Jeremiah - Commentaries by Charles Stanley

Selected Writings of Charles Stanley: Volume 2, Swallows Are Gone, The

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“Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but My people know not the judgment of the Lord. How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made He it; the pen of the scribes is in vain. The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them?” (Jeremiah 8:7-9).

The end of the year is near. The swallows are gone; the cold blasts of winter are come; but not one swallow is left behind. We saw them gathered together, and they were seen to fly higher as the time to depart drew nearer. No one saw them go, but they are gone to sunny lands of the south. The frost and the snow, the sleet and piercing winds of winter never reach them there. Very remarkable is this instinct of the birds. “Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but My people know not the judgment of the Lord” (Jeremiah 8:7).

Is there not a lesson for us in this instinct of the birds? It was pleasing to watch the swallows as the winter drew near, gathering in companies, seeming to wait for the wanderers. Then they would fly high, as wanting to be gone. We thought, Is not the Holy Spirit now gathering Christians together in little companies to Christ? Now here, now there, a wanderer is coming in. Should we not fly higher? We, like the swallows, are about to leave this scene below. Already signs of this world’s judgment begin to flit across its autumn sky. And now every swallow soared ready to depart, moved by one common instinct. Oh, that every Christian were seen manifestly ready to depart, moved by the Spirit of God.

But will it be with the whole Church of God as with the swallows? Yes, the Holy Spirit is already gathering them in little companies to Christ. He has revealed to them fresh, after many centuries, the heavenly Bridegroom, and the heavenly calling of the Church. He is leading their thoughts and hearts higher and higher yet. And soon, very soon, though the world will not see them go, yet every one shall be gone, not one left behind. “For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in 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 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Are not these the sober words of inspired reality? Yes, brethren we shall all be gone — not one left behind — forever with the Lord. If the swallows are gone to more sunny shores, oh, what will it be to be caught up away from the scenes of this world’s wintry woes and judgments, and in peaceful rest enter the glory of our Lord!

And if God never fails to take by instinct at the appointed time the stork, the crane, and the swallow, can He possibly fail at the appointed time to take the saints to meet their Lord? Is it not sad and humbling that the Lord should have to complain, that though the swallows should know their appointed time, “My people know not the judgment of the Lord”? Is not this as true now of Christendom as it was of Israel then? What profound ignorance there is on this important subject. “My people know not.” Men go on dreaming of continual summer, yes, of increasing sunshine, peace, temperance, prosperity, just at the very time when the saints are about to be gone like the swallows of autumn; and the storms of this world’s wintry blasts are about to take them all by surprise (1 Thessalonians 5:1-9).

It is incredible how utterly unaware the learned of this world are of the wintry judgments about to be poured out on the nations of the earth. “How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us?” (Jeremiah 8:8).

Never was there a day of more boasting, “We are wise.” It is quite true the Word of God is in men’s hands; but who believes it? The rapture of the Church before the day of the Lord is clearly revealed. God has said it. He has made it perfectly clear — both the departure of His saints to meet the Lord in the air, and the terrible judgments that shall follow. Has He made it clear? Yes; but, “Lo, certainly in vain made He it; the pen of the scribes is in vain” (Jeremiah 8:8). Yes, in vain has God spoken in His Word; men will not believe Him. “Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition” (Mark 7:13).

Let us now pass on to the December of this world, before the new era of the millennial kingdom begins. “The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them?” (Jeremiah 8:9).

Let us anticipate what these learned men, these rejecters of the Word of God will say. “How strange this is; those Christians we despised are all gone, like the swallows of autumn. Not one of them can be found on earth. How we laughed and hated their gathering together! What fools we thought them because they would fly higher; as they said, their Lord was coming to take them. They spoke of their heavenly calling, and would have nothing to do with our earthly societies and politics. We scorned them because they would not join our various schemes for the improvement of man. We hated the thought that we were not to glory save in the cross of Christ. They gathered together — poor little despised companies — and told of the coming Saviour to the wanderers all around. Not one saw them go, but they are gone. Any now the world’s wild, fierce, wintry blasts are blowing. Where is all our boasted wisdom? Peace is taken from the earth. All that we hear on every side is, that men are killing one another. Famine and pestilence, sword, hunger, and death are all around. Woe, woe to us, the winter of the world is come.

“And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains ... hid themselves in dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb” (Revelation 6:15-16).

We rejected the word of the Lord, but now the Christians are gone, and the great day of His wrath is come; we seek death and do not find it (Revelation 9:6). Where is now our boasted wisdom? We are worshiping devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood

(Revelation 9:20). And what is the end of all our politics? What strange events since the winter set in, and the Church is gone! It is not forty-two months yet since the new last head of the Roman Empire appeared. But oh, what months! The dragon has given him his power. Ten kingdoms have sprung up and given their power to this Satanic head. When he opens his mouth, it is in blasphemy. And all that dwell on earth worship him. And all that refuse are boycotted and put to death. It is true, all this was distinctly foretold in Scripture, but we were far too wise then to believe what God said to His servants in Revelation 6; 9; 13, and 17. Certainly there never was such a winter as this since the beginning of the world, no, nor ever shall be. Jesus said it would be so, but we did not believe Him (Matthew 24:21)."

Yes, "The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them?"

And now, beloved reader, where are you, and what is the condition of your soul? Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb, and ready to be gone like the swallows in autumn? Are you following the wise men of this world, who will so soon be ashamed and confounded? Is Christ the center of attraction? Are you separated to Him, and waiting for Him from heaven? Great is the last effort to draw Christians from Christ to join the confederacies of men. Oh, let us seek to get higher and higher. The Word of God is utterly disregarded. On no account will men allow it to be Christ alone. They would have Christ and circumcision, Christ and the world's various confederacies, or even Christ and profanity. All these things hide the coming of the Lord to take His saints. Every doctrine of human improvement denies the utter ruin of man through sin, and the fast approaching winter of divine judgment on the rejecters and despisers of the Word of God. It is solemnly true of the great men and the wise of the world, "They have rejected the word of the Lord." The mark of a Christian is, Thou "hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name" (Revelation 3:8). Which is true of you, beloved reader? Whatever name you may bear, if you have not kept His Word you are not a Christian, and will surely be left behind when the Christians depart like the swallows that are gone.

Can you for a moment admit that the instinct of a bird is more sure than the words of the Saviour? As this world's winter approaches, let us then dwell on the words of Jesus. He cannot fail to fulfill His promise. We may not know where the swallows go; but Jesus says to us, "In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go 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 14:2-3). Do we hear you saying, "Yes; Jesus says so, but our learned, wise teachers do not say so"? Remember the word, "They have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them?"

It is a solemn fact that God by His Spirit has sent forth the midnight cry, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him" (Matthew 25:6) and they have rejected the word of the Lord. God grant we may cease from man; for what wisdom is in him?

May the saints of God be now gathered together like the swallows in autumn. May we love to dwell on His sweet words of promise. Has He not gone to prepare the place? Oh, those scenes of radiant glory, far away from earth's cold wintry blasts! And will He not come to take us to Himself? With Himself! How soon, like Moses and Elias, shall we be talking with Him! Glorious reality! Soon we shall be gone; not one will be left behind; and poor deceived, apostate Christendom will be left to "become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird" (Revelation 18:2). Blessed comfort — "The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Timothy 2:19), and none shall be left behind.

"Wherefore He saith, Awake thou that sleepiest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Ephesians 5:14).

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