

The Appearing

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When the history of the world is closed, it will be found that the two events in time which incomparably transcend all others, are the first coming of Christ in humiliation, and the second appearing of Christ in glory.

It is on the second coming of Christ to earth, to reign in glory, that we desire to dwell. This great event is not the mere dream of a few visionaries, but the sober truth of the Word of God. Many Christians may be ignorant of this truth, the pulpits of Christendom may often pervert it, or, be altogether silent as to it, but, in spite of ignorance, neglect, and perversion, the second appearing of Christ is clearly foretold by God as the next great event in the history of the world.

This great truth has a much larger place in the Word of God than many believers are aware. The Old Testament prophecies are full of glowing descriptions of the glories of the reign of Christ that will be ushered in by the Second Appearing. In the New Testament it has a prominent place in every Gospel: it is proclaimed in the Acts, and has a large place in the Epistles and the Revelation.

First, it will be well to examine some Scriptures that establish the great fact of the Second Appearing.

Secondly, we may seek from Scripture, the main reasons why the appearing is kept so prominently before us.

1. SCRIPTURES THAT PRESENT THE TRUTH OF THE APPEARING

In Hebrews 9: 26-28, we find the two appearings of Christ presented in one passage. First, we read that, "In the consummation of the ages *hath He appeared* to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself". When the trial of man, during the ages, was completed and all men were proved to be under sin, there dawned that great day when Christ appeared in humiliation to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself on the Cross.

Secondly, we read He is going to "appear the second time", not to take up the sin question, but for the salvation, or full deliverance of His people from every pressure and opposing power under which they may be held.

Here then, we have the first and second appearances of the Lord Jesus. All who are subject to the Word of God must admit that this passage clearly establishes the great fact that Christ is going to appear the second time in this world.

It will however, be well to turn to passages in other Epistles, that show that the Apostles Paul, and Peter, and John, all unite in setting before the believer the appearing of the Lord Jesus, as the glorious prospect which is to govern the believer in His path, and sustain him amidst his sorrows and trials.

First, the testimony of the Apostle Paul.

In Titus 2: 11-13, we again have two appearances brought before us. In verse 11 we read, "the grace of God . . . hath appeared"; and in verse 13 believers are said to be "looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ". Thus we have the appearing of grace, and the appearing of glory. The glory is going to appear where the grace appeared. Grace leads to glory. This passage does not speak of the believer appearing in glory in heaven; but of the glory appearing on earth. At the present it is the glory of man, such as it is, that appears: in yet a little while it will be the glory of God. Grace brings to us salvation. Being saved, grace teaches us how to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in view of the coming glory. The appearing of the glory of Christ is to govern the life.

Turning to 1 Timothy 6: 14, we find a certain charge given to Timothy which he is exhorted to keep, "without spot, unrebukable *until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ*". In the early part of the chapter the Apostle has been speaking of the evils of the flesh — pride, envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings (verse 4); hurtful lusts, and covetousness (verses 9, 10). Then addressing himself to the man of God, he says, in verse 11, "*flee* these things". Moreover, we are not only to flee evil, but we are to *follow* good; so the Apostle says, follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness of spirit. Furthermore, we are reminded that there is something to *fight* for. Men are engaged in fighting, in a carnal way, for material advantages. This is a poor fight, in view of this life. We are to fight the good fight to maintain the truth, in view of eternal life.

Thus the charge can be summed up by these three words, flee, follow and fight. Nor must we forget that fighting comes last. It is useless to attempt to fight for the truth unless we are fleeing from evil, and following good. Then, indeed, we can fight for the truth. Fighting without fleeing and following, will only end in defeat.

This charge is to be kept, not simply in view of death or going to heaven, but in view of coming out with Christ at "the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ" on earth, for, only then shall we receive the recompense for the responsible life here below with all the suffering, sorrowing, and toil involved in the fleeing, following, and fighting. Again, it is not in view of producing great results down here. We may see little present result from fleeing, and following, and fighting; at times we may grow weary in the fight, but let us seek to keep the charge, for it will have a glorious answer at the appearing.

Turning on to 2 Tim. 4: 1, 2, a further charge also enforced by the appearing of Christ Jesus. There we read, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ who shall judge the quick and the dead, and by His appearing, and His kingdom. Preach the Word, be urgent in season, out of season; convict, rebuke, encourage, with all longsuffering and doctrine" (New Translation). Here Timothy has a charge to preach with urgency, in season and out of season. Two things will give him "urgency". First the judgment that will come upon those who refuse the gospel, and secondly, the glorious results for those by whom it is received at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here, too,

the appearing is linked with the Kingdom of Christ, for the appearing introduces the Kingdom.

Further, there is one more passage in this chapter, in which Paul speaks of the appearing. In verses 6-8, he refers to himself. The aged Apostle sees that the time of his departure is at hand. He has been exhorting Timothy to fight the good fight, and what he preached to others he practised himself. So here he says, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith". And as he looks on to the bright future, he sees that the Lord has laid up for him a crown of righteousness. While he had been laying out his life for the Lord, the Lord had been laying up a crown for him. He had walked the way of righteousness (2 Tim. 2: 22); and followed the instruction of righteousness (2 Tim. 3: 16); and he looks forward to wearing the crown of righteousness. But when will he wear the crown? "At that day". And when is that day? Was it at the day of death, or the day of martyrdom, or the day when his happy spirit took its flight to be with Christ? Ah no! It will be the day of the glorious appearing of Christ on earth. When Christ comes forth crowned with many crowns, then Paul will have his crown, and not only Paul, but all those also who "love his appearing". Loving His appearing supposes that we are living in a way that is suited to His appearing. We should hardly love the thought of His appearing if not walking in the way of righteousness. Immediately he speaks of some who did not follow righteousness. Demas turned back to the world; he did not *flee* these things. Alexander, did the apostle "much evil"; he did not *follow* good. Then we read in the presence of opposition "all men" forsook Paul; they did not *fight* the good fight (10, 14, 16).

Secondly, the testimony of the Apostle Peter.

In 1 Peter 1, the Apostle reminds believers that we have an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens for us (verse 4).

Then, in the fifth verse, he tells us that, as we pass on our way to the inheritance we are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. However, in the present time, says the Apostle, "ye are in heaviness through manifold trials". Still God's people are often put to grief through manifold trials, and for our comfort, the Apostle tells us three things in reference to these trials (verse 6).

First, says the Apostle, they are only "*For a season*". In Hebrews 11: 25, we read that the pleasures of sin are only for a season. The pleasures of the world and the sorrows of the saints are only for a season.

Secondly, Peter says there is a needs be. There is never a trial, or a sorrow, that we pass through small or great, but what there is a need for it. Our Father does not willingly afflict His children, or cause a needless tear. We may not always understand the way He takes, nor understand the need of the trial: some day we shall know. The Lord may have to say to us as He said to Peter. "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." In that hereafter we shall see all things clearly, and we shall sing,

"With mercy and with judgment,

My web of time He wove:

And aye the dews of sorrow

Were lustered with His love.

Thirdly, to comfort us in our sorrows we are told that all the trials of the present will have a glorious answer in a day that is to come. Now it is the trial of faith, then it will be the reward of faith,

when the trials will be found unto praise and glory and honour. But when will this day be? The day of death, or the day when we go to heaven? Ah no! It will be at *the appearing of Jesus Christ* (verse 7).

Thirdly, *the testimony of the Apostle John*.

Turning to 1 John 3: 1-3, we are reminded by the Apostle of the manner of the love the Father has bestowed upon us. It is not simply the fact of the love that John brings before us; but the greatness of the love which is seen in bringing us into the place of children. The world cannot see we are the children of God. It does not know us as such because it knew Him not. If the world could not see that that blessed lowly man, with all His infinite perfection, was the Son of God, there is little wonder that they cannot see that poor feeble failing people like ourselves are the children of God. However, they will see, but at present it doth not yet appear what we shall be. Now we look much like other men with the marks of age, and care, and disease upon us; but wait a little; in God's good time we shall come out in the likeness of Christ. When will this be? Not when we die, or go to heaven: but, says John, "*When He shall appear* we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.

These passages suffice to show that the Holy Spirit used the Apostles Paul, and Peter, and John, to manifest that the present life is to be governed by the prospect of the second appearing of Christ in glory.

2. THE RESULTS OF THE APPEARING

We may ask, Why is so much made of the second appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ in Scripture, rather than of the fact of our going to heaven. The Second Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, and chapter 1, gives us three definite reasons for the importance of the Appearing. First, it will be the day of retribution for this world. Secondly, it will be the day of rest and recompense for the people of God. Thirdly, it will, above all, be the day of Christ's triumph, the glorious answer to His lowly path of humiliation.

1. *The appearing is the day of retribution for the world.*

For long centuries God in mercy has remained a silent, though not indifferent, witness to the progress of evil in the world that has rejected, and still rejects, the Christ of God. When, however, God at last intervenes it will be in flaming fire taking vengeance on the wicked. People ask, Why does God not publicly intervene in the affairs of men? Why is war, wickedness, and corruption, allowed to go on? The answer is very obvious; it is of God's mercy that He does not directly intervene in the affairs of men; for, when He does, it must be to deal in judgment with *all* evil. For the moment God holds back the judgment, while in grace He proclaims forgiveness of sins to a world of sinners. But the day of grace hastens to its close, and will be followed by the direct intervention of God. This passage (2 Thess. 2: 6-9), tells us that when God intervenes, three things will happen in regard to this world.

First, are there those who have persecuted God's people? Tribulation will be recompensed to such (verse 6). Secondly, are there those who "did not like to retain God in their knowledge", rejecting every creation testimony? (Rom. 1: 28). Vengeance will overtake them (verse 8). Thirdly, are there those who have added to their ignorance of God the positive rejection of the revelation of His grace, in the Gospel? They will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.

But when will this take place? This same Scripture tells us plainly it will be at the appearing of

Christ, for we read it will be "when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels".

2. The appearing will be the day of rest and recompense to the people of God.

Let us remember that during the centuries since the Cross, and indeed before the Cross, the history of God's people has been one long history of suffering, shame, and continual persecution in one part or another of this hostile world. From the death of Abel in antediluvian days to persecution in our days, there has been little but opposition and tribulation for the people of God from a God-hating world.

Perhaps, no true estimate can be formed of the appalling number of Christians done to death under Pagan Rome; but it has been reckoned that under Papal Rome, and through other religious persecutions, over fifty million Christians have been hounded to death. Think what this means. Millions and millions of men, women and children abandoned to violence, outrage, martyrdom and massacre, in the most hideous forms that devilish hate and human ingenuity could devise. For the gratification of the holiday crowds of cultivated Rome, the Christians were thrown to lions by thousands. Disguised in the skins of wild beasts they were worried to death by dogs. Wrapped in pitch shirts they were impaled on stakes, and set on fire to illuminate Nero's garden parties. Later they were subjected to every form of agonising torture in the dungeons of the Inquisition. They were mutilated in the most revolting forms; they were stretched on the rack, they were buried alive, they were burned at the stake one by one, and they were massacred by tens of thousands.

And then, as our minds travel back over this history of persecution, let us remember another fact, which at first sight seems so mysterious — *there was no intervention of God*. The tortures, the martyrdoms, the massacres, went on unceasingly, and God did not intervene. The world, the flesh and the Devil *seemed* to have it all their own way, and God, apparently took no notice. The agonising cries of God's tortured people went up to heaven, but the heavens were silent. Their hands were uplifted in prayer, but no deliverance came.

Has God, then, been an indifferent spectator to the persecution of His people? Is He unmindful of their sorrows and their trials? Is He deaf to their prayers, and blind to their tears? A thousand times, No. The God that keeps a book for our names, and a bottle for our tears, and that has numbered the hairs of our heads, cannot remain unmoved by the sorrows of His people. Every tear they have shed, every sorrow they have passed through, every trial they have endured for Christ's sake, will have a glorious answer. The sorrows and trials are not forgotten, are not in vain, are not *lost*; for God says "they will be *found* unto praise, and honour, and glory". But when? "At the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1: 7). Millions of believers went out of the world amidst abuse, dishonour and shame. They will come back with praise and honour and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints and admired in all them that believe. Therefore, says the Apostle, "You who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels (verse 7).

3 The appearing will be the day of Christ's triumph.

Incomparably the greatest event that the future holds for this world is the appearing of the Lord Jesus. In its vast importance it is only exceeded by the first appearing of Christ to accomplish the work of atonement. Let us gladly admit that the Cross stands in all its solitary dignity, unrivalled in time, and

alone in eternity. The victories of man, that loom so large in the history of this world, will soon shrink into their own littleness, and pass into utter oblivion; but the mighty victory of the Cross will remain the one outstanding event in the history of the world. The glory of men's great victories fade even in time, and are forgotten in eternity; but time only adds fresh lustre to the Cross, and eternity will never cease to unfold its glories. But, while remembering the unique glory of the Cross, let us not forget the coming glory of the Kingdom which will be ushered in by the second appearing of the Lord Jesus. It will be the triumphant answer to His first appearing in humiliation. It will be God's answer to all the shame, insult, and indignities, that the world heaped upon the Son of God at the Cross. In the midst of those insults the Lord could look beyond all the shame, the suffering, and the sorrow, to the day of His coming glory, and utter these solemn and triumphant words, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven". He was crucified in weakness, He will come in power. At the Cross man crowned Him with a crown of thorns; at His appearing He will come forth crowned with many crowns. At the Cross, in righteousness He bore the judgment to make peace; at His second appearing, we read, in "righteousness He doth judge and make war". The Christ of God was last seen by man nailed to a cross between heaven and earth. The next time the world sees Christ He will be coming in the clouds, and "every eye shall see Him; and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him".

Then will be displayed the "glory of His power, when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. 1: 10).

Thus from this great passage we learn that the appearing of the Lord Jesus from heaven, with His mighty angels, will demonstrate before the whole universe, first, that God has not been indifferent to all the evil, corruption, and violence that has been accumulating through the ages; secondly, that God has not been unmindful of the sorrows of His people; and, thirdly, above all it will declare that God has not passed over the dishonour and insults that men have heaped upon the Lord Jesus Christ.