

# The Second Coming of Christ

W Kelly

F. E. RACE 3 & 4 London House Yard, Paternoster Row, E.C. LONDON.

Before the Saviour went to the cross, He left as a parting promise to the disciples these words of love — "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And 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 14: 1-3). Thus, the Christian hope is, not the spread of the knowledge of the Lord throughout the world, nor is it our own departure by death to be with Christ, but it is His return to receive us unto Himself, that we may be with Him, the Son, in the Father's house. Blessed, heavenly hope!

Accordingly, when the apostles on Olivet looked after their ascended Lord, "two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? 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 1: 10, 11). Well they knew that it was a real personal departure of their Master; just as certainly will His return be real and personal. Jesus shall come again from heaven. Incredulity may deny it; but not even incredulity will assert that it is a secondary matter. It will change at once the face of the church, the world, and all things. Is *this* secondary?

Hence, in Acts 3: 19-21, Peter calls on the Jews to repent and be converted, in order to the blotting out of their sins; so that seasons of refreshing might come from the presence of the Lord, and He might send forth Jesus that was fore-appointed to them, whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of the holy prophets since the world began. Though the day of Pentecost was fully come, and the Holy Ghost given in unprecedented power, and never had the world beheld such unselfish love among thousands of believers as at that moment, yet the apostle shows that the full blessing of Israel and of the earth depends on the future coming of Christ from heaven. It is *His* mission, not that of the Spirit, to restore all things according to the prophetic word, though no doubt the Spirit will be at the same time poured out upon all flesh. Further, Christ will be sent, according to these testimonies, not for the destruction, but for the restitution of all things. And this exactly agrees with the vision in Revelation 19, 20, where Christ is represented as coming from heaven, reigning with His risen saints, and, when this glorious kingdom closes, and the earth and heaven are fled away, only then judging the dead before the great white throne.

The Gospels the Acts, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse, all converge on the same point. Not death, nor the destruction of Jerusalem, is the revealed hope, but the return of Jesus. The Christian, the Church has the Holy Ghost, and has to wait for Christ.

Those who put off His coming find their prototype in the evil servant of Matthew 24: 48. And what our Lord said unto the early disciples He says unto all, "watch": and this in view, not of death, but of His own coming, the conqueror of death (Mark 13: 33-37). For, in truth, it is only the Lord who is the Bridegroom; and our calling, as set forth in the parable of the virgins (Matt. 25), is to go forth to meet Him. Such was the uniform expectation formed by our Lord's own teaching. Its moral bearing we find in Luke 12: 35 and seq.; and this as the constant hope of the heart - sure He is coming, not sure

when, but ever looking out for Him from day to day. "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants."

Need I dwell on the righteous wisdom of God in this? It was the Word who was made flesh, not the Spirit; it was here that Jesus suffered for sins, and by the grace of God tasted death for every one. He is glorified in heaven, but as truly as Jehovah lives, all the earth shall be filled with His glory, and not merely hear the message of His grace. Hence the counsel of God (Eph. 1: 10) is to gather up again all things in Christ, the things that are in heaven and the things that are on earth. The Holy Ghost is, meanwhile, a witness only, and not the accomplisher; He is the seal of the redemption which Christ has effected by His blood, and the earnest of the inheritance which we shall share with Christ at His coming.

Hence, from Romans 8 we learn that the creation itself, ruined by the sin of the first Adam, is destined to be set free by the victory of the last Adam. Meanwhile it groans, and so do we, albeit heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ; and none the less because we have the firstfruits of the Spirit - "even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body." Our souls already have redemption in Christ, the forgiveness of sins; our bodies wait for redemption when He comes again; and when we are manifested with Him (Col. 3: 4), the very creation around, if it be necessarily incapable of profiting like us by grace, shall be set free from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.

But though we find the coming of Christ bound up with the walk, the joys, the sorrows, the worship, the service, and the hopes of the saints throughout the Epistles of Paul (as in Rom. 13: 12; 1 Cor. 1: 7, 8; 1 Cor. 3: 13; 1 Cor. 4: 5; 1 Cor. 5: 5; 1 Cor. 6: 2, 3; 1 Cor. 11: 26; 1 Cor. 15: 23-55; 2 Cor. 5; Phil. 1: 10, 11, 16; Phil. 3: 20, 21; Phil. 4: 5; 1 Tim. 6: 14, 15; 2 Tim. 1: 18; 2 Tim. 4: 8; Titus 2: 13; Heb. 9: 28; Heb. 10: 25, 37), yet is it in the two Epistles to the Thessalonians that we have the subject most fully developed. Is the coming of Christ too high a theme, too abstruse, for the young and uninstructed? 1 Thess. 1 on the contrary, proves that it should blend into the work from our conversion. "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven." Again, if there are sorrows in serving the saints, and Satan's hindrances too, what is the labourer's crown of rejoicing? Some present reward or memorial? Nay, "Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming" (1 Thess. 2: 19)? Moreover, if an apostle prayed for the saints, he desired their growing exercise in love, that they might be confirmed unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints (1 Thess. 3). How near such a prayer brings that day, casting its light upon the present walk and its responsibilities! Then, again, were they grieving as if any brethren deceased from among them might miss their part in the coming of Christ, and in being caught up to meet Him on high? 1 Thessalonians 4 fully dispels the dark shade of unbelief, and shows that the true hope is not the separate state of bliss above,\* but association with Christ when He comes again: for the dead in Christ shall rise first, then we, the living, which remain, shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. As to the world, rejecting the only Deliverer from wrath, its portion must be the day of the Lord coming as a thief by night (1 Thess. 5). "The day" is the manifestation of Christ's coming in judgment; and as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth (Luke 21). But Christians are sons of light and day, and that day shall not overtake them as a thief. Accordingly he

prays, not only that the God of peace Himself might sanctify them wholly, but that their whole spirit and soul and body might be preserved without blame in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 23).

\*The intermediate state remains a clear scriptural truth, and its character as sweet as it is sure, for such as sleep in Christ till the resurrection. (See Luke 23: 43; Acts 7: 59; 2 Cor. 5: 8; and Phil. 1: 21-23.

2 Thess. sets the soul right touching fears for the living saints, as the First Epistle had corrected the error as to the dead. The Lord's revelation from heaven will be retributive - rest for His saints, and tribulation for their troublers (2 Thess. 1). Why, then, be afraid of the false rumour, whatever the fictitious authority claimed for it, that the day of the Lord was come with its terrors and snares? He beseeches them, therefore, by the coming of the Lord, which is to gather the saints to the Lord above, not to be alarmed by the notion that His day was present. For, in truth, that day could not come till the evil was thoroughly ripe and manifest, with which judgment is to deal (2 Thess. 2). Finally, in 2 Thess. 3 the apostle prays the Lord to direct their hearts into the love of God and the patience of Christ. How blessed the thought that if we are waiting for His return, we have communion with His patience! We wait with Him, if we wait for Him.

It need hardly be added, that the Epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude do but confirm, enlarge, and enforce the same doctrine, interweaving it also into the practical life of every day. See James 5: 7-9; 1 Peter 1: 7, 13; 1 Peter 2: 12; 1 Peter 4: 5, 7; 1 Peter 5: 1, 4; 2 Peter 1: 19; 2 Peter 3; 1 John 2: 28; 1 John 3: 2, 3; Jude 14, 24.

The Revelation impresses upon the whole its most emphatic seal. In the introduction (Rev. 1: 7) we read, "Behold, he cometh with 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. Even so, Amen." How suitable to visions of judgment! Equally in keeping is the conclusion (Rev. 22: 17): "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, come." Such is the expression of the heart from the individual saint and from the church. What else indeed could the Bride say in answer to Him who announces Himself as the root and offspring of David, the bright and morning star? Observe, too, that the Spirit, the divine Comforter who dwells in her, sanctions and leads the call to the Bridegroom. If, you, dear reader, have heard the quickening voice of the Saviour, take up the same. You may have followed Jesus only yesterday or to-day; nevertheless, fear not: "Let him that heareth say, Come." But if you have never known His voice, listen now, ere it be too late, to these gracious words: Let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." Are you deeply conscious of your wants, your misery, your sins - are you athirst? If so, you cannot say to Him, Come; but you may yourself come to Him and welcome. Yea, if most of all you feel your lack of feeling, if you only desire from Him what you want, and can get nowhere else, "whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

"He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." (Rev. 22: 20). It follows from this, the true hope of the Christian, that the expectation of seeing the world gradually filled with blessing, or even the semblance of it through the profession of the gospel, before the return of Jesus, is altogether unwarranted. *He* will have the glory of reducing all opposing powers, and of ushering in at His second advent that acceptable year of Jehovah which He proclaimed at His first coming. But the day of vengeance, which in His humiliation was left out (cp. Luke 4: 19, 20 with Isaiah 61: 1-3), will be the immediate effect of His appearing again, followed by His reign of peace and glory. See Isaiah 11: 4-9; 17, 18, 24 - 27, 30, 32, 35, 60 - 66; Jeremiah 31, 32; Ezekiel 36 - 47. Daniel is very explicit on this head: "Thou sawest," says the prophet to the king, "till a

stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing-floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them; and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." The divine interpretation (vv. 44, 45) need leave no doubt as to the meaning: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure." Other Scriptures, too, furnish more light, especially Matt. 21: 42-44: "Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the Scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder."

Thus, if it be clear that Christ is the stone, it is equally clear that at His first coming He was the despised and rejected stone. He is now become the head of the corner, glorified at God's right hand. He will by and by return in judicial power; and as surely as those who stumbled at His humiliation have been broken, so, when He descends in judgment, shall His adversaries be ground to powder. When He first came, far from falling on the Roman Empire (or iron power of Nebuchadnezzar's image), the representative of the empire crucified Him; but when He returns in glory, He will execute judgment upon that empire in its final state of division into separate kingdoms. It is only after this destructive blow that "the stone that smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth." Daniel 7, 11, 12; Revelation 17, 19, 20 corroborate this and supply further detail. But the general truth is as distinct as it is practically momentous. Christendom, far from progressing in good or purging out evil, is to end in a widespread apostasy, like Judaism since the law, like mankind at large before and since the flood. (Cp. Matt. 13: 30; Luke 17: 26-30; Rom. 11; 1 Thess. 5; 2 Thess. 1, 2; 2 Tim. 3; 1 John 2, 2 Peter 2, 3; Jude). After the Lord, at His coming, has judged the professing Christian body as well as the Jews and the Gentiles (Matt. 24, 25), He will cause the days of heaven to dawn upon the earth, His bride being manifested with Him on high, and Israel the ransomed of the Lord below, His earthly centre with the Gentiles abundantly blessed around them. The Lord will hasten it in His time.