSELF shall descend from heaven with a shout,” etc. Note here,

1. THAT DEATH IS NOT THE COMING OF THE LORD. When Stephen was dying, he looked up and saw Jesus at the right hand of God in heaven (Acts 7). But for the saints—not for their spirits as at death, but themselves, bodies and spirits united—the LORD HIMSELF is to come from heaven. Since His ascension He has been as the exalted Man, seated at God's right hand. There He lives to intercede for us, as we pass through this scene of failure. When He rises from the throne, it will be to descend to the air for us.

2. From that halting place will go forth "the shout." This expression—"shout"—is a military one, used for the sound that summons not a few but ALL the troops. Understood only by the drilled ones, it suggests that none will hear the gathering call but the saints. The world will soon find that we are gone, and, as did the sons of the prophets in the days of Elijah, go searching for us; but alas for them! Blessed for us!

3. Only the "dead in Christ" are to rise when He comes for the saints. We wait, you see, for a "general resurrection"; but saints "in the body" and "out of the body" wait for their LORD; who, having first subdued all things to Himself—His Saints being with Him in the regeneration {that is, the millennium}—then the wicked dead are called forth to be judged at the white throne (Rev. 20).

To return. The dead in Christ rise first; then we who are alive, and remain till that event, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet, in the halting-place, the LORD in the air.

Note here particularly the expression, "We who are alive," and tell me can any of us be sure of a grave? Is death the subject here set before us? Indeed I may challenge any—Where is death ever put as that for which the saint is to wait? In Matthew 25 the virgins wait for the Bridegroom. Here let me remark, first, that after Pentecost all converts looked for the Lord from heaven. "Went forth to meet the Bridegroom." For more than 1600 years the truth was lost sight of—"all (wise and foolish) slumbered and slept." And do all of you know that for more than 1000 years the truth of "justification by faith" was given up, till Luther, in 1517, preached it? Well, it is not more than forty years since the truth of the coming of the Lord (with other precious church truths, as the oneness of the body, etc.) was revived by a living servant of God {that is, J. N. Darby}. Notice, second, that soon after the midnight cry went forth the Bridegroom did come. And so the fact of the revival of this truth reminds us that now the coming of our Lord is nigh (cp. Rom. 13:11-12). As a fact we are in the night. How can it be otherwise while He who is the light is absent from the earth? But we expect a bright morning. Indeed, faith looks up and sees the twilight of the coming sun. O may the Holy Ghost cause the hope of seeing soon the Lord Himself to be very bright before us all. What a meeting will that be when parent and child, brother and sister, preacher and convert, all in Christ, shall see Him in glorified bodies, and be with Him forever!

The Thessalonians had been instructed in the truth, moreover, respecting "the day of the Lord." (Read carefully Isa. 2:12-13; Joel 2:31; 3:10-16; Rev. 6, 19.) At the time the second Epistle was written they were greatly persecuted, and false teachers led them to suppose that that "day" was come. (The expression in 2 Thessalonians 2:2, "at hand," should be "was come," or "was present." See the Greek.)

The day of the Lord will surely be a time of terrible trouble (cp. Matt. 24). But the Holy Ghost here unfolds two other wonderful facts, namely, that before that day—

1. The Holy Ghost, with the church, shall have been removed, according to the 1St Epistle; and

2. Antichrist, the Willful, or Lawless One, should be known, whom Christ should destroy, not at the shout for His saints, but at the manifestation of His glory to this world—"the brightness of His coming."

The mystery of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:7) works now, but the personification of it, in the one who, exalting himself above God, will claim and get worship from such as refusing the truth shall be given over to believe a lie—this I say cannot be as long as the church, with the Holy Ghost in it, is on the earth. The presence of the Holy Ghost hinders his development. We are now dealing with most startling yet comforting revelations of God in this Scripture. Startling to know that the time will come when rejecters of the gospel, given over to a strong delusion (2 Thess. 2:10-12), will be found at the feet of Antichrist! Comforting to be told that the catching-up will precede this (cp. 1 John; Rev. 3:10).

Lastly, the prayer of the Apostle is, that their hearts may be directed into the love of God (2 Thess. 3:5), which surely would keep them from the thought of their having to be in the judgments on the world—and "into the patience of Christ." Rest from suffering for His sake, and glory with Him are ours. He will then display us; but trouble our troublers (2 Thess. 1). But none more desires His Bride to be with Him than the Lord Himself. Yet, patiently He waits in grace to this poor world. We are to wait with Him.

See how the truth is referred to in 1 Timothy 1:11; "gospel of the glory," 4:14; 2 Timothy 2:10; 4:1-8, "Love His appearing," etc., etc.

So in the Epistle to Titus (2:11-14), the grace of God that brings salvation to all men hath appeared, and teaches us how to behave ourselves now among men. But that is not all. It puts before us (1), "the blessed hope," and (2), the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

I have only to remind you, that in this pithy sentence you get both aspects of the theme I have been endeavouring to develop, namely (1), the coming of the Lord (to the air) for His saints; and (2), the appearing or Epiphany of the Lord in glory to this earth with His saints.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Paul writes to converts to Christianity who had once settled down in a religion—Judaism—which God had sanctioned; but which, upon the rejection of the Messiah, was laid aside, and a "heavenly calling" (Heb. 3:1) revealed in its stead by the very God who had previously spoken by the prophets (Heb. 1).

Hence they are told to pass through this scene now as pilgrims, looking forward to a better country, a heavenly (Heb. 11). Quite startling this would be to Jews who had been hoping to settle down in Palestine. Well, as a nation, so they will, for God's word remains ever sure. But Christianity, distinct from Judaism, teaches that now the Lord is gathering out from Jews and Gentiles "a people for his name." Note this. (See Acts 15:14; Eph. 2:11-16.) Afterwards He will return, and build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down. The Holy Ghost speaks of the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of God (1 Cor. 10:32).

Here let me remark, beloved, that till you distinguish between Israel as a (literally) earthly nation, once great, now scattered, to be again gathered, and the church of God, composed of believers from both Jew and Gentile, and elected for heavenly glory, you can never clearly enter into and enjoy the truth about the coming. So these saints from among the Hebrews were to wait now, not for a kingdom of Canaan, but

for Christ Himself. Hence we are told (Heb. 9:28) “that to them that look for CHRIST [when these words were written all saints were taught to “look for Him”; hence it is the normal aspect in which all are viewed. It is not here to be inferred that such as deny the truth of the Coming will be left behind] He shall appear, having nothing to do with sin—for salvation.” That is, He will bring in that which is included in the idea of salvation, namely—“the redemption of our BODIES” (cp. Rom. 8:23-25; Phil. 3:21). Lastly, notice how this “blessed hope” is placed before the soul as that which should encourage it in the midst of reproaches and affliction for confessing the name of Jesus (Heb. 10:35-38). “Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which has great recompense. For you have need of endurance, in order that, having done the will of God, you may receive the promise. “FOR YET A LITTLE WHILE, AND HE THAT SHALL COME WILL COME, and will not tarry. But the just shall live by faith.” Yes, this truth, like every other, is one for faith. The simplicity of the child of God receives it without argument or a question, for “thus saith the Holy Ghost,” is, or ought to be, enough. It is for a child.

James, addressing believers among the tribes of Israel, brings in the coming to rebuke the rich, who were laying up their stores as if they belonged to this world, and to encourage the poor who were oppressed by them. “Be ye also patient, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 5:7).

The Apostle Peter has this blessed truth running like a vein of metal all through his Epistles. (See 1 Peter 1:3-8, 13; v. 10, etc.) I wish, however, just to call your attention to two points of immense importance in the present day. 1. That the hope of the believer of which I have been treating is not prophecy. Prophecy does point to the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, but as that to be on earth. The truth revealed to us in the New Testament confirms all that the prophets wrote respecting it, but is to be distinguished from prophecy, in that this deals with what prophecy does not touch. (See 2 Peter 1:16-21.) The prophets do teach the sufferings of Christ (Isa. 53); the glories of His Kingdom are developed in the law, prophets, and the Psalms (Gen. 49; Num. 24; Isaiah to Malachi; and all the Psalms, specially 2, 8, 9, 19, 45, 48, 68, 72, 76, 93, 100); but the coming for the saints, like the truth about the church, was reserved for the apostles—Paul especially—and prophets of the New Testament after the gift of the Holy Ghost upon the glorification of Jesus. It is of the last moment to see this difference. Hence the Apostle says that people should give heed to prophecy as those who would be guided by a lamp in a dark place, until—when? The day dawn {and [the] morning star} arise in our hearts. But, he says, “WE HAVE the {prophetic} word made more sure.”11 We have what the prophets pointed to, and much more beside. The word “I come quickly,” we have heard. The midnight cry we have heeded, and the watchers for the person are anticipating His coming, just as night watchers who see the morning star expect the brilliant sun.

Now, you may weigh this suggestion and avoid the confounding of the hope of the believer today, with the word of prophecy for the Jew. With all that concerns Christ you and I are deeply concerned, inasmuch as He associates us with Himself; but we are rightly to divide, or portion out the word of truth. Let two examples suffice to illustrate my thought—

(a) God speaks by Ezekiel (37:19-28) that the divided tribes now scattered are to be united, and are to dwell in the land of Canaan. This is the truth, brought out also in the “Vision of the dry bones,” as in all the prophets, in Romans 11, etc. But what is our position who now believe in Jesus? Our treasure is in heaven, from which we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil. 3; Col. 3). Meanwhile we are to be hated by the world, and treated as the offscouring of all things. To be great in the world, and rulers over it now, is not our lot. It is now the portion of the Gentiles, “till the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” But as the members of Christ we lose nationality, and are neither Jews nor Gentiles (Col. 3:11). Of course our Father knows our need, and will feed us as He does the ravens, and clothe us as He does the lilies. Which do you prefer, beloved? Rejection now with Jesus and hope of glory soon, or a great place in the world without Him? A thick border line, an unmistakable landmark separates the two portions. You must absolutely have the one or the other.

(b) Another striking illustration between the hope of the believer now and the word of prophecy, is seen in the fact that the “morning star” or “day star” {2 Peter 1:19} of the New Testament is Christ Himself as the person we wait for. To our affections He now shines forth. The watchers in the night see Him and enjoy Him by faith in their hearts, till He is seen by their eyes. But the day or morning star (Lucifer) of prophecy (Isa. 14) is the king of Assyria12 to be destroyed by Jehovah. Observe further that I am not to be surprised at the scoffers at this truth in this day. The Holy Ghost says there would be such (2 Peter 3). But that the Lord has not yet come, is not because He is slack concerning His promise. No, rather He is long-suffering to a poor world whose day of grace will close with His coming. O, how gracious are His ways and perfect withal!

Three thoughts from 1 John 3:1-3, I must refer to.

1. All believers can say positively we are the sons of God now. As in Romans 5 we begin with justification, we start with the knowledge of “peace with God,” we go on in grace, and we look forward to glory—for very precious portions.

2. As to what we shall be, we do not know, nor are we careful. We leave that with Him who will not do without us; but we do know that when He shall appear we shall be like HIM, and that is enough. Some clever (?) Grecians used to ask, How can these things be? and because they could not analyze the mode of their accomplishment they denied the truth altogether. Like the clever (?) little boy who denounced the theory of the revolution of the earth round the sun as being “stupid,” because, said he, “I see the sun rise, but I do not see the earth go round the sun,” the Holy Ghost calls similar reasoners “FOOLS,” reminding them that the whole thing is in the hands of Him who gives a shape to the corn of wheat AS it hath pleased Him. “So also is the resurrection out from among the dead” (1 Cor. 15).

3. Although we are by believing in {the Lord} Jesus made “clean every whit,” yet we are passing through a scene of defilement. But see how the hope affects us (v. 3). We tuck up the garments and glide onwards most warily, lest the smallest speck be found on us at His coming. Call you this only an “advanced idea for a few”? God is wiser than men, and has put the truth before us as that which should practically sanctify us.

Jude, who wrote, like John, for the last time, exhorts believers to contend earnestly for the faith (here it is the thing itself believed, not the belief) once delivered to the saints. Losing such an integral portion of it as the coming, called forth the three woes which the godly can see running in parallel lines in the present day (v. 11). Then Enoch’s prophecy is quoted (v. 14). Here the Lord comes with the saints to judgment on the living wicked and ungodly.

We come now to the last portion of Divine revelation. In the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, John is preeminently the one whose ministry should go on till Christ comes (John 21:22-23).

Hence the person of Christ is constantly kept before the soul in the book.

In Revelation 1, He is the judge and the One who shall be the administrator of all things. Now, He is hidden from the eyes of the world. But, “Behold! He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see HIM.”

A general sketch of the book, so far as it regards the subject before us, I gave at the commencement. I would now only remind you –

1. All the judgments (Rev. 6-19) are future, and await the appearing of the Lord Himself. This is prophecy, not our proper hope.

2. They will be judgments on living nations (cp. Matt. 24; Luke 17).

3. The Lord will first have come for His saints to keep them out of the hour of trial which is about to come upon the whole HABITABLE WORLD to try them that DWELL UPON THE EARTH. If Aberdeen should unfortunately be in rebellion against the Queen, she might say to us loyal ones, “I am coming from Balmoral to shell the city; but just before that event I will send a telegram for you to meet me at Banchory.” The message received, we await such telegram. Meanwhile we get as many of our friends as we can to lay down their arms, and to side with us for our Queen. Her Majesty hears that our fellow-citizens are killing us loyal ones, and away she starts to fire the city. Think you she would not keep her word, and send first for us? Having met her at Banchory, we then come with her in her train. And this is just a picture of what our Lord says to us (Rev. 3:10, in Greek). Hence the redeemed are seen in glory worshipping (Rev. 4, 5), being previously caught up before the seals are opened in Revelation 6, etc.

4. The last sentence uttered by the Lord to John was, “Surely I come quickly.” Ascending to heaven from the Mount of Olives, the truth enunciated was, “This same Jesus which is taken from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven”; and now you and I hear the words from His own blessed lips—“Surely I come quickly.” The moral condition of the watcher (in Luke 12:36) is such that he knows the “knock,” and opens “immediately.” (Luke deals with the moral application of the truth, but does not deal with it in the order of time.) Who would have thought that “quickly” would extend to 1800 years? Yet such is His grace. But who would be so bold as to assert that the shout may not be heard before another sun rises upon this guilty world? Of times and seasons we have nothing to do. We ARE made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; and thus ready, ours is to wait and watch. To the unprepared and to the careless, the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. When they shall say “Peace and safety” then sudden destruction shall overtake them.

Shall any of you be taken by surprise, beloved hearers? Are any sceptics among you? Are any of you going on still in rebellion against God, and refusing to own His Son? Now, tell me honestly, can you think of death—which you know you cannot escape—can you think of God and be happy? I know, and so do you, that you cannot. Then why will you resist God? He is gracious to you, and now bids me offer a free pardon to each rebel, on one condition only—namely, owning, like the thief on the cross, that the Son of God, the Lord from heaven, has satisfied God respecting the question of sin. But, to your everlasting shame and misery, you SHALL be condemned by Him whom now you will not allow to save you. O may it please God to awaken you, even though it be by crippling that body of yours, that your soul may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

And now, dear brethren, let us in the presence of Him whom we love, of Him who bore all our sins away and made us meet companions for Himself, of Him whose Father we address as “our Father,” and who has left us here as His witnesses, let us in His presence apply this blessed truth in a practical way.

I presume that each of us sees—

1. That the coming of the Lord for His saints is the proper hope put before every believer by the Holy Ghost in the New Testament.

2. That the Scriptures distinctly teach that He will come with His saints to judge Christendom; to punish the nations generally, and the Jews particularly; to establish the nation of the Jews in Palestine, thus fulfilling the prophecies; to introduce universal blessing for the earth—“the millennium” so called; to raise and judge the wicked dead, bind Satan, and then deliver up the kingdom—all things having been subdued to Himself—to God the Father, that GOD may be all in all (Rev. 20:21; 1 Cor. 15:28).

3. That respecting our hope (the subject of this address)—the believer’s proximate expectation—no dates are ever given; but the word to the simple is “quickly,” and there faith rests. Then am I indulging anything in which He would not like to find me? A bride expecting her bridegroom does not wait till he comes to adjust her garments. To go on in any when He comes “He will put things right,” only betrays the most untoward condition of heart. He can bear with ignorance, and provides a sacrifice for it (Lev. 5:27-32), but can He tolerate INDIFFERENCE?

4. Am I so engaged now and every moment that a “well-done” from His lips will be mine for my last act in this scene?

5. To each of us He has committed some talent {representing a responsibility}, telling us to occupy till He come; and now He adds, “I come QUICKLY.” Are we using such as those should, who cannot hope for another moment?

6. When He comes, the gospel door shall be shut, and then our unconverted relatives and friends shall be left behind! Are we now so putting Christ before them, and praying for their conversion, as those that hold the coming practically; or are we stumbling them by our walk and untoward ways?

7. Are we minding earthly things, and hoarding up the “corruptible things,” the silver and gold of this world; or are we using them today if the Lord gives us an opportunity, as those that expect to be called away quickly, with those for whom we are laying up? Are there no poor round us to feed? No distressed one to relieve? No cell of gloom to lighten up by the sunbeam of our presence? Are there no unbelievers here and abroad, to whom we may carry or send a free Bible, or a gospel book or tract? If there can be regret in glory will it not be for losing such opportunities of reproducing our Lord in the earth?

8. But again, if I believe this truth which the Holy Ghost has given me, why am I so anxious about what I shall eat, or drink, or do tomorrow. May I not hear the shout before “tomorrow”? And why may I not drink of my cup of joy, while to me is given a sip of one of sorrow? Why is my heart broken at the recollection of the dear departed one? Can I not commit him, with myself, to my Lord who will bring all of us with Him?

9. Lastly, am I so weaned from everything here—do I hold them all so loosely, that at any moment of my existence I could joyfully look up and say to {the Lord} Jesus, as the Spirit prompts the Bride, “Come”? (Rev. 22:17).

And now unto Him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory and majesty, might and authority, both now and ever. Amen.

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