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Owing to ill-health our esteemed contributor, Mr. Ernest Feasey, has been unable to complete his manuscript entitled "Moses: his God," in time for this issue. We shall hope to publish same, however, some time during the coming year. Mr. H. P. Barker, the well-known teacher and preacher, has kindly supplied this article in its place, and we feel sure our readers will be much helped and blessed in reading and circulating.

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OUR FUTURE AND THE LORD'S COMING

with special reference to

“The Rapture” and “The Appearing.”

CHAPTER I.

“Nearer.”

“It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.”—Rom. xiii. 11.

THE years of our lives seem to fly past with ever increasing rapidity. Yet we are always standing upon the threshold of an unexplored future. What will it bring forth? Who can tell? God holds its key in His own hand, and He only knows what will come with the swiftly passing days.

But this we can say, that never in all our history have we been *so near*, as we are just now, to the day that we have long looked for, the day of our Lord's return.

Surely it is to this day that the apostle refers when he speaks of “our salvation” being nearer than when we believed. Saved already, as to our souls, we look for the day when salvation in its fullest meaning shall be ours, when sorrow and suffering will be over, when tears shall cease to flow, when aches and pains shall be known no more, when the last trace of Adam's likeness shall be removed, and when we shall be perfectly conformed to the image of God's Son in glory. Salvation, indeed, is this, and well may our faces

glow with holy triumph and joy as we remind one another that it is nearer now than ever it was, and drawing still nearer every day.

We say "it"; should we not rather say "He"? For it is Himself for Whom we look. To Habakkuk, in the days of old, a vision of coming glory was vouchsafed, and he was told that "*it will surely come, it will not tarry.*" The Spirit of God, quoting this passage in Hebrews x. 37, interprets it as referring to Christ, and changes the "it" into "He," and says, "*He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.*"

Our thoughts are thus directed to the blessed Person Who is coming, and Who is Himself our Salvation and our Hope. Three times over, in the last chapter of the Bible, He says, "*I come quickly.*" If we ask: In what character does He speak? Under what name does He present Himself when assuring us of His speedy return? the answer is found in the same chapter: "I, JESUS." He strips Himself, as it were, of all that is official; He does not present Himself as "Lord" or as "Christ," but as *Jesus*—that Name of names, embodying every heavenly grace and perfection—He whispers the word: "I am coming!" And from our happy hearts leaps the response: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

The Spirit would fix our mind and affection upon Him Who is coming, and would cheer us all through the long night of His absence by the thought of His return.

Has there ever been a darker time in the Church's history than at present? But has *His coming* ever been so near?

In the far north yonder, the poor Laplanders have to spend many months of the year without a glimpse of the sun. Long and dreary is their winter, and eager their anticipations when summer

draws near. When the season of gloom and darkness is almost ended, the Laplanders set off to the mountains. Up their steep sides they climb, in order that they may catch the first streaks of the dawn.

In like manner we Christians are drawing near the close of the long, dark night. He, Who is the Sun, the Day, the Brightness, the Hope, is at hand. Let us be upon the mountain-top of communion with Himself, waiting, watching for the moment when He shall come. Our brethren in the early centuries were wont to greet one another with the word "*Maranatha!*" (The Lord is coming!) Alas! the upward look of the early Church has largely become a *graveward* look to-day. The Maranatha watchword has dropped out of use. But that is no reason why you and I, dear reader, should not be amongst those that watch for their Lord!

"Surely I come QUICKLY" is His word. It may be objected that the promise was uttered long centuries ago, and that the "quickly" has already been spun out to nineteen centuries.

But let me borrow a simple illustration.

"There are myriads of tiny insects which only live for a day; a day of twenty-four hours sees the whole of their lifetime out: born, nurtured, they pass through their insect childhood, their adult life, and their old age; and I dare say it seems as long to them as eighty years to us.

"I can imagine that early one morning a husband here says to his wife: 'I shall be back soon; I shall be here this evening,' and one of these tiny little insects hears that sentence 'back soon'—ah! and a lifetime seems to pass, and the insect is no longer in its early youthful stage; it grows up to adult years—why! it is a tottering old insect now. And I can imagine that insect saying, 'I do not think that man spoke the truth when he said to his

wife that he would be back soon. Soon?—I was a boy insect when he said it, and I am an aged one now ; my whole lifetime has run its course.' Silly insect ! You are judging duration by your own life."

With the Lord a thousand years is as one day. The short span of life allotted to man is as the lifetime of an insect compared with the endless years of His unchanging existence. But "quickly" is the word, and quickly He will indeed come. If the delay has seemed long, according to our reckoning, it must nearly be over now, and He, Whom we look for, will call us to His presence for ever.

Meanwhile it is our happy privilege to pass on the midnight cry, and to spread abroad the glad tidings of Christ. A letter, written by a missionary on his way to his sphere of labour in Africa, says :—

"This morning, when we had just finished breakfast in the saloon, we heard a curious shrill cry from a great number of voices. It sounded like a note from a long way off, then it was close to us, and then it passed on. The captain said, 'Do you hear that?' 'Yes,' we said, 'what is it?' 'It is the noise the natives make when they see the mail steamer coming. They give that cry, and then other natives hear them and pass on the sound, till it travels on and on for perhaps sixty miles.'"

Here is a lesson for us ! In view of the speedy return of the Lord Jesus, we shall do well to lift up our voices. The time is short. The Lord *is coming*. While our hearts go out in affection to Himself, shall we not, under the influence of His own deep compassions, seek to carry the tidings of His grace to the dark corners of the earth ?

With all the pressing needs of the Church before him, Timothy was not to forget that he lived in a *heathen* city, the capital of a *heathen* province. He was to *do the work of an evangelist*. And if the

Church to-day needs faithful ministers more than ever, both pastors and teachers, we are not to forget that the world of to-day is still, for the most part *heathen*.

The uplook and the outlook thus go together. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. xxii. 17).

CHAPTER II.

The Special Importance of "The Rapture."

THE prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the coming of Christ must have been sorely perplexing to many who read them. From some passages they would learn of His coming in power and glory, to reign in righteousness and peace, and to fill the earth with blessing. But other passages spoke of humiliation and suffering in connection with His advent, and foretold that He would be "despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

Wise men puzzled their heads over these statements, apparently so contradictory, and many came to the conclusion that the passages which spoke of the promised glory of the Kingdom referred to the expected Messiah, but that the passages which spoke of sorrow and humiliation referred to somebody else, probably, in most cases, to the prophet who uttered the words.

The great African officer of state, of whom we read in Acts viii., was one of those thus puzzled. The place of the Scripture which he read was this: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter." But he could not understand to whom the prophecy referred. So he questioned Philip: "Of whom speaketh the

prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man?"

In the light of all that has transpired at Bethlehem, at Nazareth, at Jerusalem, and, above all at Calvary, it is as clear as noonday to us that those Old Testament passages, whether they speak of suffering or of glory, all refer to the same blessed Person. It was foretold that He should be humbled and rejected; and *so He was*. It was foretold that He should come in glory, and *so He will*. The predictions that refer to the future will be fulfilled as surely as those that belong to the past have been. And it is not difficult for us to distinguish between these two classes of Old Testament passages, though often we find "the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow" prophesied of as if no long interval would separate them.

Turning to the *New Testament*, we find the future coming of the Lord also spoken of in two distinct ways, or rather, in two separate stages. Many have made the mistake of confounding these, just as readers of the Old Testament have confounded Christ's coming to suffer and His coming to reign.

The two phases of the Lord's coming referred to in the New Testament are—

Firstly, the Lord's coming to call His saints to meet Him in the air, and thus to secure their being for ever with Him.

Secondly, His appearing in glory, to reign with His saints. This, the great subject of Old Testament prophecy, is brought before us again and again in the epistles, and is amplified and explained in connection with Christianity.

The first phase, often referred to as "The Rapture," was not made known in Old Testament times. It was the subject of a special revelation to the apostle Paul (1 Thess. iv. 15). And it is

peculiar to Christianity. It is the peculiar hope of the saints of the present dispensation.

This, apart from other considerations, would make the "rapture" of special importance to us. For, in the ways of God, that which belongs *especially* to any of His people is that upon which He would have their attention fixed.

This principle is illustrated in Deuteronomy iv., where the people are commanded to refrain from idolatry, and particularly from the worship of sun, moon, and stars (v. 19). Notice the ground upon which the prohibition is based: "Lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them and serve them, *which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.* But the Lord hath taken you and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto Him *a people of inheritance, as ye are this day.*"

They were forbidden to worship the heavenly luminaries, not on the ground that they are merely created things, and can neither see nor hear, but on the ground that God has made them for the use of all nations. The light that they give shone upon the Gentiles as well as upon the sons of Israel. They were not, in any sense, *special* to the people of God.

There was, on the other hand, that which was special to them: their deliverance from the iron furnace, and their portion as the people of the Lord's inheritance. Upon these things they were to lay great stress.

To apply this principle to the subject before us; the "appearing" of Christ is not special to Christianity. It is the hope of Israel, and, indeed, of the Gentiles and the whole creation as well. It

will mean blessing to the whole earth, in the suppression of evil and the introduction of peace and righteousness. On the other hand, the "rapture" is *special* to Christianity. It was not revealed before. Though Old Testament saints may share in the joy that will be ours at that moment, it was not set before *them* as a hope, as it is before the saints of today. It is the peculiar hope of the Church.

Moreover, the "rapture" is upon the line of God's purpose, whereas the "appearing" and the Kingdom are more upon the line of God's intervention for man in view of his utter failure in responsibility. When the Lord comes for His own, He will introduce us into the eternal scene of love, in the Father's presence. When He "appears," it will be to establish that which will endure but for a thousand years. Then the Kingdom will be given up (1 Cor. xv. 24) and the earth itself be dissolved, and a new heaven and new earth be brought into being.

None can conceive the brightness and blessing of the "day of Christ," and what it will mean for this sorrow-stricken earth. But *we* have our portion in a sphere still brighter and more blessed, and into that scene we shall be taken at the coming of our Lord *for* us.

It is greatly to be desired that this blessed hope should burn brightly in our hearts. The enemy's object is to dim its lustre, and to occupy us with the earth and its things. Even the study of prophecy may turn our thoughts from Him for whom we look, unless we study it as having Him for its theme. We may get occupied with the glories of "the world to come," with the portion of the saints in that day, with anything save that which is the particular portion of the people of God today, and the enemy will rejoice. May God Himself build up our souls in the truth of all that belongs

specially to this present wonderful dispensation: **t**he place that the Church has, as the body and bride of Christ; our relationship as sons to the Father; **t**he presence of the Holy Ghost here, with all its **m**arvellous results; the present service of Christ, **a**t the right hand of God, on His people's behalf, **a**nd His coming again for us, to gather us to **H**imself, before the day of His appearing dawns.

We shall be great losers if we are not well **e**stablished in all that is comprised under the most **s**ignificant and Scriptural phrase: "*the present truth*" (2 Peter i. 12).

CHAPTER III.

The Future Finding.

WE have been found once. Who among us can forget it? It was a wonderful finding. The seeking Shepherd found nothing *in* us but waywardness and folly, but He found *us*. In His love He sought us when wandering far away, found us, forgave us, laid us on His shoulders and rejoiced over us. Blessed be His name for ever!

There is also to be a future finding; a time yet to come when we shall once again be found. And it behoves to ask, not *When?* or *Where?* but *How?* How will our Lord find us at His coming again? What will He find us doing?

He Himself has shown concern as to what He will find at His advent, and has asked: "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke xviii. 8). But His great desire is with regard to His saints. How will He find *us* at His coming?

There is the possibility of being found *sleeping*.

The days call for watchfulness. Perilous times are upon us: men are increasingly intolerant of the fear of God; the workings of evil are more and more manifest. "It is high time to awake out of sleep," and to give heed to the exhortation: "Watch ye therefore . . . lest suddenly coming *He find you sleeping*" (Mark xiii. 36). Can it be that our Lord and Master will have to say to any of us: "What! could ye not watch with Me one hour?"

The idea of *idleness* is not quite the same as that of sleepiness. The latter is the opposite to watchfulness; the former is the contrast to work. The Lord expects us to be occupying for Him, diligent in His interests, till He come. He has given "to every man His work." But even at this late hour, when all the reserves should be in the line of battle, when every hand should be zealously employed, some among us still stand idle. It is possible that when the Lord comes it will be even as it was in the parable of the Eleventh Hour: "He . . . found others standing idle" (Matt. xx. 6). Is this how we should wish to be found?

How does our blessed Lord Himself *desire* to find us at His coming? Let us divide the question into two:

- (1) How does He desire to find us as His *servants*?
- (2) How does He desire to find us as His *saints*?

We are helped to answer the first part of the question by the teaching of Luke xii. 42-44. It is the desire of the Lord that His household should be fed during His absence. He has charged His servants "to give them their portion of meat in due season."

"Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when He cometh, shall FIND *so doing*."

As those who seek to care for our Master's interests, we have to consider His express charge

concerning giving meat to His household. The household is still here, and includes all who are dear to Christ. It is our solemn responsibility to carry food to them where the door is open for us to do so. And if we are really called and qualified of the Lord to serve Him in this way, He will, *if we wait on Him for it*, give us access to many of His household, and will support us with the happy sense of His presence with us in our service.

As to the second half of the question: How does the Lord desire to find us as His saints? we have instruction in 2 Pet. iii. 14. In view of all that we look for, culminating in new heavens and a new earth, we are to be diligent that we may be FOUND of Him

- i. In peace.
- ii. Without spot.
- iii. Blameless.

Observe that "in peace" comes first. At the beginning of the dispensation the emphasis was not quite the same. James, to meet the carnal strife among those he addresses, with its resulting confusion and evil work, gives the characteristics of true wisdom as "first pure, then peaceable." The emphasis is on purity. Peace comes second.

Not that peace among the children of God was ever unimportant. Exhortations to practical unity abound in the New Testament. But towards the close, when strife and division, mutual misunderstanding and recrimination are so prevalent, *peace receives the prime emphasis*. Disunion and conflict among those who are brethren are thus marked as particularly displeasing to the Lord.

One can quite imagine the Lord Jesus Himself using the words given by His Spirit through Paul: "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not; lest there be debates,

envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults" (2 Cor. xii. 20). The very opposite of being found of Him in peace!

We find this state of strife contrasted with the diligent care of the household in Matthew xxiv. 49. Instead of ministering meat in due season, the bad servant begins to smite his fellow-servants. One can do this without resorting to physical violence, without using the thumbscrew and the rack. One can "smite" one's fellow-servants by wrongful accusation, by giving currency to false and evil reports and by otherwise stirring up strife. It can be done in the name of righteousness, and under a plea of "standing for the truth." How distressing to think of real Christians setting their hand to this kind of work!

The false zeal that leads one to smite a fellow-servant may be, and often is, accompanied by gross worldliness and self-indulgence, eating and drinking (Luke xii. 45), and keeping bad company (Matt. xxiv. 49). Against this we are warned in 2 Pet. iii. 14. We are to be diligent, not only that when the Lord comes we may be found of Him in peace, but also *without spot*, uncontaminated by the company of those who live for self alone, "unspotted from the world."

And not only this, but *blameless*, that is irreproachable in our personal conduct.

This surely is how we should wish to be found of the Lord at His coming! This is how He would like to find us. May God grant that through His own great grace we may thus be found at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, walking according to His mind in peace, without spot and blameless.

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