

The Hope of the Redeemer

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Transcript

The Redeemer's Return

THE HOPE OF THE REDEEMER'S RETURN

Chapter 2

"Looking for that Blessed Hope and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ"

Titus 2:13

In 1 Corinthians 13:13 we learn there are three cardinal Christian graces namely, faith, hope and love. Concerning the first and third of these, believers generally are well informed, but regarding the second, many of the Lord's people have the vaguest conceptions. When Christians are questioned upon the subject of Faith they are, for the most part, able to answer promptly and intelligently; but interrogate the average church-member about the believer's Hope, and his replies are indistinct and uncertain. Let Christian Love come up for discussion and we all feel that we are upon solid ground, but when asked to pursue the theme of Christian Hope many step cautiously and hesitatingly. That there is the greatest confusion of thought and belief among Christians concerning their Hope may readily be proven by questioning a number regarding the nature of their hope. Ask the average church-goer what his hope is, and he will say, Salvation—he hopes to be saved when he comes to die. Ask another and he will tell you that Death is his hope, for it is then that he will be released from all the sufferings of the flesh. Ask a third and he would say that Heaven was his hope. Perhaps this last reply would better express the common and popular belief than either of the others. But to say that our hope is future happiness, is to say no more than any heathen would say. There are several Scriptures which distinguish between Heaven and the believer's Hope, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:3, 4). Here the "living hope" unto which we have been begotten is separated in thought from the "inheritance" which is "reserved in heaven" for us. Though closely connected, Heaven and the believer's Hope are certainly not synonymous as is clear from Colossians 1:5 where they are again distinguished—"For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the Gospel." Heaven is not here said to be the believer's hope, for the hope is "laid up" for him "in heaven." What then is our Hope? It is strange that there should be such ignorance and confusion upon this subject for Hope is made almost as prominent in the New Testament as is either Faith or Love. The

Church epistles have much to say upon the subject. In the epistle to the Romans when setting forth the consequences or results of justification, the apostle wrote, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (5:1). And again in 8:24, 25— For in hope were we saved: but hope that is seen is not hope: for who hopeth for that which he seeth? But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (R.V.). To the Corinthians Paul wrote, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. 15:19). To the Galatians he wrote, "For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (5:5). For the Ephesians he prayed that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened, and that they might know "what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Eph. 1:18), and in setting forth the sevenfold Unity of the Spirit he declared, "There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all" (4:4-6), and there can no more be two different hopes than there can be two Lords, or two faiths. To the Thessalonian saints the apostle Paul wrote, "Sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13), and again, "Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace" (2 Thess. 2:16). Unto Titus he wrote "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13). And unto the Hebrews he said, "And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end. That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" (6:11, 18, 19). The apostle Peter found cause for rejoicing in that God had "according to His abundant mercy, begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). and again, he exhorted his readers to "Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). The apostle John wrote, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John 3:2, 3); Thus we see that the New Testament abounds in passages which speak of the believer's "hope." In all ages God's people have had a hope set before them, and that hope has always centered in Christ. In Eden God gave to Adam the promise that the woman's Seed should come and bruise the Serpent's head and the anticipation of the fulfillment of this promise constituted the hope of the saints in those far-off days. Said Jacob, "I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord" (Gen. 49:18). The Hope that God set before Abram was that his "Seed" should be a blessing unto all nations, which hope, as we learn from Galatians 3:16, had particular reference to Christ. The Hope which God set before Moses was expressed as follows, "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in His mouth; and He shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him" (Deut. 18:18). For the fulfillment of this prophecy see John 12:49; 14:10, etc. The Hope which God set before David was stated as follows, "And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy Seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish His Kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will stablish the throne of His Kingdom for ever" (2 Sam. 7:12, 13). And later, through His prophets, God again and again set before Israel the Hope of the appearing of their Messiah. This leads us to inquire now into — I. The character of our hope. As there is so much confusion and uncertainty respecting this branch of our

subject, and in order to clear away the rubbish which human devisings have gathered around it, we will deal first with the negative side of the character of our Hope. 1. Our Hope is not the Conversion of the World. We pray that these pages may be read by many who will be startled by the above statement. A world which shall eventually be saved by the preaching of the Gospel has been the expectation of almost all Christendom. That the Gospel shall yet triumph over the world, the flesh, and the Devil is the belief of the great majority of those who profess to be the Lord's people. In the seminaries, in the pulpits, in the Christian literature of the day, and in the great missionary gatherings where placards bearing the words "The world for Christ" are prominently displayed, has this theory been zealously heralded. It is supposed that anything short of a converted "world" is a concept dishonoring and derogatory to the Gospel. We are told the Gospel cannot fail because it is the power of God, and though the Church has failed, yet, a day is surely coming when this captivating ideal shall be realized. To believe other than this, is to be dubbed a "pessimist," yea, it is to be looked upon as a hinderer and traitor to the cause of Christ. But what are the plain facts? The Lord Jesus Christ preached the Gospel, preached it faithfully, lovingly, zealously and untiringly. But with what results? Was the world "converted" under His preaching? Should it he said this question is not a fair one because He preached only locally, we accept the correction, but ask further, Was Palestine converted under His preaching? We have only to glance at the four Gospels to find an answer. In the sermon on the Mount, our Lord declared that the "many" were on the broad road that leadeth to destruction and that only a "few" were on the narrow path that leadeth unto life. In the Parable of the Sower He announced that out of four castings of the flood seed from His hand three of them fell upon unfruitful ground. Again, we are told, "He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not" (John 1:10, 11). No, the Gospel as preached by the Son of God Himself held out no promise of a world converted by the proclamation of it, for after three and a half years' ministry such as this world has never witnessed before or since, there was but a handful who responded to the gracious appeals of the Gospel from His lips—there were but one hundred and twenty all told that waited in the upper room for the coming of the Holy Spirit which He had promised to send to His followers (Acts 1:15). How was it in the days of the apostles? During the first generation of the Church's history, wonderful things happened which were well calculated to convert the world if anything could. Eleven men who had been trained by our Lord Himself were now sent forth to herald the glad tidings of salvation. The Holy Spirit was poured forth upon them, and in addition to the Eleven, Saul of Tarsus was miraculously saved and sent forth as the apostle to the Gentiles. But what success attended their efforts? How were they received by the world? Again we have but to turn to the New Testament Scriptures to find our answer. Like their Master, they, too, were despised and rejected of men. The apostles were everywhere spoken against and regarded as the offscouring of the earth. Some of them were cast into prison, others were slain by the sword. One suffered death by crucifixion and the last of the little band was banished to the Isle of Patmos. True it is that their labors were not entirely in vain. True it is that God honored His own Word and numbers were saved, and here and there churches were organized. But the multitudes, the great masses, both of Jews and Gentiles, remained unmoved and unconverted. The actual conditions, in the days of the apostles then, gave no promise of a world converted by the Gospel. How is it in our own day? "Ah!" it will be said, "times have changed since then: Christ and His apostles lived in the days of paganism and barbarism, but under the enlightenment of our modern civilization this twentieth century is far otherwise." Yes, but all is not gold that glitters. We do not deny, we praise God for the fact, that today there are far more Christians upon earth than there were in the first century. But there are far more sinners too! What we are discussing now is the Conversion of the world. Has the growth of the Church of God kept pace with the increase of the earth's population? We trow not. Today there are probably 1,000,000,000 souls on earth who have never even heard the name of

Christ! How then can we talk about a converted world when upwards of two-thirds of humanity is destitute of the Gospel? Moreover, what of Christendom itself? How much of that which bears the name of Christ is truly Christian? What proportion of those who term themselves the children of God are really entitled to that name? More than half of professing Christendom is found within the pales of the Greek and Roman Catholic Churches! And what of Protestantism itself? What of the evangelical churches filled with their worldly, pleasure-loving, theater-going, Sabbath-desecrating, prayer-meeting-neglecting members? No; my reader, be not deceived with appearances or high-sounding phrases. God's flock is only a "little flock" (Luke 12:32). There is but a "remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5). Has the Gospel failed? Have God's purposes been defeated? Certainly not. The Gospel was never designed to convert the world. God never purposed to regenerate all humanity in this dispensation, any more than He did under the Mosaic economy, when He suffered the nations to walk in their own ways. God's purpose for this Age is clearly defined in Acts 15:14—"Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name." In full harmony with this the apostle Paul declared. "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). Clearly then, the Hope of the Church is not the Conversion of the World. Having dwelt at some length upon the general, let us now come to the particular— 2. Our Hope is not the Salvation of the Soul. In the New Testament the word "Salvation" has a threefold scope—past, present and future, which, respectively, has reference to our deliverance from the penalty, the power, and the presence of sin. When we say above, that our Hope is not the Salvation of the soul, we mean that it is not our deliverance from the wrath to come which is the prospect God sets before His people. To certain of our readers it may appear almost a wearisome waste of time for us to discuss these points, but for the sake of the class for which this work is specially designed we would ask them to bear with us in patience. In these days when the Bible is so grievously neglected both in the pulpit and in the pew, we cannot afford to take anything for granted. Multitudes of those in our churches are ignorant of the most elementary truths of the Christian faith. Experience shows that comparatively few people are clear about even the A. B. C. of the Gospel. Talk to the average church-member, and only too often it will be found that he has nothing more than a vague and uncertain hope about his personal salvation. He is "trying to live up to the light that he has," he is "doing his best," and he hopes that, somehow, everything will come out right in the end. He does not dare to say I know I have passed from death unto life, but he hopes to go to Heaven at the last. Nowhere does Scripture present the Salvation of the soul as the believer's hope. Salvation from the guilt, the penalty, the wages, of sin is something for which believers thank God even now. Said our Lord to His disciples, "Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20). The present-tense aspect of our salvation is presented in many Scriptures—"Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that heareth My word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). How simple and definite this is! Eternal life is something which every believer in Christ already possesses, and for him there is no possibility of future condemnation in the sense of having to endure God's wrath. Again we read, "Beloved now are we the sons of God" (1 John 3:2). We do not have to obey God's commandments, walk worthy, and serve the Lord, in order to become God's children, we are to do these things because we are, already, members of the household of faith. The salvation or redemption of our bodies is future, for it will not be until our Savior's return that He "shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). But the salvation of the soul, deliverance from the wrath to come, is an accomplished fact for every sinner, that has received the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her personal Savior. All such have been accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6). All such have been "made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). All such have been "perfected for ever" (Heb. 10:14) so far as their standing before God is concerned. As another

has said, "Salvation is not away off yonder at the gates of Heaven; salvation is at the cross. The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared, and it brings salvation all the way down to where the sinner is—right there. You know our Lord's own picture of it. It is the illustration of the good Samaritan. You know how beautifully that shadows out this blessed truth; that just as the good Samaritan went down the Jericho road and ministered to the wretch who lay there half dead, pouring oil into his wounds right there where he lay, just so the grace of God, that brings salvation, has come to the sinner in the place where he lies in his sins. No matter how great a sinner he may be, if he can be persuaded to turn the eye of faith toward the cross, there salvation comes" (Dr. C. I. Scofield). Again— 3. Our Hope is not Death. Of all the extravagant and absurd interpretations of Scripture which have found a place among sober expositors is the belief that Death is the Hope which God has set before the believer. How it ever came to find acceptance it is difficult to say. It is true that there are a number of passages which speak of the Lord returning suddenly and unexpectedly, but to make the words "At such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" and "Behold I come as a thief in the night" mean that death may steal in upon the believer without warning is to reduce the Word of God to meaningless jargon and is to make sane exposition impossible. Scripture says what it means, and means what it says. True there are Parables in the Bible; true there are stone passages which are highly symbolical; but where this is the case the context usually gives clear intimation to that effect, and where it does not, the plain and literal force should always be given to the language of Holy Writ. In Scripture "death" means death, and the coming again of the Son of man means His coming, and the two expressions are not synonymous. As we have said, the Return of Christ and death (sometimes) each, alike, come suddenly and unexpectedly, but there all analogy between them ends. It is passingly strange that Bible teachers should have confounded Death with the Second Coming of Christ. The former is spoken of as an "Enemy" (1 Cor. 15:26), whereas the latter is termed "that blessed hope" (Titus 2:13), and surely these two terms cannot refer to the same thing. At the Return of our Lord we shall be made like Him (1 John 3:2), but believers are not made like Him at death, for death introduces them into a disembodied state. That "death" is not the believer's Hope is clear from many Scriptures. In 1 Peter 1:3 the apostle returns thanks because we have been begotten again "unto a living hope." The saint of God has a living hope in a dying scene: a glorious prospect beyond this vale of tears. In 2 Timothy 4:8 the apostle Paul reminds us that there is laid up a crown of righteousness unto all them that love Christ's "appearing," which is further proof that death is not the Second Coming of Christ, for who is there that "loves" death? Death is my going to Christ, but His Return is Christ coming to me. Death is a cause of sadness and sorrow, but the Return of the Lord is a cause of joy and comfort—"Wherefore comfort one another with these words" 1 Thess. 4:18, see context). Death lays the body in the dust, but at the Return of our Redeemer His people arise from the dust—"the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thess. 4:17). Death is the "wages of sin," which means that death is the penalty of sin, but so completely has that penalty been borne by our Savior that we read, "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28). Death was certainly not the hope of the early Christians as is clear from 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 10 where we read, "Ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven"—these Thessalonian saints were looking for Christ not death. Finally; death cannot be our Hope, for death will not be the portion of all believers as is clear from the language of 1 Corinthians 15:51, "We shall not all sleep." What then is our Hope? We answer — 4. Our Hope is the personal Return of our Redeemer. "Jesus Christ our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1). Jesus Christ is the believer's "all in all" (Col. 3:11). He is "our peace" (Eph. 2:14). He is "our life" (Col. 3:14). He is "made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30). And, we repeat, He is "our Hope." But hope always looks forward. Hope has to do with the future. "We are saved in hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why

doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:24,25). This means that what we hope for is that which we do not yet possess. In Scripture, "hope" is something more than desire or longing: it is a joyous expectation, a definite assurance. Faith is that which lays holds of God's promises; hope is that spiritual grace which sustains the heart until the promise is "received." As another has said "Man was not made for the present, and the present was not intended to satisfy man. It is for the future, not the present, that man exists" (W. Trotter). The Hope of the believer is clearly set forth in Titus 2:13—"Looking for that blessed hope and appearing of the glory, of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (R. V.). Our Hope is the personal Return of Christ when He shall come back again to receive us unto Himself. Our Hope is to be taken out of this scene of sin and suffering and sorrow to be where Christ is (John 14:1-13). Our Hope is to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air and be for ever "with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). Our Hope is to be "made like" Him, and this hope will be realized when "we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2). This is the "one hope" of our calling" (Eph. 4:4). This is the only Hope for everything else has failed. The hope of Philosophy has failed. Philosophy was the beautiful ideal of the ancients. When Greece and Rome were the leading nations of the earth, the goal of every ambitious young man's desire was to become a philosopher. Philosophers were respected and honored by all. Philosophy set out to solve the riddle of the universal and to explain the rationale of all creation. It was expected that philosophy would find a solution to every problem and devise a remedy for every ill. But what were its fruits? "The world by wisdom knew not God" (1 Cor. 1:21). When the apostle Paul came to Athens—one of the principal centers of philosophic culture—he found an altar erected to "The Unknown God" (Acts 17:23). The only place the word "philosophy" is found in the Scriptures is in Colossians 2:8, where we read "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." Philosophy proved a will-o'-the-wisp. Never was philosophy so thoroughly systematized and so ably expounded as it was in the days of Socrates, and never was society more corrupt. The ruins of ancient Greece bear witness to the failure and inadequacy of philosophy. The hope of Legislation has failed. It was the dream of the celebrated Plato that he could establish an ideal Republic by compiling and enforcing a perfect code of laws. But a perfect Code of Law was compiled a thousand years before Plato was born. God Himself gave to Israel a Code of Law on Mount Sinai—with what results? No sooner was that Law given than it was broken. The children of Israel declared, "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient" (Ex. 24:7), but their words were an empty boast. The truth is that imperfect creatures cannot keep a perfect law, nor can imperfect men be induced to administer and enforce it. There is not a land in all the world where all the statutes of the State, or nearly all, are rigidly enforced. What then is the use of electing worthy and able legislators and for them to enact righteous laws if their successors refuse to enforce them? The present universal failure to do this testifies to the impotency of Law while it is left in human hands. The hope of human Government has failed. The Roman Empire experimented for many centuries and tried no less than seven different forms of government, but each in turn failed to accomplish the desired effects, and the last state of that Empire was worse than the first. Everything from absolute monarchy to absolute Socialism has already been weighed in the balances and found wanting. Revolting at the tyrannical yokes imposed upon their subjects by the European rulers, our forefathers in this country sought to establish a free Republic, a democratic form of government, a government managed by the people and for the people. What have been its fruits? Are economic conditions in the United States better than those in England or Italy? Are relations between Capital and Labor more amicable and satisfactory? Is there less political corruption in high places, and fairer representation of the oppressed? Are moral conditions better here: have we, proportionately, fewer thieves, fewer drunkards, fewer murderers? Is there more contentment and satisfaction among the masses? We fear not. When we witness the methods employed in the average political campaign, when

we read through the reports of the police courts, when we behold the strikes and lock-outs in every part of the country, when we peer beneath the surface and gaze upon the moral state of the masses, and when we hear the angry cries of the poor laborer and his half-starved family, we discover that the only hope for America as well as Europe is that our Lord shall come back again and take the government upon His shoulder. The hope of Civilization has failed. How much all of us have heard of 'the march and progress of Civilization' during the past two generations! What an Utopia it was going to create! The masses were to be educated and reformed, injustices were to cease, war was to be abolished, and all mankind welded into one great Brotherhood living together in peace and good will. Civilization was to be the agency for ushering in the long-looked-for Millennium. Any one who dared to challenge the claims made on behalf of the enlightenment of our twentieth century, or called into question the transformation which the upward march of Civilization was supposed to be effecting, was regarded as an 'old fogey' who was not abreast of the times, or, as a 'pessimist' whose vision was blinded by prejudice. Was not "Evolution" an established fact of science and did not the fundamental principle of Evolution—progress and advancement from the lower to the higher—apply to nations and the human race as a whole; if so, we should soon discover that we had outgrown all the barbarities of the past. War was now no longer to be thought of, for those cultured nations within the magic pale of civilization would henceforth settle their differences amicably by means of arbitration. It was true that the great Powers continued building enormous armies and navies, but these, we were told, would merely be used to enforce Peace, But oh! what a madman's dream it has all proven. The Hope of Civilization, like every other hope which has not been founded upon the sure and certain Word of God, has also proved to be nothing more than an entrancing mirage, a tragic delusion. The great World War, with all its unmentionable horrors, its inhumanities, its barbaric ruthlessness, has rudely wakened a lethargic humanity to the utter insufficiency of all merely human expedencies, and has demonstrated as clearly as anything has ever been demonstrated that "Civilization" is nothing more than a high-sounding but empty title. We repeat again, the ONLY hope of the Church is the personal Return of the Redeemer to remove His people from these scenes of misery and bloodshed to be for ever with Himself; and the ONLY hope for this poor sin-cursed and Satan-dominated world is the Second Advent of the Son of Man to rule and reign over the earth in righteousness and peace. This is the world's LAST hope, for every other hope has failed it! We turn now to consider — II. The authorization of our hope. The insufficiency and failure of the various hopes of the world reviewed above, serve only to furnish a background upon which, by way of contrast, may shine forth more prominently and gloriously the certainty and sufficiency of our hope. Every hope of man which originates in his own mind and heart is doomed to end in disappointment. If men refuse the light which is furnished by Divine revelation then they must expect to remain in darkness, and, as our Lord said, "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:23). The value of a hope lies in the authorization of it, what then are the grounds for our hope? What warrant have we for expecting the Return of the Redeemer? After all that has been said in the previous pages and in view of the various Scriptures therein cited, a lengthy reply to this question is not necessary. In brief, it may be said, the inspired and infallible Word of Him who cannot lie is our warrant and authorization for looking for that Blessed Hope. But, briefly, to particularize. 1. We have the Promise of the Lord Jesus Himself. We have already quoted from John 14 in other connections but we now refer to it again. On the eve of His crucifixion our Savior turned to His disciples and said, "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am there ye may be also" (John 14:23). Here is an assertion about which there is no ambiguity whatever. Here is a promise that is positive and unequivocal. Here is a word of comfort from the lips of Truth incarnate. The Lord who has gone away from this earth to prepare a place for His people is coming back again for them, coming back in person, coming to receive them to Himself that they may be

with Him for evermore. 2. We have the word of God's messengers at the time of His Son's Ascension. These words are recorded in the first chapter of the Acts which presents a Scene of unusual interest and importance. Our Lord's sojourn upon earth was now to terminate. The time of His departure was at hand. The great purpose of the Divine incarnation had been accomplished. The cross and the empty sepulcher lay behind, and now the Savior of sinners was to be exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high. Together with a few of His disciples He went as far as Bethany, and lifting up His hands He blessed them, and while in the act of blessing them He was "parted from them, and went up into heaven" (Luke 24:50,51). And a cloud received Him out of their sight, and then we are told, "While they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, two men stood by them in white apparel: which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10, 11). Here again is a statement that is clear and simple. Here again is a promise that is plain and positive. The Lord Jesus has gone up into heaven, but He is not to remain there for ever. The "same Jesus" which ascended is to descend: the "same Jesus" which was seen retiring from this earth shall yet be seen returning to this earth. The absent One is coming back, coming back in person in "like manner" as He went away. 3. We have the inspired testimony of the apostles. We have already shown in a previous chapter that each of the apostles bore witness to the Second Coming of Christ. Their testimony is clear, full, and uniform. At this point we shall select but a single passage, a familiar one, from the epistles of the apostle Paul. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 we read, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (i. e., "go before") them which are asleep. 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 which are alive and 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. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." The above passage is the most comprehensive statement upon the Redeemer's Return which is to be found in the apostolic writings. The importance of the communication contained therein is intimated by the prefatory clause—"This we say unto you by the word of the Lord," an expression which is always reserved for those passages of Divine revelation which are of peculiar importance or solemnity. Here again we learn that Christ is going to return in person—"The Lord Himself." Here again we have a positive promise—"The Lord Himself shall descend." And here again, the Second Coming of Christ is presented as the "blessed hope" of the Church—"comfort one another with these words." We reserve further comment upon this passage for a later chapter. 4. Finally, We have the Promise of the Lord, given from the Throne. We have previously pointed out that, some fifty or sixty years after His ascension to the right hand of God, Christ sent His angel to the beloved John on the Isle of Patmos saying, "Surely I come quickly" (Rev. 22:20). This was our Lord's last promise to His people, as though to intimate that He would have them continually occupied with His imminent Return. Perhaps this will be the best place to meet an objection that is frequently made by those who seek to find flaws in the Word of God. It is said that the Lord Jesus here made a mistake. He declared that He was coming quickly and more than eighteen centuries have passed since then and yet He has not returned! The explanation of this supposed difficulty is very simple. When the Lord Jesus said, "Surely I come quickly," He spoke from Heaven, and Heaven's measurement of time is very different from earth's. Never once while He was here upon earth did the Savior say or even hint that He would return "quickly." On the contrary He gave plain intimation that after His departure a lengthy interval would have to pass ere He came back again. In the Parable of the Nobleman He spoke of Himself

as One taking a journey into "a far country" (Luke 19:12). On another occasion He represented an evil servant saying, during the time of His absence, "My Lord delayeth His coming" (Matthew 24:28). While in the Parable of the Talents He openly declared that "After a long time the Lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them" (Matthew 25:19). What we would here press upon the attention of our readers is, that, each of these utterances were made by our Lord during the time when He was still upon earth and therefore they must be considered from earth's viewpoint; but when the Lord Jesus said "Surely I come quickly" He spoke from Heaven and concerning Heaven's measurement of time we need to bear in mind that word "Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). In the light of the last quoted Scripture it is easy to understand Revelation 22:20—if our Lord returns before the present century terminates He will have been away but two days! "Surely I come quickly." These are the words of our ascended Lord. This is His promise, sent from the very Throne of Heaven. This is His final word to His people before they hear His "shout" calling them to be with Himself. This, then, is the warrant, the ground, the authorization of our Hope. Let us now consider — III. The blessedness of our hope. It is both interesting and profitable to notice the several adjectives which are used in connection with the believer's Hope. In 2 Thessalonians 2:16 it is termed a "good hope." In Hebrews 6:19 it is described as a hope "both sure and stedfast." In 1 Peter 1:3 it is denominated "a living hope." In Ephesians 4:4 it is styled the "one hope" of our calling. While in Titus 2:13 it is spoken of as "that blessed hope." The blessedness of our Hope is that which is now particularly to engage our attention. In what respects is our hope a "blessed"? one? We answer — 1. Because of its bearing upon Israel. Israel's future blessings wait for the Return of their Messiah. When He was here before He was despised and rejected by His brethren according to the flesh but when He comes back again to this earth they shall welcome and worship Him. That prophecy of Zechariah's 'which received a partial fulfillment when He was here before, is yet to receive a further and complete fulfillment, in the days of His Second Advent. This is clear from the words which immediately follow these which had reference to His entry into Jerusalem a few days before His crucifixion—"Rejoice greatly. O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvations; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass. And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, and the battle bow shall be cut off; and He shall speak peace unto the heathen: and His dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth" (Zech. 9:9, 10). And note further the closing verses of the same chapter—"And the Lord their God shall save them in that day as the flock of His people; for they shall be as the stones of a crown, lifted up as an ensign upon His land. For how great is His goodness, and how great His beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids" (vv. 16, 17). The real "Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem" is yet future. Our Lord is to enter the royal city again and at the time of His return He shall enter it as King in fact and in full manifestation of that fact. Then it is that Zion's King shall come to her "having salvation," and then it is that Israel shall marvel at His grace and at His excellency; and then it will be that the daughter of Jerusalem shall be exalted and be once more owned and blessed by Jehovah. It is on the return of Christ to this earth that Israel shall enter into the enjoyment of that inheritance which was given unto their fathers, and under the reign of their Messiah shall become a blessing to all nations. Again; the Redeemer's Return is a blessed Hope. 2. Because of its bearing upon the Gentiles. This aspect of our subject has not received the attention which it deserves. It has been assumed by some that the present dispensation is the time when God is blessing the Gentiles and that in the Millennium the Jews will be the special objects of God's favor. It is true that in the Millennium Israel shall enter into the enjoyment of their inheritance and that at that time they shall occupy the chief position, governmentally, among the nations, but it is a mistake to suppose that the Gentiles will receive less notice from God than they do now.

During this age God is merely taking out of the Gentiles a people for His name, and hence it is that the vast majority of them are still living amid the darkness of heathendom. But it will not always be thus. The restoration of Israel to God's favor will result in wide blessing to the Gentiles. In the eleventh chapter of Romans, where the apostle is showing that Israel's present "blindness" is not to continue forever, he declares, "I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid; but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. Now if the fall of them (Israel) be the riches of the world (i.e., the enrichment of the Gentiles by the Gospel) and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness? (that is, How much more will Israel's latter-day blessing enrich the Gentiles). For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?" (vv. 11, 12, 15). How clear it is from these verses that, universal blessings for mankind are not to be brought about by the indefinite prolongation of this present dispensation and the preaching of the Gospel, but by the restoration of Israel, after Christendom has been cut off for its non-continuance in God's goodness. As another has said, "The end of apostate Judaism was judgment: the end of apostate Gentile Christianity will be judgment also. But just as blessing came to us when judgment fell upon the Jew, so when judgment falls upon Christendom, blessing will be restored to Israel, and Israel's restoration will bring still fuller blessing to the world than any it has had during the present dispensation; it will be as life from the dead!" (W. Trotter). The words of Simeon recorded in Acts 15 are in perfect agreement with the teaching of Romans 11—"Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, after this, I will return and will build again the tabernacle of David (i. e., Israel), which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up; that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things" (vv. 14-17). It is to be noted that here again the "seeking of the Lord" by the "residue of men and all the Gentiles" is subsequent to the restoration of Israel. There are many prophecies in the Old Testament which speak of the Millennial blessedness of the Gentiles. We single out one or two without commenting extensively upon them. "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" (Isa. 40:5). "O sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marvelous things: His right hand, and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory, The Lord hath made known His salvation: His righteousness hath He openly shewed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered His mercy and His truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God" (Ps. 98:1-3). Once more the order is the same: God's righteousness is displayed before the "heathen" and His salvation is made known to the ends of the earth following God's dealing in mercy with Israel. One more quotation must suffice: "And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and none else: and My people shall never be ashamed. And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh" (Joel 2:27, 28). Like all prophecy, this one receives a double fulfillment. It is to be observed that when Peter quoted from Joel on the Day of Pentecost he did not say, "And now is fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet," but "This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel" (Acts 2:16), because the words of Joel quoted above will not be fulfilled until the Millennium, then and not till then, will God's Spirit be poured out upon "all flesh"—for that glad day, the earth waits the Second Advent of our Lord. Thus we see that the Return of Christ to this earth to usher in the Millennium will be attended with gracious and wide blessing to the Gentiles, for then it will be that "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:9). Again, the Return of the Redeemer is a Blessed Hope — 3. Because of its bearing upon the Church. Concerning this point we shall here merely generalize, for this precious aspect of our subject will come up for consideration again in a later chapter. In a word, we may say that, the Hope of the Church lies

in the future and not in the present, is heavenly and not earthly. To His disciples our Lord said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:30). This is the present portion of the Church which is His body: this is all that the believer is to expect from the world in which he is now living. We are not to be surprised if the world "hates" us, because it first hated our Divine Master. Said the apostle, "Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Yea, we are assured that "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." The Lord's path to the Throne was via the Cross, and we are called to "follow His steps." The Hope of the Church then lies not in this world, but above it; not in the present, but in the future. At first sight it may appear strange, especially to unbelievers, that the Christian should speak of his hope. In contrast to the wicked who have "no peace," the saint has a satisfying portion. The believer has already drunk of that "living water" of which those who drink shall "never thirst." The believer is already in possession of "eternal life," but he has not yet entered into the full and unhindered enjoyment of it—that is still before him as the object of his hope. In one sense then, the Christian is satisfied, in another sense he is not. The believer already knows One, yea, is now indwelt by One who can satisfy him. He knows Christ, possesses Christ, enjoys Christ; but, as yet, he has not seen Christ; It is by faith (not feelings) that we know and enjoy Christ, but the more we know and enjoy Him thus, the more we long to behold Him—"Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your soul" (1 Pet. 1:8, 9). "Yes, my brethren, believing in Christ, whom we have not seen, we love Him; we rejoice in Him with unspeakable joy; we receive the salvation of our souls. But to see Christ—to have the salvation which He wrought out on the cross applied to our bodies as well as to our souls—to have it perfected in our experience even as it respects our souls—to have it consummated thus in all who are fellow-partakers with us of Christ—to be with Him, and with them, in our Father's house—to behold His glory which the Father has given Him—to appear with Him in glory when He appears—to reign with Him over a ransomed and redeemed and happy creation—to fulfill our part in the universal harmony of all in heaven and all in earth, when all shall bow the knee to Jesus, when every tongue shall own Him Lord, and all voices shall join to, celebrate His praise—this, and far more than this—far more than heart can conceive or tongue explain, is what we wait for; and, above all, we wait for Him whose return shall introduce us to all this perfect blessedness—we 'wait for God's Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.' He Is Our Hope. We know Him now by faith as our Savior, our Lord, our life, our peace, our joy, our all. And He Is Our Hope. He is plainly said to be so in 1 Timothy 1:1—'Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior, and Lord Jesus Christ Our Hope.' And what He is thus in so many plain words expressly declared to be in this passage, He is shown to be by the uniform, unvarying testimony of Gospels, Acts, Epistles, and Revelation" ("Plain Papers on Prophetic Subjects" by W. Trotter). Again, the Redeemer's Return is a "Blessed Hope" — 4. Because of its bearing upon Christ Himself. Our Lord Himself is waiting that blest moment when He shall rise from the Father's Throne, descend to the air and catch up His loved and redeemed ones to be forever with Himself. What other meaning can possibly be given to that remarkable word recorded in Revelation 1:9—"I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." And again we read, "But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God. From henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool" (Heb. 10:12, 13). Yes, for well nigh two thousand years, our Lord has patiently waited for the last predestined member to be added to the Church which is His body. Nay, may we not go further, and reverently say, from all eternity the Lord Jesus has been waiting to possess that people given to Him by the Father before the foundation of the world! It was for this "joy" that was set before Him that He despised the cross and endured its shame (Heb. 12:2). It was

for this "one pearl" which He esteemed of "great price" —oh! wondrous thought—that He went and sold all that He had to buy it (Matthew 13:46). It is for this blood-purchased people that He has been interceding on high since the day of His ascension. And at His Second Advent the time of waiting, the long interval of His "patience," will be ended. Then it will be that He shall come to receive us unto Himself. Then it will be that He shall present the Church to Himself "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). Then it will be that "He shall see of the travail of His soul and be satisfied" (Isa. 58:11). O blessed Hope. Well may we cry "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." For Him, too, as well as for us, this is "that blessed hope." And now, dear reader, What is your hope? What is it that is occupying your heart and filling your vision? Is it the prospect of a speedily returning Redeemer? If you are truly the Lord's then do you not yearn to see Him face to face? Do you not long to fall at His feet and say "my Lord and my God"? Surely you do, for you cannot be fully satisfied in this world. How could you be? How can you find satisfaction in a world from which your Savior is absent? "Earth is a wilderness, not merely (no, nor chiefly) because of its trials and its hardships, its sorrows and its pangs, its disappointments and reverses, but because He is not here. Heaven would not be heaven to the saint if Jesus were not there. He, His presence (as that which introduces us to it), His coming is our hope—the hope of the Christian, the hope of the Church. May our hearts cherish it as we have never done! May its brightness so attract us that earth's fairest, loveliest, most enchanting scenes may be weariness itself to our hearts, as detaining us from the object of our hopes! May that object so animate us that earth's heaviest afflictions—the narrowest, most rugged, and most thorny portions of the narrow way—may be welcome to us, as the path that leads us onward to the goal of our expectations, the home of our hearts, the Jesus whose presence makes it what it is, whose love made Him tread a narrower and a darker path than this, and whose smile of ineffable satisfaction shall crown the faith that has trusted Him, the love that has followed Him, and the patience of hope which has waited for Him, throughout this dreary Journey, along this narrow way, amid the darkness and solitude of this long and dismal night" (W. Trotter).

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