Luke - Commentaries by T.W.P. Wolston, Editor

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“Glory to God in the Highest, peace upon earth and goodwill toward men.”—Luke 2:14.

PEACE upon earth! How can this be true when, today, we see two nations in the throes of war, and all others armed to the teeth prepared for the bugle call to action?

How can the above angelic proclamation be correct under such circumstances? Nineteen centuries have run their course since these words were uttered, and, whatever glory may have been given to God in the highest, or whatever goodwill may have been shown to men, yet none can truthfully say that peace has spread her welcome wings over the nations of earth, or caused the sword to be turned into a plowshare.

War is the passion of the day, and any effort to obtain arbitration, other than that of battle, seems futile.

Then what of the heavenly announcement? Was it only a beautiful sentiment—only a kindly expression designed to indicate the feelings of Heaven, but having no place in the stern struggle for life and liberty here below?

Can these words and their meaning be explained? Certainly!

First, let it be clearly understood that Christianity was never intended by its blessed Author to convert the world! Ponder that statement. It is of immense importance.

I must repeat—it never was God’s design to convert to Himself the nations of the earth by the sound of the gospel as now preached. He has graciously sent that gospel everywhere, in order that souls should, through faith, be saved; but that is a very different thing from national conversion.

The infidel of today tauntingly upbraids us by saying that Christianity, as a peace-producer, is a total failure. He can see no improvement in warlike inclinations since the heavenly heralds declared “Peace upon earth.” He sees the opposite; and believes that his point is gained. But, if Christianity never undertook to produce peace on earth, then his charge falls to the ground. His supposition is false, and his accusation groundless.

The peace that Christianity did undertake to bring is of a wholly different kind. It is “peace with God” instead of national harmony. Since the proclamation of the angels, myriads of souls, out of all nations, have been led to the comfortable enjoyment of peace with God through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and have given brilliant evidence of it in blameless life and triumphant death. But, withal, that is not universal national tranquility. Far otherwise.

Christianity has not failed and will not fail of its glorious object. Souls have been, are being, and will be brought thus to God, as the trophies of redeeming love, out of every nation, kindred, and tongue, to form the Church of God and the Bride of the Lamb, whose favored companion they are in His continued rejection by the world at large, and partner of His coming heavenly glories.

Blessed portion indeed! but, reader, is it yours? Meanwhile the nations go on in pursuit of their separate and selfish interests—the stronger crowding out the weaker, or else arming in such a way as to hold their own against their rivals.

These are facts, all too patent, and will remain facts until another order of dealing on God’s part shall take place—an order, notice, that is to be ushered in by oceans of blood and indescribable sorrows. (Read, for instance, Matt. 24)

Then, and not till then, shall “they learn war no more.” The study of war shall cease—its art shall be forgotten—then shall the thousand years (the millennium) run its blessed course, and then shall be fulfilled the angelic announcement of “Glory to God in the highest, peace upon earth and good-will toward men.”

Yes, that announcement shall certainly be accomplished. All that God has said must be fulfilled. Today we have war on earth and “peace in heaven” (Luke 19:38). By-and-by the sword shall be sheathed, and, thank God, there shall be peace upon earth too. Therefore let no one imagine that Christianity has failed of her mission. She has come, like her Author, to win souls not kingdoms—to conquer hearts and not crowns.

She has come, in patient grace, to call sinners to salvation, and to deliver from the certain horrors of eternal judgment by presenting to them a God of love who gave His Son for us.

The moment is of priceless value. Get to see its wondrous meaning. Soon the door must close, and mercy take her flight. The one thing of supreme importance to you, dear unsaved reader, is the salvation of your soul. See to it that whatever else you lose, you suffer not the loss of your soul.

The Gospel Messenger: Volume 12, Three Classes of Persons.

THERE are three classes to be found everywhere; almost in every congregation you will find them.

The first class are those who are saved, and who know it. Yes, thank God, who are saved, and who know it. Saved is a marvelous word. It describes the condition of one who has discovered from God's Word that he is lost, and who has fled to the Saviour of the lost, and put his whole trust in Him who "came to seek, and to save, that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

When the woman of the seventh of Luke came to Jesus, and trusted Him, she got pardon for her sins, salvation, for her soul, and peace. And what was true of her is true of every sinner that has come to Him, and trusted Him.

Remember, it is not your worthiness, but the blood of Jesus; not your doings, but His finished work, that saves.

When He said on the cross, "It is finished," heaven rejoiced, and the infernal world groaned. Now, God is not "straitened," but is righteously free to proclaim pardon, and offer salvation to all.

"God hath saved us" (2 Tim. 1:9). Blessed words!

A dear man who, after three years of exercise of soul, got saved, said to the writer, "I know I am saved, and accepted through the blood of Christ; I have the testimony of God for that." Blessed knowledge! Would that all possessed it.

Yes, the first class are those who are saved, and who know it from God's Word.

Reader, are you of that class?

The second class are those who want to be saved, but do not know the way. There is a work of God in their souls; they have felt the awful load of sin, but as yet they do not know what puts sin away. They are on the ground of works for salvation. They have tried morality, and it has failed them; they have tried religiousness, and they are no beater off; they have tried self-betterment, but they only the more discover the hidden depths of evil found there; they have gone under the baptismal waters, and partaken of the Lord's Supper, but their case remains unaltered. Such need to look out from self altogether to Christ-to "behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). He accomplished the work that saves. His crimson blood flowed to atone for the soul. He bowed His head, and died, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

The Word of God, who cannot lie, assures you that on trusting Him you are saved.

Thus the work that saves was done outside of you, and the word which assures the believer that he is saved, is outside of him also.

"These things have I written unto you who believe on the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life" (1 John 5:13).

Mark those words, dear reader!

It is the work of Christ that saves, and it is the Word of God that assures us that we are saved.

The third class are those who are so much in love with their sins that they totally ignore the question. But if they ignore the question, the question will not ignore them. It follows them, and will follow them to the judgment throne, if they refuse to give it their attention now; and at the bar of the eternal God, the Judge of all the earth, they will have to render an account. "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:14).

If you belong to this third class, look that verse in the face; play the man, and not the fool. Let not the satanic charmer attract you from so momentous a consideration. Let not "the pleasures of sin, which are for a season," drown the voice of conscience within you. Let not, I beseech you, the boastfulness of man displace the authority of God's Word in your soul. That Word shall stand forever (1 Peter 1:25). Heaven and earth will pass away, but that will remain.

You would not ignore any great financial question that would affect your fortune, nor would you ignore any great political question, the proper settlement of which would save your country from the horrors of civil war; nor would you ignore any great calamity with which your own family might be threatened. Then why ignore a question so momentous as that which involves your relation to God, and whether you will spend eternity in heaven or hell? Why so wise when it is a question of the things of time, and so foolish when it is a question of eternity?

In conclusion, let me sound in your ear the word of the prophet Amos, "Prepare to meet thy God." Your meeting God is both inevitable and compulsory. "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12).

The way of salvation is by the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for such as you. Why not go to Him, trust Him, and confess Him both Lord and Saviour?

"Today, if you will, hear his voice, harden not your heart" (Heb. 3:7, 8).

E. A.

The Gospel Messenger: Volume 12, Joy in Heaven; or, Lost, Sought, and Found.

"I say unto you, That likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.... Likewise, I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."—Luke 15:7-10.

A boy living at a favorite seaside resort had gone into the water to bathe. Unknown to him, a strong back-going current was running, by no means easy to stem. Long and hard the brave lad struggled, but he was unable to overcome ebbing tide, and in spite of his arduous exertions, was carried some distance out to sea. A vessel bound for another port happened to be passing. The man on the look-out caught sight of an object in the water. A boat was instantly lowered, and pulled to his assistance, just in time, to save him. Thus the boy, who had narrowly escaped drowning, was picked up, and taken on board the ship. The sailors were very kind to him, one supplying him with one article of

clothing, another fetching another, till he was rigged cut in a rather odd-looking, though not uncomfortable sort of attire.

That evening a gentleman, walking along the beach near where the boy had undressed, found his clothes lying on the shore. He looked here, and, sought there, but all in vain. No appearance of the boy was anywhere to be seen, nor could any tidings of him whatever be obtained. In the pocket of his coat, however, was discovered a piece of paper which revealed who the owner was, and where he resided. With a heavy heart the finder went to break the sad news to the fond parents. He said to the father he was sorry to have to tell him, he had found those clothes on the shore, but had, been unable to get any trace of the lad to whom they belonged, and almost feared he had been drowned. The father was speechless with grief, the mother well-nigh frantic with sorrow. They repaired to the spot. They searched and searched again, up and down, backwards and forwards, but to no purpose. They called and called, but only to be mocked by the echo of their own voices. It was long and late before the loving mother, always the last to give in, lost hope, and was obliged to resign herself to the inevitable. For alas! neither sight, nor sign, nor sound of their darling boy rewarded their persevering efforts. The mother spent her time in crying, the father's heart was crushed, the other children wept for their missing brother, and everything was ordered for the house to go into mourning.

On the arrival of the vessel at its destination, another was about to start on the return voyage. The lad was transhipped, and taken back to his native place. No sooner had he put his foot on land than off he set towards his father's house. He did not like to be seen in the strange cap, jacket, and shoes given him by the crew, and took the least frequented way. At last the hall door was reached. He both rang and knocked. The servant opened, and seeing who it was, screamed out with joy, "Here is Raster Fred!" The father rushed out, and with tears of delight embraced his son whom he had given up for lost, covering him with kisses. The mother fainted—it was too much for her; but on recovery her joy knew no bounds Who can describe the happiness of that family circle? or the delightful evening they all spent—parents and children —together! The ordered mourning arrived, but was never used. It was a never-to-be-forgotten scene of unmingled rejoicing.

But wonderful as all this is, what is it my reader, to the joy in heaven over the return of a sinner? What is it to the Father exclaiming, "And let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again, was lost, and is found"? Oh, think of God saying that! For this is God's own joy, and He will have His joy in spite of all the murmurings of Scribes, Pharisees, or elder brothers, in welcoming back the wanderer, even kissing him in his rags, and there is not another that would not have thought of the rage before he kissed him but his father. Nothing could exceed the perfection of the grace that is here manifested without stint, without reproach, and without reserve. All is pictured in this, heaven-breathed parable of Divine love the departure, the search, and the reception—the sad leaving, the patient seeking, and the joyous homecoming.

But what a tale it tells of the real condition of every sinner, high or low, rich or poor, educated or illiterate, who has departed from God. And what is that condition? One word suffices—

LOST.

The lips of eternal truth have left no doubt on that subject. Every figure chosen by the blessed Saviour emphasizes the same solemn fact. Three times over it is here stated with unmistakable clearness. The comparisons are—a lost sheep—a lost piece of silver—a lost son. Lost! lost! lost!!!

Friend, your state is serious. It is not a temporary injury that has befallen you—not some slight breach which you can repair— not some lapse out of which you can recover yourself—not a simple wound which you or your fellowman can heal. You are lost. You may be amiable and polite, but you 'are lost. You may be beautiful and idolized, but you are lost. You may be intelligent and learned, but you are lost. You may be affectionate and benevolent, but you are lost. You may be moral, yea, even religious, like the Pharisees, but you are lost. Do you say, "I do not mean to be lost." Christless reader, according to the words of the Saviour of the lost, you are lost now. Do you ask, "Is there no hope"? Yes, but not from you. There is not only hope but salvation, thank the Lord! Still, though, for you, it is not from you. Your condition is such that nothing but the death of Christ could meet it. The Shepherd had to give His life. It was He who said, "The good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep," and, as you know, that He did on the cross. Now do you acknowledge in His presence that you are lost, and honestly take that place before God? If so, I have something else to tell you. You are SOUGHT.

Just because you are lost, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit are seeking for you. The very object of this tripartite parable is to let you know the blessed activity of the quenchless love that goes after the lost, a quest too, wonderful to say, that engages every Person of the Godhead. Is this not contrary to all your vain imaginings? You reply, "Indeed it is, for I always thought God could only look upon me to condemn me, and I dreaded to think of Him." Quite so, it is the lie of the enemy, whose device is to keep you at a distance from your only real Friend, for you are not even your own friend.

But you ask, "Do you mean to say that God loves me, a sinner, and wants me as I am?" That is what I do mean, and most positively affirm. What saith the Scripture? "For God commendeth his love towards us, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," and the "Son of Man is come to seek" as well as to "save that which was lost"; and remember, the "Scriptures cannot be broken."

Is not "lost" just what you are? Well, then, God commendeth His love toward you: Think of the feelings of the parents towards that lost boy! How they yearned over him! How they sought for him! How they mourned his loss! That is earthly love' But what is it to God's love? God is love, and being God, He will be love. Why remain away from Him? God vindicates Himself in being good to sinners. If a shepherd seeks a lost sheep, and a woman a lost piece of silver, has He not a right to seek the lost? He has, and, blessed be His name, He does, yea, finds His very joy in doing so, because He loves the sinner. Neither the lost sheep nor the lost piece of money could do anything. The losers were the seekers, and God seeks the lost. But, strange to say, the natural heart objects to Him seeking sinners. Yet, had He only sought the righteous, what would have become of us? Because "the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all," it is the grace, that imputes nothing, which enables the soul to tell itself out unreservedly, when it knows there is forgiveness, not blame, for all that is discovered. Come, then, as you are to the seeking God; not to be judged, but to be justified; not to be condemned, but to be blessed; not to be cast out, but to be saved; for I have something still to tell. Not only are you lost and sought, but you may be

FOUND.

The shepherd said, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." The woman said, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost." And the father said, "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this thy brother was dead and is alive

again, and was lost and is found." You ask me, "Is that God?" I answer, Yes, that is God, the whole Trinity, so to speak, mirrored in the shepherd, the woman, and the father. Do you not realize the depth of His interest in you? Would you be afraid to be blessed by Him? How can you keep at a distance? The wonder is you can remain away a moment longer. Is it possible you can refrain from saying, "I will arise and go to my Father?" Have you arisen? He sees you, even "a great way off." Oh, those eyes of love! And when you have said not only "I will arise," but determined to say, "Father, I have sinned, and am no more worthy," what will you find? That the next instant He is on your neck, reproaching you? No, but kissing you. The very first conscious dealing with God is a kiss, whatever the previous workings in the soul may have been. And what is a kiss? It is an intimation of affection on the part of one who gives it. A kiss is an expression of endearment. It is a token of love. "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him." You ask me: "Is that prodigal I? Does he represent me?" I reply, Yes, you, you or any other "one sinner that repenteth."

You ask again, "Is that father, God?" I answer, Emphatically so, that is God, and God is love. Not only eyes of love that saw, but heart of love that had compassion, feet of love that ran, embrace of love that fell on his neck, and lips of love that kissed. Oh, the untold meaning of that reconciliation kiss! No sooner has the Father heard the wanderer's confession of sin and unworthiness, than He calls for the "best robe," the "ring," and the "shoes." It is no question of the worthiness of the erring child, but, what is worthy of the Father. "But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." Now, observe, this is not what is done in him, important as that is in its place. All this is put on him, and the Spirit takes pains to state it so. What is wrought within gives the capacity to enjoy all this, but it is not that in which I appear there.

This is the Father's provision for the returned confessed, forgiven, and reconciled sinner in the Son of His love; so that he can be with the Father in His house as grand as anybody there. Like the thief on the cross of whom the Saviour said, "Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." The "best robe" is Christ Himself, or "accepted in the beloved." The "ring" is the emblem of everlasting love that has neither beginning nor end. And the "shoes" are the badge of sonship, for no servant in that country was allowed into the master's presence with sandals on, that being the sole privilege of his own children. A "hired servant" might suit the prodigal, but not the heart of the father. He must have him there as a son. Then, through what was for him "in Christ," entitling him to be in God's presence according to God's very nature, immediately the Father has made him suitable for His own eye, he is inside the house, and what follows? Not now "bring forth," but "bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry." He had been already kissed, robed, ringed, and sandaled, now he is feasted. And what a scene of festivity, mirth, and gladness it is! It passes description.

A wonderful time of joy most surely it was when the missing lad presented himself at his father's house, but God's reception of the sinner through Christ puts all human welcomes into the shade. If this is being found, would you, my reader, not like to be found? Come back, then, thou erring one! O wanderer, return. What a joy to be found! True, but the joy of God, the Finder, exceeds everything. This is grace. This is the gospel, and it is for you.

W. S. F.

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