

[R3191 : page 147]

"LOOKING FOR THAT BLESSED HOPE."

"I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." – John 14:3.

WHAT joyful hopes, what exuberant anticipations, cluster around this promise, in the hearts of the Lord's faithful! In a few words it sums up all the good things that God hath in reservation for them that love him. But not all mankind have such feelings in respect to this subject; – not all are aware of the gracious blessings held in store for the world, awaiting that auspicious time for their dissemination; and not all mankind are in such a condition of mind and heart as to be able, with joy, to anticipate meeting the Lord. We can readily surmise that not only a large proportion of nominal Christendom, but a comparatively large proportion of true Christians, are not living in that attitude of heart and daily life which would permit them to anticipate this meeting with sentiments of pleasure.

Not only do false doctrines hinder a joyful anticipation of this great event, but sin, likewise, hinders such joyful anticipation, induces shame and fear, – knowing that even those conditions of heart which may be hidden from fellow-servants cannot be hidden from the Master. We pray with the prophet, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults, keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins," and to the extent that this is the desire of our hearts, and the effort of our lives, – to the extent that the testimony of God's Word dwells in us rightly, and enables us to recognize the lengths and breadths of divine love and compassion covering unintentional shortcomings, – to this extent the Lord's faithful ones are able to rejoice in this promise, and to look forward with joy not only to the meeting with the Lord, but also to their abiding everlastingly in his presence and companionship. But to all others – to all who are not living up to their privileges as children of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ [R3192 : page 147] their Lord, – to all who are not seeking to walk circumspectly in the

footsteps of Jesus, the words of the text come bringing only a measure of joy, a measure of hope, and not an exuberant overflow.

THEY KNEW NOT AND RECEIVED HIM NOT.

Looking back to the harvest of the Jewish age, we readily perceive that the difficulty in the way of God's ancient people – the direct cause of their stumbling – lay in their failure to appreciate the fact that the coming of Messiah, for which they had so long waited and prayed, was a compound event, having its beginning in their day in the advent of Jesus in the flesh, and having its consummation now, in our day, in the advent of Jesus, a spirit being in glory. The prophecies do not clearly distinguish between the sufferings of Christ and the glory to follow; and it is not for us to blame unduly the poor Jews for seeing with hope and joy the ultimate blessings which Messiah would bring, and overlooking the trials, sufferings and death which must necessarily precede the glory. The Apostle assures us of their expectant attitude; saying, "Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God, hope to come." – Acts 26:7.

We inquire, Why were they permitted to stumble through the misconception of the prophecies? Why was it not explained to them clearly and definitely that the Messiah should first come as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, to be a sin-offering for the sins of the whole world; and that subsequently he would come as the King of Glory to deliver and bless the possession purchased with his own precious blood? We answer, Because the Lord did not wish to draw all Israel into the Gospel Church. He wished **[R3192 : page 148]** to draw only a certain special class; hence, as the Prophet foretold, he spoke unto the people in parables and dark sayings, that hearing they might hear and not understand, and seeing they might see and yet not believe – lest they should receive Jesus, lest they should accept him as their King. God's dealings in this matter would be inscrutable, unjust, unloving, unfair, were the ordinary conception of his plan the

correct one; – if, for instance, all those who rejected Jesus were to be sent to eternal torment.

But we have already seen that this was not a part of the divine plan, and that while only the elect class of Israel received the Lord, or were able to appreciate him and to accept his invitation, the remainder of that people were merely blinded, and that, as the Apostle tells us, for a time only, – until the elect class should be completed by selections from the Gentiles also, and then divine favor shall return to them, and all Israel shall be saved from that blindness which there came upon them. The eyes of their understanding shall be opened, and the Lord in glory, speaking to them at his second advent, will no longer hide his meaning under parables and dark sayings, but, on the contrary, shall cause the knowledge of the Lord to fill the whole earth, so that no man will need say unto his neighbor, Know the Lord – because all shall know him, from the least of them unto the greatest of them. – Jer. 31:34.

If such were God's dealings with the natural Israelites – if the matter of the sufferings and glory of Messiah, and the relationship of these two features of his coming were hidden from natural Israel, how has it been with nominal spiritual Israel? – with those who from amongst the Gentiles have to some extent accepted God and Christ? Has this subject of the manifestation of Messiah been clearly discerned by nominal Christendom throughout this Gospel age? We answer, No; although the blindness to the subject is from a somewhat different standpoint. The Jews through their traditions were blinded to the sufferings of Christ, and looked only for the glorious empire which he would establish for the blessing of the world; while Christians, generally, see matters only from the reverse standpoint – see merely the first advent of Christ, its sufferings, the redemptive work, and fail to discern the Kingdom and the blessing of all the families of the earth, which are to result from its establishment at the second coming of our Lord.

What is the source of this error, this blindness to the facts so clearly enunciated in prophecy, that the Apostle could declare that the times of restitution which shall come at the second coming of our Lord, had been "spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began"? Why do not Christians see this? We answer, Because they are blinded in the same sense that the Jews are blinded, although with a different form of blindness. But as the "Israelite indeed" amongst the Jews was not suffered to be blinded on the subject, but was clearly instructed by the Lord, guided into the truth, so that all the wheat of that nation were brought to a knowledge of Messiah, and only the chaffy element failed to discern him; so now, amongst the wheat and tares of this Gospel age we find the Scriptures clearly teaching that all who are of the wheat class will have the light of life; and all who are of the tare class will, just as surely, be left to grope and stumble in darkness, as did their prototype in the end of the Jewish age. Why? For the very same reason. Because the Lord is still seeking not for masses; not for numbers; but for peculiar characters – for those who are in heart-harmony with him; – for the pure in heart, in motive, in intention – the honest, the sincere. These will as surely be guided by the Lord into a knowledge and appreciation of the second advent of Messiah and of the Kingdom glories, as were those of the similar class in the end of the Jewish age – even though, as in the case of Saul of Tarsus, it should be necessary to strike them down in the way with some exhibition, or demonstration, of the truth.

THE HIDDEN MYSTERY.

There is a secret connected with this subject which the Apostle repeatedly calls the "Mystery" of God (Rom. 16:25,26; Eph. 3:9; 5:32; Col. 1:26; Rev. 10:7). This mystery, as he explains, relates to the Gospel Church; – the peculiar relationship between the Gospel Church and its Head and Lord is not intended to be understood by the world or by the nominal Christian nor by even the true Christian who is not in a proper attitude of heart and fully consecrated to the Lord.

When we catch a glimpse of this "mystery" it explains the whole situation. It shows us that from the divine standpoint, the promised Messiah, the Deliverer of the world from the bondage of sin and death – the Restorer, the great Prophet, Priest and King, whose Millennial reign as "the seed of Abraham" is to bring blessing to all the families of the earth – *is not our Lord Jesus alone*, but also with him, and under him as its Head, the entire Church of God – the faithful in Christ Jesus – the "little flock," whom God is selecting from amongst men during this Gospel age, – these, unitedly, are the Christ, the Messiah which God promised and is providing for the deliverance of the world.

Grasping this "mystery," it shows us that the first advent of Christ – in the flesh – for the suffering [R3192 : page 149] of death – has been in progress for nearly nineteen centuries. First came "the Lord Jesus, the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," who was the forerunner; none could precede him, all who would be associated must be followers and under his control and direction, for he is the "Head over all, God blessed forever." (Rom. 9:5.) He learned certain lessons which would qualify him to be the great High Priest for the world, as the Apostle declares, "Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." – Heb. 2:17.

Additionally, through the sacrifice of himself, this Chief of a Royal Priesthood *bought* the world, thus making possible the restitution of as many as will in due time receive the blessing of God at his hands, and at the same time making possible the invitation of some of them, some of the redeemed, to become joint-heirs with himself in his Kingdom. But if it was necessary that the Head of the priesthood should be tested in all points, and should learn obedience by the things he suffered, it was certainly not less necessary that all who would be members of the Kingdom class with him, after being redeemed by his precious blood, should be exercised, tried, tested,

proven – "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." So how plain it is, that the Head having been manifested in the flesh, seen of men, testified of angels, etc., all the members of his body should likewise be manifested in the flesh; because, as the Apostle declares, – "As he was, so are we in this world." – 1 John 4:17.

Looked at from this standpoint, we see that the first advent of Christ – in the flesh – has been a gradual one, covering a period of nearly nineteen centuries. We see that the Master has acknowledged these members of his body, made them his ambassadors, and through them has borne witness to the world, and in their sufferings he has suffered; for, as the Apostle declares, "We fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ." (Col. 1:24.) The Apostle Peter declares, that the prophets "spake of the sufferings of Christ [which, as we have seen, have extended over a period of nearly nineteen centuries] and of the glory that should follow" – as soon as the sufferings are completed. (1 Pet. 4:13.) The sufferings evidently did not end at Calvary, else the glory would have begun long ago. The words of our text are in full harmony with this; for the Master addressed not the world, but this very class, his brethren, his Church, the members of his body, "you." His declaration implies that when all of this "you" class shall have been found, tested, tried and approved – when the elect company shall be complete, the Head, who meantime passed into glory, will reappear to be then and ever afterward associated with the members of his **[R3193 : page 149]** body in glory – "in power and great glory" – a spiritual company. And for what purpose?

We answer that God is "the same yesterday, today and forever"; and his plan is an unchangeable one; hence, all this preparation of the Messiah, Head and body members, is part and parcel of the original plan. This implies that when this great Messiah, Head and body, changed and glorified, no longer in the flesh, but in the spirit, no longer of human nature, but of divine nature, shall be complete, – then shall come the time in which all the gracious promises of ancient times shall have fulfilment, – "times of restitution." Then Israel's

blindness shall be turned away, and the blindness of the Gentiles also; for is it not written that "all the blind eyes shall see out of obscurity" and "all the deaf ears be unstopped," and that Satan, the god of this world, shall be bound, and deceive the nations no more? The Apostle declares that he has blinded the world; and doubtless Satan supposes that he is interfering with the divine plan; but behold, as the mists clear away, we perceive that the Almighty has made use of his unwitting servant, to keep secret the mystery which he did not intend should be understood except by the faithful, until the great day of revealing. Then the whole world, released from its bondage of ignorance, superstition and blindness, shall be again made to see, and assuredly many will shout for joy, "Glory to God in the highest," – giving thanks for the gracious plan of God in which they will be participators, and which will be carried out through the agency of the glorified royal priesthood of which our Lord is the Head and Chief and Redeemer.

ERRORS BECLOUD TRUTHS.

False doctrines have beclouded this subject of the second coming of the Lord in the minds of many. (1) First came the wrong thought that the Church in its present condition, in the flesh, was to accomplish the promise of God made to Abraham, – to bless Israel and all the families of the earth. How false this conception! It is true that some blessing has followed the promulgation of the Gospel, even when sadly mixed with the traditions of men; it is true also that a measure of civilization and enlightenment has followed in the wake of the testimony of Jesus, even when uttered through imperfect lips and in distorted form; but this is not the blessing which God has promised; this is not the "restitution of all things spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets." In no sense of the word is it the blessing of all the families of the earth. **[R3193 : page 150]** At no time has even this measure of blessing reached more than a tithe of the living generations and nations – to say nothing of the generations of all nations which have passed into the great prison house of death. What

a shortsighted interpretation it is that could apply to the Church in its condition of humiliation, of the past nineteen centuries, all those glorious promises of power and glory and majesty, and earth-filling knowledge, and victory over evil, sin and ignorance, and Satan; and the blessing and uplifting of all mankind; – so clearly stated by all the holy prophets since the world began!

(2) Another false doctrine which has helped to becloud the minds of many is the theory that those who die *do not die*, but are, on the contrary, when dead, more alive than ever before – that they merely *seem* to die – that in reality they are in the moment of dying clothed upon with immortality, and as spirit beings, pass into an eternity of either bliss or torment. This unscriptural teaching makes void the Scriptural promise of a resurrection of the *dead* by claiming that *none are dead*; and it makes void also the lesson of our text and hundreds of others like it; for why should those who believe such things have any interest in such a promise as this text presents – "I will come again and receive you unto myself"?

In proportion as the doctrine of the second coming of Christ, and the resurrection of the dead then to take place, have been lost sight of from either of the above causes, in that same proportion blindness and darkness and lack of spiritual life have surely resulted. By the lack of spiritual life we do not mean lack of excitement, "revivals," "vanity fairs," "church work," etc.; but we do mean lack of piety, lack of deep Christian experience, lack of the fruits of the spirit and the joys thereof. And be it noted now, that those Christians who hold this hope of the second coming even though bound with various false doctrines, receive a blessing from it that is not fully counteracted by the false traditions of men which they have wrongly associated with it. Indeed, this must be true in respect to every feature of divine truth; – every item of it has its power as a sanctifying medium, as explained in our dear Redeemer's prayer – "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy Word is truth." Whoever has even one item of truth to nine items of error, has to the extent of that one item, a sanctifying power; whoever has

five parts of truth and five parts of error has a considerable measure of sanctifying power; and whoever, by the grace of God, can get rid of all the error, will have the tenfold power of the truth working in him to will and to do God's good pleasure – sanctifying him.

These ten various points of truth are not alike powerful either, and amongst them all we know of none which has greater purifying influence than this one referred to in our text – "that blessed hope" – the appearing of our glorious Lord.

THIS HOPE PURIFIETH.

"He who hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." (1 John 3:3.) He who has not this hope in him may purify himself in some measure from other motives, but is not at all likely to be purified to the same degree as he would be purified by this hope. Indeed we may be sure, on the other hand, that none but the pure in heart can honestly and truly entertain this hope; to the impure of heart it must rather be a dreadful thought that, shortly, he who can read the very thoughts and intents of the heart will be present; and that all shall appear before him – that all shall be open and naked before his sight. The illiterate and uncultured and morally impure would feel sadly out of place if found in the midst of the pure, the noble, the refined, even for an evening; much more would the matter be distressful to them if the prospects were that they must be thus associated forever. And so it is with the immoral and impure of heart in respect to the second coming of our Lord, and the prospect that all the pure in heart shall be there with him, – the impure cannot covet a place in such a gathering, nor could they rejoice in the hope of such a companionship. Indeed the thought of such associations everlastingly would to such be unendurable.

When we speak of the pure in heart who alone can rejoice in this promise, we are not to be understood as meaning perfect men and women according to the flesh, in every word and act acceptable to the Lord. We have God's own assurance that there are none such – "There

is none righteous, no not one" – all come short of the glory of God, the majority very far short. But the Lord knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust, that we were born in sin and shapen in iniquity, that all the children's teeth were set on edge by the sour grapes of sin of which our first parents partook. Those who rejoice in the promise of our text were "children of wrath even as others," and the difference now is that they have been reckonedly justified – their sins are covered by the merit of the great redemptive sacrifice, they have a new standing with the Lord as "new creatures" – not sinners, but friends – accepted in the Beloved; accepted not according to the flesh and its imperfections, but according to the new mind, the new heart, and its new divine aspirations and endeavors.

FEW KNOW OF OUR LORD'S PAROUSIA.

Let us, dear brethren, keep well before our minds the Master's promised return, and now in the time of [R3193 : page 151] his "*parousia*" (invisible presence), let it have its full weight and influence upon our every word and act; yea, upon our very thoughts. Let the hope that we shall soon experience our resurrection change, and be made like our dear Redeemer, and see him as he is, and share his glory in the great "*epiphania*," or shining forth of the Sons of God in the glory of the Kingdom, enthuse us; – let this energize our hearts, loose our lips, and strengthen us for every duty, privilege and opportunity – to serve our Master and the household of faith. If this hope has been an anchor to the Lord's people for so many centuries, how much more does it mean to us who are living now in the very time of his presence, waiting for his "*apokalupsis*" – his revealing in the glory of the Kingdom!

It is only in accordance with what we have seen respecting the heavenly Father's dealings in the past, that we now perceive that there are various matters connected with our Lord's second advent which are inscrutable to the natural man, and can only be perceived by the faithful, and that under the guidance of the spirit in the understanding

of the Word. As we saw previously that the Jews failed to grasp the facts connected with our Lord's presence at the first advent – except those who were Israelites indeed, and they but a handful in comparison with the nation, – so here, may we not expect that even amongst those who today are hoping for the Master's return, only a comparative remnant, a handful, will be in such a condition of heart as to permit them to discern clearly and distinctly the manner of the second advent? The presence of our Lord, invisible to men, is for the gathering of the wheat into his barn and the tares for burning; and, subsequently, the manifestation of the complete Christ, Head and members, in the glory of **[R3194 : page 151]** the Kingdom, as the Sun of Righteousness will be for the healing and blessing and restoring of all mankind then willing to accept the blessings of the Lord on the terms of righteousness.

