

WAITING FOR THE CONSOLATION OF ISRAEL

We are like Simeon this morning. We are “*waiting for the consolation of Israel*” (Luke 2:25). All waiting is more or less of a weariness. People do not wait unless they know what they are waiting for, and are sure that it is coming. The certainty and value of what they are waiting for keep them in the waiting attitude. God has said,

“They shall not be ashamed that wait for Me.”

In waiting for the consolation of Israel, we are waiting for God: because the only ground we have for expecting the consolation of Israel is the fact that God has promised it. Our neighbours think we are waiting for a poor thing in waiting for the consolation of Israel. This is because they have a poor idea of what the consolation of Israel means. They think of it in the nakedness of what they understand by the “restoration of the Jews,” which is a very cold affair as they think and talk of it. To them the restoration of the Jews is merely a question of the timid, cowering rag-hunting Jew being removed from his dispersed state in the countries to live in his own land. They are tempted to say, “What the better will the world be for that? What the better will any man be for that? What does it matter to us where these Christ-hating Jews live? If that was all, certainly the restoration of the Jews would be of no more interest or consequence to us in any way than the shifting of the Bashi Bazouks from Bulgaria to Armenia, of which the world heard after the last Russo-Turkish war. But that is not all, or a hundredth part of what is meant by the restoration of the Jews. When we know the Truth, we know that the restoration of the Jews, in its completeness, means everything we can desire for men or nations. We see this, when we ask, Who are the Jews? There is only one answer sustainable by truthful history, and that is the answer contained in the words of Moses when he said to the twelve tribes encamped on the border of Moab, 40 years after their departure from Egypt:

“Thou art an holy nation unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deut. 7:6).

God Himself joins in the answer:

“This people have I formed for Myself: they shall show forth My praise” (Isaiah 43:21).

The mode and process of their formation and choice are abundantly illustrated in the details supplied to us, in the call of Abraham, God’s promises to him, the fortunes of his family, their settlement and multiplication in Egypt, their enslavement there, their deliverance by Moses, their reception of a divine constitution and law through him. These details are well known to those who know the Truth. The purpose for which the choice has been made is variously expressed. The mode adopted in the verse quoted from Isaiah—“*They shall shew forth My praise*” in one way, includes all. It is like that other statement, “*the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.*” When this is achieved, “*All families of the earth shall be blessed*”, as promised to Abraham at the very beginning. People look at the Jews and say, “How can we expect any such result from such a people?” In this they judge by appearances, which is always unsafe. The same question might have been asked with more apparent force concerning Israel in their slavery in Egypt. They were not only in subjection, but they were in an utterly benighted state, worshipping the gods of Egypt, as we learn from Ezekiel. Yet we know what has since been accomplished

through them—the righteousness of God exhibited in the Law: the great and precious promises revealed through the prophets: the raising up of a numerous family of righteous servants, to God in their several generations, and “*of whom, as concerning the flesh Christ came.*” “*To them,*” as Paul summarises the matter, “*pertain the adoption and the glory, and the covenants and the giving of the law and the service of God and the promises.*” Had we seen them in Egypt, nothing could have come through a nation so downtrodden and debased. In truth these results would never have come had they been left to themselves. They were not left to themselves. God laid hold of them and by them and through them accomplished the results. So when we see the Jews in our day far scattered, benighted and disobedient, we should make a mistake if we formed our judgment of the future from what was naturally like them. God has made known His purpose with them, and all that is left for us is to ascertain what that purpose is, for His purpose is certain to come to pass. He has declared that His purpose is to gather them:

*“He that scattered Israel will gather him.”
“I will take you from among the heathen and gather you out of all
countries and will bring you into your own land” (Ezek. 36:24).*

He has also declared what His purpose is in so gathering them:

*“I do not this for your sakes, O house of Israel but for My holy
name’s sake which ye have profaned among the heathen whither ye
went—I will be sanctified before their eyes.”*

Hence the purpose of God is irrespective of any condition Israel may be in: and our interest in them arises from the purpose and not from what they are in themselves. Not till they are saved can we look for the promised blessedness. For what is their salvation—their gathering together from all lands, their purification, and reconstruction as a nation, but the setting up of the Kingdom of God; and what can we look for till the kingdom of God come? When we look at the matter in this way, we see that this thing that people talk coldly of as, “the restoration of the Jews” is really the beginning of the salvation of God in the earth. That salvation, as Jesus said, is “*of (or from) the Jews.*” When it arrives, the prophets represent the righteous as saying, “*we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation*” (*Isaiah 25:9*). The connection of this saying shows what good reason they have for their joy.

*“In this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a
feast of fat things.”*

Wherein consists the fatness of the feast, we are presently told. First of all, the spiritual and intellectual obtuseness that afflicts mankind is to be brought to an end.

“He will take away the veil that is spread over all nations.”

What an emancipation is this? Consider the difference between an ignorant, loutish man, and a man brimming over with loving intelligence. Such is the difference between the present state of the earth’s population and that to which they will be brought by the new influences and institutions of the Kingdom of God. At present, darkness—oppressive and dreary—covers the earth: then the glory of the Lord shall shine: the nations shall walk in the light thereof. No longer will man have to say to man, “*Know the Lord;*” “*all shall know Me.*”

*“From the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, My name
shall be great among the Gentiles.”*

How interesting will the human race be everywhere when the mortal veil is removed that now overspreads their understanding. It is a veil of different materials, just as the veil of the tabernacle was of different materials, with this difference, that the various materials of which the veil of the tabernacle was composed were all materials of excellence and glory, whereas the veil of darkness is made up of different forms of barbarism. There is the darkness that is native to the unenlightened human understanding, there is the darkness that comes from the perverted action of the human propensities tending to diabolism, and there is the superadded darkness of tradition and of the strong delusion that God sent upon the Gentile community to whom His Word came by apostolic hands, "*because they received not the love of the Truth.*" The whole forms an impenetrable veil and reduces mankind everywhere to a state of barbarism—more tolerable than the barbarism of cannibalism but still barbarism whose hideousness becomes visible when the light of the new man shines. How glorious when Yahweh pours His Spirit upon all flesh, and they become everywhere gladly responsive to the law that will go forth from Zion. Then only will the dream of poets be realised that "man with man will brother be, the world o'er and a' that." Then consider the next ingredient of the "*feast of fat things*"—not next in the sense of being second, by any means, but only next in the order of mention in the prophecy "*He will swallow up death in victory.*" God says He will do this "*in this mountain*"—in the Holy Land. To what extent will this go? If we had not the apostolic writings, we should be at a loss here. We might imagine that the whole nation of Israel restored and the Gentile nations everywhere were at this time to become immortal—with which supposition we should find it difficult to harmonise the occurrence of death among the priestly relations (Ezek. 44:25), and the population in general (Isaiah 65:20). But the apostolic writings show us the details and the reconciliation. They not only show us "*Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God,*" and therefore that resurrected men are in question, but they expressly inform us that it is "*those that are accounted worthy of that world and of the resurrection of the dead*" that "*shall not die any more, being made equal to the angels*" (Luke 20:36). Who these are Paul reveals:

"We (Paul and his class everywhere of any age) shall be changed—this mortal shall put on immortality."

And he directly points to the prophecy of Isaiah as applicable to the event:

"When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor. 15:54).

By this, the abolition of death is restricted to a particular class at this time, otherwise described as "*the time of the dead that they should be judged and that Thou shouldest give reward to Thy servants the prophets and to the saints and to them that fear Thy name small and great*" (Rev. 11:18). But though restricted to a class, the thing is done at this time and in this place "*in this mountain,*" and is the most glorious element of the feast of fat things. How perfectly glorious! Such a thing never was before, that there should be upon earth, among men, a class of men who are immortal—ever young, incapable of decay, fatigue, pain or death. Especially glorious is this feature when we consider the relation of this class of men to mankind at large. This relation is in the scripture expressed without ambiguity: "*they shall REIGN.*" The sense of the reigning is defined: "*power over the nations, whom they shall rule with a rod of iron;*" "*rulers over many things.*" Hence "*Kings and priests unto God, who shall reign upon the earth.*" "*The saints shall take the Kingdom and possess the Kingdom.*" Consider then that these immortal sons of God shall be the captains of

mankind, who shall govern without error, without partiality, and without fear; whom no rebel can successfully oppose; no stratagem surprise; no accident kill, and no disease lay low. For mankind how unspeakable a good is this: for the rulers themselves, how great a salvation. What greater could there be?

“There shall be no more curse, the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it. And His servants shall serve Him. And they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their forehead. And there shall be no night there, and they need no candle nor light of the sun, for the Lord God giveth them light and they shall reign for ever and ever.”

“The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them and shall lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.”

Returning to Isaiah’s description, it is similar to this of the Apocalypse:

“The Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people will He take away from off the earth.”

How fierce the “rebuke,” how bitter the tears, we all have some knowledge. Look back upon the frowning ages past of this dark and evil day. The accumulated sorrows of the night looked at thus in the bulk are dreadful to contemplate. Even our own puny individual shares are sometimes too much for our weakness. How fat is the feast that will abolish all this with a stroke, so that the people of God will seem to awake as from a horrible dream of the night to find all serene and the morning sun shining in the azure heavens. The tears and the groans of many generations will here find their end, broken hearts their healing, suffering Israel, His long promised “consolation.” “Waiting for the consolation of Israel” is to wait for good things indeed. “These sayings are faithful and true,” said the angel to John when he told him of them. We can say how true if we but look, and we require to be made to feel their truth while they are still a matter of promise; for no man will submit to self-denial on the strength of a promise as to whose truth he has any doubt. Look at the pledge of their truth we have in our reading this morning.

“Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the Lord, for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but will correct thee in measure, yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished—Behold I will save thee from afar off, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return in rest and none shall make him afraid.”

It may be asked, what pledge is there here? It may be said this is a prophecy, and what pledge can a prophecy be of a prophecy? Look again; though this is a prophecy, it is something more. It is prophecy fulfilled, or at least involves it, for see:

“I will not make a full end of thee; I will scatter thee; I will correct thee.”

This was written over 2,400 years ago. This prophecy requires that during all the time Israel would be dispersed and afflicted, but not ended. How has it been? Has it not been just so? Do we not see Israel scattered among the nations at this very day? Are they not in affliction great and sore? Now consider this in the light of two natural

probabilities lying in opposite directions. Was it not probable that in the severity of such experiences as the Jewish nation has been subjected to, the nation would perish and disappear, as other ancient peoples have done? But if they have so much national grit as to be able to withstand a furnace heat of afflictions that would melt other people, was it not likely that they would assert their racial superiority and long ago have got the upper hand of their Gentile neighbours, or at least have established their own nationality in the face of all opposition? These undoubtedly were the natural probabilities prospectively contemplated. Yet here is all natural probability outraged, and the Jews, after all these ages, occupying before our eyes the very position that this word of prophecy foretold—widely scattered in every nation under heaven, but persistently surviving, the object of the universal hatred and persecution in which the most powerful governments have heartily joined, yet unprevailed against from age to age, though her ancient persecutors, Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome have passed away, clever, able, wealthy and influential in many cases, and yet unable to rescue Jewish nationality from the abyss into which it was plunged nigh 2,000 years ago.

In this we have a powerful, visible, living pledge of the fulfilment of the other part of the prophecy which says

“I will save thee from afar off and thy seed from the land of their captivity.” . . . “Thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed forsaken, neither shall thy land any more be termed desolate. As a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee, and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.”

“*Consolation*” implies a previously grieved and afflicted state. Such has been Israel’s state for ages. Such is the state more or less, of all who make the hope of Israel their portion, and who thereby become incorporate in the “*commonwealth of Israel*” to whom the promises belong. The “*consolation of Israel*” for which Simeon waited is that for which they wait. When it comes, it will be real, adequate, and everlasting. Shall we not with patience wait?

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