Isaiah - Commentaries by Walter Thomas Prideaux Wolston

Student Story, Milk Without Money;" or, a Lesson We Must All Learn.

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(REPRINTED, BY ARRANGEMENT, FROM "GOD'S GLAD TIDINGS.")

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price."—ISA. Iv. I.

I WAS on an evangelistic tour through the north of Ireland, accompanied by a beloved fellow-laborer in the gospel. Being announced to preach at the town of L—, on the 14th September, two routes to our destination lay open to us,—a long detour by rail, or a direct drive of about twenty miles on an outside jaunting-car over some verdant mountains. Taking the wise advice of our host of the previous night—a beloved brother in the Lord—we chose the latter, and being well furnished with little gospel books for the journey, we started. My friend sat one side of the car and I the other, and all along our journey we scattered our precious gospel seeds, giving them to walkers, jerking them to riders in vehicles, and now and then jumping off, as our stout nag toiled up the hills; and handing them to rustic cottagers, and sun-burned reapers in the fields of golden grain which, on all hands, waved under the balmy zephyr breezes of the loveliest day I ever saw in Erin's isle. I am thankful to say our tracts were welcomed on all hands; and one feels sure the fruit of this happy service will show up, in the day of the Lord, in the persons of some precious souls blessed through these little silent messengers.

The sun began to get very hot, and quite naturally, after two or three hours of this sort of work, we became rather thirsty. We had come on no very drinkable water, so, spying a little house where I knew there would be a cow or two, I asked our driver if he thought I could get some milk there. Receiving an affirmative answer, I ran to the door, which was open, and knocked. This brought out from the innermost apartment a sedate but pleasant-looking female, evidently, I should judge, the mistress of the primitive establishment. Looking at me, as much as to say, What do you want? but not speaking, I courteously said, "Will you be good enough to sell me some milk?"

She paused a moment, and then very firmly replied "No!" following up this decided negative with a pleasant smile, and "but I will give you some," putting as strong an emphasis on the "give" as she had placed on the "no."

So saying, she turned back to her little dairy, while I turned to my friend, who had come to my side, saying, "Now, that's the gospel, is it not? God gives, but He will not sell, salvation." We had a most delicious draught of cold sweet milk, for which we most truly gave her thanks, accompanied by some little gospel books, and a few words about God's blessed Son and His great salvation, which was as free to her, by faith, as she had made her milk to us, and then resumed our journey.

Then, and many a time since, I have pondered over this scene as a lovely illustration of God's way of dealing with souls who really want salvation. We did not know, and therefore did not count, on the bounty of the one we appealed to. And so it is with man. Not knowing God, he knows not the grace and love of His heart; and, though needy, and owning it too, fancies he must bring an equivalent to God ere he can get from Him that which he needs. If you, my reader, arc of this mistaken class, may God open your eyes to see His way of salvation. His grace provides it, and not your works of any kind. There are two good reasons for this. First, God is too rich to sell salvation; and second, man is too poor to buy it. Hence you must get it as a gift, if you are to get it at all.

The quotation I have made at the head of this paper shows this truth very simply. The "thirsty" are invited. And are not you among this number? You certainly are, if you have not yet found Jesus, for "your labor," whatever its nature, "satisfieth not," our verses say. Thirst is a craving which the suited fluid alone can satisfy. Now the thirst of an anxious soul is really for God and His Christ, though very likely it could not put it in so many words; but the Lord Jesus, who knows the heart well, says, " Whosoever drinketh of this water [the well of this world] shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst" (John 4:13, 14). Precious words! But not more precious than true. Again, He says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto mc, and drink" (John 7:37); giving also this sweet assurance, "He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst;... and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:35, 37).

Now, dear anxious reader, are not you invited? Do not these glorious words of the Savior encourage you to come to Him? They ought to, if they do not. Listen again, "He, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." "But," you say, "how can I be sure it means me? Perhaps I am not thirsty enough, not anxious enough, for salvation." Very likely; no one ever was as anxious as he should have been, considering God's view of sin, and the awful danger of the unsaved sinner. But the point is not the measure of your anxiety, but the fact of your being "thirsty" or willing at all. If so, hear the word of the Lord: " I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.... Let him that is athirst come.

And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 21:6; 22:17). What charming words! "I will give... freely." That is God's side. "Let him take... freely." That is your side. God gives; all you have to do is to take what He gives.

"What must I bring?" say you. Nothing! Come to Jesus as you are. "He that hath no money" is the invited one. You have no equivalent for that which God dispenses, so you are bid to come and buy "without money and without price." Why "buy"? Because it supposes a person in earnest. When a person goes into a shop to "buy" an article, his very presence there shows he really wanted it, or he would not have gone to the trouble of entering the mart. Buying implies direct dealing between two parties. This is the very thing God wants. He wishes you brought into His own presence in real desire to have salvation—the water of life—Christ. You come. What then? You find all is a gift. How simple!

What earnestness is with God, when thrice in this one verse He says "Come!" I cannot refrain from quoting it again, "He, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: COME ye, buy and eat; yea, COME, buy wine and milk without money, and without price." How blessedly falls that heaven-born word on the ear—Come! come! COME! Who could refuse such grace? Come as you are; come in your sins; come in your guilt. Come in your distress; come in your sorrow, your want, your woe, your misery, your helplessness, your nothingness, your poverty, your hardness of heart,—yea, exactly as you are, as you read these lines. Only come, come to Jesus, and you will be received, blessed, forgiven, cleansed, and saved on the very spot.

More, you will be made the possessor of a new life, for, He adds here, "Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live." This, too, is a gift, as is all else that the soul receives from God; for it is written, "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

Rest assured, if you come in any way but as a simple receiver, you must be rejected, as was Cain. Did you never notice that the Lord Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive "(Acts 20:35). This being so, who is to have the more blessed place, you or God? Let one speak who knew well this truth," Without all contradiction, the less is blessed of the better" (Heb. 7:7). Now, then, what do you say? I will tell you what I say: "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15).

Night Scenes of Scripture, Night Without a Morning, A

(Isaiah 21:11-12; 1 Thess. 5)

We have been looking on previous evenings at that which the Lord Jesus Christ did when He came the first time into man’s world. We have looked at His birth, a little at His life, and oftentimes at His death, the basis and the groundwork of the soul’s relationship with God. We have seen that the work of Christ fits the believing soul absolutely for the presence of God, even now, that the atoning work of the Savior is so perfect that even now the conscience is purged, the believing soul is cleansed from its sins, and is brought in righteousness to God: nay, more, the believer is born of God, possesses His nature, is in relationship with Him, knows he is a child of God, and can call Him Father: because coupled with the forgiveness of sins in the New Testament, is the reception by the believer of the Holy Spirit, who dwells in him, and produces in him the spirit of sonship, so that he can truly say, Abba, Father.

When the sinner believes in Jesus, his sins are forgiven, and as soon as forgiveness of sins is known, the believer is sealed with the Holy Spirit. Christ was preached at the beginning as the exalted Savior, who gives repentance and remission of sins; and when the gospel was preached to Cornelius and his friends, and the proclamation was made, “To him give all the prophets witness, that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins,” we read that “while Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44). That is the way in which the Holy Spirit comes now. A sinner hears of Jesus, and is made to feel his need of the Savior, that is, he gets awakened, becomes exercised about his soul before God, then he turns to Jesus, believes on Him, trusts Him, gets under the shelter of His blood, and having received the forgiveness of his sins, God gives him the Holy Spirit, as His seal upon all who believe in His own blessed Son.

Scripture presents Christ personally as the object of faith, and whosoever believes in Him comes under the benefit of the work He has accomplished, and then when there is faith in Jesus, and in the work which He has accomplished, God seals the faith of the newborn soul, and the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in the person of the believer, being the seal of his faith, and the earnest of those blessed, unseen, and eternal realities that belong to every child of God. In proof of this statement notice what the Apostle Paul says, in writing to the Ephesians: “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph. 1:13). Who believes the gospel? The sinner. And who is sealed by the Holy Spirit? The believer. Nothing could be more simple: the sinner hears the gospel, and believes it; and the believer, being sealed by the Holy Spirit, is brought into the enjoyment of all that belongs to him.

I will illustrate what I mean. Suppose I want a hundred sheep, and go to the nearest sheep-fair, and find what I want. I say to their owner, “I am prepared to give you two pounds each for your sheep.” He contracts to sell me the sheep at the price, I put down the money, and thus the sheep become mine. What do I do next with them? Drive them home? No, I do not take them home immediately, I am not in such a hurry: before I drive them a yard I take my paint pot, and I put my math upon every one of my sheep. If I fail to do this, in driving them home they might get mixed up with some other people’s sheep, and I should not know which were mine. Alas! that is the way Christians do get mixed up with the people of the world, and often you cannot know the one from the other. It will not do for me to say I think I know that sheep to be mine by a leg mark, or by the turn of his ears, or by his horns: no, I must be sure of my own, and so I put my peculiar mark on each. Similarly, in giving the Holy Spirit, God puts His mark, clearly and distinctly, upon all His own.

But let me ask you this: Did the mark I put upon the sheep make it mine? You know it did not. I put the mark on it because it was mine, but it was the money I paid for it that made it mine. So it is the work of Christ, the blood of Christ, that redeems, and saves, and brings the soul to God, and then the Holy Spirit is given to dwell in the believer as God’s seal upon him, and the earnest of the good things that belong to him, so that the believer is sure of glory; his heart is now put in possession of eternal things, and he enjoys them. It is like the bunch of grapes from Eshcol which Israel saw in the desert, and beautiful they were, it took two men to carry one bunch. The people were not in the land when they saw those grapes, but having seen the grapes, they had a taste of the land before they got into it. Before you and I go to heaven, we have, by the Holy Spirit, a taste of heavenly things. We know that we belong to heaven, and we know the atmosphere of the place we are going to. We know the Father, we know the Savior, we have eternal life, and enjoy communion, and fellowship with the Father, and with the Son.

A Christian has thus actually begun his heaven down here on earth. People often say, “We shall be happy by-and-by.” Why not be happy now? Why put it off? The Lord wants you to be happy down here. Oh, but, you say, I have seen a great many people who say they are Christians, and they are not happy. The more the pity, they ought to be, if they are Christians. But perhaps these may not have been real Christians, still that does not prove there are no real ones. Young men think they have found a ground for remaining unbelievers, because they have found some professors who are not genuine. I ask then, When you get hold of a bank-note, do you always put it in the fire, because now and then a

bad bank-note has turned up? Not you, you know better, for what does a bad bank-note prove? That there are plenty of good ones. So if I meet with a counterfeit saint, he only proves that there are real ones.

Now what is a Christian? He is a man clear of death and judgment, brought to God, his sins forgiven: one who has a new nature, who has received the Holy Spirit, and who has a new place before God in Christ, of whose body he is a member; one who knows he is a child of God, an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ; who has nothing but glory now before him, and is looking for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, to take him home to the rest and glory of the Father's house. It is therefore a wonderful thing to be a Christian: an unspeakably blessed thing: and I should like every soul here tonight to have the enjoyment of it.

But, someone says, many Christians are often very miserable, and dull-looking, and do we not read, in the seventh chapter of Romans, of a man crying out, "Oh, wretched man that I am"? Yes, but do you know why that man is so wretched? I will tell you. He is thinking only of himself. He speaks forty times about himself, and never once about Christ. He has a good right to be wretched. That man is overwhelmed with what I call "the self-occupation fever," and plenty of Christians, I fear, have that complaint. If you were only looking at Christ, instead of at yourself, your heart would be full of Christ, for you would be always feasting on Him.

When you get the joy of the gospel, the knowledge of God's love, and what it has accomplished for you, you will find it a wonderful thing, and you will have a deepening sense of the glory and worth of Christ. It will not make you wretched, but unspeakably happy. Let me say to you therefore, with all emphasis, that Romans 7 does not describe proper Christian state or experience. It is a very good thing for a man to learn, as the man in Romans 7 does, that he is good for nothing, so that he has to turn to Another. In the end you find he gets delivered from himself, and then he is no longer groaning and sighing, but giving thanks: "I thank God through Jesus Christ my Lord." I get in the cross — the death of Christ — not only what puts away my sins, but also what gives me title to be rid of myself, though the one part is often known a long time before the other. I recollect well the night when I learned that God had forgiven and forgotten my sins, but I confess it was certainly two or three years after that I learned that God had given me leave to forget myself. And that was a great day in my history when I learned to forget myself in the contemplation of Christ.

How does one get to that point? I will tell you briefly. If you look at Christ, dying on the cross for your sins, you will get relief for your conscience in the knowledge that those sins are put away forever. But if you look at the cross, and see Christ dying for you, and see that you died with Christ, you will learn that you have a new life, and a new place, a new standing before God altogether. As the apostle says, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). It is an immense thing to see this new standing. As a sinner I was in Adam, and a partaker of death and judgment, but, by grace, I am now in Christ, where Christ now is, before God.

If you will study Romans 5-7, you will find that in the fifth chapter you have two heads, Adam and Christ; in the sixth two masters, sin and God; and in the seventh two husbands, the law and Christ. It is plain that I cannot be under two heads at once: if I am in Adam, I am not in Christ; and if I am in Christ, I am not in Adam. How do I get into this new standing? Through faith in Christ who died for me, and rose again, and I learn that I died with Him. How do I get from under the dominion of the old master, sin? By death. "As many of you as were baptized unto Jesus Christ, were baptized unto his death" (Rom. 6:3). You start your new career before God on the ground of your identification with the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. You are thus set free from your old master, sin, and you have a new Master, God. How do you get free from the old husband, the law? By death too. Is the law dead? God forbid. Who is dead then? The man to whom the law applied I am dead. When does a man get out of the region of law? When he is dead. "Ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Rom. 7:4).

But there is another thing I must not forget. When a young woman is going to be married, people often ask, What is her dowry? You will find the believer's dowry in Romans 8 There is what may be called the marriage settlement, and a splendid one it is. There you have the unfolding of the truth of the new place which is yours, in Christ, before God. The believer is in Christ, and hence there is no condemnation, and Christ is in him. He is in the Spirit, and the Spirit is in him. He is a son of God, a child of God; he can say, Abba, Father. He is looking for the glory of God with joy, waiting for the redemption of the body, and, while he is waiting down here, what is taking place? The Holy Spirit is interceding in him, and Christ on high is interceding for him. Everything works together for good, and God is for him, so that he can say triumphantly, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). And then Paul concludes by saying: "We are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:37-39). That chapter opens with no condemnation, and closes with no separation; and this is what every believer is entitled to know, and enjoy, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Well now, I really think it is worth while to be a Christian. I give you my honest conviction. Have I proved it? Blessedly. I can only say I have been thirty-five years on the road to glory, and it gets better and better as I go on; the light gets brighter, and the joy gets deeper. And I may add this, I never yet met a man who was sorry he was converted. I have known scores of men die who were sorry they had not been converted. Therefore, if there are any here tonight who are not converted, I really think if they are earnest, and honest, and simple, they will want to be Christians from this night forth. For I can tell you we Christians have got an uncommonly bright prospect. We have a title to glory without a flaw, and a prospect without a cloud; you have a title to hell, a title to the lake of fire, without a flaw, and a prospect without one single ray of light to cheer it, or to relieve it. Which of us, do you think, is the better off?

The Christian having this new place before God, and being so blessed, what does he desire? To be with his Lord. The first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ fits us for His second coming. His second coming is always presented in Scripture as the Christian's hope — His second coming in a particular character, as the Bridegroom for the Bride. Oh, says some one, I thought the Lord was coming to judge the world. True, He is, but that is not the way He presents Himself to His own. He is coming as the Bridegroom to claim His Bride, and I never knew a bride yet who connected a court of justice, a trial, and a sentence with the coming of her bridegroom. Surely every bride would say, "My bridal day will be the brightest in my life."

What am I looking for as a Christian? For the coming of the Lord, as my Savior, not for death. If you are looking for death, you have not yet risen to the height of what the gospel does for the believer. I know the world may scoff, and say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" and I shall have something to say by-and-by to the scoffer of Edom, who says in derision, "Watchman, what of the night?" But, first of all, I say to

you who are Christians, What lies before you? It is the coming of the Lord. Did He not say, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”? (John 14:3). He did. And does not the apostle Paul say: “But now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment; so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall he appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation”? (Heb. 9:26-28). When He comes back the next time, do you think He will touch the question of sin with His people? Impossible. When He came the first time He settled forever with God the whole, question of our sins, for He bare them, and put them away; and when He comes again it will be “without sin,” that is, not raising that question, but for salvation, for our deliverance, spirit, soul, and body, out of this scene altogether.

It is very important to see this, that a Christian need not even expect to die. On a previous occasion I made a remark which somebody afterward said he wished I had amplified. It was this, The man who is only born once dies twice, but the man who is born twice will certainly not die twice, and he need not even die once. I do not say you will not die, but I say emphatically it is part of the gospel that you need not die.

I will tell you how I learned this blessed truth. Thirty years ago, when a medical student, I was living in the north of London, in the house of a godly couple, who had but two children, a son and a daughter. The little boy of thirteen, Johnnie, was very friendly with me. One evening in the summer of 1864 I was busy at my studies, when there was a knock at the door, and I said, “Come in.” In walked John with a book and slate under his arm, and a frown on his brow. “If you please, sir,” he said, “I have got an awfully difficult sum in algebra, which I cannot understand, and mother said perhaps you would be kind enough to explain it to me.” We sat down to the equation, and very soon it worked out all right. The frown went off the boy’s face, he was delighted, and he thanked me very heartily. He was walking off in the full conviction that he would be at the top of his class the next day, knowing this difficult sum, when I said, “Stop, John, there is a still more difficult problem to be settled: how are you to be saved?” “Only by the Lord Jesus,” he replied. “Quite true, and do you know the Lord Jesus yet?” “I do not, but I wish I did.” “Well, you may know Him if you really wish to, you may come to Him just now,” and taking up my Bible I put the gospel as simply as I could before the little fellow.

Within ten minutes the light entered his heart, and he confessed his faith in the Lord Jesus. He believed the gospel so simply and readily that, thorough believer as I am in sudden conversions, I began to think that perhaps he did not apprehend the subject, and was professing to be converted too quickly. I questioned him, and cross-questioned him, and tried to puzzle him if I could, but it was no good. He had come to Jesus, and He had saved him, and blotted out his sins, and the boy’s face was beaming in the sense of the Lord’s love. “Well, suppose the Lord should come?” said I. “I would be quite happy to meet Him,” replied the lad. “And suppose you were to die?” “I would be quite happy to die now,” was his calm answer. “But, sir,” he added, “there is no reason why I should die now, is there?” “What do you mean, my little man?” said I. “Well, you know, sir, you have been telling me that Jesus has died for me, and I thought then there would be no need for me to die.”

I said to myself, “Thank God, that boy knows the gospel better than I do.” I had never seen clearly till then that because Jesus had died and risen again, the believer in Him is delivered from the necessity of death, so that the apostle may well say, “We shall not all sleep” (1 Cor. 15:51). The Lord in His wisdom may, and has let many of His saints die, and go into the grave, but when He comes He will raise them up. Even in the case to which I have just referred, that was His will.

I lost sight of that lad for over a quarter of a century, but I heard that as he grew up, he became a noted servant of Christ, and his name was known in many quarters of England and Scotland, as a preacher of the gospel. Twenty-seven years had rolled by, when a professional call took me one day to the south coast of England. I was told that there was an earnest preacher — a doctor of divinity — living in the town, whose name I thought I recognized as that of my former little friend John, and I thought I would go and see him. I sent in my card, and he came into the drawing-room, and received me with open arms. “I would not have missed this for ten thousand worlds,” he said, as we grasped hands after twenty-seven years of separation. Each had much to tell of the grace of the Lord to our souls during that long period. It was only a few minutes that I was with him, for I had to leave, and very shortly after I heard that as he was going to preach one day, he felt ill, reclined on a sofa, and, while alone, passed away to be with his Savior. So I say you nay die, but get hold of this, you need not.

The scoffer may say to me, “All men will die,” but God’s Word assures me, “We shall not all sleep.” The Lord is coming presently, and those who know Him will pass up into glory without death. I know that men scoff at the idea of the Lord’s coming, just as the child of Edom says in Isaiah 21, “Watchman, what of the night?” Well, what is the night? The night is the time of the absence of Jesus, and the morning will be when He returns. And the apostle in the scripture I read to you, says, “We are not of the night nor of darkness” (1 Thess. 5:5). The Christian he calls a child of light, and of the day. The Christian is in the night, but not of the night: he is of the day, and he is going on to the day. And what of you, my unsaved, unconverted friend? You are of the night, as well as in the night of the world, a sinner in your sins, and you are on your road to an eternal hell, but Satan will not let you know it if he can help it. You are in darkness, and your thoughts, and your deeds, are thoughts and deeds that suit the night. You know nothing of light, you know nothing of God, you and He have never met yet. Christ, who is the light, and you, alas, are total strangers. But you may know Him as your Savior this very night, and then you will be able to look forward to the morning.

Now, what do I hear the watchman say, in answer to the scoffer? Listen: “The morning cometh.” The morning will surely come, a morning without clouds for every believer, a morning of clear shining after rain. After all the night of sorrow we look for the coming of the Lord as the Bridegroom of our hearts, and oh, what a moment it will be when He comes, and the children of the day rise to meet their Lord in the air. Oh, happy saints! blessed are ye who belong to the Lord, and are of the day. The apostle in writing to the Romans can say: “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand” (Rom. 13:11-12).

The apostle does not mean that we are more sure about being saved, but that the hour of our deliverance out of this scene, body, soul, and spirit, is nearer than when we believed. The Lord is about to take us to the place to which we belong. Where does a Christian belong to? To heaven. Where does a man of the world belong to? To earth. Ah, but, you say, if I were to admit that — I belong to heaven, I should have to shake off a good deal of the world. Well, that would do you no harm. It is a very good thing for a man who is running a race to shake off a hindrance. Would that you could see clearly that the Christian belongs to heaven, to Christ, who is there, and that he is not of the night, but is a child of light, and belongs to the day. He is looking for the morning, and he is fitted for it by his Savior’s work. Now that the night is far spent and the day so near at hand, it is high time to awake out of sleep. Why? Because we are going to be judged? No, but because our salvation is nearer than when we believed.

If you will look now for a moment at the scripture which I read from 1st Thessalonians, you will see how the apostle brings out clearly what Christians are looking for. He says, “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.” Times and seasons “relate — as prophecy always does — to things down here on earth. “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.” Let me say, by way of explanation, that the last four verses of chapter 4 are a parenthesis, and the fourteenth verse of the fourth chapter is really connected with the first verse of the fifth chapter. “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him” — that is, when the Lord Jesus returns by-and-by in power and glory, He will then bring all His saints, who have previously died, with Him.

But the question naturally arises, How can the Lord bring His people with Him? Surely He must in the first place take them to be with Him? That is exactly what the last four verses of chapter 4 explain. The apostle shows that when the Lord Himself comes to claim His loved Bride, He first raises the dead saints, then changes the living, and both together are caught up to meet Him in the air, It is true you have the voice of the archangel, but the Lord Himself descends from heaven with a shout, and it is His shout that the sleeping saints will hear (John 5:28). Would you not like to hear that shout? Would you not like to see your Lord this very night? Could anything gladden your heart like seeing that precious Savior who has died for you, and fitted you for glory? Besides the shout, and the archangel’s voice, there is the trump of God — no doubt a military allusion. The general gives the word of command, the aide-de-camp passes it on, and the trumpeter rings out the order to all the field. So will it be when the Lord comes.

When the shout, and the voice, and the trump are heard, the first movement is among the dead saints. The dead in Christ — not the dead out of Christ — shall rise first, “Then 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” (1 Thess. 4:17). Oh, what a prospect! How sweet! How comforting! I delight to think it may be tonight we shall hear the voice of our blessed Lord Jesus, and shall rise to meet Him, arid be with Him forever. The dead in Christ of every clime and age will rise in the likeness of Christ. The bodies sown in weakness, dishonor, and corruption will be raised in power, glory, and incorruption, after the pattern of Christ’s resurrection. “This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power” (Rev. 20:5-6). If the saint is in the grave, when the Lord comes, he will be taken out of that grave, in the very likeness of Christ. The Holy Spirit says, “When He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.” And what then? We shall be forever with Him. What a prospect!

Now, many of you dear people have been looking forward to dying, and after that to being judged. Both death and judgment are behind the Christian, while life and glory are before. How is death behind me? Christ died for me. How is judgment behind me? Christ bore my judgment. Will there be any condemnation for the believer? Impossible. Nor will there be any judgment of the person of the believer. Your works and mine, as believers, will be reviewed in the light of the judgment seat of Christ, in view of reward; but remember when we get there we shall be in the very likeness of Christ.

I know some people say you cannot be sure whether you are going to heaven or hell till the day of judgment. Are you going then to take the Apostle Paul out of heaven, where he has been for eighteen hundred years, and put him on his trial as to whether he is to go there or not? The essence of the gospel is this, that the judgment which you and I deserve has already been borne by the Savior, and now we stand before God in Christ clear of all judgment, so that by-and-by we shall be caught up in His very likeness to be with Him forever. Let us take care that our conduct is suitable to our position. Let us put on “the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation” — the head covered by the consciousness, that we are going to glory. You would be a notable person if you were known as one who had always on the helmet of salvation, while having on also the breastplate of faith and love, which keeps you going on right, and preserves you from the attacks of the enemy. As we are not of the night nor of darkness, so we are not looking for judgment or wrath: for “God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him” (1 Thess. 5:9-10). Blessed words!

Now, I ask, could anything be brighter or more blessed than the Christian’s prospect? Instead of the fear of death, judgment, and wrath, he has before him the bright hope of seeing, and being forever with the Lord. We are looking for it “in the morning,” as it says in Psalm 49. The godless are laid in the grave like sheep: “Death shall feed upon them, and the righteous shall have dominion over them in the morning.” Cheer up, my dear brethren, let your hearts be joyful, let your souls be encouraged: the night is nearly gone: your Lord is coming. And that is the more reason why we should be increasingly earnest and fervent in desiring and endeavoring to get poor sinners brought to the Savior. If I think a man may live the natural term of his life, I may give a good many in this hall a few years yet to live. But, besides the uncertainty of life, there is the fact that the Lord is coming. What does He say in Matthew 25? That while the five foolish virgins went to buy oil, the bridegroom came. At midnight there was a cry, “Behold the bridegroom.” That is the cry of God’s Spirit which has already gone forth.

The Person of Christ is being preached, and the effect is a general activity. All the virgins arose and trimmed their lamps, the foolish as well as the wise. The foolish are the mere professors, and no doubt there are some of them here tonight. What was their folly? They took their lamps, but had no oil in their vessels: they had not got the Holy Spirit. I think I hear somebody saying, You are making too much of receiving the Holy Spirit. Indeed I am not. The Lord Jesus points this out as the great difference between the wise virgins and the foolish, that the wise took oil, in their vessels, with their lamps. The wise were deeply concerned about having the oil, the foolish were only concerned to have lamps — something they could hold in their hand to make other people think they were right, when all the while they were wrong. And are you here tonight a mere professor of Christianity but unconverted, a church member, but unsaved, a poor foolish virgin, a lamp-holder, but oil-less? If you would be wise, make sure of having the oil, the Holy Spirit. This distinguished the wise virgins: they had with them what would maintain the light till the Lord came.

Do not risk any delay, I beseech you. See what came to these foolish virgins through their delay: “While they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut” (Matt. 25:10). It was in vain for them to come knocking afterward. The answer from within could only be: “I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity” (Luke 13:27). Oh, beloved friends, that will be a terrible day for all mere professing Christians. When the Lord comes, every one of His own will be caught up: you will find this one gone, and that one gone, and you have not gone, you are left behind, you had a name to live, but, alas! you were dead. Oh, Christless professor, get the oil tonight, I beseech you!

And now, scoffer, have you something to say to me? You do not believe in these things, do you? You ridicule the idea of the Lord’s coming? Peter has already told us of you: “There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of

His coming?" (2 Peter 3:3-4). "Watchman, what of the night?" cries the New Testament scoffer derisively. The night is going on still, there is not the least sign of the Lord's coming, for "since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."

Stop, my friend, that is not true. The flood has intervened. God did judge the world once; and if He judged the world once, by water, He will do it again, not by water, but by fire. Why does the Lord not come? Not that He is slack concerning His promise, but because He is "long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." Ah, man, if you were wise, instead of scoffing, you would go down on your knees, and say, "Thank God, the Lord did not come yesterday, for I am not yet prepared, I have got no oil: thank God for His long-suffering, which yet offers me salvation." But mark, "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night," so you had better repent now, and be ready.

The watchman saith something, what is his cry? "The morning cometh, and also the night: if ye will inquire, inquire ye: return, come" (Isa. 20:12). Heed that call. The Spirit of God calls you. The Spirit and the Bride say to Jesus, Come: they invite him that heareth to say to the Lord, Come: they invite him that is athirst to come, "and whosoever will, let him come, and take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). God lingers in goodness over a world of sinners, He keeps back the moment of His Son's return, that He may yet gather in souls, and save the unsaved, the guilty, the godless, by the converting power of the gospel.

The Lord is not willing that you should perish, but remember this, "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night" (2 Peter 3:10), and I never heard of a thief blowing a trumpet when he was going to break into your house. Thus will the Son of Man come to deal with this godless scene. When men "shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3). And what then? Then, when the Lord's mediatorial or millennial reign is over, you will have the burning up of all things, the great conflagration of which Peter speaks: "The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing, then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness."

Why? Because we know that what man thinks so much of is merely "reserved unto fire," it is all evanescent, it is all passing away, a fleeting shadow; but what God gives us in the gospel is abiding, eternal, and immutable.

In Revelation 21, where this dissolution of all that we see around us is also spoken of, we have the new heavens, and the new earth brought in, into which the Christian passes in association with Christ, the judgment of the great white throne having taken place. Remember that the sinner, who has died in his sins, will be raised again in his sins, to stand before that throne. You may lie a long time in your grave, friend, forgotten by men, but not forgotten by God. Yours is an awful future, because, as the watchman truly said, "The morning cometh, and also the night." It is the morning the believer has before him, but what have you before you? That dark night, "the blackness of darkness forever," of which the Holy Spirit speaks through the Apostle Jude (vs. 13), and which God calls "the second death."

Resurrection is a universal truth. Every Christian will have part in the first resurrection, "unto life" and glory. For the unsaved it will be, alas! "unto judgment," for "there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just, and unjust" (Acts 24:15). It is to be noticed, however, that when the wicked dead are raised, God does not call theirs "the second resurrection" but the "second death" (Rev. 2:11; 20:6-14; 21:8).

Surely, dear unsaved one, once is enough to die: will you face the second death? In the first you pass out of man's sight, but in the second death you pass out of God's sight. The Holy Spirit thus describes the eternal future of the lost: "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev. 21:8). Solemn list, and who are they who head it? The fearful and unbelieving. I quite admit you have in that sad category of the lost the gross sinners, the murderers, and whoremongers, but they do not head the list. If God sent down an angel from heaven to this great city, to record on his tablet the names and the character of all those who will be sure to have their part in the second death, where do you think he would begin? Do you think he would commence with the debauched frequenters of the public-houses, the slums, the dens of iniquity that you would be afraid or ashamed to enter. I believe not. His list would commence with " the fearful and the unbelieving." It is the timid people, the cowards, those who are afraid to confess Jesus, and the calm cold, critical unbelievers in Jesus that head the list of the damned. Oh, how many have I seen in this city, interested, anxious, and somewhat convicted, but afraid to confess Christ. My dear friend, perhaps you are such an one; a young man, or a young woman, knowing the gospel, but holding back from confessing Christ. Will you be among those who head the list of the lost?

How different will be the future of the saved and the unsaved. Both will be in resurrection, for "all that are in the graves" will come forth, some to "life," some to "judgment." This latter means only to be judged, convicted, and condemned.

Do you mean to go into this night without a morning? The morning will soon come for the Christian: our night will soon end in a glorious morning: but your night, friend, will have no morning. Pause, and ask yourself, Can I risk an eternity so terrible, a godless, hopeless, peaceless, joyless, because a Christ-less, eternity?

Have you ever known what it is to endure a night of sickness, and spent it tossing restlessly upon your bed? How long it seemed! The clock moved so slowly; each half-hour seemed a century, but at length, after long watching and waiting, you saw through the crack of the shutter, a little gleam that told you morning was coming. What a relief it was! But what will it be to be bound in chains of everlasting darkness? Oh, friend, I pray you, think of it! Picture to yourself a man in the depths of a lost eternity, in the unutterable gloom of that scene where light and hope never enter. The slow tick of hell's clock — as another has said — falling with maddening regularity on the ear, and the eye vainly seeking in the impenetrable darkness to follow its pendulum, as it swings slowly from side to side, saying, "Ever...never; ever...never — Everlasting...Never-ending." This would be indeed DAMNATION. It pictures a scene of darkness, distance, misery, and wretchedness; and all the fruit of sin, folly, and unbelief. The unbeliever has his part there just because he would not come to Jesus.

Oh, may God in His infinite mercy deliver you from such a fate, from a night without a morning may He lead you now to bow to Jesus, to confess His name, for we read in Romans 10: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." SALVATION is worth having. DAMNATION who would not avoid?

Happy would it be for you if you could say to me as a young woman said lately after a gospel meeting. She became concerned about her soul through tumbling into a tank, and being nearly drowned. She came up to me after the meeting (I had been preaching on Matthew 25) with a beaming face, saying, “I want to tell you that I have got oil tonight.” “What do you mean by that?” I said. She joyfully replied, “I have come to the Lord this evening, and He has saved me, and I have got the oil — the Holy Spirit.” She was decided for Christ, and received salvation. Be you decided also!

Oh, let me, in conclusion, most affectionately beseech you to come now to the Lord Jesus. He will receive, bless, and save you, just as you are, and a “morning without clouds” will then be yours.

God grant, dear friend, that you and I may meet in glory by-and-by, to ever praise the grace that has saved us, and given us eternal association with His dear Son. Amen!

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