

WHEN AND HOW
OUGHT I TO EXPECT
MY LORD?

THE CHRISTIAN.—“Come, Lord, Jesus.”

THE UNFAITHFUL SERVANT.—“My Lord delayeth his coming.”

THE SCOFFER.—“Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.”

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WHEN AND HOW OUGHT I TO EXPECT MY LORD?

THE second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ is a doctrine, I suppose, held by all christians. At the Ascension it was plainly declared, that "this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts i. 11.) Our Lord also said, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." (John xiv. 3.) I say, the second advent is held as a doctrine almost universally; but when we come to enquire what is meant by the second advent, we get the most diverse answers; some contending that, when a christian dies Christ comes by His Spirit or an angel, and that this is the second coming of our Lord. But can language be plainer than the two passages above quoted? Our Lord said, "If I go away, I will come again," and surely the coming again must be in a way similar to that by which He went. The passage in Acts is, if possible, still plainer: "This same Jesus ... shall so come in *like manner as ye have seen him go.*" Therefore, if we are to let scripture teach us, it is surely plainly revealed that Christ is personally coming again to this earth.

But our question is, *When* and how ought we to expect our Lord? Well, some christians plainly tell us, that there are certain events that must happen on

the earth before our Lord will return, and therefore we ought not to be expecting Him at present. Others put it very mystically, and say that we ought to be expecting our Lord, but that yet there are events to happen before He will come. Others, again, have made calculation, and fixed upon certain dates, and say that on and after such and such a date we may expect our Lord, but not before. Indeed, so varied and bewildering are the theories put forth, that many a dear saint has given up the subject as quite hopeless, and been led to suppose that prophecy is only another name for *opinion* and *speculation*, which is far better let alone.

And surely, if it is mere opinion and speculation *it is* better let alone. But has *God* revealed nothing plainly about our expecting our Lord—so plainly that there is no room for opinion, unless a christian will have it to accord with some preconceived judgment? And can any christian say that he has searched the scriptures and sought for the teaching of God's Holy Spirit, allowing the word to speak for itself and to mean what it says, and yet been obliged to conclude that there is no answer to the questions, When and how ought I to expect my Lord? and What is the proper attitude of mind respecting His coming? Surely not. We will, then, bring our questions to the word, and let God answer them.

“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord . . . that when He cometh and knocketh they may open to Him immediately.” (Luke xii.)

Now I ask, Can this be the language of one who intended to send a messenger to us before His personal return? "Ye yourselves like unto men that wait *for their Lord.*" And if it had been revealed that any messenger would arrive, or any event happen, before the Master's return, would not the natural consequence be that the servants would ungird their loins, and let their lights grow dim, hoping they might have time to prepare for their Lord *after the messenger had come?* Thus, while they might be expecting the messenger, they certainly would not be expecting their Master. But they *were* to expect their Lord, and they were to keep their loins girded and their lights burning, that they might open to Him *immediately.*

Now can language be plainer than the above passage? And in the context it is further enforced: "Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find *watching*" (ver. 37), while the language of the unfaithful servant is, "my Lord delayeth his coming."

May we not then conclude that our habit of mind is to be that of constant expectancy for our Lord's return, and such an expectancy, too, that is entirely at variance with the supposition that there is any revealed event that must happen before He can come? But notwithstanding this, and many other similar passages, it has been often said and reiterated, that there are events revealed to happen before our Lord will come. Thus, some say that the Jews must first be restored to their own land; others, that the whole world must be converted, &c. But do those who make these assertions see what is involved in them? Let us suppose for a moment that it were so, and that the two

events above named must take place before our Lord returns, then it must follow that *we* in England could not yet be expecting our Lord at all, for *we*, knowing a little of what passes all over the world, see very little real movement in the mass of the Jews to return to Palestine—indeed it is still owned by the Turks; and as to the world being converted, I suppose most will agree it is nearly as far off as ever.* Then it is quite clear that *we* could not expect our Lord, and the passage in Luke practically is lost to us.

But, further, suppose a poor Hottentot hears the gospel, and is converted, it would follow that such a man, though indwelt by the Holy Ghost, and with his Bible in his hands, could not be

* This seems to be the deliberate judgment of one who is expecting the conversion of the world by the agency now in use. When he had taken into consideration the increase of the population in the united kingdom, and then added together all who had become members of christian churches he said, in astonishment, "When will the *world* be converted at this rate?" And if it is thus in England, what must it be in the large catholic countries? what in the Mahometan? what in the Asiatic religions? what in paganism? A table of statistics gave in 1863:—

600 millions	Asiatic religions.
200	"	...	Pagans.
160	"	...	Mahometans.
170	"	...	Roman Catholics
76	"	...	Greek Church.
80	"	...	Protestants.
5	"	...	Jews.

1,291 millions.

Only 80 million Protestants! and, of course, this includes, in Protestant countries, all who are not Jews or catholics, whether converted or not. Of these, how many are christians?

in a right position of soul as touching our Lord's return, because he does not see the newspaper every day to know if there is any movement among the Jews towards their own land, not to mention statistics from every part of the globe as to what prospect there is of all being converted ! And thus *the newspaper would be a necessary appendage to the scriptures*. Can we believe this ? Nay ; but let us rather take the simple statement of scripture : "Be ye like unto men that wait for their Lord that ye may open to Him immediately."

Moreover, *the apostles* were exhorted to wait for their Lord, eighteen hundred years ago. Many are attempting to shew that during this year (1866) there will be some movement, and that in 1867 or 1868 we may begin to expect our Lord. But the passage above quoted from Luke was spoken by Christ to His disciples, and *they* were to wait and to watch for His return (the figure used supposing that He had left them, which He did at the ascension, and that the promised Comforter had come, which He did at Pentecost).

Others say that the millennium will doubtless be the seven thousandth year of the world's history, and commence A.M. 6001 ; and then they have tried to make out the world as old as 5994* so that in six years' time, they say, we may expect our Lord. But there was a very pointed

* This cannot be arrived at from Scripture alone. Of course there is a gap between the Old Testament and the New ; and though the prophecy of the seventy weeks may help us to fill this gap (Christ being out off after the 69th week), yet, in the chronology of the earlier parts of the Old Testament there are several very difficult points which, with our present light, can only be reconciled by conjecture. Doubtless this has been allowed for a wise end, so as to throw all men's speculations into confusion.

question asked by the apostles which called forth a very significant reply; "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, *It is not for you to know the times or the seasons*, which the Father hath put in his own power." (Acts i. 6, 7.) And again, "Take ye heed, watch and pray; for *ye know not when the time is.*" (Mark xiii. 33.) And so it always has been. Many have foretold that the world was to come to an end at such and such a time. The time passed, and only proved their folly. Whereas, if we turn to scripture, all is plain and simple as to the certainty of Christ's coming, and as to our duty and privilege of being always ready. But "ye know not when the time is." Thus we read that the Thessalonians were turned from "idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven." (1 Thess. i. 9, 10.) How simple and blessed, but how different from consulting the newspaper or calculating the world's age in order to know when to expect our Lord!

Again, we find the apostle, in referring to the coming of the Lord, says, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thess. iv. 18.) But how can we comfort one another with the prospect of speedily being taken away to be with the Lord, if events have previously to happen and such events too as have often called forth the remark, "Yes, they doubtless will happen, but not in my time?" Thus scripture is robbed of its application and we are robbed of our comfort.*

* As an illustration of the unfair way in which scripture is dealt with, take Barnes' Notes—a book that has sold by thousands—and no one need be surprised that christians, who are guided by such books, give up such subjects as our

Thus far, then, scripture is very plain—that Christ is coming Himself to fetch His saints, and that we are to be constantly watching and expecting His coming. But there are one or two points that still demand our attention, for, to have a clear view of our subject, we must look at it from various points and compare scripture with scripture. Doubtless, the not doing this—together with having one leading thought and making all to bend to it—has hindered and stumbled many. For instance, it is a very common thought that the coming of the Lord is at the literal end of the world, that a general judgment immediately follows, and that then we enter at once the final state. Now there could not be a greater mistake, and the correction of it, happily, does not depend on the mere opinion of any man. For the word of God is plain. Take, for instance, the passage in Matt. xiii. 39: “The harvest is the end of the world.” Now it is well known that it is “the end of the age,” and not the end of the material earth. And so we read of “the world [or, ‘age,’ the same Greek word] to come.” (Heb. vi. 5.) And

present enquiry in despair. If scripture speaks of a first resurrection, Barnes says, something takes place “*as if* they had been raised from the dead.” When it speaks of some living with Christ a thousand years, he says, “there would exist, at the time of the 1000 years a state of things *as if* the martyrs were raised from the dead—an honouring of the martyrs *as if* they should live and reign with Christ.” And so in many other places. Let a passage at all cross his theory and he puts in the words “*as if*.” And yet this is by an accredited orthodox divine! and if such is done in a green tree, what shall be done in a dry? A unitarian could easily get over all his difficulties if he might add “*as if*” whenever he pleased. But this would be cried down as shocking in a unitarian; is it less so in an orthodox divine?

the "ages to come." (Eph. ii. 7, still the same Greek word.) Now these passages clearly intimate that there will be ages after the present one; and this is very important, because, if the coming of Christ is not at the literal end of all things, and if there be other ages after this, then some of the things which men say *must* take place before Christ comes *may* take place *after* He comes. And this is the very thing that is borne out by the word, and explains much that is otherwise inexplicable. Take, for instance, the conversion of the world so called. It is plainly revealed that "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Isa. xi. 9.) But when and how? Some say, before Christ returns, and therefore we must not expect Him yet! But this is contrary to other passages of scripture. In the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matt. xiii. 30), we read that both good and bad are to grow together until the harvest, and "the harvest is the end of the age." Then all will not be converted before the end of this age.* And in another place the Lord Jesus is represented as coming "with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel." (2 Thess. i. 7, 8.) Hence all cannot be converted

* It has sometimes been a difficulty to understand how, if the church is to be caught up before *the end*, the good and bad can grow together till the harvest; and how the rapture of the saints agrees with the tares being gathered *first*. But are not these difficulties met by remembering that there will be "good" after the rapture of the church. There were saints before the church began (supposing that it began at Pentecost: see the tract "Christ and the Church" on this point) and there will be saints *after* the church is taken way, the rapture being before the end of the age.

before Christ comes; and thus we see that the theory is in direct contradiction to these passages as well as to many others.

So, again, the return of the Jews to their own land—it is plainly revealed that they will be restored. And they *may* begin to return before the Lord comes for His saints; but can any one produce a single passage that asserts or implies they must be restored before that event?

But there are two passages that demand our attention, and which are calculated, when looked at together, to throw much light upon our subject.

The Church is caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

“The Lord himself shall descend from heaven [into the air] with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”

(1 Thess. iv. 16, 17.)

Compare with this—

Christ comes to the earth with His saints.

“Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed.”

(Jude 14, 15.)

Now, it is manifest that these two passages do not refer to one and the same event. The one is Christ coming into the air *for His saints*, and the other is His coming to the earth *in judgment*.* Still it is worthy of note that both events are often referred to as the “coming” of the Lord, as though the first event was the *beginning* of Christ’s coming and is truly His coming *to the church*, and the latter is the end or consummation of His coming, and is truly His coming *to the world*. And while it is clear from other passages that before the latter, some events foretold will have happened, such as the restoration of the Jews to their own land, the development of Antichrist, &c., yet it is equally as clear that before the former—the coming of Christ for His saints—there is nothing that must necessarily happen, and nothing that at all hinders our constantly looking and longing for our Lord’s return.

Now, these two great events, and the distinctive features of each, must ever be kept in mind (especially as we have seen that both are referred to in the word as the “coming” of the Lord), for they give the key to the understanding of many passages; and it is important to be able to tell to which of them any passage that speaks of the coming refers. Take, for instance, such a portion as Luke xxi. It has been contended, by those who insist that the “rapture of the saints” and

* A passage in Psalm cx. may at first sight seem to clash with this. “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” But it must be observed that this speaks of something which *Jehovah* is to do, and not what *Christ* does; and surely, the enemies being made a footstool by a declaration given in heaven (see also Psalm ii. 8, 9), is not the same thing as the actual execution of vengeance on them on the earth.

the "day of the Lord" are one and the same), that this passage points out that there are to be signs before the coming of the Lord, and that we ought not to expect Him until we see the signs, quoting "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh." But if there could be a doubt about some parts of the passage, there is one verse that settles the question: "As a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth." (verse 35.) A snare to all that are on the earth! Is this Christ coming for His church? It certainly is not: it must therefore refer to His coming to the earth in judgment.*

But further, it seems to be forgotten that after the church is taken away, there will be saints, and that these saints will need scripture *specially suited to their peculiar circumstances*. Now, unquestionably, there are in the word the very portions ready for them; and there cannot be a greater mistake than to insist that every passage of scripture which speaks of the coming of Christ must refer primarily to our day and to our circumstances. And doubtless some passages that appear obscure to us in their minuter details will then be perfectly plain to the saints in their circumstances; though we

* The different parts of Christ's coming may be illustrated thus: 'A certain city of a king is in revolt. After many warnings he rises up to go and punish the inhabitants. On his way thither, he privately calls from the doomed city all who have been faithful to him. They leave the city and come to meet him. After they have left, the state of the city gets much worse. A few, however, espouse the king's cause, and are much persecuted by the rebels. The king then comes to the city, with the faithful ones who came to meet him, and, taking vengeance on his enemies, he delivers those who were being persecuted, and establishes peace.'

may hope to be able now to determine, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, which passages do, and which do not, refer to the rapture of the saints.

Again, it has been maintained "that God could not have caused the primitive church to expect the return of Christ in their day, for it would have been begetting an expectation which He knew would not be realized." But this is a sophism. Scripture does not tell any to expect Christ *in their day*. This is adding to scripture. But it does tell them to expect Christ, and they were always to be expecting Him. He said to his disciples, "Be ye like unto men that wait for (or expect) their Lord." *They* were to wait for Him, and this was not an expectation that will not be realized. It is true they died before Christ returned, but He will return and their expectation will be fully realized.* And, besides the exhortations to them and to all to wait, watch, look for, &c., our Lord was careful to use language, so plain as could not be misunderstood, to keep up the expectation: "A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father." And Christ's closing word is, "I come quickly." (Rev. xxii. 20.) Human reason may say, 'A little while!—come quickly!—why He could

* Peter's speaking about his dying (2 Pet. i. 14) is no real difficulty, because he tells us that the Lord Jesus shewed it to him; so that one needed a revelation from God even then before he knew he would die. Paul, too, spoke of his departure (2 Tim. iv. 6), but he also must have had a revelation, or he could not have foretold that the time of his departure was "at hand." This was one of his latest epistles. In an early letter (1 Thess.) he had said, "We [not they] which are alive and remain," evidently including himself among those who might be alive when the Lord should return. *This* was the general expectation; *that* was exceptional.

not have raised such an expectation when He knew He would not come for more than eighteen hundred years!" But He *did* raise the expectation, and pressed it again and again with His own lips. He did say, "A little while and ye shall see me." It is true thousands have died, but that is no hindrance. No one, not even the disciples, could have said, after His ascension, "My Lord will not return in my time." And the hope will certainly be realized, that "Whether we wake or sleep, we shall live together with him." (1 Thess. v.)

So then, we are to be always expecting our Lord—always ready. The morning light breaks on the horizon and we say, Our Lord may be here to-day. The sun sinks again, but we lay our heads on the pillow with the thought that our Lord may be here before the morning: thus while we sleep our hearts wake, and we shall not be surprised when His blessed voice greets our ears, though it be in the midnight watch; but, like a wife who has long expected and sighed for the return of her lord whom she fondly loves, we shall be ready to open to our Beloved, as He Himself enjoined, *immediately*.

And well may it be said, "comfort one another with these words." Thousands of us wake in the morning to encounter the stern realities of life's rugged path, while others toss their aching heads on their sleepless pillows; and all have to strive against sin and self, the world and Satan. But at all times, in all places, and under all circumstances, let Christ's closing words comfort us:

"Yes, I am coming quickly;"

And may we, from our hearts, respond, "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

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