

## The Day of the Lord

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"Now, we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto Him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand" (2 Thess. 2: 1, 2).

I showed last night the importance of not confounding the day of the Lord with the promise of His coming. On the other hand, we must take care also of confounding the coming of the Lord with His day here spoken of. That is, we must keep each separate; each in its own distinctness. The coming of the Lord, I have endeavoured to show, will be the consummation of the Lord's grace. The day of the Lord will be the execution of the Lord's judgment. Hence, if we mix up the coming of the Lord with His day, we weaken the solemnity of judgment, just as if we mix up the day with the coming we lose all the freshness and fulness of His grace. In short, grace and judgment must each have their due expression, and as the coming of the Lord Jesus is that which Scripture employs to express the Lord's return to earth to receive His own people and present them arrayed in His glory in the Father's house on high, so the day of the Lord embraces His intervention with men on earth, putting down all the pride, malice, and unbelief of men, and bringing in a new system of divine government, where all things shall be subjected to His authority. I do not say all men converted, but all men brought under His rule. There will be a feigned obedience rendered during that day of the kingdom here below. You cannot be surprised that it should be so, because not only will there be a spared remnant of men at the beginning of that day of the Lord, but its course will embrace not less than a thousand years, and during that long period of unbroken prosperity, with every mark of divine goodness lavished upon the men that are living here below, there will be millions of persons born to those who were spared from the beginning. Of these millions Scripture nowhere teaches that they will be born of God. They may or they may not be, but even those that are not born of God will have no longer the evil to contend with that man has now. No more will there be want; no more oppression; no more the temptation to open wickedness; no more wars or fightings; no more disease or pestilence; no more Satan even allowed to tempt men, for he will be under restraint during the whole of that time.

You who read the Scriptures cannot be ignorant of these things; and, happily, in this country, at any rate, most men read the Bible, and you must know that I am referring to plain positive Scripture in what I have been saying. The Bible is an open book in Scotland, and the children learn to read it, even though sometimes their elders do not explain it to them as it might be looked for. But there it is, and in very plain terms in the last book of the New Testament. Further, it is quite a mistake to suppose that it is only the last book of the New Testament which speaks of that day. On the contrary, all the Old Testament prophets are full of it, though they do not define it as a period of a thousand years. This was hidden from them. It awaited a prophet still greater than they. It was suitable in God's wisdom that John the Evangelist should be also John the Prophet, and that he should remove the veil off those times and seasons which the Lord would not allow His disciples to occupy themselves with when He was going up to heaven. It was enough for them to know, not the times and seasons of the redemption of Israel, but that now God the Father was about to accomplish the promise of the Holy Ghost, and to make them witnesses for Jesus throughout all the earth; and this is going on now. Witnessing to the Lord Jesus by the Holy Ghost is now proceeding. That is what we commonly call the gospel, and very rightly. But along with the gospel you must always remember there goes the church — the gospel

being the testimony of God to every creature, and the church being the gathering together of those that receive the gospel and acknowledge the Lord Jesus, baptized by one Spirit into that which is called in Scripture the body of Christ.

Now, I have a little to say in explaining this matter more fully — that is, the day of the Lord; and I shall still keep up the contrast between the coming of the Lord and the day of the Lord, because as to these the most important point is that you should be clear about your own position as believers; that you should know your own portion in the day of grace. The coming of the Lord Jesus to make good all that His love has secured to faith is of prime importance. The day of the Lord, although it be of great interest in a positive way, is, as far as we are concerned, more negative, and we must not mix up the bearings of judgment with the dealings of grace, if we would avoid serious dishonour to the truth. This confusion was evidently a danger from the beginning. Here we see it in these verses — "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and [by] our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand." The word "by" has no business there at all. It is printed in italics to show you that it is not in the original, but there is even more than that: the original excludes the word, and, therefore, it was really a mistake on the part of our translators to introduce it. The particular form of phrase employed by the Holy Ghost brackets the two ideas, and makes them to be one connected whole. The coming of our Lord Jesus and our gathering are the two parts of one great transaction. Now, if you bring in the word "by," it separates them, instead of combining them together. It is remarkable that the translators, who were real scholars, should have overlooked the point; but any person to whom it is pointed out, who knows the Greek language, will see in an instant what I mean. It is one of the peculiarities of that language that one article is used when it is intended to bring in two things. If they mean to separate the two, they bring in a second article. There is no second article in this case. For instance, where it is said "Our God and Father" there is one article used, because the same person that is God is also Father, and in order to combine the two the one article is used.

This, however, is by the way, but it strengthens what I have already referred to, that the translation of the Christians that are now here below, as well as of the Old Testament saints, is the necessary and immediate consequence of our Lord's presence in the air. The moment He comes all that are His instantly rise in a changed or glorified state to meet Him on high, and these two events are bound up together in the one phrase. Thus the force of the first verse is this: We beseech you by your blessed hope, by that which is full of comfort and joy — His presence to gather you to Himself on high — do not be alarmed by the false rumour that the day of the Lord has already come. It has not come, and it cannot come until certain terrible evils are accomplished, which are future.

Now, you must carefully notice that the apostle does not say that the Lord cannot come first. That "day" it was on which they were so entirely mistaken. To use a vulgar phrase, the cart was put before the horse. That is to say, they put the day of the Lord before the coming of the Lord, whereas the apostle implies that the true relation of these events is the Lord's coming first of all, not to be occupied with His enemies, but to assemble His saints in His presence. He has a much nearer object. He has a loved object. The first thing the Lord does when He comes from heaven is instantly to gather to Himself all that are waiting for Him. We must always bear in mind that all children of God are supposed to wait for Him. Don't allow yourselves the thought that persons who may be somewhat unenlightened about it do not wait for the coming of the Lord. The truth of it is, that all saints do so more or less, though some of them have got erroneous notions. Some suppose that there must be intervals and terrible events between the present and the coming of the Lord; others suppose that there

will be a long period of blessedness. They are both untrue.

Let me tell you, however, that what is commonly said by some to be the coming of the Lord (namely, when the Lord takes His place on the great white throne to judge all the dead) is not the coming of the Lord at all. If you look at the twentieth chapter of Revelation, you will see it is not His coming. When you talk about the Lord's coming, you ought to mean that the Lord is coming back here — coming from whence He has gone. This is the true meaning of it — He that is absent will be present. We are not told where the great white throne will be, and the reason we are not is very simple. Always in judging of distance we naturally judge from the earth, where we are. Such is the point from which all distance is naturally measured by man. It follows necessarily from his situation, and quite rightly so. Now, when the great white throne of judgment is set, the heavens and earth that now are will have completely passed away. There will be, for the time, a total dissolution both of heaven and earth.

There can be no question of coming in that case. There will be everlasting judgment. All the dead shall go and stand before the great white throne, but where that is, no man can tell. Only God knows. The reason is, that the heavens that now are, vanish, and the earth likewise, and where it is, it is impossible to say. Its elements will be in space somewhere, and we can perfectly understand that, when the wicked dead stand before the Judge of all, it is not of the least importance to say where. We know also the accompanying fact, that the heavens that now are will have completely disappeared. Therefore it is too late to speak of coming. The coming of the Lord must be before this universe disappears. That is plain; and it is what every one who speaks about the coming of the Lord must mean. He who once came in humiliation is coming again in glory; not said to be coming to the new heavens and the new earth, although I have no doubt He will be there also; but this is not what is meant by the expression, the coming of the Lord.

All creeds acknowledge that Christ will come to judge the quick and the dead, and that the heavens must receive Him till the times of the restitution of all things. This means that everything that is now groaning will be put right; that this poor world, which is now a scene of travail and sorrow, will be changed; and that this mighty change will be brought about by the intervention of the Lord in power, not by the nostrums of men. All the physic that learned men might give the world would not make a bit of difference on the earth, nor would it change the nature of the race. This mighty change is to be effected by a greater than man, and the greater One is the Redeemer. That is essentially to be the glory of the Lord Jesus. Even the Holy Ghost will not effect that change. The Holy Ghost did not become incarnate; nor did He suffer for our sins. It is the Saviour who is to be glorified in the sight of all men — not merely in heaven, but on earth. Now is the Christianity that is founded upon the cross. The Lord is now glorified, and we, who walk by faith and not by sight, enter into that. Unbelievers in this day know nothing about God; nothing about themselves; nothing about God's Son. I do not upbraid them; God forbid. I feel most deeply for their carelessness, prejudices, and guilt, because if any man reads the Word of God he will find there the most powerful body of testimony to its truth. It is not merely the reasonings of men. These will never really satisfy the soul — can never set one heart right. Christ alone can do this by the power of His redemption; by His infinite love; by grace and truth, by a life of holiness and righteousness. There is no other object that one's heart can rest on. Even the wisest king that has ever lived became a fool at last. I know no person in a more pitiful position than old king Solomon giving in to the follies of his Egyptian wife, of his 700 wives, and 300 concubines. That is a sad and evil history, and yet Solomon was the son of the great king David. We want great David's greater Son. That greater Son is the Lord Jesus; the true Son of David, the one specific for the good of men; the only One that shows the perfection of holiness, but who nevertheless died that He

might win the most unholy to God. There is the Person to transport the heart and bind it for ever to the God which it had hitherto traduced. We had thought Him some hard taskmaster, and people talk very often to the great dishonour of God. They think it an awful thing that God should condemn a man for eating a thing so small as an apple. This is not the true way to put it. Adam sold God for such a small thing as an apple. Is not this the humbling truth? It is Adam giving up God — the woman first, I am sorry to say. She worked upon him through his affections; the man would not be severed from her even in sin. It is well when a man is not too proud to follow his wife in what is good — sometimes they do not; but to follow a wife or anybody in what is bad is a sad piece of folly as well as sin. Therefore, one wants not merely God to show Himself as He is in grace to all man's wickedness, but God in the person of a man, the Son of man that God might be glorified thereby.

All the talk of those who love to speak about the perfection of man and the glory of man is put to shame by the name of Jesus, because, after all, what does their talk come to? They are great on the theory of evolution. They think their fathers had been monkeys at one time, but all that, I need not say, is as contrary to the truth of God as it is contrary to all science, because nobody ever saw the leg of a monkey merge into the leg of a man. There is nothing of the sort in any fossil remains, not to speak of present phenomena. All true science goes upon fixed principles and observed facts. No doubt there are variations of species. Everyone knows and fully allows that. There may be a very wide variety in every species, but still you never find one species turning into another. Nobody ever met an apple that was becoming a pear. Is it not an extraordinary thing that clever men should produce such fancies as science?

Returning to our subject, here we have the apostle exhorting from the blessed motive of hope, and telling the Thessalonians that they should not be alarmed by the false fear.

And let me tell you that a favourite weapon of the devil in injuring God's people lies in fear. Very likely he draws them into something wrong first. He entices men, perhaps, into sin. That is one fault; and then he distracts and overthrows their conscience, and makes them judge God according to their own notion of what they deserve. On the other hand, he works also by falsehood, and makes even the believer stand in doubt of God. But his great weapon, in many ways, has always been terror. What is the weapon of God? What is His way of drawing men from Satan's power, and from evil of every kind? Faith — not fear; faith of God's grace and truth as revealed in His Son; not only in the person, but in the infinite work of the Saviour. His person alone would not suffice. But, on the other hand, His work could not have sufficed without His person. I am not called to worship grace, but to worship Him who died upon the tree. It is an easy thing to slip away from the truth, and turn the work of the Lord into an object of idolatry, as we see in the Roman Catholic system, where the Lord's Supper is converted into one of the most hideous forms of idolatry. One can understand that men should get on by slow degrees to idolise a wafer. One might reason about it, of course, as being almost incredible, but there is the fact. Our forefathers all worshipped it; all Christendom worshipped it once, with a very slight exception — a thin line of witnesses whom the Lord raised up, but who, for the most part, were spoken of as the vilest of the earth; and remember it was not merely bad men who persecuted them. The best of the Popes encouraged the persecution of the Waldensians. Through their vain traditions and their unholy prejudices they really played a most evil part in persecuting these true children of God who stood up against that corrupt woman — that great city Babylon.

As the enemy works by fear, the Lord does by faith. You see that is exactly what is brought out in these verses. What is the great object of hope in the words before us? It is the coming of the Lord. Behind His coming to take us up to heaven I see dark clouds and coals of fire. I see that the wrath of the Lord is to break forth — for let us not forget the wrath of the Lamb. But, surely, we must not mix

these things up together, and make a mere medley of grace and judgment. This is precisely what faith disentangles. Faith lays hold of Christ as the true object of the Christian's hope. Judgment is for unbelievers. Never allow the thought that a man is not responsible for his unbelief. Grace gives a man faith to believe; but a man is truly responsible for his unbelief. He knows very well that he is fighting against the Word of God.

Take, for instance, those men who say that there never was such a character as the Lord Jesus Christ; never anything so humble, so loving, so holy, so sublime. I admit freely and entirely that if the Lord Jesus was not the Only-begotten Son of God He was not holy or sublime. People who tell lies are not very admirable folk; and I say if Christ was not God He was not good, because it is impossible that One who was good should pretend to be other and better than He was. Now, the Lord Jesus Christ does constantly leave the impression upon the soul, indirectly as well as directly, that He was God. Take, for instance, these words "Before Abraham was, I am." Before Abraham came into being I am — not "I came into being." He was the self-subsistent One before Abraham was in existence. Abraham was born; the Son of God never began to be the Son of God. He was born as man; the Word was made flesh, but He was the Only-begotten and the Eternal One before He ever came into the world. That is what lies at the very bottom of all truth as to Christ; and, therefore, if persons object to this and try to overthrow it, just look at the insult to God. Think what God feels about the rejection of His infinite love — of the One that all heaven worships! Think of poor puny men pouring contempt upon the Lord!

I suppose there never was a time in the history of the world when so many respectable baptised persons rejected the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not so very long ago since a Bishop on the other side of the Tweed preached a sermon urging the Jews to become Christians; and a clever Jew replied to his Lordship, telling him that it was a very inopportune moment to ask the Jews to become Christians, when so many Christians were ceasing to be Christians. This was a very painful thing to hear; but I am afraid the Bishop could not well get out of the scrape. That is, he could not fairly deny the fact that many nominal Christians are abandoning nominal Christianity, particularly among educated men. I daresay the working men of England are rather disposed in that way too, at least they were some time ago. But on the opposite hand, the teachers, the barristers, the medical men, and the clergy have shown them a remarkably bad example. Why do I say this? Just that we may, at any rate, have the truth before us and not be left in a foolish paradise of our own ideas; that we may truly realise the solemnity of the present moment, and that we may personally cleave to the truth with full purpose of heart. The truth is found inseparable from Christ.

That which the Holy Spirit brings up to meet the lie of Satan is the truth. Faith lays hold of the truth, and the truth as to this matter is that Christ Himself is coming to gather all that are His to meet Him on high, changed into His glorious likeness. The apostle presents that hope to neutralise the fear of the "day." The fear which the evil one was creating amongst the Thessalonians was that the day of the Lord was come. Perhaps many of you recollect the time when a person in America named Miller produced a fearful condition of things. He pretended to fix the date when the day of judgment was coming — the day of the Lord on the earth — and the consequence was that numbers of persons gave up their business, shut up their shops, abandoned their farms — they were chiefly persons in that class of life. The day came, but there was no such thing as the day of the Lord; and it was not merely that the faith of the great mass of the people was shaken to its centre, or that a good many lost their businesses and were ruined, but numbers of them from the shock lost their reason. That, however, was not at all a new thing in the world. In the year 1000 there was a great time of alarm. Ignorant people thought that there was a fatal charm in the word thousand, and, according to the reckoning of the

doctors, they were taught that the day of the Lord would be then. The day came and passed, and there was no appearance of the day of the Lord. Before that time, in the year 600, there had been another but perhaps milder shock of that kind of earthquake. These all passed away, and what was the effect? People got hardened more and more in unbelief. Why was this? Because it was not the truth. They had no right to talk about the day of the Lord in that way. They were puzzled and alarmed about the day of the Lord, because they did not realise the apostle's motive of comfort in the coming of the Lord.

There is a true order of events. The Lord is coming — that is the first thing — coming to gather His own together; and, therefore, they need not trouble themselves about the alarming cry that the day of the Lord was there, for even, when it does come, it will not affect them. It will fall upon those that know not God, and those that obey not the gospel.

I may direct the attention of any of you who wish to understand the subject to the chapter before this. You will find that there is a most careful preparation for the due understanding of the day of the Lord. The apostle presents the truth to them in the previous chapter, showing that they were quite mistaken in their anticipations of the nature of that day, because they feared that it would fall upon the saints. Not at all. When that day comes, you will arrive with it. Who, then, are the people that will have trouble in that day? The people who are troubling you now — your persecutors. The day of the Lord is a day of trouble, not for God's people, but for God's enemies. They were all wrong in their thoughts, and he sets them right about the nature of the thing before he brings in the elaborate refutation in the second chapter.

I now turn to this, for it is very full of spiritual instruction for our souls. Observe, first of all, the careful preparation of the ground, and, secondly, the careful setting right of the heart. "We beseech you, brethren, by the coming of the Lord" — that is the motive for the sake of (ὕπέρ) which he entreats them. It is not the subject-matter that troubled them. Here the Revisers of the New Testament have done harm, I think, because their version connects the coming of the Lord with the day of the Lord. They take it to be the subject of which he is speaking in the first verse; but it is not. It is the motive against the rumour, the fear of which had taken possession of and troubled them. Clearly the "day of the Lord" is the subject, and the coming of the Lord Jesus is the motive of comfort against the false representation and the fear that it was come. To confound the two is fatal; and I have no doubt it was that which led to the mistranslation, and to the day of the Lord being understood to be "at hand," and not to have actually come, as the heterodox said.

I remember glancing at a book by a certain Regius Professor of Greek upon the Epistles to the Thessalonians. You would expect a Greek Professor of Oxford to understand Greek; but the extraordinary thing was that he continued the same mistranslation as is in the Authorised Version. There is no ground to doubt that the closing verb means "is present," not "at hand:" an error alike of rendering and of doctrine, which would contradict the apostle's own teaching in Rom. 13: 12, that the day *is* at hand. Certainly the false teachers did not anticipate what the apostle taught; they pretended to have his authority for saying that the day *was* come, to the alarm of the Thessalonians. There is no just reason for questioning the regular sense. What is now admitted by every Greek scholar worth consulting eluded the Professor. How do you account for that? People go to the New Testament with their own ideas of what it ought to be, instead of to receive what God says. This is the way that people do when they rise up against the plainest truths that are in the Bible. It is because their minds are preoccupied. They have got a certain pre-conceived idea, and because of this they make the greatest blunders. Remember I do not say that the person who is addressing you is not liable to as great a blunder. I am sure we all are if we go to the Bible in that spirit. You will not, therefore, suppose I mean to speak disrespectfully of any person, but to press positive facts. We ought to have far more

homage for the truth than for persons. I do not understand a man writing to keep back the truth. It may seem a wonderful thing to find a person who has the just reputation of being a scholar misinterpreting plain Greek. But he did so; and it was entirely owing to the fact that he had got a system in his mind which falsified his views of Scripture and the translation of Scripture. The only way in which a man can get rid of that is when, by grace delivered from prejudice, he looks to the Lord and approaches Scripture with the desire to learn what God says.

The apostle, having given the motive of comfort why they should not be agitated about this report which had so alarmed them, lets them know that the people who had spread that report were no better than they should be, because they had actually given out a letter of their own as if it were a letter of the apostle's! You must not suppose that it is his First Epistle they had misinterpreted. What he says is — "That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us." He does not say it was his letter. If he had referred to the First Epistle, he would have said, the letter from us. He would have referred to it as a well-known letter. If he had referred to it vaguely, it might have been any letter, but he would not have said "as from us." but ours. What he meant was that it pretended to be what it was not. The worst morality is shown particularly in implying what is not true was inspired. Forging is a great sin. It was not merely that they pretended to a revelation, or to a word spoken in the assembly, but they really pretended it was Paul's letter. When the truth is lost, how often men cease to be truthful!

And now the apostle goes into the facts of evil, which must precede the day which is to judge them. He says — "Let no man deceive you by any means; for [that day shall not come] except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition." I do not recollect the Revised Version, but I have no doubt you will find it is "*the falling away,*" which is the regular word for the apostasy. It is not merely an indeterminate expression — "a" falling, as in the Authorised Version. Next, the man of sin. The apostasy referred to what was already known among the Christians and even among the Jews. In the eleventh of Daniel we hear of a king that should do according to his own will, that was to come by-and-bye; and this king is described in very characteristic colouring. He rejects false gods, he refuses his father's god, he would not have what is called the desire of Israel, that is, the Messiah; and he rejects the true God. Yet, for all that, he falls a victim to a god of his own device. Like Jeroboam, he sets up a new religion in order to accomplish political ends. It is not merely an ambitious prelate who sets himself up — this would be bad enough — but it is one who claims the honour due to God. He makes no hypocritical pretence to be a servant of His servants. He claims for himself supreme and exclusive divine worship in the temple of God.

I think that it is unjust to say that this has ever yet been realised to the full. I have as bad an opinion of Popery, I suppose, as anybody here; but I do not believe that Popery is the apostasy. The apostasy is a great deal more, and a great deal worse. I believe that a man might be saved who is a Roman Catholic; I believe, in the midst of the terrible corruption and superstition of the Romish Church, there is enough of the word of God read, enough of Christ, for a poor soul to lay hold of the great truth of a Divine Person who became man and died for sinners. Hence, I believe that there have been not only Roman Catholic laymen, but Roman Catholic priests saved, and, what is more, Roman Catholic Popes. I believe Pope Leo was a good man (although he was ambitious), as also Pope Gregory the First. Alas, Gregory the Seventh was a very different man. I only refer to these as two occurring to me that seem to have strewn a fear of God and a love of His truth in the midst of abounding darkness and superstition. We must not allow ourselves to be carried away too strongly by controversy. We must bear in mind that there are persons who may be objects of divine grace under most untoward circumstances. I can conceive of a Roman Catholic being saved, but who can conceive

of a Unitarian being saved? The latter denies the divinity and atonement of Christ. Indeed, anyone who denies even the true humanity of the Lord is worse than a Roman Catholic. The falling away or apostasy means the rejection of all revealed truth.

The apostle then tells us that the day of the Lord cannot come until the apostasy, and the revelation of "the man of sin." That is perfectly plain. The Lord told Abram, as a reason for not judging the Amorites, that the cup of their iniquity was not yet full. The cup of Sodom and Gomorrah was filled, as we know, but that of the Amorites was not. They were allowed to follow their evil courses until the earth was ready to spue them out, and then the sword of retribution fell upon them at God's command. It is always a principle in God's dealings that the iniquity which He judges must be thoroughly out. The lawlessness of Christendom is not thoroughly open. There is still, in the midst of a great deal that is very sad, a great deal of conversion going on. There is also not a little of devotedness to Christ. The forms and the reality of truth are yet apparent, and it is as yet "the mystery of lawlessness." It will be a totally different thing in that day.

Thus we come to what I am now to dwell on — that from the coming of the Lord differs the day of the Lord, not only in character but in time. There is an interval between. How long that interval is must be learned from other scriptures, where the times and the seasons are taken up — namely, in the Book of Revelation. Where would you look for prophetic seasons so readily as in that book? What do you find in it, looking at it as a whole? You have the epistles to the seven churches, giving a prophetic view of the church as long as she should be here below; and at the end of the last of the seven churches — the church of Laodicea — a door is opened in heaven, and the prophet is permitted to look in, and he sees a new company in heaven, never, in fact, seen there before — twenty-four elders round the central throne of God, themselves seated on thrones.

Who are these crowned elders? In my judgment they are symbolical of the Old Testament saints and the New Testament saints — the great company of the heads of the heavenly priesthood. This is the reason why they are said to be four-and-twenty — which was the number of courses of priests under the Mosaic dispensation. You must not suppose that the twenty-four means twenty-four individuals — there might be thousands, possibly millions of saints. The great idea of the symbol, I take it, is that the twenty-four are the heavenly priesthood — the chief-priests of glory. God is to have other priests and kings besides these. Who are they? Persons who are called to the knowledge of God after the elders are taken to heaven. For, remember, the elders are never added to; you never find twenty-five or twenty-six — still less have you thirty-six or forty-eight. There is no addition. It is a complete body. Now, that is a very important fact. Others will be objects of divine grace, but they are not added to the four-and-twenty elders — they are grouped by themselves. They are a company blessed of God — glorified, no doubt, in due time, but not added to the twenty-four.

We must leave room for the dealings of God. God is sovereign; and if I can believe in the sovereignty of God now in one form, I can believe it in another. The Book of Revelation shows particularly this very principle. Later on in the book, for instance, you have a company seen standing on a sea of glass; and, what is very remarkable, on a sea of glass mingled with fire. In the fourth chapter of Revelation there is a sea of glass, but no fire. In the fifteenth chapter, where you have this fresh company of conquerors, it is a sea of glass mingled with fire. What does this mean? They have passed through tribulation. The others, you see, have gone up before that terrible tribulation. In their case the symbol of fire would have no meaning.

Perhaps I ought to explain what is meant by this symbol of a sea of glass. Whether in reference to the first company or to the second, the sea would be a natural thought. A sea of water would be for

washing us from the defilements we acquire in our passage through this world. The priests, you know, used to be first washed all over; but afterwards, whenever they went to do service in the Temple, they washed their hands and their feet. In the heavenly sea there is no longer water but glass. Why? Because it is no longer a question of getting impurity removed. Theirs is all gone. It could never have an entrance to heaven. Therefore, you see, first of all, when the elders are caught up to heaven at the coming of the Lord — nothing else could take them up — there is a sea of glass, but no mingling with fire.

Then, in the central part of the book, you have this great tribulation — the most awful judgments of God upon man's wickedness. The tribulation goes on; and in the fifteenth chapter you have the new company standing upon the sea of glass, with harps of gold in their hands, and singing the song, not of the Lamb merely, but of Moses and the Lamb. The twenty-four elders sing the song of the Lamb merely. We do not sing the song of Moses. It will be all very well by-and-by for the converted Jews to do so, and so they will; but we have learned, by the grace of God, the surpassing glory of the Lord Jesus. On the mount of transfiguration the apostle asked to be allowed to build three tabernacles — one for Moses, and one for Elias, and one for Christ. No, says God the Father; "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." He is the one surpassing and exclusive Object in this new song. Don't let anyone suppose that I mean the smallest disrespect to Moses as a servant of God. Far from that. I hold every word Moses has written to be inspired. The Lord Jesus never was called to write anything, because He was the Word, and it would not have been suitable to His glory that He should have written a line. He was above all that. It is not a question, then, of His writing, but of the Holy Ghost leading others to write about Him. Thus, you see, in the sixth chapter of Revelation, the elders sing merely of God and the Lamb, whereas this new company that come through tremendous tribulation will sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. It is not called a new song at all. It is very important to lay hold of these differences in Scripture.

Now, then, apply this to what we have before us. The Lord will come, and, as the instant effect, will gather all His own to be with Him in heaven. The Spirit of God will begin the work of converting souls by the word, particularly amongst the Jews, but it will not be confined to them. He will work a work both in the Jews and in the Gentiles; only they will not be brought into one body. That remarkable property, that exclusive quality, of the church of God, the obliterating distinction between Jew and Gentile, will no longer characterise the work of God; but the Jews will be converted as Jews, and the Gentiles as Gentiles. In the seventh chapter of Revelation they are seen as two distinct bodies — first, out of all the twelve tribes, and then all the multitude that no man could number.

I am aware that there are learned men who say they are the same; but, really, their mode of interpretation is a matter of constant wonder to me. No simple man could believe they were the same. Sometimes it requires a deal of reasoning to make one receive such a thought as that. When people get completely occupied with a thing, it is astonishing how they can persuade themselves and others to believe it. To my conviction, there will be two companies. I think this lies clearly upon the face of the statements of Scripture — not only for the simplest reader, but for the most profound theologian. There will be a company out of all Israel that are sealed, and an immense company out of the Gentiles. Over these, during the millennium, the Lord will reign when He comes again. But, besides these, there will be a number of persons who are killed. They do not live to be under the Lord's reign; and thus, if the Lord did not work something very blessed for them, they would lose both the heavenly glory of the church, and the earthly joy of those who are to people the earth when He comes to reign in glory. What does He do for them? He waits until the very last man has suffered, and then also He brings them risen from the dead into heavenly glory.

I know there are those who manifest a great deal of confusion about that. They fancy that everybody must be raised exactly at the same moment. It is perfectly true that we shall be raised at the same moment; but why all others should be raised along with us seems to me peculiar. I do not see any necessity for it at all, but the reverse. The fourth verse of the twentieth of Revelation bears very distinctly on the importance of distinguishing between the coming of the Lord and the day of the Lord — "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them; and [I saw] the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God; and those who worshipped not the beast, neither his image, neither received his mark on their foreheads or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years."

Who were these? The first were the elders that came out of heaven. These were the persons who had long been in heaven, and consequently in their case, you observe, they had their seats upon the thrones already, and judgment was given unto them — not judgment executed on them. The very reverse. They were to judge the world, to judge the angels, as we are told by the apostle Paul in First Corinthians.

Next, "And [I saw] the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God." I saw the souls — not the bodies. There, clearly, you have a company of people that had suffered after the elders had been taken to heaven, and they were still in the separate state. He saw the separate spirits or souls of those that were beheaded. Do not be carried away with the idea that souls sometimes means persons. Of course we know that; but it is easy to discriminate whether separated souls or living persons are meant. "Seventy souls went down into Egypt." That is very intelligible. They were not separated souls, but persons; but if I said seventy souls of the people went down into Egypt, this would be another thing. In short, a different form of phraseology would have been used. Scripture is always most precise. I entirely deny what unbelievers say, that things are loosely expressed there. Had it been — "I saw seventy souls that had been beheaded," it is evident that it would be so many persons that were meant.

Lastly, "And which had not," etc. There is here a slight but unfortunate mistranslation. It should be, "and those who (or, such as) had not worshipped the beast" — a third class of persons. This is now generally conceded. I do not think that any scholar has any doubt about it. Dean Alford, who was a good scholar, takes it as here — a third class. The late Mr. Elliott does the same. I mention them, because they do not agree with me in many respects; but I agree with them and they with me in this, that there are three classes. The first is those already glorified, and not a word, therefore, about their souls; whereas, in the second and third classes, we find the souls — first, the souls of persons that had been beheaded for the word of God, and then those that would not accept the mark of the beast, in the last part.

If you want to find confirmation of this, you will find it in the sixth chapter of Revelation, where the souls were seen underneath the altar — in a separate state, of course — and they were told that they were to wait till the number of their brethren that were to be slain as they were should be fulfilled. There is the second class. There were to be two bodies of sufferers — the first body in the beginning of Revelation, and the second body in the fifteenth; and now both classes are here before us. But before we hear of these two in their separate state, we have the elders in their glorified state. (1) "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them . . . and (2) I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus . . . and (3) those that had not worshipped the beast . . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." Why is it said that the two last classes lived? Because till now they were in the separate state. It is not said of those who sat upon the thrones, as being needless; but it was necessary to tell us that those were to live who had been martyred in the Apocalyptic crisis.

When did all this beheading take place, and this sealing of those that would not accept the mark of the beast? During the time of the great tribulation. So you have those who had to pass not merely a sea of glass, but a sea of glass mingled with fire. The coming of the Lord involves the translation of those, now waiting for Him. Then comes an interval of tremendous trial, through which souls are to be born of God, many of whom will have to suffer; but they will have their sufferings made up to them by being raised up when the Lord appears in glory, and they will all reign together — they that had been already caught up, and those that now rise; while they that are still alive are the blessed people of the millennium, who will form the nucleus of that great scene of blessing which will fill the whole earth; for surely Jehovah Jesus will reign in that day.

I have now presented to you as clear a sketch of this important subject as I could in a single lecture. But the great point I press is the essential difference between the exercise of grace in the coming of the Lord to take His own to be with Him, and the exercise of judgment when it is the day of the Lord. That is the distinction you have to bear in mind — the Christian characterised by a grace that takes him up to heaven; the Jew characterised by the Lord's appearing to exercise judgment, which will leave him unimpeded by his enemies here below. Our blessing does not depend upon the execution of judgment. Our blessing is of pure sovereign grace. We had no claims, no deserts, not even pleas in support of our case; and when the Lord comes to receive us, there will be no execution of judgment on the earth whatever. But it will be different when He appears to save the poor Jews. They must go through a retributive time of tribulation; and then the Lord, at the last moment, when they seem about to be swept away, comes down on their enemies and delivers the godly remnant.

In this you have, I believe, an outline, and it is for you to make the truth your own. Search the word, and you will find abundant proofs crowding upon you as you read with faith; but you never will so read, and never get full profit, unless your souls are thoroughly clear as to your own redemption. This is the indispensable condition of growing in the knowledge of Christ, and of real intelligence in the word of God. If you are not clear about the gospel, where is the good of talking much about the second advent? And, therefore, I press upon you to take care your souls have shared in the blessing of the first. Amen.