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MESSIAH'S KINGDOM TO BE INVISIBLE

– JUNE 7. – LUKE 17:20-37. –

"Behold, the Kingdom of God is in your midst." – V.21.

OUR understanding of the Master's words depends considerably upon the setting in which we see them. John the Baptist preceded Jesus and preached the Kingdom of God at hand. In due time he pointed out Jesus as the Messiah that should come, the Lamb of God. After waiting for months for Jesus to establish Himself as an earthly king, and finding instead that his own work was closing, he was put into prison by Herod. John then sent to Jesus to inquire whether or not He was the One that should come or whether they should look for another. He was disappointed in not seeing evidences of the Kingdom, as he had expected.

The Scribes and the Pharisees heard of the claim that Jesus was the long-promised King who would set up His Messianic Kingdom, and they derided Him. They looked at His motley company of followers – publicans and sinners as well as honorable people, but none of special rank, influence or wealth. They considered Jesus a deceiver and His followers dupes. Our lesson tells how they attempted to expose what they supposed was a deception of Jesus, thus to turn away the delusion of His followers. Therefore they asked Him in public the question, When will God's Kingdom come? How long will it be before you set it up?

Doubtless they purposed to entrap Jesus; for if He should say, A long time, His followers would be disheartened; if He should say, A short time, they would proceed to query, Where will You get Your army? How will You pay Your soldiers? How will You supply them with food? Will You go to Rome to battle with the powers that be, that our whole nation has been unable to cope with? etc.

But these Pharisees got only as far as their first question, because the answer to it confuted them, and no doubt perplexed them. Jesus answered that God's Kingdom would not come with observation; that is to say, [R5455 : page 141] when the Kingdom should come, people would not see it. Proceeding, Jesus elaborated, saying that when the Kingdom of God should be established, people would not see whether it was here or there; for the Kingdom of God would be the Power of God exerted everywhere in the midst of the people.

Our translation is faulty, though evidently not intentionally so, when it reads, "For, behold, the Kingdom of God is within you." The translators, had they noticed carefully, would have been on guard against saying that the Kingdom of God was within those Pharisees that Jesus had designated hypocrites, whited sepulchres, etc. A closer examination of the original would have shown that the text would better be translated, "The Kingdom of God is in your midst."

A kingdom is always represented by its king. Jesus, as the King, was present in their midst, but they did not recognize Him. "There standeth One among you whom ye know not." Similarly, all through the Gospel Age, the Church of Christ, His "Body," has been undiscerned by the world. "The world knoweth us not, even as it knew Him not." For eighteen hundred years this has been true in this sense; but Christ and the Church in the flesh are not the Kingdom of God in the full, proper sense that the Bible promises it – a Kingdom of power and great glory. Christ and the Church have been only the incipient Kingdom, an embryotic Kingdom – the Kingdom class, preparing for investiture of authority in God's due time, which we believe is now near.

This Kingdom is to be a spiritual one, and hence its rulers will be as invisible as are the angels and the Heavenly Father. Jesus declared, "Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more." What was true of the Head will be true of every member of the elect Body

of Christ, the Church. "Changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," the world will see them no more; "for flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God," and flesh and blood cannot see that which is spiritual.

During the Millennium, the Kingdom authority and power of God through Christ and the Church will be exercised amongst men; and yet they will not see it with the natural eye, but merely with the eyes of their understanding. All the blind eyes will be opened. Thus every eye will see that the Kingdom is established; and every one will understand that He who suffered has entered into His glory, that the Church, His Bride, is with Him in glory, and that the blessings of the Millennium proceed from them. – Revelation 20:6.

"DAYS OF THE SON OF MAN"

Turning from the silenced Pharisees to His disciples, Jesus said, "The days will come when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it." This was astonishing news to the faithful. Yet they were accustomed to hearing from the Master things which they could not understand; such as that they must eat of His flesh and drink of His blood, that He must be crucified, etc. They took all these things figuratively and wondered what might be the real interpretation. How could Jesus be the great King, as they had expected, and yet they not see Him and His days?

Jesus continued to discuss the enigma, saying, "They shall say to you, See here; or, See there: go not after them, nor follow." In a word, do not believe anybody who will thus tell you about My Second Coming; do not be deceived into believing that I will come in any such manner. I will tell you how I shall come: "As the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, and shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of Man be in His Day."

This astounding statement is better understood when we translate the Greek noun *astrape* as "shining" instead of "lightning"; for evidently it refers to the sun, which rises in the east and sets in the west, shining out of the one part of the heaven even unto the other. But how will this represent the Son of Man in His Day? How will He be like the sun? We answer that the Day of Christ is a thousand-year Day, the Millennium; and our Lord's statement was one of the "dark sayings" of which Jesus said, "I have many things to tell you, but ye cannot bear them now," and promised that in due time the Holy Spirit would grant them an enlightenment, that all of His words might be clearly understood. This portion, now due to be understood, is therefore becoming clear to those of spiritual discernment.

Then, that they might gradually learn that these things belonged to a distant time, Jesus explained that first He must suffer many things and be rejected of that nation. Coming back to an explanation of what would be the signs of His presence, in answer to their question as recorded in Matthew 24, He declared, "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man."

Here we have something definite, concrete. We know what to look for at the time when the Kingdom will be due for establishment – the time when the Sun of Righteousness will begin to shine forth from one end of heaven to the other. The signs of the times will not be in the outward condition of the world; for on the contrary everything will be going along in as quiet and orderly a manner as ever, just as in the days of Noah, just as before the Deluge came, and just as in the days of Lot, before the destruction of Sodom – they ate, drank, married, built, bought, sowed, planted, as usual. These things are not signs of wickedness, but are mentioned to show us that there will be no outward sign to indicate to the world the time of the Second Presence of Christ, when He will begin to deal with the world and to set up His Kingdom.

THE DELUGE AND SODOM'S DESTRUCTION

Why introduce these two pictures – the Deluge and the destruction of Sodom – in conjunction, while talking of the establishment of Messiah's Kingdom, which is to bless the world? The answer is that the Bible everywhere foretells that although Messiah's Kingdom is the great provision of God which will lift the curse and bring in blessings world-wide, nevertheless it is to be established upon the wreck of our present institutions. And it is this wreck of social, financial, political and religious institutions of the present time that Jesus illustrated by the Deluge and the destruction of Sodom. And His own presence preceding this Time of Trouble is to be unseen **[R5456 : page 141]** to the world, unknown to the world, unsuspected, unbelieved, until the cataclysm of trouble precipitates with suddenness.

This is not a charming picture. We are glad that we may turn from it, and note the silver lining of the cloud, and the glorious blessings which will speedily follow the establishment of the Kingdom on the ruins of our human failures.

Emphasizing the suddenness with which the calamity will overtake the world, Jesus said that on the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained down fire and brimstone from heaven; and He declared that thus it will be in the Day when the Son of Man is revealed. The Greek text shows a difference between the Parousia, or presence, of Christ before the Time of Trouble, and the later Epiphania, or revealing.

The description of the revealing of Christ is given in **[R5456 : page 142]** the words, He shall be revealed in flaming fire. (2 Thessalonians 1:7,8.) Indeed, that Time of Trouble is frequently described symbolically in the Bible as a burning of the world – so much so, that all the creeds of Christendom express the thought that the earth is to be "burned." They overlook the fact that the heavens are to be "burned" also.

In the symbolical usage of the Bible, the earth represents the social order of human affairs; the sea, the restless, discontented masses; the heavens, the ecclesiastical powers. St. Peter tells us that all these will pass away with a great confusion, and that instead will come the new heavens and the new earth which God has promised. (2 Peter 3:10-13.) The new heavens will be the new ecclesiastical society – the Church in glory, joint-heirs with Christ in His Kingdom. The new earth will be the new social order which Messiah's Kingdom will establish.

SAINTS ON THE ROOFTOP

Again recurring to the period in which He will be present before being revealed "in flaming fire," the Lord seems to assure us that all of His faithful ones will die, and be changed in the moment of dying, before the great trouble, the symbolic fire, will consume present institutions. In figurative language He says that in that Day (of His Parousia, presence, before His Epiphania, revealing) those on the rooftop, with their goods in the house, should not leave to take them out. What is here meant?

Briefly, we believe that the house represents the House of God, and those on the rooftop represent the most saintly of the people of God. At that time such will come to realize the necessity for flight; and the question will arise, How much of their stuff, their valuables, will they seek to save? They are warned not to seek to save any of the stuff – considerations of social privileges, honor of men, sometimes titles of small offices; such as vestryman, deacon, elder, minister, etc. An attempt to save any of these things will mean disappointment. Everything must be forsaken, else the test of that time will not be successfully passed.

Likewise, any in the field must not turn back. The field represents the world. And any of the Lord's people who have gone out into the world – who have left the church nominal – are not to

go back; but learning the truth of the situation they are to flee to the Lord from the field.

St. Matthew's account speaks of special troubles at that time upon such as are with child and give suck, which we believe is also symbolical, and refers to Christian people, seeking to convert the world and to teach beginners. These will be in special travail of soul, because of the change of dispensation and the call, "Come out of her, My people." It will be especially difficult for such to hear and to obey that call.

In the flight from Sodom, Lot and his family were warned to make haste, and not even to look back to the things that were to be destroyed. So the Lord's people are not to look back at the things to be destroyed. Give them no thought. "Flee out of Babylon!" "Deliver every man his own soul!" Lot's wife, disobeying, looked back longingly to the things of destruction, and failed to escape. The Lord applies this illustration to His people, and urges that their flight be with a full renunciation of the things of the present time. Whoever shall seek to save his life must lose it. Whoever will lose his life will thereby be preserving it – gaining the everlasting life.

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