

“BLESSED”—AFTER JESUS RETURNS

Death has made frequent inroads among us lately. It is not inappropriate to refer to the fact at a meeting expressly held to show forth the Lord's death till he come. The Lord's death and the death of his people are two different things, but still they are connected. It is written,

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.”

There are millions of deaths that are of no interest to Him one way or another; *“all flesh is grass;”* as the flower of the field man passes away, except where he attains a higher relation, through the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. To such the words of Solomon apply,

“The righteous hath hope in his death.”

In the Apocalypse we read,

“Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord.”

It is customary to quote these words on all hands as affirming a blessedness in the fact and state of death—the idea that the dead are blessed in being not dead, but having departed into a blessed state; this is the idea we all had in the days of our ignorance; it is not the idea contained in the words of the Apocalypse. There are two supplemental words which divert it from such a meaning—

“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth” (Rev. 14:13).

These words suggest the question, “From whenceforth?” The answer to this question is only to be obtained by a study of the chapter in which the words occur. This chapter has to do with a certain situation seen by John in vision, the situation having to do with those *“things that must shortly come to pass,”* of which he was told the whole vision would consist; things future to John's day. To the various things shown there were various times; times of persecution had to do with a different time from the times of glory. It was one of the times of glory that John was shown in the 14th chapter, as the first verse informs us:

“I looked, and lo, on the Mount Zion stood a Lamb, and with him an hundred and forty-four thousand having his Father's name written on their foreheads, and they sang as it were a new song,” etc.

These were the redeemed in glory, as we are expressly informed:

“These were redeemed from among men, and are the firstfruits unto God and unto the Lamb.”

These, as we know from the whole tenor of the apostolic epistles, and the teaching of Christ, are not manifested until the lord comes to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe. Their manifestation stands related to Mount Zion, just as the manifestation of Israel under Moses stood related to Mount Sinai. Mount Sinai was areal mountain, but came to be used as a figure expressive of the Mosaic constitution of things; so Mt. Zion is a real locality, though used with a figurative import in the Apocalypse. The figurative does not exclude the literal, though it is larger than the literal. It includes the literal, just as the Euphrates when used as a symbol of the Turkish Empire includes the literal as an element.

The literal associations of mount Zion explain to us why the Lord and his people should be manifested there in the day of the manifestation of the sons of God. Mount Zion is the place where David reigned. We read that—

“The Lord hath chosen Zion, He hath desired it for His habitation” (Psa. 132);

And Moses speaks of the whole mountain of the Lord as the *“place He hath made for Him to dwell in,”* an idea that seems petty or large, according to the way it is looked at. To the caviller it is a petty idea; but when we come to consider that the manifestation of the divine glory upon the earth must be at a particular spot, it is fitting that an appropriate spot should be chosen, and that it should be an object of desire. Such a spot is the Holy Land, standing first in the association of divine transactions in the past, and first in the centrality of its geographical location. When the Lord fulfils His promise to *“build again the tabernacle of David that is fallen,”* we read that *“He will build up Zion”* (Psa. 102), and that He shall *“reign in Mount Zion before His ancients gloriously”* (Isa. 24); and that *“in this mountain the Lord of Hosts shall make to all people a feast of fat things, and even swallow up death in victory”* (Isa. 25:6, 8).

It was therefore no unnatural thing that John should see the Lamb and his companions standing there when the time shall have arrived for the God of heaven to set up a Kingdom that shall never be destroyed. But before they can appear in that position there must be a great work of executive judgment such as in Egypt preceded the establishment of Israel under Moses. Accordingly we find that the principal scenes of Revelation 14 are scenes of this character. John saw an angel fly through the earth announcing that the hour of divine judgment had come, and another angel proclaiming woe upon all who should worship the Beast and his image, which I need not say to prove is the apocalyptic synonym for the European state of things in church and state. We read,

“The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture.”

Those who are subject to this indignation have been in other times the merciless destroyers of the saints. Their persecuting powers and enormities were foreshown in the Apocalypse, and so also their downfall and destruction; both foreshowings being intended for the comfort and encouragement of the saints, who in all generations have recognised that the triumph of their enemies, so bitter to them, was no accident, but was in the divine purpose, and also that their judicial overthrow was only a question of time.

This view became their faith, and was the source of their patience, hence the expression,

“Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (v. 12).

And John immediately proceeds to say,

“I heard a voice saying unto me, Write, blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth;”

That is, from the time exhibited to John in the immediate connection, which was a time of triumph for the saints over their enemies. They are blessed from the time of Christ’s coming onward. This is the blessedness spoken of in all the forms in which it is expressed in various parts and connections.

How unmistakable is the causation of the three frog power in relation to the political and military complications which have oppressed Europe for 30 years past. How unmistakable is the decay and impending dissolution of the Ottoman power, which, according to the apocalyptic figure, has been slowly drying, as a river might dry, for 50 years past. How striking is the fact of Britain’s occupation of Egypt and Cyprus, after many years of definite

expectation. How decided, though small, is the movement towards restitution, both in land and people, and who can shut his eyes to the oppressive and constant war preparations of the nations; and who can be oblivious to the “*distress of nations with perplexity*,” and the fearful apprehensions of coming events that brood in all classes of thoughtful minds, and undermines all business calculations?

It may well be said,

“*Blessed is he that watcheth.*”

Very blessed indeed will such appear to be when the moment arrives for the Lord’s bright figure to emerge from all this darkness. Very palpable are the things to be watched, for those who have eyes to see and hearts to desire the fulfilment of the sure purpose of God. Very great is the danger of being driven off the attitude of watchfulness by the preoccupations of immediate personal surroundings, which blind the eyes to the wide bearings of elements and events affecting the whole habitable. The danger arises from the pleasantness of living as other men live, and the comparative bitterness of the self-denial those are called upon to exercise who accept the position of strangers and pilgrims waiting for the Kingdom of God. The rule of human life is gratification. There are various kinds of gratification, of course, and there is a form of gratification connected with the truth; but gratification is not at present a characteristic feature of the divine service, because of the commandments. We are called upon to deny ourselves many things that are agreeable; “*deny all ungodliness*,” for example. What is that? The world around us is called the world of the ungodly; a world of men and women who live without reverence to God; who do not recognise His share in the objects of being, but cast His Word behind their backs, with all its requirements that they should attend to wisdom and knowledge; that they should worship God; that they should be kind to men; that they should deny themselves, and be holy in all manner of conversation. To keep up a line of conduct in harmony with the divine requirements is trying to flesh and blood, and can only be maintained by the power of conviction concerning things revealed, alias faith, which, as John says, is the victory that overcomes the world. No man with a clear perception of the unreality, vanity, and futility of human life divorced from God, and with similarly clear perceptions of the reality and certainty of His purpose in Christ, as already partly unfolded in the past, could be induced to play fast and loose with divine obligations, and throw in his lot with a foolish generation for the sake of its passing gratifications. Yet there is great danger in failing in these clear perceptions. They are only to be obtained by exercising the mind in the knowledge of these things, which, when we come to practical applications, means reading and reflection, which bring prayer and obedience. Weary may be he that watcheth for the time being; but how blessed, even if he die at his post, will he be when the Lord of life and glory exercises the power the eternal Father has given him to reorganise the dead, and call them forth to the issues at which divine wisdom has been aiming from the beginning. These issues are grand beyond the possibility of exaggeration, or our power to conceive. They are slow in being worked out, and involve much labour and suffering, but their magnitude and value will be commensurate with the skill of preparation. Merely human happiness soon comes and soon goes, like the grass of a season; but divine blessedness, reached through a long pilgrimage of labour and tears, is like the mighty oak when established, and that lasts many generations; a generation in this case without end, a generation of the race symbolically represented by the 144,000. John heard them sing—this is beautiful; men sing when they are happy. Happy will be the sons and daughters of the Lord when they have gained the victory, after a long and bitter waiting. They will experience the truth of what is written in the Psalms,

“*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.*”

“He that goeth forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”

So also will they be able to say,

“When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then were our mouths filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing, saying, The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.”

Those who are permitted to take part in this tempest of melodious exultation are very choice men and women in god’s estimation. He styles them *“My jewels.”* We do not call anyone a jewel unless we love them very much, and God’s love has its conditions. Those who are neither cold nor hot, He has no relish for, but reveals by the mouth of Christ that He will spue them out of His mouth. *“I love them that love Me”* saith He, which on thorough reflection will appear to every reasonable mind the perfection of reason. How would anyone be in place among the angels who did not share their enthusiastic devotion to the eternal source of being? This being in love with God means being out of fit with man. Here is where the present difficulty lies. *“They are virgins!”* so we read concerning the 144,000. This is one of the figures; it is not literal, for actually the redeemed will comprehend multitudes of married men and women, including the apostles. The *“virgin”* is spiritual, as is shown negatively by the figure of a harlot for the false church, which commits fornication with the kings of the earth. To be not of this world, and to be accounted as the off-scouring of all things, is very painful to human nature; but this is no reason why we should shirk it. It was painful to Abraham to offer up Isaac, it was painful for Christ to be crucified, it is painful for us to suffer with him; but let us not forget that if we suffer we shall reign, and that even our tears will be wiped out and our groans extinguished in everlasting joy.

Taken from: - “Seasons of Comfort” Vol. 2

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