2 Kings - Commentaries by William Kelly

The Coming of the Lord, Coming of the Lord, The: Part 3

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The Lord is capable of taking food. He partook of a piece of honeycomb and a fish; but this was not because He required them, but because they required to learn that He was truly risen from the dead. His, we know, is a spiritual body glorified in heaven. And so shall we be; but the Lord here speaks of our faith meanwhile. “Ye believe in God, believe also in me.” Although He had taken a body, and although He was to take that body after the resurrection, still He would be invisible by going to heaven. It is the Christian's faith contrasted with Jewish sight of the Messiah reigning visibly over the earth. “In my Father's house are many mansions.” He was going thither. Observe the statement, “there are many mansions,” signifying that there is room for you as well as for Him. Room enough and to spare—room for all the faithful. “If it were not so, I would have told you.” I would not implant in you a desire that could not be realized. “I go to prepare a place for you.”

Now, the Chiliasts were quite wrong in thinking that heaven would be merely this earth in a renewed condition. Perfectly true that the earth is to be renewed—perfectly false that we are not to be in heaven. Thus to be with Christ in heaven is true, and is the truth which is taught here; and there is where our hope should be resting. Only it is wrong to disconnect heaven then from the earth. This will be the peculiarity of the kingdom, that it will not be as now—the heavens separated from the earth by the sin of man, but heaven and earth both put under the Lord Jesus Christ, the glorified Son of God, the Head of both heaven and earth. Those who now believe in Him, those who have believed in Him from the beginning—we shall all be with Him. “In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again— (not you will come to me, but) —I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.”

Death is never the hope of the Christian. There is the hope of the resurrection of the body; but the turning-point is Christ's coming. When the Lord takes the rule, we shall share along with Him. When the Lord comes in judgment to the world, we shall follow Him out of heaven, but we shall always be with Him— “Forever with the Lord.” There is our proper place. Where He has now gone—where He is now in the presence of the Father—there we shall be. How simple! Would not a father love to have his children near him? So we shall be. But is there not One above all nearest to the Father? It is He, the Son of God, and He will introduce us there—the fruit of His infinite work, and the objects of His Father's love, even as He Himself is.

Now that is the hope of the Christian, the coming of the Lord Jesus—that, and not changes on the earth. There is to be great glory to God, and, let me tell you, there are to be evil and judgments first. I quite admit that truth will surely prevail in the end; but “the end!” that is a serious word. And, further, I quite admit that the Lord is to bless the world. There will be the power of the Holy Ghost, and on the ground of Christ's redemptive work all the earth will be blessed. But, still, it will be the reign of Jesus. How infinitely more blessed that will be than if we could do it ourselves! As the Apostle says “Not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.” He would not like anything that detracted from the Lord Jesus. And is it not most suitable and worthy that He who was crucified should be exalted? that He who was rejected should be glorified in this very scene of His shame and suffering? This is our hope, and surely it is one not to make the Christian ashamed, although it may well shame those unbelieving believers who put proud aspiring man in the place of Christ. Amen.

W. K.

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The Coming of the Lord, Coming of the Lord, The: Part 2

I do not condemn articles of faith. For my own part I rather admire the Articles of the Church of England; I don't mean the ecclesiastical or political, but the doctrinal. I consider them very fair; sound, for the most part; and certainly moderate in their statements. Even the Athanasian Creed, which many clergymen are anxious to get rid of, I consider to be the best of the three Creeds. As to the Apostles' Creed, it is a very poor affair; and I suppose you know that no apostle had ever anything to do with it. This is merely one of the frauds of the early Fathers. Then the Nicene Creed is anything but a successful production. The great point in it is, “I believe” —not in the church— “I believe the church;” which has tended to set the church up as a teacher. But the church is nothing of the kind. It is all a mistake. God is the source of teaching. The instrumental means by which the church is taught is through His ministers, but the church does not teach. It is all an error of Popery, but it is an error that has got into all kinds of bodies very far removed from Popery. I only now refer to it to show the importance of the truth, and I say again that, while allowing the value of these articles of faith where it is set forth in creeds, still there is no life in them. They may have their value in guarding against error, or in being a kind of bulwark; but we want something more than that. It is not enough that the house be empty, swept, and garnished. Far from it. We don't keep out error merely by an abjurement of error. We need the power of the truth. We want a living power to preserve our own souls individually. There is that which tends to death, because it tends to corruption, and there is but one thing which counteracts it all; the Holy Ghost working through the Word, and through the Word revealing Christ to men.

I say, therefore, that exactly as we see the true grace of God in all Christ's fullness of glory—because the grace of the Lord depends upon the glory of His person—so exactly is His grace efficacious and effectual. A man dying on a cross is nothing, but a Divine Person dying there is

everything for God and man. A mere death on the cross, what would that be? Why, there were two men died along with Christ, and what did their death signify so far as others were concerned? One of them died an impenitent criminal. The other, through the grace of the Divine Sufferer beside him, died a blessed death. We want the death of One who can turn death into infinite and endless bliss. That is what the death of Christ effects. As the person of Christ is everything in every truth of God, so there is nothing which contains real living power apart from His person. In the future the same thing is true. Take away Christ's person, and make it merely a going to heaven, how cold a thing it will be! It is blessed, no doubt, to go to heaven; but people begin to doubt about going to heaven unless Christ is before them. They sometimes say they have doubts and fears in forgetfulness of Christ.

Who could look in the face of the Lord Jesus and say they have doubts and fears? Certainly the penitent thief had not. He had been a sinner up to the last moment. He had not been brought out of his sins till then. What was it that delivered him? The hearing of faith, the believing in that Blessed One who was dying beside him. No doubt there must have been a lighting up of every atom of the revealed Word of God ion his soul. Messiah he had heard of before only as in Scripture. But when he put the person of Him who was dying along with the Word of God, when the Holy Ghost connected the two, when there was a spark, as it were, put to the coal—what a change! This is what is needed. Faith does bring in Christ, and that is what the faith of God's elect has always done. The Old Testament saint had Christ before him as truly, though not so fully, as we have. Abel rested in Christ, as did Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the rest of the Patriarchs. Did not Abraham rejoice to see His day and was glad, as the Lord Himself tells us? And so with all the other Old Testament saints. You may depend upon it that this is a universal truth, and that no soul will be in heaven along with Christ that has not seen Christ by faith. But now that He is come, and now that He has done the infinite will of God His Father on the cross, there is a tendency to rest upon the work without the Person, and the consequence of this is that you deprive the Word of half its value at the least. You deprive it of all that gives force and fullness to it if you separate the person for a moment from the work; which is just the tendency of some teachers about the matter.

Do not suppose I am pleading for any looseness of dogmatic teaching. On the contrary. Perhaps one may be a greater stickler for orthodoxy than many persons who think themselves more orthodox. Assuredly I am pleading for carefulness about the great foundations of the church of God, and I thank God that these have been maintained. Even in the Romish Church it is one's comfort to think that after all they have the doctrine of the Trinity—that truth which never can be touched for a moment without danger—and that they believe in the reality of the Deity and of the this obnoxious denial of the fruit of redemption is humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are other views that tend to destroy the force even of these truths. I mean the exalting of other beings; the multiplying of mediators, and the bringing in of the sacrifice of the Mass, to the destruction of the power of the one sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

I return to the great truth before insisted on, that is, how essential it is that the person of Christ be a prominent point in the Christian hope, as in all other truths. Just as for our souls, it is not merely a salvation, but a Savior. “Believe” not in the blood, not in the work, not in the cross—that is not the message of the apostle Paul to the inquiring jailor “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” That Blessed Person brings in His blood, brings in His work, brings in His death and resurrection; but if I merely put forward the work, I may dwell simply upon the fact and not upon the person. But there is another effect of it too. A person draws out my affections towards him. Christ draws me to His feet to worship Him. The faith of a man is small if it does not produce a worshipping spirit.

Just so as to the coming of our Lord Jesus. It is not my going to Him. It is not your going, or any other person's going, or all the persons in the world going, divided as they are in place and in circumstance. Such is not our hope. Our hope is one; not this split up and quite diversified hope. Our hope is bound up with Himself coming for us. If you are the children of God, do not suppose that I mean that you lose nothing meanwhile if this is not your hope. I have no sympathy with the modern attempt to revive the old patristic notion that the believer in dying goes into some prison or safe-keeping where he is until the morning of the resurrection. You may ask, Who teaches such nonsense as that? Very respectable persons indeed. Perhaps you are not so much used to it on the north side of the Border; but I hear a great deal too much of it in the south, and it is not confined to mere objectors, but, I am sorry to say, even in some Christian societies taught. For what does it all turn upon? That it is essential to your enjoying the true hope that your soul be founded upon the truth of the first coming of the Lord Jesus. Have you entered into that which Christ has brought near? Do you know yourselves to be whiter than the snow, in the sight of God? That is what the blood of Jesus accomplishes. It is not merely a temporary cleansing. This was what the Jew got. The Jew had cleansing of the flesh, but it was just as long as the particular atonement for the sin lasted. Thus there was a frequent renewal, a constant repetition, just because the whole thing was imperfect. The perfect work of our Lord Jesus is contrasted with that in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The whole point there is the many sacrifices of the Jews because of their imperfection —the one sacrifice in its abiding perfection and in its efficacy for you, for me, and for all who are believers in Him.

It is of importance that you should enter into this view of the subject, and I shall tell you why. How can you glorify God and His Christ if you do not know that all is clear between yourself and God, and clear forever? You may tell me of the danger, and I admit it. There is nothing that the Wicked One will not pollute—nothing he may not turn to license, unless the Christian uses in faith the guards that the Word of God supplies. But nothing can atone for enfeebling the truth. Is it the truth that by one offering Christ has perfected forever them that are sanctified? Then make that truth your own. But do not fall into the Methodistic, or Quaker, or Pearsall-Smith idea of sanctification—all of which are substantially the same. The true Scriptural meaning of sanctification is that you are set apart to God. It is not at all a question of whether there is no evil in your flesh, for there is a great deal. Why, that is all fallen nature is made of. But yet you are sanctified. Sanctification has nothing whatever to do with the extinction of evil in the flesh. That idea, begun with Pelagius, revived by Thomas a Kempis, handed down through Jeremy Taylor, the French and Dutch mystics, W. Law and John Wesley, has passed into other communions where they have no notion whence it came.

Beloved friends, the old doctrine you ought not to have forgotten in Scotland, and I trust you have not, and I do not mean to say you have, but, still, I know it is forgotten in a great many places—namely, that the believer has two natures and not one. All teaching that sets forth the nature improved is false. The old man in the saint is always bad. While we are living men here below, the will of the flesh is opposed to God: there is that which God does not improve, and which does not in the least degree admit of improvement. Our old man is not extinguished, but crucified. “Let not sin, therefore, reign over you.” It is not gone, but the allowing it to reign over you is exhorted against. It is like a wild beast which you are to keep under lock and key; but the wild beast does not become tame by merely locking it up. And the overlooking of that point quite accounts for a Christian falling into what is wrong. He sins when he is careless or off his guard. There is in the believer on the one hand, that old nature of the flesh which is always prone to evil; and on the other the new man, or the new nature—that which loves God and His will; and it is in virtue of this that the man is said to be sanctified. He has got a nature he never had before. He is set apart to God, and, being brought by faith under the power of Christ's work, he is said to be washed, sanctified, justified. Don't you allow the idea that justification is in

the wrong place there. Nothing of the sort. God does not make mistakes in that way, and, depend upon it, the apostle Paul knew quite as well as you or I what he was writing. There are no mistakes in Scripture; for this is what God has written. “Washed, sanctified, justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God.”

You may ask, what has that to do with our hope? It has this to do with it, that you will never fully get the true hope until your heart is resting simply on Christ alone. If you are not submitting to what the Apostle calls “the righteousness of God,” in His redemptive work, you will shrink from Christ's coming, and want to put it off as long as you can. You are afraid of Christ then, and regard Him as a judge. I quite admit He is judge of all men as such. He will judge the world. But to say that He is judge to His body, the church, is all wrong. Such is not His relationship to the church at all. He is the church's Bridegroom. Do you think, when a woman is to be married to a man, that she could look upon him as a judge? Even though he were a judge officially, he would only be a judge to others and not to her a judge to prisoners, but not to his wife. What confusion of thought! And yet it is confusion made by highly respectable persons in all ages. Hence I wish to press this upon you, that the source of difficulty and doubt about our hope is the failing to grasp the full truth about what Christ has already accomplished for us. Therefore, the first requirement of every soul is to search and see what the Bible says on that head. Are you set free (Rom. 8:2)? It is not enough that you should be merely converted or quickened. This, of course, every believer must be. But you will find a great many truly converted persons who are not really at ease. They are not quite at liberty of heart. They have got their anxieties in their relationship to God. When they are in that condition, how can you expect them to welcome the Lord Jesus? Clearly the reality of waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ has never taken possession of them.

I remember a celebrated author, a servant of Christ, who wrote the biggest modern work upon the Book of Revelation. I once had some correspondence with him on this subject, wherein he conveyed— “If I could think of the Lord possibly coming to-morrow, I should be much afraid and agitated!” This showed, surely, that his heart was not resting, as a Christian man is entitled to do, on the perfect love of Christ his Savior. You can readily understand the expectant bride waiting to be married to her future husband, and you might say that she was agitated. There might be no little excitement, one could understand; but, surely, when there was true and confiding love between the two, it would not savor of alarm. It would not be the agitation of fear. Now, that is exactly what my departed friend acknowledged. And what did it betray? Very likely what is at work among some here, a want of conscious liberty of heart, because of everything being clear between the conscience and God. And the source of that bondage of fear is the want of simplicity of subjection to what God tells us in His Word that He has found in the blood of Christ for us. The death of the Lord Jesus is of perfect and everlasting efficiency, and it ought to be a point of honor, if I may so say, that believers never should allow aught to overcome their resting in assurance on Him.

May a person, then, not be overcome? Yes, but treat it as a sin: do not nurse doubt; do not allow it to master you. Treat it as evil—not because you do not deserve to be troubled, but because God does not deserve to be doubted. That is the point. When the Son of God has wrought a perfect work in glorifying God about sin, it is a disgrace to Him as well as to me if I allow anything to cloud confidence in His love. “Be strong,” says the apostle Paul to Timothy, “Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” This is beautifully shown in the case we have already referred to—namely, the robber on the cross, the penitent and believing one. It is very difficult, especially amongst those who reason a great deal, constantly to maintain an unclouded sight of Christ; and I have observed that much controversy on religious questions has a very injurious effect in that way too. No man ought ever to read controversies unless his duty compels him to do so. Don't read them for the purpose merely of knowing all the great questions and the great answers that have been made in this world. There is a far more blessed thing. Acquaint yourselves with God Himself. Acquaint yourselves with Christ. Grow in grace and the knowledge of Him; and the effect of this will be that all objections of Satan will fall before Christ, and your soul will be kept in the unclouded favor of the God of love.

Where this is the case, the waiting for Christ is simple and certain. He that rests upon Christ only and His redemption, waits for Christ alone. There will be many other elements. Sweet and blessed to think that we shall be with all the redeemed; that we shall know them as they will know us, and that there will be the joy of life and the joy of companionship. Not merely the blessed fellowship of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, amid all the delights and songs of heaven—we shall have every kind of joy. Not a single element of holy joy shall be wanting in the heavenlies. All these things, we know, we shall have by the grace of God; but there will ever be one commanding object, and that object is Christ.

Therefore now we may come back to Christ Himself. And look how the truth binds these together. The moment He comes, every saint that has ever been, rises to meet Him. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, from every land and of every tongue, from every age and people at once—not a few selected ones, but all the saints shall rise and meet their Lord. Banish from your minds those ideas that are found rising up again to pollute the air for God's children—that it is only those who know more than their fellows that shall be caught up, and that other Christians shall be left to pay the penalty of their want of intelligence at this time. Where do they get that? There is one black spot upon all these theories, and naturally, that the people who preach that a selected class shall be caught up to meet the Lord always have the misfortune to mean themselves. If I came to tell you that none of my co-religionists, as they are sometimes called, although I entirely repudiate that expression, desiring no religion but Christ—but if I came saying to you that only those who share my views, whatever they be, on this or any other matter, are the favored few that are to be caught up to meet the Lord Jesus, you might well hiss me out of your town, as I should deserve to be rejected as a false teacher, at least as one merely crying up a party. No, the saints of God shall all share it. It is not merely what strictly is the church of God—not merely those who are indwelt by the Holy Ghost, and have been since the day of Pentecost—but all saints that have ever been in this world, that will answer to the call of the Lord Jesus.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout. Did you ever learn that this word “shout” only occurs this once in the New Testament? There are words for shouting found elsewhere, but this word is quite peculiar. What is the peculiarity? The word thus employed is the technical word for an admiral's call to his seamen, or a general's to his soldiers. It is, to put it more broadly, any special call of command to those who were in special relationship to him that commanded them. And thus you see the bearing of the word on this great topic. It is not a call to the world—it is not a call to everybody. The gospel is that, and thank God for it; but this shout is only for those who know His voice, who have heard Him already—those who are familiar with His love, those who are His own, those who have learned to obey—those, therefore, that know that it is the great Captain of Salvation who is calling from on high, who is calling His own to be with Him on high. The word “shout” has nothing to do with the question of loudness, any more than it has to do with universality—the very reverse, it rather excludes it. It is exactly what would not be used by even a scholarly man in a vague general way—how much less by an inspired apostle. “The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout” —it is a word of command; it is an assembling call-"with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God.” All these, you see, are entirely unconnected with the world. They have to do with God's own people, for “the dead in Christ

shall 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 so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

There is another point I should like to say a word upon in connection with it, because it helps to make plain a saying of Christ. In the fourteenth chapter of John there is a very beautiful setting forth of this blessed hope. “Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me.” At first it sounds very peculiar that the Lord should here tell believing disciples to believe in Him. I do not think it means that they were merely to increase their former faith. “Ye believe in God, believe also in me.” I take it that the force is this You believe in God though you have not seen Him; believe in Me, who am going to become invisible to you. I, who have been your visible Master, your Teacher in your midst, am going to leave the world. I am going, therefore, to enter a condition of invisibility as far as you are concerned, because I shall be no longer on earth, but in heaven. This follows most simply and naturally from the words of the next verse “In my Father's house are many mansions.” It is not that the Lord was going to have done with His body; He never will do that to all eternity. In that sense, therefore, it will never be a question of absolute invisibility, but only relative to those disciples certainly so. And this is necessary for Christianity. If I were asked to give in very few words one specific difference between Christianity and Judaism, I would say that Judaism was a religion of sight; Christianity of faith. We walk not by sight, but by faith. Here then, now, to test the truth of it all, the Lord enters that condition, but not by becoming a spirit. The Lord is not a spirit; He has a spiritual body. An angel is a spirit; but the Lord Jesus is not. “A spirit hath not flesh and blood.” We must not at all allow such a notion as that the Lord Jesus, in His risen condition, has not flesh and bones—of course He has. He has no longer a life in the blood, because this is a life in connection with earth, a life which lives by food, air, etc.

[W. K.]

(To be continued)

The Coming of the Lord, Coming of the Lord, The: Part 1

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, that the day of Christ is at hand” (2 Thess. 2:1, 2).

There are two great parts in the future advent of our Lord Jesus Christ which need to be carefully distinguished. They are both of the greatest importance, but they have each a very distinct character; and the confusion of that which is distinct always leads to the enfeebling, if not the destruction, of the truth.

It is so with every truth of God. If I look at the person of Christ there are two great sides to it. There is His deity and His humanity. If I confound them, or use one to neutralize the other, I have lost the truth about Christ. It is not true that He is God only, nor that He is man only. Nor is it true that it is a confusion of the Godhead with the humanity of the Lord, There is His person, but most assuredly there is a Divine nature and there is a human.

So, again, if I look at the atonement of our Lord Jesus Christ; there is the very fullest grace, but there is righteousness. If I forget the righteousness, undoubtedly I shall use the wondrous self-abandonment of the Son of God, who suffered for our sins, in a selfish manner. If I only see love in it, I shall make light of sin; and if I do not see love and the fullness of love in it, I shall never have peace with God. So that the confounding of things that differ—no matter what the theme you take up, or the test by which you prove the truth of it—the confounding of things that differ is one of the most dangerous ways of losing the power of that which God reveals for the blessing of our souls.

It is not otherwise with the second advent, as it is called, of our Lord Jesus. There is one side of it which is the expression of the fullest love and sovereign grace. There is another side—that there will be the execution of the most solemn judgment. Here the distinction is even more marked, if possible, than in the atonement, or even in the person of our Lord, because the expression of judgment falls upon man objectively, whereas the Christian is now and ever safe in Christ. As to the person of Christ it is the same principle. One needs to be subject to the truth of God as to the deity and humanity of the Lord. In the atonement, it is just the same thing. It is the believer who reaps all the blessedness of God's unsparing judgment of sin; and it is the believer who enters into all the fruit and perfect results of God's perfect love. But in the second advent of our Lord Jesus there are different objects. It is not only that there is the twofold side of the truth, but the sovereign grace which is manifested in the coming again of our Lord Jesus will give to those who know Him a definite, distinct, and intimate relationship with Himself; whereas the execution of judgment is on those who abide His enemies. To confound these, therefore—to suppose they are bound up together in one and the same transaction—we shall find to be a mistake fraught with consequences wholly destructive of spiritual intelligence. Whereas, when we discriminate between these two things so different, then I am persuaded we are on the way to find that a great deal of the Word, otherwise hidden from the believer, will become more and more plain to him. Therefore I press very much the distinctness of these two doctrines as an important element—as important as any other—for those who believe the Word of God.

And, one must add, it is the more necessary to do so, because the confounding of these two things is rather common in fact, a natural tendency of the heart. I have not the slightest doubt from the translation that is given in our ordinary Bibles that those who made it excellent men as they were, and learned—did not distinguish between the two. To me that is manifest from the mistake into which it led them—a mistake which I have not to combat now, I am thankful to say. You have all got the Revised Edition of the New Testament in your hands, I suppose, and anyone who takes the trouble to compare the Revised Version with the old, will find that what I have often insisted upon—very probably in this town—has now been effected. Undoubtedly the revisers did not make that alteration because they believed in what I am going to set before you to-night. They did it very much as a question of language. I suspect that very few of them knew the truth in respect to the question. I say this not in the least out of a disposition to slight their knowledge of languages; and I am persuaded that they themselves would allow that this is the case-more particularly, also, as there appears to be a mistake in the way in which they translate the first verse. But they have been faithful in this, that they let you know that the true meaning of the last clause of the second verse is that the day “of the Lord” —for this is the true reading of the best copies—is not “at hand,” but present.

It is not a question of translation—in the day “of the Lord” rather than “of Christ” —it is a question of text, and their text is better there. But the last word is a question of translation. They say, “is now present.” I need not tell you that this makes an enormous difference. To say that

the day is “at hand” represents the day as future. To say that the day is “now present” is in contrast with the future. Now, there the main error lay. What our Authorized Translators say—that the day of Christ is at hand—was really true; whereas, to represent the apostle as combating its nearness is not true. It is a most serious mistake. The false teachers were preaching that the day was already come, but the Authorized Translation makes it appear that the apostle denies this to be true. Elsewhere, in the thirteenth chapter of Romans, the apostle says— “The night is far spent, the day is at hand.” He could not possibly say in chapter thirteen of Romans it is true, and that it is false in 2 Thess. 2:2. That is what the Authorized Translators really involve-that the apostle contradicts to the Thessalonians what he affirms to the Romans. That could not be; nor is it true. Any scholar knows that the word is quite different, and that the word “at hand” is perfectly right in Rom. 13:12, and “at hand” utterly wrong in the A.V. of 2 Thess. 2:2.

The Revisers are here right. What the false teachers taught was that the day of the Lord was now come. You would naturally ask how that could be. It seems such an egregious thing to assert that the day of the Lord was already come. They clearly had a sort of figurative understanding about the day of the Lord. They knew the day of the Lord to be an outburst of trouble and perplexity—a time of darkness and thick clouds, according to the Old Testament prophets; and they pointed to all the trouble the Thessalonians were suffering and said— “The day of the Lord is come.” The apostle says, “No; it is not arrived. It cannot come yet. There are tremendous evils which must take place before the day of the Lord can deal with them.”

The important theme to-night is not the day of the Lord. I merely make these preliminary observations to show you how mistaken it is to conceive of the coming of the Lord as the same thing with the day of the Lord. Beyond controversy, it is evident that the Thessalonians would not have allowed for a moment that the Lord was come. That was contrary to the sense of all—contrary to every appearance of the truth. They knew that when the Lord comes—the apostle had shown them that carefully the dead in Christ should rise first, “and we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” All this was not come—therefore the Lord could not have come. There was some figurative meaning given to the day of the Lord, and that was exactly where the folly of the false teaching showed itself.

The apostle elaborately enters into this, for the purpose of putting both truths in their right relation the one to the other. “We beseech you, brethren” (not here in regard of, but) “by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The word the Authorized Version has translated “by” —and, I think, not improperly— is the word referred to first, and I believe we do not get so good an equivalent in the Revised Version. Thus what betrays that the revisers did not understand the argument of the apostle is that they say “in regard of” or something equivalent. Now, by this they show that they conceived the coming of the Lord and the day of the Lord to be the same. They thought that the subject which the apostle was discussing was the coming of the Lord. Now, this is not so. The subject under discussion is the day of the Lord. The error was that the day was present. The false teachers did not trouble themselves about the coming of the Lord; but they were very full of the day of the Lord, and they took advantage of the circumstances of the Thessalonians to say that the day had begun—that that day had actually arrived.

For what, then, does the apostle bring in, in verse 1, the coming of the Lord? To lift up their eyes from their circumstances, from their troubles, from their persecutions, from the darkness and clouds of the earth, to heaven. Do you not know that the Lord is coming—that He Himself is coming in person? No one could say that the Lord was come. This would have been so utterly to contradict common-sense that they would themselves have repudiated such an assertion. But the apostle recalls them to the great and blessed hope of the Christian. We all know—all of us who are familiar with the New Testament, with the First Epistle to the Thessalonians more particularly—that the bright hope of the Christian is that the Lord is coming. What is He coming for? Not to put away our sins: He has done that already. Not merely to bless the earth, because this is not our hope, although we expect it. There are many things we expect that are not our proper hope. What is our spiritual hope? Himself; He Himself, to take us to the Father's house; Himself, to present us in His own beauty and glory to THE FATHER; Himself, that as He has gone into the Paradise of God He will come to fetch us there—not even leaving it to the highest angel in heaven to bring us there, but Himself will come, that the objects of perfect favor may enjoy it where there is nothing inconsistent, where there is glory, where there is the absence of all that can grieve or distract the heart, where there is everything to promote the enjoyment of His love, and where all will be according to that love. Glory is not the highest thing, but love; and, therefore, in the seventeenth of John, our Lord Himself tells us that the glory will be the proof to the world of the love that is set upon us. But a proof to the world never can be so deep as the thing itself. We all know, supposing a subject were arrayed by his Sovereign in the most gorgeous robes, and put in a position however high, it would not be the same as enjoying the love and confidence of the Sovereign in the most intimate way. And what is a Sovereign's love compared with that of Christ? Remember, too, that it is not a love that is for a little season only, but full and forever.

Well, then, this is the hope of the Christian; and it is of the greatest importance that you should remember this is our true hope, that the Lord Jesus will come to take us to be with Himself, and like Himself, and this where He will be forever. It is not merely going to heaven, and still less is it reigning over the earth. I fully allow that both these things are true. God never made the earth to be merely a football for the devil. He will not allow the earth to be a place for His enemy to harass His creature and put dishonor upon Himself. He means to make this earth a part of His glory. It may be the outer circle of it, but this earth shall know the glory of Jehovah. It is not only the knowledge of His glory, but the glory of Jehovah shall fill the earth; not merely the heavens, but the earth. The heavens are higher than the earth, and so the glory unveiled there will be of a superior character to that which will embrace the earth. Accordingly there is where the Lord will give us this blessed hope in all its fullness and in the depths of its power; when the Son of God will come to receive us unto Himself, and present us with Himself on high the objects of God's love—the love that rests upon Him resting upon us, and ourselves brought into a suitable relationship to God. Now we are members of His body; then we shall be His bride. Of course I know, and you know, that these are but figures; but the figures of Scripture are not the flourishes of rhetoric, nor are they to be regarded as words that signify nothing; on the contrary, they signify everything that they express—that is, they are vivid images of the truth, which God will most surely make good in that great day.

But there is another thing of very great moment. You will see why it is that if Christ personally be the center of our hope, as He undoubtedly is, it exactly falls in with all truth. What is it that makes any part of divine revelation vague or indistinct? I will tell you, separating it from Christ. If you are a believer, yet if you allow the very smallest separation of any truth from Him, if you do not see all truth in Christ and with Christ, you will be, comparatively speaking, feeble in the faith. That is the reason why, if you take up a book on theology or divinity, as it is called, it is all so cold, and has so little in it which attracts the heart. It is only a skeleton. It is not really the living Christ. Everyone feels this who has any kind of spiritual sensibility. Therefore it is that when persons draw their views from books of divinity rather than from Christ, as revealed in the Word of God, the effect on their souls is to make them cold. There may be power of reasoning, order, or even imagination in the book; but imagination is more like the coruscations of electricity than the real, true warmth of living power. Nothing but Christ has life.

Christ is our life, and the Holy Ghost will never act except in view of Christ and for Christ. The Holy Ghost has been sent down from heaven for the express purpose of glorifying Christ. He does not glorify Himself, and He certainly will not glorify any mere article of faith, although it may be true.

[W.K.]

(To be continued)

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