

THE PRESENCE AND HARVEST.

(MATT. 24:3.)

"What shall be the sign of thy presence and of the consummation of the age?" (See Emphatic Diaglott.)

This rendering sheds light on the relation between the presence of Christ and the Harvest. The Greek word *parousia* does not mean the act of coming, but the being present. So the Lexicons tell us. The word *aion* does not mean this globe, or this general order of things, but an era, or age.

This passage, it will be seen, gives no countenance to the quite popular conception of the relation between the coming of Christ and the "wreck of matter and crush of worlds." This false notion makes the subject one of dread.

The word *suntelia*, translated end, does not mean a point, but a period of time. The same word is used in Matt. 13:39: "The harvest is the end [*suntelia*] of the age." In verse 30 Jesus shows that the harvesting is a work done. "In the time [period] of the harvest." With these few facts before us, reading the text gives this as the substance of the question: "What shall be the sign [evidence] of thy presence and of the harvest of the age?"

The sign of the presence is the sign of the time of harvest – one sign (evidence in the aggregate) for two things. The worker and the work are related to each other. Whoever believes, on the strength of what he considers good evidence, that the harvest is come, ought to believe in the presence of Christ, as Lord of the Angel reapers. The presence and the harvest are related not only in the text, but in reason. Some who once consistently accepted both, because of their relation, now deny the presence, and inconsistently hold that He will not come

until the end of the harvest. They will doubtless soon, in order to regain the balance of consistency, discard the harvest also. Matt. 24:3 must suffer violence, if it must be maintained that the harvest – the end of the age, and its work, – precedes the coming of Christ; and this is the position of all who deny the presence of Christ and yet teach that we are in the harvest time.

It would not be so inconsistent with the order of the text should it be claimed that the presence of Christ, for some preparatory reason, should precede the harvest, as it was at the first advent, from His birth to His ministry; but to invert the order and have the consummation of the age before His arrival seems absurd.

We have no desire to make parallels, but when parallels really exist between the closing work of the Jewish and Gospel ages, we are glad to accept them, and regard them as a strength to the argument on the equality of the "Two Dispensations." And it is strangely out of harmony with the pattern character of the Jewish dispensation to claim, as some do, that though Christ was present on the Jewish level to introduce the Jewish harvest, yet He will not come to the level of the Gospel church until the Gospel harvest is ended.

There can be no doubt that the cause of this inconsistency, and denial of the presence of Christ during the Gospel harvest, is a misapprehension of what the level of the perfect Gospel church is. Paul gives us the key when he says: "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you." (Rom. 8:9.) The ideal of the flesh is a perfect flesh man, but the ideal of the Spirit is "the spirits of just men made perfect." (Heb. 12:23.) If a perfect flesh man has a flesh body, a perfect spiritual being ought to have a "spiritual body" – and such Paul assures us will be the case: "It is sown a natural [psukikon – animal] body; it is raised a spiritual [pneumatikon] body." The former, even when perfect, is, and must be, according to the law of the flesh; and the latter is by the law of the

Spirit. So Jesus, knowing both laws, says: "That which is born of [produced by] the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of [produced by] the Spirit is spirit."

No wonder that those who deny the presence and yet believe the harvest is here, are anxious to ignore some of the parallels of the Two Dispensations. Losing sight of the parallel causes them to ignore also the contract; for the second coming is, **[R237 : page 7]** and should be, in harmony with the spiritual character of the Gospel dispensation, even as the first coming was in harmony with the fleshly character of the Jewish dispensation.

That spiritual beings are naturally invisible to mortals, has often been proved; and that they have power to appear when it is necessary. God is said to be invisible, and of Christ it is said: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature;" (Col. 1:15) clearly implying that as soon as creatures are born of the Spirit they, too, become invisible. Angels are naturally invisible to mortals, and yet on special occasions they have been seen, and men have the promise of being made like unto the angels, and also like unto Christ.

The invisibility of the new being to mortals is more than implied in Paul's teaching in 2 Cor. 4:14-18.

That the risen body of Christ was invisible to mortals, only when for special reasons He appeared, should be admitted by all who ever knew that truth, or who have read the account. That, though Christians are actually in the flesh until these bodies are changed, (Phil. 3:21) God does not count them in the flesh, but in the spirit, (Rom. 8:9) and therefore as "risen with Christ" (Col. 3:1) "through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead," (Col. 2:12) cannot be ignored with impunity.

As Christ risen is naturally invisible, as we have shown, so when we have attained His perfect state, we too will be naturally invisible to

mortals; i.e., when we have actually attained that in which we are now counted, on account of our faith, and the new work begun in us by the Spirit. That new nature is spoken of as Christ in you; (Rom. 8:10, and Gal. 2:20) Christ formed in you; (Gal. 4:19) "the hope of glory;" (Col. 1:27) "the inner man;" (Eph. 3:16) and "a new creation," (2 Cor. 5:17). The last passage, with its context, shows that this new nature by which we are related to the second Adam, and not the old Adam, nature, is the basis of our recognition as Christians, and of our fellowship. It also shows that the reason we are so counted is because we are in Christ, and He is no longer known after the flesh.

In the preceding chapter, before mentioned and to which attention is now called, the two natures, or men, are contrasted; – the old being the outward, the seen, the temporal, the perishing; while the new is the inward, the not seen, renewed day by day, the eternal. Those who cannot see that the new creature is invisible to mortals, both in the pre-natal and perfect state, it is to be hoped, are not willfully blind.

Failing to apprehend the double relationship of the Christian, in all its bearings, has caused some to misapprehend our position as to the presence of Christ. As natural or mortal beings we are related to the first Adam, but in our new nature we are related to the second Adam. Now we are as new beings in an "earthly house," and so our bodies are said to be the "temple of the Holy Spirit." We do not, however, wish to be unclothed, but clothed upon with the heavenly house, or house from heaven. 2 Cor. 5:1-8.

There are two phases of service appropriately related to these two phases of life – an external service and an internal service. The "court" and the "holy place" of the tabernacle seem to represent these two phases of service. The court was open and visible, but all beyond the first vail was covered with dyed rams' skins, "and a covering of badgers' skins above that." Ex. 36:19. No eye could penetrate it. The only light there was from the lamps. The court (sometime also called

the "holy place," (Lev. 14:13 and Ex. 29:11,31) was the place of sacrifice and of washing, and seems to represent our more earthly phase of life, and the disposition to be made of the flesh, by the indwelling Spirit. (Rom. 8:13.) But the "holy" or second apartment seems to represent our hidden life – in which "we walk by faith, not by sight." In this department and by faith, we eat of the hidden bread, walk in the light the world cannot see, and serve at an unseen altar. When we ascend to the perfection of spiritual beings we will see Him with eyes immortal; but while we walk by faith, we must receive His presence by faith, under the leadings of the Spirit. Nickname our view as men may please, to us it appears in harmony with the Law and the Prophets.

The philosophy of the plan, as well as the general statements of the New Testament, teaches the higher and spiritual and invisible character of the coming of Christ to receive His saints to Himself. To ignore that philosophy and those teachings is to ignore the relation of the natural and the spiritual as seen in the two Adams, the two Dispensations, the two Jerusalems, the two bodies and the two – "First the natural, afterward the spiritual," in almost every element of the plan.

The fact that a sign of His presence was needed and given is evidence that the presence was to be invisible to the natural eye. The sign – (all the evidences) – is for the church. This is proved by the general plan. "Light is sown for the righteous." The world is to learn by judgments, which will doubtless be the appearing of the sign to them. There is doubtless import in the fact that the disciples came to Him privately, saying: "Tell us when shall these things be," &c.

The condition of the world – their excuse and ignorance – during the first part at least of the parousia – presence – of Christ – is stated by Himself. (See Matt. 24:37-39.) The word coming in this passage is not Erkomia, but Parousia. The Saviour compares the period of His

presence to "the days of Noah" – not to the flood, as some suppose, but to the "days which were before the flood," while the ark was preparing." (See verse 38 and compare 1 Pet. 3:20.)

In Luke 17:26, instead of "coming," we have a "phrase "in the days of the Son of man," which agrees with the idea of Presence. That this presence, in his days precedes, for a time, the rapture or taking away of the saints, is proved by the light given for them by the Saviour; and by the fact that the day does not come unawares on the watchers, because they walk in the light. (Luke 21:34-36 and 1 Thess. 5:1-5. Another evidence that He will be present for a time and that presence proclaimed, before the wise are gone, may be drawn from the contrast between the work of the "Faithful and wise servant" and the "Evil servant." (Matt. 24:45-51.) The evil servant says: "My Lord delays," and smites his fellow servant, who must be proclaiming the opposite, which is, "My Lord no longer tarries." Until he has come of course he delays. It is not so much the honest doubt that is to be condemned as the persecuting spirit.

This Suntelia – the end of the age, the harvest – agrees with Peter's "Last of the days," in which he says: "Scoffers will come with scoffing," and saying, 'Where is the promise of His presence?'" The scoffer's point is that nothing in the circumstances appeals to the natural eyes "All things continue in this way from the beginning." 2 Pet. 3:3-4. (Diaglott) "If your Christ has been present these seven years, He has done nothing" – an expression some use (and we give it free from its severity) sounds a little like the plea Peter mentions. If the harvest work has been in process, He has not been idle, for even though the Reapers are the Angels, He is Lord of the Angels as well as men. He is therefore the chief Reaper – the Lord of the Harvest. If there is no evidence of the presence, there is none of the Harvest, – the sign of the one is the sign of the other. To use the amount of evidence is great – coming by a combination of the prophetic periods, the

parallels and the "signs of the times." There are doubtless unseen facts which, when knowledge is perfected, will be found in harmony with what we have seen. But there is so much evidence which appeals to faith, **[R237 : page 8]** that we are encouraged to hold fast. We think if Jesus were present in the flesh, as when he came to the Jews, He would say now as then: "Ye can discern the face of the earth and of the sky; how is it that ye cannot discern this time?" The clearer the understanding, the deeper will be the impression of the facts, and the sanctifying effect will be the greater.

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