

OUR LORD'S PRESENCE.

"Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?"

Matt. 11:3.

John the Baptist was a brave, devoted, faithful servant of God. He counted no privation or suffering too great if thereby he might serve and honor God. And the experience of John was very much like the experience of very many of God's children.

When he first started out on his mission full of zeal and enthusiasm, doubtless he had high hopes of great success – not success as it is often measured today, by popularity and fame for oratory, or a great salary, for he was content to live on locusts and wild honey and he wore no soft clothing. No, his great anxiety was to have men repent of sin and to be ready to recognize and receive the promised Messiah of whom he was the forerunner. To know that he was chosen of God to actually introduce to the world the Messiah, the great deliverer promised away back in Eden and expected for four thousand years must indeed have inspired him with deepest enthusiasm and zeal.

For a time John met with great success and great multitudes repented of sin and were baptized. And after six months of such effort John was permitted to point his disciples to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. But it proved to be only Jesus of Nazareth, John's cousin. And many said, "Is this not Jesus the son of Joseph the carpenter, whose father and mother we know?" and others said, "What good thing can come out of Nazareth?" Jewish expectation was indeed greatly disappointed.

John was not so popular after that; his influence began to wane and his bold faithful course soon led to prison. This was a severe test of faith. Doubtless John in common with other Jews had

failed to comprehend the object of Christ's first advent, and began to think how strange it seemed that his own cousin, of humble birth and without worldly honor should be pointed out as the Messiah in whom the hope of the world should center.

In his discouragement and loneliness John's faith began to waver – had he indeed been deceived in this matter? Instead of this prison and this reproach among men, he might have been enjoying the honors and comforts of the world: had he in his enthusiasm made a great mistake?

Thus disturbed by doubts John sent two of his disciples to Jesus saying, "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?"

At this time Jesus was publicly preaching and calling attention to the fact that according to the prophets the time was fulfilled and the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Mark 1:14,15. But in answer to John's question Jesus did not say, Go and tell John that we are now living in the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy, (Dan. 9:24-27,) though that was true; nor did he furnish all the other prophetic evidence that pointed to him for fulfillment: But Jesus said, "Go and show John again, those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me." (Matt. 11:3-6.)

Notice that the things they could plainly see and hear were evidence sufficient that this was indeed the Christ. When God would make known to us any great truth he does not confine himself to any one method of proving it, but gives evidence in various ways.

Just so it is that the great fact of our Lord's second presence is now made known. To those saints who now like John inquire, "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" our Lord sends answer, saying, "Go tell them again the things which ye do see and hear. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

At his first advent the people not only heard the proclamation, "The time is fulfilled," but they could see the actual fulfillment of those prophecies concerning Christ which were then due. The Prophet had said, referring to Christ, "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Isa. 61:1).

It was to the fulfillment of this prophecy of his mission that Jesus called John's attention. He could not then say, This day is all prophecy concerning me fulfilled; but he could and did call attention to certain marked features of prophecy then being fulfilled which afforded sufficient evidence that he was indeed the Messiah: For instance – his preaching was especially to the meek, the poor. Unlike the professed teachers of the day, he did not court the favor and flattery of the rich and neglect the poor, but the very reverse. The poor had the good news preached to them, and if the rich desired to hear they had the privilege of coming on the same conditions and on the same footing, which would certainly incur the reproach of their rich neighbors and of popular religious sentiment.

Jesus also began to proclaim liberty to the captives of death, to teach that a time was coming when death should be no more, and to illustrate his power to liberate all by loosing a few from the

bands of death: "These things did Jesus and manifested forth [before] his glory." (John 2:11.) Go and tell John again these things, said Jesus. He knows them, but needs to be reminded of them again. This was but a small part of the long line of prophetic evidence since made manifest to the Church, but it was evidence sufficient for strong, unwavering faith.

The same thing is true to-day. While all that is prophesied concerning the second coming of Christ is not yet due to transpire, yet we see that those things due in the beginning of his day are actually coming to pass before our eyes. Nominal Zion now, as at the time of the first advent, is proud, popular and corrupt, and it is only those who have come to realize this – those who mourn in Zion – who are comforted by the good tidings now brought by the great Head of the Church, whose promised presence was to bring new light. Now, as then, it is the poor – the meek, who receive him gladly and to whom his special attention is directed; these are receiving the exceeding beauty and glory of God's unfolding plan for the ashes of old human traditions, the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

The prophecy of Isa. 61:1-3 was only due to have a partial fulfilment at our Lord's first advent; its complete fulfillment is due in this, his day. But we should not expect all of its fulfillment in the first dawn of the day. The opening of the prison doors of death to those that are bound by it is not yet due, but will follow in its order. The "day of vengeance" foretold is now due, and every student of the signs of the times is able to recognize the gathering storm. As Jesus said, "Ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?" (Matt. 16:3.)

Doubtless the principal cause of John's doubts was the disappointment of his Jewish expectations as to the manner of Christ's coming, and this, we see, is a cause of stumbling to many

to-day. Let us ever bear in mind Jesus' words – "The kingdom of God comes not with outward show, nor shall they say, Behold here or there, for behold God's royal majesty is among you" – unseen by the natural eye, and at first undiscovered by the world. (Luke 17:20. Diaglott.)

"If anyone should say to you then, Behold here is Messiah, or there, believe it not....If they say to you, Behold he is in the desert! go not forth; or, Behold he is in secret apartments! believe it not. For as the lightning emerges from the east and shines to the west, so will be the presence of the Son of man. (Matt. 24:23,26-28.) The evidence of the kingdom being come is the fulfillment of the last part of this [R629 : page 7] prophecy of Isaiah, the former part of which Jesus gave as evidence of the first presence. (Luke 3:18-20.) The day of vengeance upon every form of evil, oppression, and sin, is here, and the evidences are ever thickening. We recognize his presence by these very evidences – the lightning flashes of truth. And where the truth – the food – is found there the eagle-eyed, far-seeing, hungry saints are gathering and are being fed and enlightened. (v. 28.) Yes, we see the flashes of light which attend and attest our Master's presence, and we are being richly fed at his table (Luke 12:37); but though Christ has been seen and known in the flesh, we expect to see him so no more, (2 Cor. 5:16), but we shall see him as he is when made like him.
