

The Day of the Lord

1 THESSALONIANS 5. —Paul had been speaking on the subject of the coming of the Lord as the comfort of believers with regard to those who were dead. He here says it was unnecessary for him to write them on the subject of the times and seasons. For this he gives two reasons: "*Yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.*" How did they know? By Paul's teaching: for we find him, in the next epistle (2 Thess. 2: 5) saying, "*When I was with you, I told you these things.*" What did they know? That the day would come unexpectedly—"as a thief." Upon the believers? No. Upon those who should cry, "*Peace and safety,*" when destruction should be at the door. This is not the case with believers. They know that there is no "*peace and safety*" for the world until the Prince of Peace is enthroned on Zion's Hill. "*In his days the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth*" (Psa. 72:7). "*In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely*" (Jer. 23:6). There is no peace to the world under its present constitution of wickedness. And especially at "*the end*" is there no peace to be looked for, but nations angry, and a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation upon earth to that same time (Dan. 12:1). But all the time and at the last will be found such (and these very numerous) as cry, Peace and safety. The world has been sounding this cry during all its troublous and blood-stained history. After every war, there is to be everlasting peace; and every war is a "guarantee" of the general repose. Notably is this the case in our own day, when the world is armed to the teeth, as it never was before, and trembling in the uncertain balance of peace or war. Notwithstanding the most unpromising situation of things, every potentate, statesman, diplomatist, politician, and newspaper writer talks complacently of peace as a thing to be secured. "Peace" has been on their lips while war is in their hearts, and the heedless throng, anxious only about business, have caught up the strain. The saints are not of those who cry, Peace and safety, except to such as fear God and keep His commandments. For all the rest of mankind war is appointed, especially the war of the great day of God Almighty, which, at the coming of the Lord, is destined to sweep away all refuges of lies, and lay the foundation for a reign of righteousness and everlasting peace.

The day of the Lord will not come upon the saints as a thief. As a snare it will come upon all men that dwell upon the whole earth (Luke 21:35), but upon the called, and chosen, and faithful, it will come as the welcome deliverance which a lifetime's expectation and preparation will have made them ready to receive with gladness. Seeing the appointed tokens among the nations, they lift up their heads, knowing that their redemption draweth nigh.

But there was another reason why the day of the Lord could not come upon the Thessalonians as a thief, and as we are in their position, we do well to consider it. They were not in darkness, that that day should overtake them as a thief. **They were all the children of light and of the day.** Come soon or come late, it could not find them unprepared, but ready to rise in joy in response to the uprising of the Sun of Righteousness. Paul did not mean to say that absolutely every individual of the Thessalonian ecclesia was in this position; for you find him mentioning some who were otherwise conditioned. "*I hear,*" he says, "*that there are some which walk among you disorderly*"; and he thought it necessary to direct the ecclesia to withdraw from all who did not submit to his word (2 Thess. 3:6). An ecclesia by position and profession belongs to the light of the day. That is the description of the high calling which has called it into existence; but it does not follow that all its members come up to the profession. It is possible that many of them may come short of the stature of the new man in Christ, and

consequently fail in obtaining the promise. It is even possible that in a whole ecclesia there may not be a single individual acceptable in the sight of God. We seem to discover such a case in the messages of Christ to the seven ecclesias that were in Asia. To all, with two exceptions, he speaks of the bulk of their members in doubtful terms. Of one, he speaks as if it lacked a single individual of the true type; which affords matter for serious reflection for us who, living so long after the authoritative proclamation of the word, are in much more danger of being in that position.

To Laodicea he says, *"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot."* Some wonder why Jesus should wish anyone to be cold. We find the explanation in the fact that, as a matter of temperature, cold or heat are acceptable in food, while a middle state is unpleasing. As cold water to thirst, or warm food to the hungry, so should the saints be to Christ. In some form or other, they should minister to his pleasure. He should find satisfaction in their love and obedience and zeal in one shape if not in another. We should afford him joy by our walk somehow. Lukewarmness is sickening. This is the state of professors who yield him no pleasure. In this state, they are in danger of being spued out of his mouth. This was the disaster impending over Laodicea. The reason is in these words: *"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."* This shows the possibility of a community thinking well of itself, but being wretched before the Lord. Jesus says that many on that day will say to him, *"Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works?"* But he will profess unto them: *"I never knew you."* "Not every one," he adds, *"that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."*

Self-congratulation is a dangerous luxury on the part of either individuals or communities. Be thankful for privileges and attainments, but make no boast. Enjoy the goodness of God in meekness; flourish it not in the eyes of neighbours as a matter of superiority; for what have we that we have not received; and it may be that we have not received so much as we think. Let us take care that we deceive not ourselves. The boast of Christadelphian superiority to the sects is rank abomination in the sight of God, if we are reprobate to His commandments. It is good to know the truth, and to stand in Christ Jesus; but let us beware of saying, *"We are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing,"* lest we are in the position of the Laodiceans who, without being aware of it, *"were wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked."*

It may seem strange that anybody should be wretched and miserable without knowing it. But when we understand these terms to refer to one's actual relation to good and evil, and not to our feelings for the time being, the matter is clear. A man making merry on board a ship that is shortly to drown him in the depths of the sea, is more wretched than a man cast away on a desert island, from which he is about to be rescued, and to be conducted to great comfort and plenty. So in Christ, those people are truly wretched and miserable who, though on very good terms with themselves, are objects of detestation in the eyes of the Lord; while those whom he regards with approval are truly blessed, though they may be in fear and bitterness, and have much acquaintance with grief and suffering. The former class have much need to listen when Christ counsels them *"to buy of him gold tried in the fire that they may be rich"*; that is, faith that stands the trial of grievous circumstances—a faith more precious than gold that perisheth though it be tried in the fire, showing itself in untiring obedience to the commandments amid all the seductions or discouragements of this mortal state. *"White*

raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear"; that is, the righteousness that comes from the forgiveness of our sins and fruitfulness in the Spirit. *"Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve that thou mayest see";* that is, to correct the mental perceptions in such a way as to see all things in the light in which Christ regards them.

Jesus invites the shortcomers to purchase these things of him. It is the same voice that we hear in Isaiah—the Spirit of Christ in the prophet: *"Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live"* (Isa. 55:1-3). The same gracious words we hear from the mouth of Christ himself: *"I will give to him that is athirst of the water of life freely."* *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* *"Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out."* *"The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."*

Let us strive to realize what these beautiful metaphors mean, as regards our acceptance of the invitation. In what way are we to buy of Christ the things he commends to the Laodiceans? We shall see this if we consider what they are. Gold tried in the fire, or a tried faith. How cometh this? *"Faith,"* we are told, **"cometh by hearing"** (Rom. 10:17). By hearing what? By hearing the Spirit; as saith Jesus: *"He that hath an ear, let him HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH to the ecclesias."* What that Spirit has said, in all the holy men by whom it has spoken, and, lastly, by the Lord himself, **has been written**. Consequently, in its literal application to us, the blessing is connected With READING. *"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written **for our learning**, that we through **patience and comfort of the scriptures** might have hope"* (Rom. 15:4). Let us, then, in obedience to the invitation of the Spirit, **read what has been written** that we may acquire that faith which cometh by hearing, and which, in its exercise, is likened to gold tried in the fire. This reading to be effective must be constant. It must be all the days of our life (Deut. 17:19; 4:10). We must give earnest heed to the **things we have heard**, lest at any time we let them slip (Heb. 2:1); giving **all diligence** to make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10). We must honour God by listening every day to His voice which speaks to us in His word. Thus shall we obtain the mind of the Spirit. Thus shall faith grow strong within us, ready for the trial which shall not destroy it, but purify it as gold. Thus shall we pray effectively before Him that we may be assisted in time of need. This figurative exhortation to buy gold tried in the fire, resolves itself into an exhortation to read the word; to watch daily at wisdom's gates, waiting at the posts of her doors, that finding her, we may find life and obtain favour of the Lord (Prov. 8:34).

The same line of thought will be traversed in the consideration of the other items. *"White raiment,"* or a state of acceptance before Him by righteousness, is only to be attained by allowing the Word of Christ so to operate continually on the inner man that we become like-minded with himself, and obtain the forgiveness of all our sins, and become energized to the performance of righteousness as by a second nature, even the new man renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him. Eye-salve is obtained in like manner, enabling us to see all things in their true light, and to act the part of wise men accordingly.

These things are characteristic of all who are truly the children of light and of the day. These things belong to the day. The present time is night in relation to the world at large. The earth's population, in all its teeming millions, walks in darkness. The world lieth in wickedness. Folly reigns. Wisdom is scarcely to be found. The fear of God is nearly unknown. The mass, even in "civilization," are but brutish untutored barbarians, uninfluenced by the higher laws of intelligent being, and governed only by the animal instincts of eating, drinking, clothing, and herding together. We shall see how intense has been the night we are coming through, when we get into the full blaze of the glorious day. We shall realize it more powerfully than we do now with our comparatively blunted perceptions.

We are not of the night if we are Christ's. We are of the day. We belong to the day of Christ: to the good time coming when righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. We have now to realize the principles of that glorious era in present and complete submission to them. "*Let us not sleep as do others,*" so Paul exhorts, "*but let us watch and be sober.*" He does not mean literal sleep, for literally, we **are** to sleep as do others; for if we did not sleep, we should die, and the work of God be frustrated. We are not to sleep in the sense in which the world is asleep. We are not to share their state of unconsciousness with regard to the great realities of existence, and spend our time in illusory dreams. The world is unconscious of God; it is unconscious of His universal presence and power; it is unconscious of Christ, and of God's purpose with Him; it is unconscious of the great claim He has on every living soul; it is unconscious of the great plan He is working out, and of the principles which He desires His creatures to recognize. It is dreaming of life, and comfort, and prosperity without God; the phantasm of a disordered brain. With this state of mind, the saint has nothing in common; but if he be not on his guard, he may sink into it. How are we to preserve our consciousness of all the great things that pertain to the "*day*"? How shall we avoid sleeping "*as do others*"? By giving heed to what the Spirit saith; and the Spirit speaketh in the word. By this companionship with God we are kept in remembrance of the great facts upon which the realities of life are founded. We are preserved in remembrance of **Him**, having the fear of Him before our eyes all the day long. We are enabled to have continually in view those stars of our history—the death, burial, and resurrection of our compassionate Lord and Master, who now lives a Priest for those who hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope steadfast to the end. We are kept in a state of continual acquaintance with the things God would have us do and think, and with which He is well pleased. We are kept in constant recollection of the great purpose for which the Son of God has appeared, and that the heavens must hold him only till the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

If we forget these things, we "*sleep as do others,*" and drift along the stream of death, concerned only, like the Gentiles around us, with the questions, "*What shall we eat? what shall we drink? and wherewith shall we be clothed?*" This is to be prevented by the continued reception of the Spirit that will keep us awake. We cannot keep awake in our day in any other way. We are not reminded of these things by the aspects of Nature presented to us as we walk abroad. The blue sky, the shining sun, the gentle breeze, the murmuring waves, the waving cornfields, the singing birds, or the thronging streets of a great city, are powerless to enlighten us on the great things of the Spirit. These things are based on history and promises, and Nature is as silent on these as on the exploits of Bismarck. We can learn them only where God has chosen to deposit the instructions. We can learn them in His word, and in His word only. Business is a continual weariness of buying and selling and getting gain, useful in its way, but a deadly fever if it monopolize the mind. Jesus gives us a correct estimate of it in telling us there are those who, when they hear the word, "*go forth, and the care of this world,*

*and the lusts of other things entering in, **choke the word**, and it becometh unfruitful."*

The wisdom of daily reading becomes more and more apparent. This lesson cannot be too strongly enforced, or too distinctly apprehended among those who have fled to lay hold of the refuge set before them in the Gospel. Their life depends upon it. They are in danger of being blinded to it. Away from it, we are open to a hundred plausible deceptions which lay hold with a death-grip all the more fatal because soft and sweet. Spiritual decay potently prevails where the reading of the word is neglected. A lamentable mistake is made by those who conclude they have no time to read. What should we say of persons concluding they had no time to take their food? No more insane would this be than the other hallucination in its ultimate effect. Man lives not by bread alone. He may live an animal life by bread alone: but animal life is a brief affair. There comes a life afterwards that springs from the word now stored into the heart; and deceived is the individual who excludes the Word of God from his daily consumption on the plea that he has "no time." What is he so busy about? What should we say of a man in the cabin of a sinking ship, who should neglect preparations for the lifeboat on the plea that affairs in the cabin left him no time? This is a dying life—dying, dying, dying; and slaves of death are those who allow its transient concerns so to fill their heads and hearts as to shut out the "*one thing needful*." A wise man will not be found perishing so. He will not be cheated on any pretext, out of that bread which shall be unto him "*life everlasting*." If he is ever so poor, or ever so close-worked, he will find twenty minutes a day, at least, to sit at the shrine of God, and be taught by the voice that speaks to him as from over the mercy-seat of the ancient tabernacle of the testimony. And if rich, he will smite the golden beast with the rod of his authority, and order it to be in the corner for a time every day, while he listens to the Maker and Possessor of heaven and earth. The man—poor or rich—who acts not thus, is a fool; for what does the struggle of life amount to, apart from the attainment of that good which shall not be taken away? To a complete vanity. The poor man sweats out his three-score and ten, and lies down to be no more remembered. The rich man, by much contrivance, draws the coin from his neighbour's pockets, and, having scraped much to his corner, comes to his weary end, closes his eyes in disappointment, and dies like the fool with his barns, with a fearful awakening in store, when God, whom he has cheated, will mete out his portion of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversary.

Let us, in these days, be wise; and we shall at last see the glorious harvest in joy unspeakable, in the ranks of the blessed company who shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.

(Taken from "Seasons of Comfort" Volume 1, Pages 146-151, by Bro. Robert Roberts)