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GOD'S WAYS HIGHER THAN MAN'S WAYS.

– ISAIAH 55:1-13. – JULY 23. –

Golden Text: – "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found."

TODAY'S lesson is often seriously misapplied. It is supposed to be a picture of the blessings of the Lord upon the Israelites returning from the Babylonian captivity. But whoever will examine the whole matter in the context will clearly discern that if it were a prophecy of that event it signally failed of fulfilment. So far from Israel's return from Babylon being accompanied by the running of nations to them and the Lord's glorification in them, the very reverse was true – they had a very struggling existence for years under very adverse conditions, and never secured their national independence, let alone authority over other nations. Verses 12,13, representing the hills and trees and the pouring forth of blessings do not fit the return of Israel nor their experiences at that time. – See the accounts given in Nehemiah and Ezra.

The proper application of this prophecy is in line with the interpretation already given in chapters 52 and 53. Chapter 52 describes our time, the awakening of Zion and the putting on of the beautiful garments in the resurrection morning. It describes the harvest time, when the watchmen lift up the voice together and the feet of the Church are seen to be beautiful upon the mountains, bringing the message, "Thy king reigneth," and the further message that the Lord's people should depart out of Babylon. (Vs. 11,12. Compare Revelation 18:2-5.) Then follows a description of how highly exalted Messiah will be during his Millennial reign. Chapter 53 calls attention to the fact that the report, the teachings of the Lord through various mouthpieces, has not been regarded, has not been "heard," not been "believed," and the arm of Jehovah has not been appreciated during this Gospel age, and an account of why this was – because of the ignominy and suffering under which it pleased the

Father to develop the New Creation, Head and body. Chapter 54 continues the thought saying, "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear," etc. This the Apostle applies to the Gospel Church, or rather to the original Abrahamic Covenant. (Gal. 4:27.) The prosperity of this original covenant as superior to the Law Covenant which temporarily succeeded it is shown, and the result is pictured, namely, that ultimately the fruitage of this Covenant shall be great. The Church is pictured as the glorious New Jerusalem built of precious stones, and the declaration is made that "no weapon formed against it shall prosper."

"WHOSOEVER WILL MAY COME"

Then Chapter 55 describes the condition that shall obtain after the Gospel Church shall have been selected from the world and glorified. Hence the lesson before us pictures the Millennial age and its blessing upon the world of mankind through the glorified Church. "Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price." This verse is in close agreement with the picture of the Millennial blessings given us in Revelation 22:1,17.

We have already pointed out that according to the Scriptures there is no river of life flowing at the present time – nor will there be until the Church is glorified, the Kingdom established, and that then the river of life will flow from the throne, from the Millennial Kingdom power and authority established in the earth, and then it will be the glorified Bride with the Spirit that will give the invitation to the world of mankind in general. We have already pointed out the Lord's words to the effect that now whoever has the water of life receives it not from a fountain or river or pool but from the Lord, "a well of water springing up in you." Since there is no water to which to invite any at the present time, the invitation of this lesson must belong to the time when there will be such a flow of living waters.

There is a certain sense in which now any who thirst may come to Christ and find him a fountain of life, and all of the Lord's people are thus refreshed in the present [R3597 : page 217] time by partaking of Christ and thus having formed in them the well of water that will spring up into everlasting life. The statement of our lesson, however, seems to be a more general one, an invitation to every one such as the Millennial invitation will be, for the invitation of the present time has limitations.

The water of life which our dear Redeemer offers us now is not without price, for he himself stipulates that none can be his disciple except he take up his cross and follow him – he who loves father or mother or lands, etc., more than me cannot be my disciple. The cost of the water of life in this present time is self-denial, self-sacrifice, a walk in the narrow way and baptism into Christ's death. Who shall say, then, that the present offer is without price, without conditions, without cost? The Master said that those desirous of being his disciples should sit down first and count the cost. The meaning of all this is that the Lord is selecting during this Gospel age a peculiar people, a special class, those who would be copies of the Son of God and count it all joy to lay down their little all in the divine service because of their appreciation of the wonderful words of life, the exceeding great and precious promises coming to us through our relationship with Jesus.

"A WELL OF WATER IN YOU"

On the contrary, with the end of this Gospel age there will be no more suffering for righteousness' sake, the narrow way will no longer be. It will give place to the highway of holiness upon which all the redeemed of the Lord, during the Millennial age, may go up to life, restitution, perfection. We are glad for the world and for the favorable opportunity which will then come to all mankind through the merit of the precious blood. We are glad that the way shall then be so clear that a wayfaring man may not err therein; we are glad

that then the knowledge of the Lord will fill the whole earth as the waters cover the great deep. But, on the other hand, we are glad also for the narrow way and for the high calling which is ours, preferring it with all its difficulties because of the exceeding great and precious promises connected therewith – promises of association with our dear Redeemer in his Kingdom and its glorious work for the world of mankind – promises of glory, honor and immortality, if so be that we suffer with him that we may also be glorified together.

HIS MERCY ENDURETH FOREVER

Many seem confused to think that the opportunities of the future will be so much greater than those of the present time. The reason for this distinction can only **[R3597 : page 218]** be seen by those who recognize the Scriptural teaching that the Bride of Christ now being God selected is a very peculiar class in the Lord's estimation, and that it is a special favor toward them that they are now counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake, to be sharers in his death and sharers also "in his resurrection" – the first resurrection. Once the difference is seen between the reward of the Church and that of the world it will be easy to account for the difference between the fiery trials which shall try *you* and the more favorable environments of the world in the next age. The world will indeed be called to come to the waters of the river of life and to partake thereof freely, without money and without price, without our walking in the narrow way or taking up a cross of self-denial and suffering for righteousness' sake. All that will be required of the world at that time will be that they shall be thirsty, shall be desirous of the life offered, that they shall be hungry for the Bread of Life. All such may indeed delight themselves in the fatness, the fulness, the glorious provision which the Lord has made for them and which will then be opened before them.

In the third verse we have the representation of the Master's gracious invitation as it will soon reach the world of mankind

through the glorified Church, "Incline your ear unto me: Hear and your soul shall live." This testimony is in full harmony with Peter's statement of the conditions of the Millennial age. (Acts 3:22,23.) "A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me [Moses]; him ye shall hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it will come to pass that every soul that will not hear [obey] that Prophet, shall be destroyed from amongst the people." "Hear [obey] and your soul shall live," shall be the watchword of the Millennial Kingdom.

The New Covenant, the everlasting Covenant, the sure mercies of David [the beloved], is to be proffered to all. That New Covenant, as the Apostle points out, is the divine agreement to be merciful – to forgive, to cancel sins that are past – "I will put my law in their minds and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God and they shall be to me a people.... I will be merciful to their unrighteousness and their sins and iniquities I will remember no more." (Heb. 8:8-13; Jer. 31:29-34.) "The sure mercies of David" are the mercies guaranteed to Israel and the world through his greater Son, our Lord. The real David (the real Beloved) shall be the divine channel for the outpouring of the blessings and mercies of the Abrahamic Covenant.

DAVID, "BELOVED OF THE LORD"

Of this antitypical David it is written, "Behold I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people." This is the great Prophet, the great Priest, the great King, typified by Moses and Melchizedek and the kings of the line of David. Behold he shall call a nation not previously known – the new nation called during this Gospel age, a holy nation, a peculiar people, a Royal Priesthood, to show forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Pet. 2:9.) And ultimately as a result of this calling of spiritual Israel as a holy nation and as a result of the establishment of the Kingdom and the glorification of

this holy nation with himself at its head, because the Lord, the holy one of Israel, will glorify these, therefore many nations that previously knew him not shall run unto him because of his being glorified.

Throughout the Millennial age there will be a grand opportunity for every member of Adam's race to seek the Lord while he may be found, to call upon him while he is near. The opportunity will last for a thousand years and all will be invited to drink of the water of life freely. All appreciating the situation fully may attain to all that was lost in Adam – attain it through the processes of restitution.

Verse seven shows how the Lord may then be sought and found, namely, the wicked must forsake his ways of unrighteousness, the unjust must abandon unrighteousness even in thought. Under such conditions during that thousand years all may return unto Jehovah and find mercy and abundant pardon through the great antitypical David. But it will require all of that thousand years of Christ's reign to restore and make fit for presentation to Jehovah those who will hear the voice and apply for the water of life, forsake unrighteousness and seek the Lord. How glorious the prospect!

Verses 12,13 set forth the blessings and peace and favor of God which will then be upon the whole world of mankind. It will no longer be true that whosoever will live godly shall suffer persecution, for then whosoever will live godly shall go out with joy and be led forth in peace by the great Shepherd of the flock, who, after telling us that we, his flock of this present age, are like sheep amongst wolves, assures us that "other sheep I have which are not of this fold." (John 10:16.) It is these other sheep of the Millennial age which are referred to and whose leading out and in in peace and joy is assured. There will be no wolves there, no "lions or any ravenous beast," is the assurance.

In grandly poetic language mountains and hills and trees and fields are represented as all rejoicing in that glorious day when Satan shall be bound, when the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth, when the darkness of sin shall have fled away before the glorious beams of the Sun of Righteousness. Instead of the thorns of the present time, the wicked who lurkingly seek to injure the unwary foot, there shall then be the fir tree, an evergreen – symbolical of a man possessed of life everlasting. Instead of the briar with its thorns reaching forth to attack and ensnare those attracted by its sweet odor, shall come up the myrtle tree, beautiful and harmless. Thus does the Lord contrast the condition of the world to-day, full of men and women who are really thorns and briars in word and deed, injuring others, and the peaceable, strong, stalwart ones full of life and vigor in the next age.

THE LORD SHALL BE GLORIFIED

The conclusion of the chapter is that by that time, when the Lord's work of salvation for our race shall have been fully accomplished, the results will be to the name or honor of Jehovah, and this sign of his greatness and goodness will be perpetual – it will never be cut off. Evil doers, we are assured, shall be cut off – it would not be to the glory of the Lord that they should be permitted to continue. It will be to the Lord's glory that he should save from amongst mankind all who have a love for righteousness, all who under favorable conditions would prefer harmony with God and with righteousness, with truth and with goodness and purity.

Verses 8-11 point out that such wonderful blessings as these will be beyond the thinking of mankind – they [R3598 : page 219] will be unready to believe that God's plan as it shall ultimately be developed will be so grand, so broad, so high, so deep. The Lord, therefore, explains in conjunction with these promises, "My thoughts are not your thoughts; neither are my ways your ways, saith the Lord." Many have thought it strange that earthly parents and

generous and benevolent members of the human family should conceive grand and noble beneficences for each other, and especially for the more degraded of mankind, and have wondered how it could be that men's ways would be so much higher and grander than God's ways. The difficulty has been that they have not known the mind of the Lord; they have supposed that God had predestinated a little handful to eventually attain glory – saints favored by his grace and possessing much advantage every way over the majority of mankind. They have supposed, and in all the creeds of Christendom still teach, that all the remainder of mankind are according to the divine purpose to be eternally tormented. They have thus imagined that a good man's ways and a good man's plans are much higher than the ways and plans of the Almighty. Alas! How the Lord's holy name and character have been traduced and blasphemed by those who really sought to serve him and honor him. Alas, how shortsighted we have all been!

Not until the Millennial Kingdom and its work are seen – not until the eyes of our understanding discern something of the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of God's wonderful provision for every member of the human family – not until then can we realize the meaning of this assurance before us, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my plans than your plans."

SHOWERS OF REFRESHING

The Lord gives us a word picture respecting his dealings with us as a race – respecting his word of promise which has been with us for 3,500 years, assuring us of the ultimate blessing of all the families of the earth but whose fulfilment is not yet apparent except to the eye of faith. The illustration offered is that as the rain cometh down from heaven and returneth not thither until it have watered the earth, causing it to bring forth and bud and to give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall it be with the Word of the Lord which

has gone out of his mouth: it shall not return unto him void, empty, without fruit, but it shall accomplish that which he pleased and shall prosper in the thing whereunto he sent it.

Isaiah evidently realized, as did Solomon (Eccl. 1:7), that the rain coming down from the clouds returned thither again, and it therefore furnishes us a faithful picture of the Lord's Word, promise, which, as his messenger, comes into the world charged with a certain duty, obligation and purpose, which will ultimately return to the Lord to make report. The report, the result of the promise, shall not be other than that which the heavenly Father in his greatness and mercy and love designed; the report of the results of the divine plan shall not be such as would be a discredit to the Creator, a shame or blot upon his work, his character, his plan. The results shall be worthy of the one who conceived the plan: they shall show not only to restored humanity in the Millennial age, especially at its close, but they shall show also to all the holy angels, the wisdom, justice, love and power of God, and how grand and noble and loving are his thoughts and plans toward his creatures.

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