

The Rapture of the Saints Raised or Changed at Christ's Coming

2 Thess. 2: 1-12.

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Lecture 5 of 'The Second Coming and Kingdom of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is a matter of thankfulness to God, that the very adversaries of the truth that will be asserted tonight are compelled to correct their own theories. The force of that truth is such as cannot be honestly gainsaid. They cannot but acknowledge that the coming of Christ in person is the true hope of the saint. Time was (and most of us who have been at all versed in the spiritual history of God's testimony during the last quarter of a century or more can well remember) when it was otherwise. All who can carry their eye back over that brief space, or who have had occasion to acquaint themselves with the facts, will know that it was once far different. Even among true children of God the almost universal notion was, that death, in order to the departure of the soul separate from the body to be with Christ, was the hope, and that this was really meant by much of Scripture which spoke of the coming of the Lord. Others, too, were not wanting who indulged in a still lower expectation; and, I am sorry to add, that the faintest of all hopes is far from exploded yet. Are there not Christian men looking for a world-wide triumph of the truth on the earth by missionary effort and the like? Are they not on the rack to imagine such destructive blows to be given the mystery of iniquity by the advancing gospel, and by providential events, as shall establish the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ without let or rival here below?

Nevertheless, even for the measure of homage which has been reluctantly paid to the truth of God, we may be, and perhaps ought to be, thankful. It is the pretty general acknowledgment among believers, that the Lord's personal coming to receive His saints, then glorified, is the only adequate answer to the Church's hope. Still, one cannot but feel that it is only a comparative comfort, because of the large admixture of human thoughts and expectations, which goes far practically to nullify that seeming admission of the truth in the hearts of many children of God. For what avails it for the soul's condition, what for the testimony of God's truth, if there be the holding of the truth just so far as not to be an infidel to it, while the affections (for there are divine affections for the new life) are not heartily enlisted and in full activity? what can be the result, where the ordinary thought and the habitual teaching tend to turn away the eye from Christ and to fix it upon intermediate events? These events, by which the enemy seeks by all means to distract us from the true star of our hopes, may be either triumph in the world for the truth on the one hand, or sorrow, distress, persecution, terror, produced by Satan's power among men, on the other. It is difficult to say which has the worst moral effect upon the soul.

My business now will be to prove from the word of God that every theory is false which turns away the heart of the Christian from Christ: that it is a matter of comparatively insignificant moment whether one anticipates a long period of unprecedented prosperity, or whether another looks with dread for a shorter hour of equally awful trouble. In either case it is not the hope Christ has set before the Church, though there is a measure of truth in both. We all believe that there is a long reign of peace and joy for the earth. At least I may assume that all, or almost all here, believe it, as every Christian does who is not corrupted by the rationalism of the day, or by some peculiar fancy prejudicial to the truth. Again, we all believe that there is a day of darkness, of special Satanic power, for the earth. It is not, therefore, that one disputes the fact, either of the brief season of Satan's rage and man's trouble here below, or of the long triumphant display of Christ's power when it shall be established everywhere over the whole world; but what we deny strenuously is, that either one or other is the proper hope which the

New Testament puts before the Christian man.

Now, in the goodness of God, we have very full instruction upon the subject, and this remarkably compressed in two epistles, from one of which the introductory portion has been just read. It was remarked on a previous occasion, that the coming of the Lord is no mysterious subject, involved in clouds, beyond the spiritual capacity of even the babe in Christ. The first chapter of 1 Thessalonians disproves it. The Thessalonians were converted, not only from idols "to serve the living and true God," but "to wait for his Son from heaven." They were right. The Spirit of God sanctions such waiting — never in a single instance condemns it. The Spirit mentions it to their praise. It was His own power and mighty testimony to the world. Nay more, it is the instinct pertaining to the child of God. There is no Christian that would not ardently await the Son of God from heaven, unless he were turned aside by the false teaching of men. The Thessalonians accordingly were thus expecting the Son from heaven; yet were they ignorant as to the details of the Lord's coming, and of its relation to other portions of the truth, especially to the prophecies. But it is of immense importance that it should be held distinctly in the soul, that the hope of Christ is no mere prophetic event, does not, properly speaking, belong to prophecy, though, of course, connected with it, but is in itself apart from the revelation of the events that are to take place upon the earth, of which it is the province of prophecy to treat. The hope, on the other, is the consummation of the spiritual desires implanted in every Christian's breast; and therefore one sees at once with what sweetness and propriety our Lord Jesus, who is the object of our faith, is equally that of our hope. It is no mere prospect of getting something, no mere expectation of deliverance from sorrow and trial, or of enjoying circumstances of glory and triumph in the earth.

All these things are beneath the purpose of God for us; founded, no doubt, upon snatches of revealed truth, which, in the enemy's hand, serve to supplant that which the Lord puts before us, and the Holy Spirit forms in us, and every simple, unspoiled soul necessarily tends to — the desire that Jesus should have His glory, joy, and love, without a check or cloud, for those He loves best — the desire after that precious time when every thought of His heart shall be accomplished in His Bride, as well as for the kingdom here below, to the glory of God the Father. What a change will this be from the circumstances of sorrow, and need, and shame, through which we are passing; though, after all, His love is just as perfect towards us now as it can be then. But He is not content with the present result; He always looks upon us according to that which is given us in purpose, according to the full fruit in glory of His work, His cross, death, and resurrection. Then He will have those He loves together; He will have them near Himself where He is; He will have them in the house of His Father; He will have them above everything that could cause a pang, or be productive of shame to themselves and dishonour upon His name. Surely this is a hope suitable to the heavenly Bride, because it is worthy of Him who died for us and rose again, and is coming back to receive us unto Himself. He is coming, that He may have all that are thus loved, all that are destined according to the will and counsels of God the Father to be with Himself above. And thus it was accordingly that the Thessalonian saints waited and looked, though they little understood the hope, and were not acquainted with the details of prophecy, and had a great deal to be instructed in as to the effects of the coming of the Lord, its bearing both upon the dead and the living (as you may find on the dead saints chiefly in the first epistle, and on the living very particularly in the second). Still were they right in the simple, living, habitual expectancy of their Lord, and thoroughly owned of the Holy Ghost in that attitude of their souls. Of course, this was no more than the general truth. Without enlarging on each passage in these epistles which touches the Lord's advent, I would particularly notice now what has been just alluded to, their error as to the dead saints. This drew out a remarkable and new revelation of the Holy Ghost through St. Paul. I say a "*revelation*," because he intimates as much himself.

In the earlier chapters there is no such revelation about it, though, of course, it is all the inspired word of God, every whit of it; but in chapter 4 there is a positive communication of fresh light, not before possessed by the Thessalonians, and most needful for the Church at all times. They were so full of the expectation of a returning Saviour, that they never so much as contemplated the thought of any from among them dying. They were just then startled by the fact that some brethren did fall asleep. Apparently they were stumbled, and certainly they were yielding to undue sorrow. This might expose them to the tempter. The Holy Ghost therefore writes by the apostle to correct the error. They imagined that the dead saints must lose a large part, if not all, of the joy of welcoming the Lord when He comes from heaven. It is not that they so far forgot the truth as to think their companions had by death lost the blessing of eternal life. No persons knowing the gospel as they knew it could harbour such thoughts about believers. If they were sure the Old Testament saints would be saved, they could hardly imagine their own dead brethren who knew and loved the Lord would be lost. But still they thought that there would be a serious drawback from full joy and triumph. They thought that they could not have the sweet privilege of receiving and being received by the Lord at His coming from heaven. On this head they are set right, and with much positive instruction otherwise, in these terms: — "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are sleeping, that you sorrow not, even as the rest also who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so those put to sleep through Jesus will God bring with him."

Such is the first main thought here presented, — that God will assuredly bring with Jesus those put to sleep by Him. They had doubted this. They had feared it could not be. That in some manner the deceased Christians would be brought into blessing afterwards, they of course may have believed; but they never had conceived, as indeed they had not yet been instructed, how dead saints could be with Jesus at His coming. Here the Spirit of God explains how it would all be effected. "For this we say unto you in the word of the Lord, that we, the living, who remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise prevent" (or, I venture to suggest, instead of this, *precede*) "them which are asleep." It is well known that this is the true force of the expression. Indeed "prevent" is merely the old English word; so that it is not a question of a different rendering, but of substituting modern English for that which is somewhat obsolete. Thus, surviving saints on earth are not to be before those who would be then asleep, *i.e.* dead. "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we, the living, who remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." That is, if there be a difference, the dead will rather be before the living, so far from the dead saints missing that joyful hour and its precious accompaniments, and the full enjoyment of the hope for which the saints had been waiting in life. They, though they had passed away from this world, are not viewed as, properly speaking, dead, though of course there was the fact of death; but they are described as those that are fallen asleep, and this by Jesus. The grace of Christ had given death this character in their case. But, moreover, they should be brought with Jesus. How could this be, seeing that they were departed? In order to be brought with Jesus, we are next told that He Himself would descend from heaven with a shout. There is not a word of any saints with Him then. He is alone, as far as His risen people are concerned. He is then coming to raise them. He descends from heaven with a shout, and this "shout" has a very special character. It is the word of a commander to his own troop, of an admiral to his own seamen, or, in fact, of any one, who is in a position that gives him authority, to such as belong to him. It is the summons to His own, the arousing word of command, the effect of which is that the dead saints instantly arise from their graves. "Then we, the living who remain unto the coming of the Lord, shall be caught up *together with them.*" There is nothing like an interval which you can call appreciable, except to faith; because the dead saints raised, and the living ones

changed without passing through death, are "caught up *together* to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." This then accounts for God bringing them all with Jesus. Such is the manner of it. The Lord Jesus having first come, awakened the sleepers, and changed those alive, translates them both to meet Him in the air. "So shall we ever be with the Lord." The apostle explains how it comes to pass that, when Christ does come in His glory, and all His saints with Him, the dead shall be there just as much as the living. The reason is that, previously, He comes and raises the dead, changes the living, and has them at the same time caught up to meet Him in the air.

How important and fruitful a Scripture this is, need not be said; yet I would call your attention particularly to a few points. We are told that the dead in Christ rise first; then, not *they* who may be alive and remain at His coming, but "we." Why this language, if it was the mind of the Spirit of God to challenge the attitude of the Thessalonian saints — to say that they were excited about the hope, too much occupied with it, improperly looking for it as possible in their own day? Did he tell them they lacked sobriety, because a long period must elapse first, numberless events be fulfilled, visible signs appear; and when they had seen one, two, three or so on of these signs, then they might begin to look out with the intelligent conviction that the coming of the Lord was at length drawing nigh? Had they been in the main mistaken about the matter, could any occasion more demand its correction than this? The Spirit of God was correcting an error of detail; why not deal with it all, root and branch? Why not lay the axe of the word to the root of this tree of human imagination, if such it were? So far from this, the Holy Ghost puts His seal upon the substance of their expectation. They were waiting for Christ to come, and so was Paul; and the apostle, instead of seeking to alter their attitude as an error, puts himself along with the Thessalonian saints in the looking for Christ as a present, continual expectation of the heart. "We which are alive and remain" does suppose the hope from day to day though it does not mean what wicked rationalism imagines, that the apostle Paul gave a date for the Lord's coming. Scripture never fixes anything of the sort; but what it does, and what the apostle Paul evidently shows here that it does, is to sustain souls in constant hope. It not only sets the saint to wait for Christ, but it keeps him waiting, and condemns every thought inconsistent with waiting for Him. It corrects whatever of error may have encumbered the hope, unsparingly cutting it down; but it confirms the great fundamental truth which the New Testament establishes in the heart of the believer, the continual expectancy of Christ as a present hope. This is not confined to one portion of the word of God. The gospels taught the same; further developments come out in the epistles. Our Lord invariably directed the heart thus even where He was not distinguishing between the expectation of godly persons in Israel and that which gradually dawned when Jewish hopes waned away. He has not forgotten His ancient people, as we saw the other night; He remembers and provides for Israel. He has shown us what their hope is, and has maintained it in the New Testament, lest there might have been the notion that the Old Testament hope was a thing for ever gone by, because of the wickedness of Israel. The very New Testament, which shows us the introduction of another building of God, the Church, and the hope that is in its fulness characteristic of the Christian, demonstrates along with it that Israel's expectations are still kept for them, until they are awakened by the Spirit of God to long for, appropriate, understand, and enjoy them.

In the Gospels our Lord presents things at first after a general way. He does not enter with that particularity where He presents His coming, so that you can easily say for whom specially it is. The effect is, in divine wisdom, that while much suits the Christian, there is instruction for the godly Jew of the latter day also. But, at the same time, this one grand feature is found to pervade all our Lord's instructions on the subject, well worthy of note, that whatever He says, even if it were in a parable, the language is so constructed as to keep him who believes the word of God on the look out for Jesus. The uniform object, evidently, is to forbid such a thought as a long period elapsing first as a necessary

barrier. Take, for instance, in Matthew 24, the household servant, who is put in a position of authority in the absence of his master. Where is there a hint of another servant, and then another succeeding, and another? The very reverse is true: as far as the parable bears upon its face, you could not gather but that the Lord was to come in that very generation. Am I denying then that God foresaw the long time the Church was to abide in this world? Not at all; but this was the sole, or at any rate the chosen method, according to the wisdom of God, in which the saints could be always expecting the Saviour. Therefore you cannot draw from these parables, or others kindred to them, the smallest allowance of the thought, that the believer ought not always to expect Jesus during his own lifetime. Such, on the contrary, was in fact the cherished hope of the earliest believers after Christ's death and resurrection.

Again, in the parable of the virgins, there is the same analogy. As far as the parable states, it is the same virgins who went out first with their lamps, then went to sleep, later on were roused from their sleep by the midnight cry, "Go ye out to meet him," and finally went in with Him to the marriage. Of course, the parabolic scope is not limited to the letter, and room is left for continuous application. But there is no ground whatever, on the other hand, for the supposition, that these parables expressly insinuate a long succession of ages and centuries to elapse before Christ could come. But then, while this is true, mark the exceeding perfectness of the word of God. If the Bridegroom should tarry, still the truth remains the same. If the Lord delay what might seem to be a long time in the life of a single virgin or a single servant, or if He in fact (not there stated) spanned over many generations of believers, still the hope remains to burn brightly again. As far as the word of God is concerned, Scripture thus invariably keeps before the believer the Lord as at hand. Therefore every theory is a falsehood which implies that it is wrong to expect Christ habitually, or that there are certain *revealed* events that must happen first, requiring the lapse of many years, or ages perhaps; that only then, when these events are accomplished, or these ages expired, can we soberly and truly look for Christ to come. Such a theory, I repeat, is contrary to every one of those plain Scriptures, which some inconsiderately allege to prove a necessary delay.

How, could the Holy Ghost have written such words, "We which are alive and remain," if He would have us know that Christ could not come soon? Are we not to gather that He had an object in His phrase? — that, knowing the truth and the future perfectly well, His blessed aim was to settle the believer in the habitual expectation of the Lord Jesus Christ, whatever excuses the unbeliever may make? And so it will be found with the various parts of Scripture that treat of this weighty theme. It is remarkable, (and I would warn you of the fact, having been struck with it only lately in considering the subject,) that the objections usually alleged by those who look for the great tribulation as that which must be gone through by Christians before they are entitled to expect the Lord for their translation to heaven, are precisely the same sort of difficulties as the adversaries of the pre-millennial advent produce against that scheme as a whole. In a word, when men essay to prove that we are not to be expecting Christ's advent continually, that we are not warranted to look for Him as the proximate hope of the heart, their plea for intervening events assumes pretty much the same shape as that of the men who do not believe He is coming until the thousand years' reign is over. What are we thence to infer? That both parties are actuated by the self-same spirit of unbelief; that they are the antagonists, I am grieved to say, of the truth of God, as far as this grave subject is concerned.

We may learn much from the first parable we referred to — the household servant. What is the virus of his wrong? What stamped him as "that evil servant"? No doubt his conduct betrays these two fatal blots: he beats his fellow-servants, he eats and drinks with the drunken. There is a haughty self-exaltation towards those put by the Lord on common ground with himself; there is also association and fellowship with the world. But what characterized the laxity and perverseness of his soul? That which

was within led to these outbreaks of evil; for never does evil begin in external conduct of any kind. The mischief is always within in the first instance. How, then, does the Lord characterize that inner spring? He, the Judge of all, knows the principles of the heart. How does He describe this man's inward departure before it is developed in those evil forms of an external kind? "He says in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming." Are there any persons here that say in their hearts, "My Lord delayeth His coming"? There are many that think so everywhere: how many, alas! say so in Christendom. The Lord is not describing the profane world, but those that bear His name: He is in this part portraying the professing system that bears His name. He has done with the Jewish branch of His subject before He presents the parables we have touched on. Within the range of Christendom He gives us, as the first picture of evil, this deep-seated, wide-spread root of mischief, that certain, professing to be His servants, cherish as the thought of their heart (and there is nothing more fatal), "My Lord delayeth His coming." It is not a merely mistaken notion, it is the heart that is utterly wrong. One might ignorantly admit some perverse doctrine on the subject, and this, of course, would hinder the soul; but here, as in all real mischief, the affections are thoroughly wrong, the judgment is consequently darkened, and the whole moral life becomes the expression of those corrupt affections and that false judgment.

This first picture among the three parables that refer to Christendom is much to be noted. Dark as it is, the Lord Himself is He who draws it for us, under the unfaithful servant saying in his heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming." Various paths may lead a man into such a thought, as the deliberate feeling of his heart: the Lord does not warrant us to ask how it came to pass. If such is the fact, the results are beyond measure fatal. The servant's heart was proved not to wish for his Lord's return. He made up his mind, therefore, that Christ was not coming shortly; *he did not* love His appearing. Why should he? How could he? He might have been interrupted in some of his plans and projects by His speedy coming. He therefore said in his heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming." But it was a false heart, caught by a device of Satan. Morally it was the forerunner, as far as this parable declares, of the spirit of self and the world coming in to ruin the ministry of Christ and turn what ought to have been a service into a lordship, making a human "clergy" out of a divine ministry. I wish to hurt nobody's feelings, and beg the forbearance of such as might conceive themselves attacked. Nevertheless it is due to the word that I should affirm what I believe to be of God from it — that there is a false position in this respect in ominous vicinity to the heart's putting off the coming of the Lord.

Let us look a little more into the parable of the virgins. It has been already cited for a particular purpose. We may now enquire into its general bearing upon the subject. Some there are who apply it to the Jewish remnant; but this is a palpable mistake. There are excellent reasons which forbid its reference in any just sense whatever to them. First, there is no ground in Scripture to believe that, when the Jewish remnant are once called out, they will ever go to sleep before the Lord comes. The circumstances they must encounter would make it a very extraordinary issue if they went asleep; and those who affirm this ought to produce some proof of it. The Jewish remnant go asleep! Men called to face sufficiently imminent danger every day of their lives, until they fled from the sharpest trial since creation! The great crisis of their history may be short; but as long as it lasts, they are nursed in storms and tempest, with death continually before their eyes. Will they then go to sleep during that brief period of at most seven years? Their fiery trial is not to be above half that time; but take the largest possible reckoning in which they can be spoken of. In point of fact, during the first three years and a half, as will be seen more fully on some future occasion, they are not distinguished properly, Morally alone are they a remnant, or in the sight of God; they may not come out distinctly as such before men until the last half week. What can be more opposed to fair inference from every Scripture that speaks of them, than to suppose that such men, at such a crisis, could go asleep? Moreover, take notice that the parable speaks of the whole mass. It is not merely the foolish virgins, but "all" who slumbered and

slept. Now, the remnant, as far as I know, has no false profession in its midst, has nothing answering to wise and foolish — to those who had and those who had not oil. Looking at Christendom, on the other hand, one can see perfectly how this has been verified. And this is not the only reason. Other remarks I may add by the way, though it is a little digression from the subject, that the truth may be cleared, and the distinct force of this parable may be maintained upon the Christian conscience. This must plead as my apology for dwelling on the subject, and rejecting utterly every attempt to turn it away from Christian profession, as its proper object.

The virgins, first of all, went out to meet the Bridegroom. It is not so with the Jews. They will never go out to meet the Bridegroom. The very principle of their call is rather to stay where they are, and there will the Lord bless them. Even if you consider their fleeing from Antichrist in his time and the unparalleled tribulation, it is not going out to meet the Bridegroom. But what we have in this parable of our Lord is a most instructive picture of the Christian position in relation to the coming of Christ — the virgins going forth to meet the Bridegroom. It is supposed, again, that some are mere professors, for they are with-out oil in their vessels. This, as remarked, will not be the case with the Jewish remnant. Further, whatever they may possess, Jews can hardly be described in this way as having oil in their vessels. This is really a beautiful emblem of the Christian, characterized by the unction of the Holy Ghost. Though the remnant be under the hand of God's Spirit, this does not answer to having oil in the vessel. The washing of water by the word may be theirs, but not yet the outpoured Spirit.

The more you look at it, proofs will multiply that Christianity was meant by our Lord in this parable. Thus all go out to meet the Bridegroom. They quit everything here below, not to escape from evil or trouble, but attracted to an object of joy and blessing. It is the power of Christ and the character of Christianity, from the first moment that the great principle wrought in souls upon earth by the power of the Holy Ghost. In Abraham there was a calling from country and kindred, as far as that was concerned, but no going forth to meet the Bridegroom. In Christianity this received its bright and only real illustration. The Lord, before He went away, put this before the sorrowing disciples: "Ye believe in God: believe also in me." It is as if He had said, I am not going to be the visible Messiah upon earth, as you expect; I am going to be invisible, even as God is; I am about to disappear from the world. But if I go away, my heart and thoughts are with you. In my Father's house, whither I go, I am about to bless you even more than if I stayed here. If I do not set up my earthly kingdom according to the prophets, I am going to what is far better — to the Father's house; and if I go and prepare a place for you (for this was one object of His going, as He states it here), "I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also." In this you have exactly the Christian hope. It is the Lord Jesus leaving this world for heaven, giving them the certainty that He associates them with Himself in His heavenly place, and, moreover, that, when the place is ready for them there, He will come again for them. John 13 shows, that, all the time He is in heaven, He is preparing them for the place; chapter 14 shows that He is preparing the place for them: that done, He will come again and receive them to Himself, that where He is, they may be also.

Far from there being anything Jewish in this, it is, on the contrary, the contrast to everything of the sort. It is the proper Christian hope; for the Lord comes, and this, not to bless us in our place by putting down evil, and making this world a sweet and precious abode, where the fragrance of His goodness, power, and glory will be shed universally. This is the Jewish expectation, which the holy prophets continually present. But here it is quite new and heavenly, the Father's house, and a place for them as much as for Him. there. Who had ever heard such a thing before? When, where, had there been the most distant hint? Now the Lord divulges it. It is not, of course, that the mystery hid from

ages and generations was yet brought out; but He did announce the proper Christian hope, which they would understand better when the Holy Ghost was come. And so they did.

Then, in the Acts of the Apostles, the general thought is set before the disciples in their approaching testimony to their Master unto the ends of the earth. "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" I admit that it takes in the establishment of Christ's power and kingdom here below; but it is only the broad truth for which I now quote it. Still, it is at bottom substantially the same thing. The disciples were to look for Jesus from heaven. It is not great doings here below: but the Christian, associated with Christ in the testimony of His grace now, is to look for Him coming from heaven This, you see, connects itself with the virgins going out to meet the Bridegroom. The New Testament, as a whole, enlarges and illustrates this most precious thought. It is not so much the blessing of men upon the earth, nor the reduction of the power of Satan here below in binding him and putting him aside from the earth, as the taking away of the believer out of the world to be with Christ in the Father's house. Only in the epistles of Paul this becomes still more evident. Now this is what we have to seize. Faith goes out to meet the Bridegroom, before He really comes and accomplishes the desire of the heart. Such is the character of the call of these virgins. It is not abiding where they are, to be blessed on the earth; but going forth to meet the Bridegroom. It is, in principle, going forth unto Christ without the camp, as in Heb. 13, to be blessed with Him in the heavens, as it is to share the reproach of the cross in this world. So we find every provision for sustaining in them this hope. They had not only the lamp of testimony, but the oil of the Holy Ghost, to keep up the light burning brightly in a way which, I believe, is characteristic of the Christian.

Spite of all, however, they go asleep. The Bridegroom tarries; the Christian, true as well as false, forgets his hope; but the mighty grace of God makes the solemn cry heard at midnight, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!" We are not told who is the instrument. Enough for us to know that the cry was to be, and that the effect would be believers abandoning whatever had detained them before, and going forth once more to meet the Bridegroom. It is the resumption of the original attitude of the Christian in this respect. The true hope of the Church stirs the long sleeping disciples. The Christian hope is revived in the saints. The Spirit of God shows that His power would not permit such a hope to expire finally in the Church. At an undated time is the cry heard once more.

The cry at midnight I believe to be of the most solemn importance. Just before the Lord Jesus Christ was to return, there is the cry heard, and not till then. The virgins, even the foolish as well as the wise, aroused by the cry, trim their lamps; but only they that have the oil in their vessels are in a condition to be received. The others are occupied by their wants, seeking here and there to find that oil which they have not. The Lord comes at the critical moment, and the wise virgins alone go in to the marriage.

Mark another thing. They *went forth* again to meet the Bridegroom. The Christians at this time, and at this time only, since their early turning aside to slumber, return to their original position of going out to meet the Bridegroom. They leave all for Christ once more. Have you done it? Can you say that you have gone out to meet the Bridegroom? Are you detained by old habits? Are you kept back by the traditions of men? Have you got so accustomed as to like the state of decadence into which Christendom has fallen? Do you prefer to sleep at leisure? Or are you roused at the cry that grace has sent forth again? Have you gone forth to meet the Bridegroom? If so, happy are you! If with the oil in your vessels, the consciousness of your relationship, the enjoyment by the Holy Ghost's power of that which you are called to, you can stay and sleep where you are, be it so: for my part, it seems wiser and truer, not to say due to Christ and His love, to go forth with alacrity of heart, and

await His coming in peace.

The next parable does not call for many words just now. Without repeating the common truth, it may be remarked, that here we have a vivid account of that which pertains to Christianity on the active side. When Christ ascended up on high, He gave gifts unto men. Never was, and, I believe, never will be seen, the same fulness of blessing of this kind as is known in Christianity. There will be a brief, wide, energetic testimony everywhere at "the time of the end," no doubt; but still, this trading with the various talents which the Lord gives — to one this, and to another that — is characteristic evidently of the Christian ministry. Accordingly you have the servants found in the active use of these different gifts of the Lord's grace, who calls them to render Him an account, at last, how they were used. Still, throughout, whether it were household servants, whether virgins, whether men trading with talents, there is this one stamp imprinted on these as on all other parables that bear upon Christendom. There is no revelation of such a delay as necessarily implies a succession of servants from age to age, no disclosure of the almost double millennium of Christendom which has transpired in point of fact. Just so far is a delay spoken of as might give occasion to the progress of permitted evil in Christendom. And is it not remarkable, that the apostolic hour does not close till the last survivor of that holy company could affirm that the worst character of evil was there already, whereby it was known to be the last time? (1 John 2) Take any other prediction you please, as, for instance, 2 Tim. 3: "In the last days perilous times shall come." What does the Spirit of God expressly add? That these times were a long way off? On the very contrary, He enjoins, "From such turn away." Something of it, at least, was there then. There is no delay. Then, again, take worse than that — the mystery of iniquity. It "already worketh." Where was the delay? Take even antichrists, the worst form of evil that can possibly be save one, the last of themselves: "Many antichrists are already come." Thereby the apostle knew it was the "last time." What evils more were to be dreaded? What was there to be waited for? Christ! No events, therefore, are so interposed by revelation as to be a barrier to the return of the Lord in the hearts of the saints. He might delay, in fact; and no doubt these evils, which already wrought, would consequently expand, and become much more definite and appalling. The lapse of time, if God so pleased it, would make their character more and more plain. Most true was His description of these deep and various evils; but the evils were there and then detected, pronounced upon, and judged from the very first age of Christendom. Therefore the expectation of such evils could not rightly act as an obstacle. They were already treated as in existence; they are so described by the Spirit of God. Nothing then can justly detain the heart; for what, according to the word, ought to hinder one from always expecting Christ?

But then it is asked, are not particular cases adverse? Do we not find the Lord telling Peter by what death he must glorify God? Do we not hear Paul telling us that the time of his departure was just at hand? In truth, such objections refute themselves. It proves the very contrary of that for which they are summoned. Would it not sound a very extraordinary thing among men for any man to be seriously told that he must die some time or another? Ordinarily, people have made up their minds for it as a certainty; they are satisfied that all must die. How comes it to pass in Scripture, that a man who was carrying his life in his hand, like the apostle Paul, needed to have an intimation that his death was nigh at hand? How comes it that so bold a servant of God as Peter, in the midst of hostile Jews, whom he denounced as murderers of their own Messiah, had to be told of the death whereby he was to glorify God? Because at that time the children of God expected not death, but Christ to come in glory. Because their Lord's return from heaven was strongly and universally watched for by every saint of God. So truly was it the sanctioned settled hope of all, that the exception had to be a matter of positive special intimation from God. Again mark the manner in which these intimations are given. There is little reason to suppose that Peter comprehended the meaning of that to him when heard; as the

disciples, we know, misunderstood in general the Lord's word to John. It was put in a most enigmatical form, just as John's tarrying was cast in such a figurative mould that the disciples themselves discussed with perplexity what was meant. They conceived that John was not to die. "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Thence they drew the inference that John was not to taste death. They were wrong there: did they know the other so much better?

Observe this also, that the Spirit of God in the word never notices Peter's death, so that the Church could know anything about it, till he was just on the point of departure: then Peter says the Lord had told him that he must "put off this tabernacle." Was this to make a sign of it, or to help on the systematic deferring of the hope? Besides, Peter might have died any day; Though he was not a young man when the first epistle appeared, yet the Spirit of God kept him from writing about it then. — Nowhere else does he refer to it till he was just going to depart. The Church's hope could not therefore be affected by it, for the mention was made only as he was leaving the earth; and the gospel of John did not appear for long after. Just so was it with the apostle Paul. He names something similar, but when? He was not even aware that he was going to die when he wrote his epistle to the Philippians; or rather, he was sure he was to live a little longer, though stating it in one of the last of his writings. It was only at the end of all, when he was on the point of being offered up, that he declared his departure was at hand. What sort of proof is this that there are intervening events revealed in God's word which ought to hinder a Christian from continually watching for Christ? It is really strong presumption in a direction exactly the reverse.

So everything that is hastily caught at to prove that our Lord delays His coming, when duly examined and understood, will be found to fall in with His own condemnation of that sentiment, and the general strain of the Spirit's testimony to the clean contrary. Have we not all experienced man's unbelief to be so blind that the very reason produced for rejecting the truth is, when viewed in the light of God, the weightiest ground for receiving it? Take, for instance, rationalistic attacks upon Scripture, and especially their efforts to lower the Gospels. What is the fact? The discrepancies in the Gospels demonstrate, not only the veracity of the writers, but the beauty and perfection of the truth. Even a simple Christian man, it is to be hoped, speaks conscientiously the truth. Such assailants never knew or practically forgot that God wrote the Gospels. They are under the illusion that it was, but Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John who did the work; whereas, employing whom He pleased, it was *God* who wrote them. This truth the Christian accepts without controversy, and would never dream of questioning, unless beguiled from his simplicity by the spurious theories of men who know not the Scriptures nor the power of God, however conversant they may be with the externals and accessories of the Bible. The alleged discrepancies are not in the smallest degree due to human infirmity; they lie not so much on the surface as in the depths of divine purpose, as the fulness of Jesus is variously viewed and depicted. No one evangelist could suffice. Hence to each it was given by the Spirit of God to bring out the glory of Christ, as it pleased Him, though suitably, no doubt, to the vessel employed. Thus the points of difference in the scope, manner, and expressions necessarily spring from this rich and varied exposition of the truth as it is in Jesus. The simple Christian receives it all, and enjoys it; but the more the truth is sifted and appreciated, the more triumphantly it is vindicated. This, of course, supposes not only faith, but a certain spiritual intelligence which you must never look for in the self-complacent rejecter of revelation. The intelligence of faith turns the objections into deepening proofs of the divine value of God's word.

No otherwise is it with the objections that are often brought against the constant hope of the Lord's coming to meet the saints. They, when dispassionately and intelligently looked into, turn out to be proofs that God so wrote the New Testament, by the evangelists, as they are called, and by the

apostles, as to keep the soul in its first bright impression expecting Christ from day to day. There is no such idea as fixing a special time, whether you put it at one epoch or another. The whole system of measured dates or equivalent signs. to decide about the coming of the Lord is false. Some have pointed to A.D. 1867. Then, when we approach the year, they begin to shift the time somewhat farther off, and say that it is but "the beginning of the end." What is this but saving their own credit at the expense of Scripture? To sober, not to say reverent, men, it looks like unworthy dealing with the word of God; and the source of the error, I am not afraid to tell them, is ignorance of the word of God, and especially of the Church's calling and hopes.

The word of God is pure, being the reflection of His truth and holiness. There is no such thing as seeking to make an impression upon the spirit of the believer for the sake of effect. God Himself has purposely put the Christian and the Church to wait for Christ without knowing the time, inasmuch as He reserves all such matters in His own authority, as indeed is most due and wise withal In His grace there is a reason given, which is that "the long-suffering of the Lord is salvation." Such is the true key to the delay. God is not closing up the number of the elect before the time. He will not shut into narrow limits the rich grace which has gone out so far and so actively, and already called in not a few. God is magnifying His Son. He is slow, therefore, so to speak, to foreclose the period. He is widening it rather, as it were: He enlarges less for greater bounds. He has allowed a time to pass, no doubt, which would have surprised the early Christians; but when you examine the word of God, there is not a trace of a thought which fixes or limits the time. They were always expecting Him, but at the same time without knowing when He might come. And what is the cause of this? Why is there the absence of a date? The Lord was continually presented as coming quickly, at hand, &c., and it was His will that the Christian should be always looking for Him.

Let us turn to the portion of the word of God read to you to- night. This Scripture has been made to teach a palpable error, through an unfortunate misconception on the part of our admirable translators. Nor were they singular; for the same thing pervaded almost every version in this particular until a recent date. It is no wonder that, thus prevalent, this mistake has been so largely the means of misguiding or perplexing the believer. Some here might be astonished to hear that there are those who consider that 2 Thessalonians was written to correct an error into which the saints addressed had fallen through misinterpreting its predecessor. The first epistle is supposed to have produced the hasty and erroneous expectation that our Lord was at hand. The second epistle is supposed by these to have been written and sent to correct this, to reprove them for their feverish state, and to declare that the Lord was not at hand, as the enthusiasts imagined. This explanation I denounce as contrary to the word of God. One proof that it is false and unsound lies in this, that it sets Scripture against Scripture. The truth always harmonizes. The moment fresh light is seen, it removes that darkness which made one part of the word of God inconsistent with another; and there is no more common or surer evidence, that the soul has been led, by influx of light from above, into acquaintance with the mind of God, as revealed on any given matter, than this power which puts facts previously disjointed in texts of Scripture into order and clearness as a living whole.

What the apostle is really correcting by the second epistle is an error wholly different from that which is attributed to these saints, or those who had led them astray. He had comforted them about the dead saints in the first; he now seeks to dispel their alarm about the day of the Lord on themselves, the living saints. You must remember that the Thessalonians already knew that the Lord was coming, as they also knew that the day of the Lord would be a day of trouble and darkness; so that "when men would say, Peace and safety, sudden destruction would fall upon them." But how these things were to be put together, they did not know: such indeed is the condition in which a great many Christians are

at this moment. They did not understand the relative order of the Lord's coming and of His day. The consequence was, that, in the case of the Thessalonians, false teachers took advantage of their ignorance to trouble them. It is important to observe, that alarming the saints of God, filling them with anxiety touching God and their own relation to Him, and holding out a disturbing, painful impression of that which He is going to do with respect to them, is one of the plainest tokens of the devil's work. To arouse unconverted souls, ay, and to alarm them too, may be all quite right; but when a soul has found Christ, and is supposed to be resting upon "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," to overwhelm it with terror or even doubt as to its association with Christ through prophetic events, is the antagonistic work of the enemy. I am not now speaking of the case of a person falling, alas! into sin. It is quite right to rouse the conscience in such circumstances, and to bring the person to confess his sin; but I allude now to producing alarm in the saints of God, and this through some misused picture of the day of the Lord. It is to falsify in the most intimate relations to Christ; it is to turn the fulness of grace into a source of terror which is most ruinous. This was precisely what these false teachers essayed to do: thus too others have wrought since. They presented the "day" of the Lord before these believers as a present thing, substituting its horrors for the coming of the Lord with its eternal joy and blessedness.

It is carefully to be observed that "the *day* of the Lord" and "the *coming* of the Lord" are never confounded in the word of God. What is the difference? The "coming" of the Lord is the general term. It means His presence, in contrast with His absence. That is the literal force of the word, which is, I dare say, fairly enough translated "coming," because He must *have* come in order to be present; but it is His state of presence which is the true and genuine force of the word. Now, it is evident that our Lord might change His absence for His presence without manifesting Himself.

Hence, you have this difference — that Scripture speaks not only of the general truth of the presence of Christ by and by, as that which is to be, instead of His being absent as He is now; but it defines a particular part of that presence, which is variously styled, His "day," His "revelation," His "appearing," or "the manifestation (epiphany or shining forth) of His presence." I am now referring to many Scriptures which any one who is familiar with the word of God will easily enough bear in mind and apply. The great distinctive point is, that, while the "presence" or the "coming" of the Lord is necessary to all these things, still all these other terms imply notions over and above the thought of His presence. His "presence" is the larger term and leaves room for His coming before the "day," *i.e.* before He appears, reveals, or manifests Himself.

Is this to draw upon imagination? It is to assert very needed and important truth from Scripture. Take this example in Colossians 3, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear" (or be manifested), "then shall ye also appear with him in glory." Now, there we have, as distinctly as God could put it, the fact of the joint manifestation of Christ and us in glory. It is not that, when our Lord appears, then shall we be caught up to be with Him; for this is false. There is no such idea anywhere taught in the word of God. Where is the least hint that the world and the Church shall behold Christ at the same time? that the first moment of seeing Christ will be the same for an unbeliever as for the believer? The very reverse is true. For the Scripture before us declares that, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." This means, not that we abide upon the earth till He appears to all, and that we are only caught up when He thus appears, but that when *He* makes Himself visible from the heavens to the earth, then we, too, shall be seen along with Him in glory. We must, therefore, have been caught up to Him before. This exactly falls in with 1 Thess. 4, as has been shown. There, it is said, "Those that sleep by Jesus will God bring with him." The Lord will descend from heaven "with a shout" — such a shout as suits Christ, if He only intended His voice to be for His own. This seems the reason why the apostle singled out a special word. "Shout" (κέλευσμα) is a term

implying the relationship that exists between the Lord and His own followers, like that of soldiers summoned by their general, or seamen by their commander. If nothing more were meant than the loud expression of His voice for all the world as much as for His own people, we might naturally infer this peculiar word would not be used. Whereas the word conveys the thought of a shout from one who commands to those who are commanded; and, therefore, it is mere and ignorant unbelief to press the fact that the Lord so shouts, and then to conclude that all the world must hear Him at that epoch. It is contrary to every analogy, that the world will be witnesses of the Lord's coming to take away the believers. It is easy to conceive that the Lord could conceal it if He pleased. Of course the world may be alarmed and astonished for a while by the fact of the disappearance of so many. That there will be a great effect produced in the world by it, I am not in the least disposed to deny; but I believe that the simple and natural interpretation of the terms employed in this Scripture supposes a special connection between the Lord and those for whom He comes, and that the choice of the expressions limits His action in sight and sound too, as well as in effects of deeper moment, to those whom it all concerns. No more at present would I deduce or assert.

But the false teachers, who found the Thessalonians so bright and happy in their hope (particularly now as their anxiety about the dead had been dispelled by the first epistle), began to alarm them by their doctrine about the day of the Lord. "Oh," they may have said, "see these troubles come upon the Church now; see the havoc that has been made; see all those disasters which are rife in the world." It would seem, from the first epistle, there was a great deal of persecution at that time; and the opening of the second epistle confirms this. We find that there is much allusion to those who harass believers. We learn from the Old Testament that the day of the Lord is characterized by darkness, trouble, and anxiety — a day of clouds and darkness. These false teachers consequently said, "The day of the Lord is *come*" (not coming). This is the error that the apostle is combating. Is it a rendering confined to a few individuals? I remember the time when it might be doubted very much if there were six men in England that accepted it. I doubt very much whether there are six men in England, who, having weighed the subject with due care, would care to dispute this now. They would not agree with all that I have drawn from the passage; but it is remarkable how God has vindicated the truth of this very Scripture, even now, by those who have no particular theory whatever about it. Nevertheless, they contend for this view of ἐνέστηκε,* in 2 Thess. 2: 2, as a matter of plain and fair interpretation of the words of the Holy Ghost. I question if any able man, competent to pronounce upon such a matter, unless previously and much biassed, would any longer argue that the English version is correct in its representation of the last word of the second verse. Every intelligent person, who is not under strong prejudice, will readily own the passage means that the day of the Lord is (not "at hand," but) *actually arrived*. This was the error which the apostle sets himself against. The false teachers said, "The day of the Lord is there." The apostle proves, on the contrary, that it cannot be present before certain facts which did not yet appear.

* It is true that Liddell and Scott, misled (I doubt not) by others, up to 1865, have given in their Greek Lexicon "*impending*, Lat. *imminens*," on the authority of Aristoph. Nub. 779, Isaeus, 88 40 and Demosth. 896 29, though admitting "present," as another unquestionable meaning. Having satisfied myself that these excellent lexicographers were mistaken, as not one of these three passages has any other sense than the regular one of "*present*," I wrote to Dr. Scott, who, after taking time to weigh them, as the point was of evident importance, had the candour to answer in the following terms: "On consideration of them, I am disposed to admit that there is none which seems necessarily to refer to a state of things not yet commenced." In their 6th edition (1869) they give, for what I have quoted, "*pending, present, begun*." Any one who can afford the leisure to search may see ample examples of the word in such authors as Polybius, Dio Cassius, etc., whose Greek is of great value for illustrating

the New Testament. I have myself searched in vain for a single occurrence that bears the sense of "imminence." Messrs. Webster and Wilkinson are therefore quite in error in speaking of "the more ordinary classical meaning 'imminere,' to be close at hand." This is the meaning of ἐφειστώς (as in 2 Timothy 4), not of ἐνεστώς, which Schweighaeuser (a very different scholar from the slipshod Schleusner) pronounces (in Lex. Polyb., and, of course, in its ordinary classical usage) to mean "*non instans vel imminens, sed qui coeptus est, i.e. praesens.*" He mentions no exception; nor have I observed one. Mr. E. Elliott labours to dilute the force of ἐνέστηκε by the use of πάρεστιν in John 11: 8. he does not of course perceive that his own illustration (even if it were granted that the two words are precisely parallel in the latitude allowed them) is destructive of his defence of the authorised version. For the Lord, in John 11, *had left* the place where He was previously, had come into Judea, and had reached the outskirts of the village, though not yet in Bethany. So I do not doubt the false teachers had sought to terrify the Thessalonian saints with the notion that the day of the Lord had begun its terrors, and had occasioned this or that judgment, though it had not reached its height at Thessalonica. That is, they taught that it was come, (not "at hand") though not yet displayed in its full strength of judicial visitation.

First let me state the circumstances of the case. The same word, translated "at hand" in our version here, occurs in some six or seven other places. It appears in Romans 8: 38, but there it is "things *present*;" In 1 Corinthians 3: 22, it is just the same, "things *present*." In 1 Corinthians 7: 26, it stands, "*present* distress." So again in Hebrews 9: 9, it is translated, "for the *present* time." Again, in 2 Timothy 3: 1, it has a different form - "perilous times shall *come*," but it is not "shall be at hand," which would give a totally unwarranted sense, or rather no sense at all. I have no hesitation in saying, therefore, that there can be no legitimate doubt that the true meaning of the word everywhere is "present," and that here it means "the day of the Lord is present." What confirms this is, that the apostle elsewhere insists that "the day is at hand." (Romans 13) What day? The day of the Lord, of course. Did he then teach afterwards what he denounced in the misleaders of the Thessalonians? This is what the false version does; it puts the apostle in opposition to himself, and it makes him take up the error of those Judaizing teachers. In truth, he does nothing of the kind. He denies in 2 Thess. 2 that the day of the Lord was come. He declares in Romans 13 that it is at hand. That day meant the day of fearful judgment, even the execution of God's wrath upon earth; and this he denies to have arrived, contrary to those who troubled the Thessalonians.

The error he proceeds to meet by two considerations. First of all, he presses a motive for the heart; and, secondly, he reasons from the positive facts of the case. The motive was this: "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." They pretended in various ways that they had a revelation for it. They even alleged Paul himself as the author of their error. He utterly denies it. It is no question at all of the former epistle. He does not say, "by the letter from us," but "by letter *as* from us." It was a pretended letter from the apostle, teaching their false thought; not the real epistle, which teaches nothing but the truth. The suppositious letter contained the error that the day of judgment was actually there (not at hand merely). It was a forged letter, and a false doctrine. "Don't you know," he intimates, "that the Lord is coming and is to gather you all to Himself?" Such is the motive by which he appeals to the heart: it is the means by which he rouses their spiritual feelings against the cheat. When the Lord does come, the first thing He will do is to gather those He loves to Himself.

* The apostle had not been presenting the truth of the Lord's coming in the preceding chap. 1, but the real moral character of His *day*, as the display of retributive rest and trouble to the saints and

their enemies respectively. Hence it cannot be said with truth that he is entreating the brethren touching either what he had just taught or what he was going to teach. With *verbs of beseeching* ὑπέρ is not equivalent to περί, but means "by," "by reason of," "on account of;" whereas περί, in such a connection, as is plain from its frequent use in the New Testament, is simply "concerning," or "in regard to." Where there is a motive prominent with ὑπέρ, we can say, "on behalf" or "for the sake of;" but with supplicatory verbs like ἐρωτάω, "by" is the natural meaning. Compare Matthiae (Gr. Gr. II. § 582) and Jelf (Gr. Gr. II. § 630.)

But there is another ground of argument that he takes. He reasons upon the matter of fact, and demonstrates that the day of the Lord cannot come except there be the apostasy first, "and the man of sin be revealed" — the lawless one who shall exalt himself in opposition to God. When this display of lawlessness on the earth is full (the man of sin, as being evidently the expression of human evil: the one who sits in the temple of God, as the height of Jewish pride and antagonism against God; and, beside all this, he that sets himself up against all that is called God, or object of veneration, which comprehends God's government in the world), then the day of the Lord* may, not to say must, come. Everything of God connected with the Gentiles is thus gainsaid; all the testimony to God in Israel is set at nought and defied; the final issue of the apostasy in Christendom is there. The man of sin confronts as it were the Man of righteousness, who thereon bursts in upon the guilty scene, consuming with the breath of His mouth, and destroying by the appearing of His coming. For all is out that demands divine judgment — human evil, Jewish evil, Gentile evil, and the evil of Christendom, the culmination and concentration of the whole being this personage whose coming is after the working of Satan in every kind of power, and signs, and wonders of falsehood. I verily believe in the full force of the word. Whatever may be the form of evil by the way, there will be this person at length manifested as the antagonist of the Lord Jesus, the Sun of righteousness, the Lord over all peoples, and nations, and tongues, the Head of the Church, and, more than all, the true God and eternal life. Then will come to pass Satan's long-planned effort and display on earth against the God of heaven, who will come in avenging glory in the person of Jesus, as once He appeared in the grace that brings salvation. Can the issue be doubtful? The lawless one (for such is the meaning of his title and character) is in a moment hurled to destruction, being cast alive into the lake of fire.

* The unquestionably right reading is "the day [not of Christ, but] *of the Lord*," τοῦ κυρίου, as the oldest MSS., versions, and other witnesses show. This, as being the well-known Old Testament theme (referred to in 1 Thess. 5), makes the distinction from the παρουσία still more apparent. It sometimes in prophecy has an inchoate sense, as in Isaiah 13 and elsewhere; and this may have been taken advantage of by the false teachers. In the New Testament it has always and only the complete meaning.

Thus the apostle, by a twofold process, positive and negative, puts an end to the delusion whereby false teachers harassed the Thessalonian saints. Christ must first come and gather His own to be with Himself safe and sound. Then again the development of man's and Satan's evil combined must be full before the world can be judged. In the dealings of God it is ever so. He would not allow even Sodom and Gomorrah to be destroyed till their iniquity was proved to be intolerable beyond possibility of doubt. He would not command the Amorites to be smitten before their cup was full. So it will be in the end of this age. When patience is exhausted and the worst corruptions of the best blessings are manifest, then the Lord will arise in His power and put down all His foes for ever.

Thus, the passage closely bears upon our present subject, and, when rightly rendered and applied, strengthens, instead of weakening, the Christian's constant expectation of Christ. And one error leads to another; for those who have translated wrongly have also fallen into the mistake of

confounding the coming of the Lord with His day. Now the coming (παρουσία), no doubt, embraces the day of the Lord as one of its parts, yet is only a part of it. Accordingly the coming of the Lord directly involves the dealings of grace with the saints, such as their gathering to Christ or translation to heaven; the day of the Lord never does. Grace is in no way the aim or character of the day of the Lord. It will be their manifestation in glory, if you will. It will be the righteous adjudication of that which is now a scene of weakness, perplexity, sorrow, sin. It will be not only the putting down of the world's pride, but the Lord will also then assign to His servants, to each man according to his own labour, or, according to the style of the parable, He will give to one five cities, and to another ten. Thus, I do not in the least deny that we are to have the reward of the inheritance in that day, even as the world will then be judged of the Lord. But with equal assurance, I must affirm that Scripture never represents the coming of the Lord for us as an object only to be expected after certain events have transpired.

Thus, we have the two series of facts in Scripture: the coming of the Lord, which is always set forth without dates; and the day of the Lord, which requires some momentous events to be accomplished first, and therefore implies dates more or less. How are we to judge? There is nothing simpler. Admit both; allow each its own proper sphere without confounding them; and all becomes easy and plain. The coming of the Lord, in its bearing upon the Christian, is our hope — the hope of the personal presence of Jesus to take His saints out of this world, and translate them to the Father's house. Never, in any passage of the word of God, is a single incident put before it as necessary to be accomplished before the Church can legitimately look for Him. The alleged cases of Paul and Peter are just the exceptions which prove the rule; the Christian and the Church even then looked, not for death, but for the coming of the Lord. They were right. The one unvaried object of the Saviour first, and of the Holy Ghost afterwards working by the apostle, is to keep the hope of His coming as the immediate prospect before the saints. I use the word "immediate;" for the practical aim was that, when the Lord knocked, the saints should open to Him immediately. It is merely a question of His presence, and their instant reception of Him according to the figure employed.

Lastly, when we come to the final book of the New Testament, surely here, if anywhere, we might expect the detailed mention of preparatory events to usher in the coming of Christ, if such circumstances were revealed as necessary to precede it. It is *the* great book that predicts the closing scenes of man's day, and the judgment of the Lord. If these last revelations were meant to hinder the looking for Christ as a present continual hope; if I ought to wait till all the seals were opened, all the trumpets blown, and all the vials poured out, and then, not before, really to expect Christ, here was the occasion to correct any unseasonable enthusiasm. I might get into all sorts of confusion as to where I am in the book, or what seal, trumpet, or vial I am under. Who may not lose himself in such a laborious investigation? Where do you find two men of independent judgment agreed on these points? Any two of the firmest and fastest disciples of the historical school would be found to differ considerably, each from his neighbour. Scripture is plain that the disciples were set to wait for the Lord, and that the Holy Ghost confirms it: can they believe that the book of Revelation was meant to come in and swamp their whole hope? Are we to say to you that have been looking for the Lord, all this is to happen as a prelude, and you must gaze on the changes in the world till all the predicted preliminaries have been accomplished, and then you may begin to look for Christ shortly? Is not this what the confusion of unbelief does?

But are we, on the other hand, to thrust aside the book of Revelation? Assuredly not. But still we assert again, that the hope of the Christian is distinct from any dependence on the accomplishment of intervening events. It is a question of the [father sending the Son in His grace to receive us, and therefore kept in the word of God entirely apart from the evolution of earthly affairs. Will any contend

that there is the smallest contradiction in God's revelations? There is none whatever. We find in the beginning of the Apocalypse the seven churches mentioned, and thenceforward no more about them till we come to the closing chapter, when a message is sent again to the churches. After the "things that are" (or the time-states of the Church) are done with, heaven is opened, and soon the prophet sees there a new class described very completely. They are seated upon thrones; they are clothed in white; they have crowns on their heads. They enter into God's character with the utmost intimacy of knowledge, and answer to the glory of God in every point. Who then can these be? Who are these four and twenty elders? They were never heard of before in heaven, as far as we can gather from Scripture. We have many visions of heaven in the Old Testament, and more or less distinct. We have also striking glimpses into heaven in the New Testament. But here, for the first time in the word of God, we hear of a number of persons who clearly are redeemed men in heaven. For, allow me to say, these were not spirits. The description differs from that of separate spirits, which are nowhere said, as such, to sit on thrones, and are never represented acting above, as these are said to do.

Is it asked respecting these redeemed persons that are crowned, enthroned, and exercising a kind of royal priesthood in the presence of God, Who are they? The message to the seven Churches told us, that those who overcame would be blessed of the Lord with Himself above. We need not now enter into the particulars of the promises. Have we not here that which, as far as it goes, makes good what the Lord puts before us? No doubt much remains to be fulfilled; but still, how much will then have been done for the dwellers in heaven! But, moreover, we have these elders represented as four and twenty. What is the meaning of the symbol? Clearly, it seems to me, that they are the heads of the royal priesthood. When David and Solomon arranged the priestly race of Aaron, they were arranged in twenty-four courses. Accordingly there need not be a doubt that the twenty-four elders are a symbol that alludes to these classes of priesthood. Why in twenty-four classes? Why not in one, or in twenty? The four and twenty appear, I apprehend, because the saints glorified above are viewed as heads of the priesthood. The central part of the book of Revelation shows that there will be saints on earth during the great crisis. Yet after this, as before, the four and twenty elders are seen in heaven, neither more nor less. Clearly, therefore, you have to account for these two facts — the absence of the Church upon the earth after Rev. 3, and the presence of the elders in heaven from Rev. 4. Is it possible to avoid the conclusion, that the true members of the Church of God are in the interval between these two chapters removed out of the world, and taken to heaven, and seen there under the symbolic twenty-four elders? And they are *complete*, which can only be after the Lord has gathered the saints to Himself above. Before that, some of the heavenly saints being above and some below, there would be no propriety in the use of a symbol which requires *all* to be included.

It was not fitting or required to give the description of our Lord's coming to remove them to himself in the Apocalypse. Let it be remarked, that, no matter what the scheme of prophecy be, nor what view is entertained of the Revelation, there is no vision given in the Revelation of the Lord's coming to take the saints above. If you make the Lord delay the removal of the saints till Rev. 19, no account is there found of His coming to receive the saints for heaven, any more than there is in chapters 3, 4. Observe, too, that if you suppose the rapture delayed till chapter 19, you do not account for the vision of the four and twenty elders all through. If you say that it is that part of the Church which is gone to heaven now, I am obliged to reject the idea, and for this reason, that a part does not meet the symbol of the twenty-four elders. They are the heads of the complete courses. But you can never have the heavenly priesthood completed in its heads till those sleeping are raised, those alive are caught up, and all translated to the Lord at His coming. It is only thus and then that there is the required completeness; and therefore it follows that, if the twenty-four elders be the heads of the heavenly priesthood, and if the Church now on earth and then caught up, answer to them, the Lord

must have come between those two before-named points to receive the saints to Himself. I apprehend that the reason why the Lord's coming to translate His own to Himself is nowhere described in this book is grounded upon the principle, that the Revelation is occupied with judgments rather than with a display of grace. The fact is there made most evident, that the heavenly ones are somehow gone on high; but the Lord's presence and their gathering together to Him above would not fall in with the general character of that book. While they are in heaven, the providential judgments under the seals, trumpets, and vials run out their appointed course here below; but the elders are in their places during the shifting scenes, and never leave heaven; neither do we ever trace the least addition to their number. The emblem was complete from their first appearance in Rev. 4. Does not this entirely fall in with the truth that I have endeavoured to present this night? The Lord keeps His coming to receive His saints as a distinct hope of the heart, apart from earthly events. When they are, at His coming, translated to heaven, then the earthly tide of events begins to flow.

Hence, a further stage of Christ's coming is called "the appearing," "the revelation of Christ," and the other terms which imply manifestation — among the rest, "the day of the Lord." Where do you find the counterpart of this in the Apocalypse? It is given in Rev. 19, where we see the heavens open, and the Lord coming in judgment. The Lord is described as the Word of God emblematically riding on the white horse; it is the image of aggressive action, of a prosperous conquest over His foes. Such is very simply the meaning. I am not advocating a mere literal way of interpreting the Revelation, which is a capital blunder; for it is allowed to be a symbolical book. Here then we have the Lord represented as coming from heaven. But does He come alone? The heavens that let out the Lord are also seen to let out the saints, the hosts that are in heaven, who follow Him upon horses, robed in fine linen white and clean. "Who are they, and whence came they?" They are saints, and they come out of heaven. Of what is their garb, white linen, the symbol? The righteousness of saints. They are not angels then. This is entirely corroborated by a previous intimation in Rev. 17: 14, which announces the Lord's coming from heaven for the judgment of the world, where the beast and the kings were seen joined together against Him. It was said that they should "make war with the Lamb, but the Lamb should overcome them." But who were the parties? "The faithful, and called, and chosen." This is not a description possible, as a whole, to be applied to angels, but only to saints; for we never hear of angels described as "faithful;" still less could they be described as "called." The call of God could not be predicated of an angel, though of course he might well be said to be "chosen." There are elect angels, but they are never said to be called. For calling implies grace entering the world and separating unto God, bringing out of the condition in which people were. This could not be applied to an angel, for an angel abides in his antecedent state, save the fallen ones; but a poor sinner is justly said to be called, who is made by grace a saint of God through faith in Christ. Therefore I have no hesitation in affirming from these inspired statements that we have come to the second act, so to speak, in which the Lord manifests His presence. He appears from heaven, and the saints, already risen and changed, already taken up to be with Him above, come along: with Him from heaven. It is between His coming for the saints and His coming with them from heaven, that the earthly events transpire, with various signs and tokens — never of His coming to receive the saints, but of His coming to judge the world. In short there are no defined periods or visible harbingers to intimate that He is coming to receive us, but there are manifold and manifest signs before He comes with the saints in the execution of His judgment upon the world.

Some perhaps may inquire how this change comes to pass; and what is the moral meaning of these signs being withheld now and shown afterwards. The answer is simple, and, I believe, certain, from the word of God. It is in that precise interval that God will begin to work for and in His earthly people. It is during that very season that the Jews will be touched by God's Spirit, and their hearts

turned towards their long-despised Saviour. Objects of mercy as the remnant may be, the nation will have to pass retributively through an hour of fearful trial, danger, and desolation; but they will be wrought upon, and so prepared, that, even before the Saviour does appear, their hearts will welcome Him in the name of Jehovah. They will be the nucleus of His earthly people round their Messiah. They will not of course come from heaven, as do the risen and glorified saints with Him; but He comes to take the earth as well as heaven (Rev. xx.), though He does not mingle these risen saints, or others who will then be raised, with those who yet abide in their natural bodies upon the earth for the millennial reign. Blessed association there will be, but no confusion of earthly and heavenly.

But I do not enlarge on the subject tonight, partly because the hour admonishes me that I have already spoken at length, and partly because details will come more properly before us tomorrow evening, if God will, when we shall see what light is afforded as to the great tribulation that is coming upon the earth, and who they are that must pass through it — whether they are Christians, or whether persons to be called after all Christians are taken away from the earth. I will therefore add no more now, but pray the Lord to bless what has been before us, and use it in clearing away doubts, and difficulties, and clouds, which may have shrouded God's light from any hearts willing to bow to His word.