

The Imminency of the Redeemer's Return

by A.W. Pink

The Redeemer's Return is an imminent event, and we must maintain an attitude of constant expectation and watchfulness, looking for Him to return at any moment.

Scripture: Matthew 24:42, Hebrews 10:37

Topics: "Imminent Return of Christ", "Watchfulness and Readiness"

Description

A.W. Pink emphasizes the imminent return of the Redeemer, asserting that while the exact timing of Christ's return is unknown, it is a certainty that could happen at any moment. He highlights the importance of living in constant readiness and watchfulness, as the Lord's return will be unexpected, and encourages believers to maintain their faith and vigilance. Pink argues that the anticipation of Christ's return should transform our lives, urging us to live righteously and in love, as the hope of His coming is a powerful motivator for godly living. He also addresses common misconceptions about the timing of the Second Advent, reinforcing that the early apostles shared this expectation of immediacy. Ultimately, Pink calls for a life of preparation, love, and faithfulness in light of the Redeemer's imminent return.

Transcript

The Redeemer's Return

THE IMMINENCY OF THE REDEEMER'S RETURN

Chapter 5

"For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry"

Hebrews 10:37

In the previous chapter we sought to do nothing more than prove that our Redeemer would return before the Millennium, the date of His return, either the approximate or the precise date, we did not touch upon. Nowhere in the Bible is the actual time of the Second Advent made known, instead, it is presented as an event which may occur at any hour; or, in other words, the Fact of the Saviors appearing is invariably set forth in the language of Imminency, When we say that the Redeemer's Return is an imminent event, we do not mean it will occur immediately, but that He may come back in our own lifetime, that He may come back this year; yet, we cannot say that He will do so.

The Fact of the Second Advent is certain because expressly revealed in Holy Writ; the Date of the Second Advent is uncertain because it has not been made known by God. Here then we have a truth which is simple to grasp, yet one which is of fundamental importance and great practical value. The majority of the errors and heresies which have gathered around this subject are directly traceable to the ignoring of this elementary consideration. For example: if the Lord's people had given due heed to the fact that Scripture presents the Second Coming of Christ as something which may happen at any hour, then the post-millennial teaching that our Lord will not come back again for more than a thousand years, would never have obtained the hearing and acceptance which it has received.

Furthermore, if the wondrous truth that our Redeemer might return today once took firm hold on our hearts, it would revolutionize our lives and provide us with a spiritual dynamic which is incalculable in its reach and incomparable in its value. Without expatiating any further upon the general bearings of this aspect of our theme, let us now proceed to show that-- 1. Our Lord Himself spoke of His Return in the language of Imminency. In the Olivet discourse where the Master replied to the inquiries of His disciples concerning the Sign of His Coming and of the End of the Age, He said--"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

But know this that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh. Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over His household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, That He Shall make him ruler over all His goods.

But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth His coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the Lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for Him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 24:42-51.) This Scripture refers primarily to our Lord's Return to the earth, as is evident from the fact that He here styles Himself "The Son of Man;" yet like all prophecy it has at least a double bearing and therefore may properly be applied to His secret Coming in the air.

An analysis of the above passage reveals the following important truths. First: the "hour" of our Lord's Return is unknown to His people. Second; because we know not the exact time of His appearing, we must be in an attitude of constant expectation and watchfulness. Third; the Lord will return unexpectedly, even in such an hour as His own people "think not." Fourth; the faithful and wise servant is he who shall give meat in due season to those of the Lord's household during the time of Christ's absence, and the one who is found so occupied at the time of His appearing shall be richly rewarded.

Fifth; the one who shall say in his heart "My Lord delayeth His coming" is an "evil servant," and such an one shall receive a portion of shame and suffering at our Lord's Return. The Parable of the Ten Virgins intimates that the Lord Jesus desired His people to maintain an attitude of constant readiness for the appearing of the Bridegroom. At the beginning of the parable He pictures all of the "virgins" taking their lamps and going forth to "meet" Him. The interpretation of this part of the parable is very simple.

In the early days after our Lord's departure from the earth, His followers detached themselves from all worldly interests and set their affections on Christ--His return being their one hope and great desire. But

while the Bridegroom tarried the expectation of His appearing disappeared, and spiritual sloth and sleep was the inevitable consequence, and this condition prevailed until the midnight cry arose--"Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet Him." The effect of this cry is seen in the arousing of both the wise and the foolish virgins.

The need of preparation and watchfulness is disclosed in the doom that overtook those who had no oil in their vessels. The practical application of the whole parable was made by the Lord Himself--"Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh (Matthew 25:18). At the close of St. Mark's account of the Olivet discourse he records at greater length than does St. Matthew our Lord's command to his disciples to watch for His return--Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is.

For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark 13:33-37). A careful reading of these verses makes it apparent that the design of the Master was to impress upon His disciples two things: first, that while it was certain He would return, yet it was uncertain when He would appear; second, that in view of the uncertainty of the exact hour of His second coming the Lord's followers must maintain an attitude of constant watchfulness, looking for Him to return at any moment.

On another occasion the Lord said to His disciples, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning: and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when He will return from the wedding: that when He cometh and knocketh, they may open unto Him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if He shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants" (Luke 12:35-38).

The comparison is a very impressive one. The believer is exhorted to be like a faithful servant, standing on the threshold with loins girded and his lamp lighted, peering through the darkness for the first sight of his returning Master and listening eagerly with attentive ear for the first sounds of His approaching steps. "For even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back.

I tell you in that night there shall be two men in one bed: The one shall be taken, and the other left. Two woman shall be grinding together: the one shall be taken and the other left" (Luke 17:30-35). The force of this passage is in full harmony with the others already considered. The Lord's appearing is to be unannounced and unexpected. It will occur while men are busy at their daily vocations, and therefore it behooves us to be constantly on the qui vive. In passing, we may observe how the last quoted Scripture brings out the marvelous scientific accuracy of the Bible.

We are told in verse 31 above, that it shall be "day" (In one part of the earth) at the time Christ is "revealed," while in verse 34 we learn it will be "night" (In another part of the earth), thus anticipating a comparatively recent discovery of science and demonstrating that the Lord Jesus was perfectly cognizant of the rotundity and rotation of the earth! "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be

overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares.

For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:34-36). Mark particularly, above, the words, "lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting (self-indulgence) and so that day come upon you unawares." Daily, nay hourly, readiness is required of us. Language could not be more explicit.

Let those who speak so disparagingly of the "any moment theory" weigh the words "at any time" and remember they were uttered by the Lord Himself. The precise Date of the Second Advent has been designedly withheld from us in order that we should maintain our attitude of watchfulness and that we remain on the very tiptoe of expectation. Just here we must take note of an objection that is brought against the position we are now advocating, namely, In view of the fact that in the above quotations it is clear that our Lord taught His disciples to look for His Return in their own lifetime, how can we harmonize this with His teaching in Matthew 13 where we found He foretold that certain conditions must arise before the end of this age could arrive?

How can we square the presentation of the Redeemer's Return in the language of imminency with the predictions that before He came back the little mustard-seed must grow into a great tree and the whole of the three measures of meal be completely leavened? At first sight this appears a real difficulty, but further reflection will show it is more apparent than actual. When we examine the parables of Matthew 13 in the presence of the above objection our first question must be, What impression were these parables calculated to make upon the minds of the apostles, or on Christians in apostolic days?

That these parables contain prophetic pictures which it has taken many centuries to fully develop is evident to intelligent believers living now, but we insist that these predictions were couched in such terms that there was nothing in their surface and obvious signification which forbade the apostles and their converts looking for the Redeemer to return in their own lifetime. In other words, there was nothing direct in these parables which argued the inevitable postponement of the Second Advent until a long interval of time had lapsed after they were uttered by the Lord Jesus.

In our exposition of Matthew 13 (see the previous chapter) we showed how, very early in the apostolic era, these parables began to receive their fulfillment, and, as we would now point out, they were fulfilled to such an extent that as a matter of fact they presented no necessary obstacles to the first century saints who believed in the Imminent appearing of the Savior. The first parable need not here detain us, for, the Sowing of the Seed was done by Christ Himself while He was here in person on the earth.

Concerning the parable of the Tares it is sufficient to say that within the lifetime of the apostles themselves, long before the end of the first century was reached, Satan had succeeded in covertly introducing his children among the people of God. It is true the parable teaches that the wheat and the tares were to grow together until the harvest and that the harvest would not be until the end of the age, but there is nothing in the parable which intimated that a protracted interval lay between the sowing and the harvest, nay, there was nothing in it which discouraged the belief that the crop might hasten rapidly and the harvest occur in the lifetime of the apostles themselves.

The third parable foretold that the little mustard-seed was to become a great tree and, as we saw, it was the growth of Christianity (previously corrupted) which was thus symbolized. But let it be carefully noted

that nothing at all was said in the parable as to how great the "tree" was to become. Furthermore, we know that even in the days of the apostles Christianity had made marvelous progress and had spread through extensive regions. At the time our Lord uttered the parable His followers were but a mere handful and there is nothing to indicate that up to the hour of His ascension His flock was anything more than a "little" one.

But contrast the conditions that we read of in the Book of Acts. Mark the three thousand which were converted on the day of Pentecost. Take note of such expressions as, "And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:14); "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (8:5, 6, 12); "And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus, And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.

Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord" (11:20-24). Take into consideration the churches which were planted in Galatia, Corinth, Thessalonians, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, Babylon (1 Pet. 5:18), Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and then it will be seen that the predicted growth of the mustard-seed could present no obstacle to the disciples' continual expectancy of Christ's appearing.

And if it be further objected that our parable foretold the corruption as well as the growth of Christianity, the answer is that the apostolic Epistles record the fulfillment of this part of the parable too. Read such passages as Philippians 3:18, 19, where the apostle says, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the Cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things;" and "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work" (2 Thess. 2:7) and from such Scriptures we may discover how extensively the meal had been "leavened" in that early day.

Thus the parables of the mustard-seed and the Leaven had been so far fulfilled in the lifetime of the apostles themselves that none could say the end of the age might not even then be near at hand. One other Scripture needs to be noted in this connection ere we turn to our next point. It has often been objected by post-millennialists that in view of our Lord's declaration "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matthew 24:14), that it was impossible for the apostles to be expecting Christ to return in their own lifetime, But this objection is disposed of by several passages recorded in the New Testament itself.

In Acts 19:10 we read, "And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." And again, in Colossians 1:5, 6 we are told, "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the Gospel: which is come unto you, as it is in all the world" and in verse 23 of the same chapter "be not moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister."

From these passages thou it is abundantly clear that no such formidable hindrance as imagined by post-millennialists interposed between the apostles and the hope of the imminent return of the Redeemer. Scripture thus affords positive evidence that the Gospel had been so widely diffused by the apostles themselves that nothing further necessarily and inevitably intervened between them and the realization of their hope. Having thus, we trust, satisfactorily, disused of the most plausible and forcible objection which can be brought against the pre-millennial and imminent Return of our Lord, let us now consider-- 2.

The Apostles referred to in the language of Imminency. "Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:11,12). The "salvation," to which the apostle here refers is the completing and consummating of our salvation, when we shall, in spirit and soul and body, be fully conformed to the image of God's Son.

The time when this will be realized is the time of our Redeemer's Return, for, "when He shall appear we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2). That time will be the believer's "day," that "perfect day" unto which the path of the just "shineth more and more" (Prov. 4:18). The "night," spoken of above, is the present period during which the Light of the world is absent. Observe that the apostle, under the Holy Spirit, regarded the night as "far spent," and the day as "at hand!" "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. 16:20).

The reference here is to Genesis 3:15 where we have recorded Jehovah's promise to our first parents that the woman's Seed should bruise the head of the Serpent. As believers will, in the coming day, rule and reign "with Christ" (see Revelation 3:21; 19:14; 20:4) it is here said "The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet." In the use of the word "shortly" we learn that the apostle did not regard, the fulfillment of this promise as something which lay in the far distant future, but rather as that which was even then impending.

"I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in everything ye are enriched by Him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:4-7). From this passage we learn: first, that these Corinthian saints were "waiting" for the Coming of the Lord Jesus, which proves they were looking for Him to return in their generation; second, that the apostle commended them for their attitude, yea, "thanked God always on their behalf;" third, that this expectation on the part of these Corinthian believers was the very summum bonum of Christian experience, inasmuch as it is said, they "came behind in no gift," and then as a climax it is added--"Waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:24, 25). The coming "Day" with its glories and blessedness was that which filled the apostle's vision. The promised "Day"--the Day of Christ--which was to follow this dark night of sorrow when the Bridegroom is absent, was the hope which stayed his heart.

He could "see," by faith, that day was approaching, and on the fact of its imminency he bases an exhortation to those who are partakers of the heavenly calling to conduct themselves in the present in a manner befitting those who are the children of light. Again, in this same chapter the apostle says, "For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (vs. 37.) How clear it is from these words

that the Holy Spirit desired the first century believers to be 'looking for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the great God and Savior, Jesus Christ'!

So real was the hope of the Redeemer's Return to the heart of the apostle Paul and so imminent did this event appear to him that we find he included himself among those who might not fall asleep but be among the living saints when the Assembling Shout should be heard. Said he "Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15:51, 52). Again, "For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our (not "your") vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body" (Phil. 3:19, 20).

Once more, "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 (not "ye") 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" (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). The enemies of the faith have seized upon these very statements to show that the apostle Paul was in error, that he wrote by unaided human wisdom, that he merely recorded in his Epistles his own beliefs, and that in some of these he was clearly mistaken.

But such an objection is quite pointless to the saints who believe that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." We hope to show further on in this chapter why the Holy Spirit moved the apostles to write of the Second Advent of Christ as an event which might take place in their own day. The apostle Paul was not alone in this regard: we find that the other apostles also regarded the Return of our Lord as something which might occur at any time. The apostle James wrote, "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh." (Jam. 5:8).

There is no ambiguity about this language: such a statement not only argued the pre-millennial Coming of Christ, inasmuch as His Coming could not be said to have "drawn nigh" if a whole Millennium intervened, but it also announced the imminency of His return--something which might be expected at any time. The apostle Peter declared, "But the end of things (all things connected with this present regime) is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and Watch unto prayer" (1 Pet. 4:7). The apostle was expecting the speedy winding up of this present economy and the introduction of a new order of things when his Lord returned and took the government upon His shoulder.

The apostle John said, "Little children it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (1 John 2:18). The "last time" or "last hour" (Greek hora) must be distinguished from "the last days" (2 Tim. 3:1) and "the last day" (Greek hemera--John 6:39). The "last days" refer to the closing decades of this present dispensation. The "last day" looks forward to the Millennium when the saints shall participate in the "first resurrection"--it is the last Day of God's dispensational week, foreshadowed by the Sabbath.

The "last hour" is connected with the Antichrist. It is the "last hour" of Satan's freedom for, excepting the "little-season" referred to in Revelation 20, after this dispensation Satan will be for ever banished from these scenes. This dispensation then is Satan's "last hour" as the "Prince of this world" and it is during the closing moments of this "last hour" that the Antichrist shall be revealed. The force then of the apostle's statement was to the effect that though the personal Antichrist had not appeared up to the time when he wrote his epistle, yet, the saints must not conclude from this that the Second Coming of Christ was necessarily a long way off.

No; even then there were many Anti-christs by which they were to know it was the "last time." Thus we see that the testimony of the apostles was uniform and explicit. They were looking for their Lord to return at any time. Such ought to be our attitude too. "Let not my eyes with tears be dim, Let joy their upward glance illumine; Look up, and watch, and wait for Him-- Soon, soon the Lord will come.

Soon will that star-paved milky way,

Soon will that beauteous azure dome,

Glories, ne'er yet conceived display --

Soon, soon the Lord will come.

Changed in the twinkling of an eye,

Invested with immortal bloom,

I shall behold Him throned on high,

And sing, 'The Lord is come!'

One beam from His all-glorious face

These mortal garments will consume,

Each sinful blemish will efface--

Lord Jesus: quickly come!

What will it be with Thee to dwell,

Thyself my everlasting Home!

Oh, bliss--Oh, joy ineffable!

Lord Jesus, quickly come!"

3. Why was the fact of our Lord's Return presented in the language of Imminency and the exact date withheld? At first sight it may appear strange that our Lord has not made known to us the precise date of His appearing. He has caused many details concerning the Blessed Hope to be recorded in the Word. He has made known many things which are to transpire at His second advent, and in view of the fact that so much has been revealed it may strike us as peculiar that the very point upon which human curiosity most desires enlightenment should have been left undefined.

We need hardly say that it was not ignorance on our Lord's part which caused Him to leave the hour of His second coming undetermined, though some of His enemies have dared to charge this against Him, basing their evil indictment upon Mark 13:32--"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father." These words need occasion no difficulty if we pay due attention to the particular Gospel in which they are found, namely, Mark's--the Gospel of the Servant of Jehovah, The purpose of Mark's Gospel is to present the Lord Jesus as the perfect Servant, the obedient Servant, the Servant whose meat it was to do the will of Him that sent Him, and, "the servant

knoweth not what his lord doeth" (John 15:15).

Mark 13:32 does not call into question our Lord's omniscience but asserts that, as a Servant, He waited Another's will. A little reflection will reveal the perfect wisdom of our Lord in concealing the exact date of His Return. One reason was that He desired to keep His people on the very tiptoe of expectation, continually looking for Him. Again, this question needs to be pondered in the light of the Unity of Christ's church. The tendency with all of us is to regard believers as so many detached individuals, instead of viewing the saints as "one body" (1 Cor. 12:13) "members one of another" (Rom. 12:5).

The church is not an organization, it is a living organism, a "body" of which Christ is the "head." Hence, the Imminency of the Redeemer's return is to one member precisely what it is to all the members, and therefore it is that first century believers were just as truly and just as much interested in the appearing of the Savior as are believers now living in the twentieth century. The object of hope then is the object of hope now, for the Body is one, and conversely, the object of hope now must necessarily have been the object of hope then.

Consequently, the early Christians, by virtue of the Unity of the saints, were exhorted to walk in the light and blessing of a hope which is common to the entire church. The Return of our Lord might not have been revealed at all, but in that case a most powerful dynamic to godly living would have been withheld from the church. The Imminency of the Redeemer's second advent was revealed as an incentive to watchfulness and preparedness. If then the fact of our Lord's return had not been presented in the New Testament as something which might occur at any time, but, instead, had been expressly postponed and fixed to happen in some particular and distant century, then all believers who lived in the centuries preceding that one would have been robbed of the comfort which is to be found in the assurance that Christ may return at any hour and would have lost the purifying effects which such a prospect is calculated to produce.

As it has been well remarked, "It is not that He desires each succeeding generation to believe that He will certainly return in their time, for He does not desire our faith and our practice to be founded on an error, as, in that case, the faith and practice of all generations except the last would be. But it is a necessary element of the doctrine concerning the second coming of Christ, that it should be possible at any time, that no generation should consider it improbable in theirs" (Archbishop Trench).

Here then is the simple but sufficient answer to our question. The second coming of Christ is presented in the language of imminency because of the far-reaching effects it is designed to exert on those who lay hold of the promise, "Surely I come quickly." The imminent return of the Redeemer is a practical hope. It is the commanding motive of the New Testament. The Holy Spirit has linked it with every precept and practice of Christian character and conduct. As another has so well expressed it: "It arms admonitions, it points appeals, it strengthens arguments, it enforces commands, it intensifies entreaties, it arouses courage, it rebukes fear, it quickens affection, it kindles hope, it inflames zeal, it separates from the world, it consecrates to God, it dries tears, it conquers death" (Brookes).

To amplify this statement in detail -- The hope of our Lord's second advent produces loyalty and faithfulness to Christ, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over His household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth, I say unto you, that He will make him ruler over all that He hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My Lord delayeth His coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The Lord of that Servant will come in

a day when he looketh not for Him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers" (Luke 12:42-46).

The moral purpose of this parable (see context of above quotation) is apparent. While the steward maintained an attitude of watchfulness he was faithful and sober, but when he said in his heart "my Lord delayeth His coming" he began to beat his fellow-servants and to eat and drink and be drunken. Watching for the Lord then is an incentive to loyalty and fidelity, while unwatchfulness results in worldliness of heart, carelessness of walk and carnality of life. The Return of our Lord is presented as a motive to brotherly love--"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end He may stablish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (1 Thess. 3:12, 13).

In view of the fact that our Lord may return at any hour, how awful are divisions between the Lord's own people. Soon shall each of us appear before the Bema of Christ where every wrong will be righted and every misunderstanding cleared up. The Lord is at hand, therefore let us sink our petty differences, forgive one another even as God hath for Christ's sake forgiven us, and increase and abound in love one toward another. The perennial hope of Christ's second advent is used as a call to a godly walk--"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). How clear it is from these words that the Blessed Hope is intended to check the spirit of self-pleasing and self-seeking in the believer and to promote holiness in the daily life. As says the apostle John, "He that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself even as He is pure" (1 John 3:3). The return of our Lord is designed to comfort bereaved hearts--"For 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 (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" (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Those to whom the apostle was writing were sorrowing over the loss of loved ones. But observe, he does not seek to solace by telling them that shortly they would die and join the departed in heaven. No; he held up before them the prospect of a returning Savior who would bring back the sleeping saints with Him. The promise of the Redeemer's return is calculated to develop the grace of patience--"Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord.

Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (Jam. 5:7, 8). These words were addressed to saints who were poor in this world's goods and who were groaning beneath the oppression of unrighteous employers. How timely is this word of exhortation to many a twentieth-century saint! How many of God's poor are now crying unto the Lord for deliverance from pecuniary difficulties, from tyranny and injustice!

These cries have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts, and just as He intervened of old on behalf of Israel in Egypt, so will He speedily come and remove His people from their present cruel task-masters. In the meantime, the word is, "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord." The hope of our Lords return is the antidote for worry--"Let your forbearance be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. In nothing be anxious" (Phil. 4:5, 6, R. V.). Brethren in Christ, why be so fearful about meeting next year's liabilities?

Why be anxiously scheming and fretting about the future? Why be worrying about the morrow? Tomorrow you may be in heaven. Before tomorrow dawns the assembling Shout may be given. At any hour thy Savior may come. The Lord is at hand and His appearing will mean the end of all your trials and troubles. Look not then at your dangers and difficulties, but for your Redeemer. In nothing be anxious. The prospect of a speedily returning Savior is employed to stimulate sobriety and vigilance--"Knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light" (Rom. 13:11, 12). As we have shown in a previous chapter the "salvation" here spoken of is that mentioned in Hebrews 9:28 ("unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation") which salvation is brought to us at Christ's second advent. Note, particularly, that this salvation is not presented as a distant hope, to be realized at some remote period, but is set forth as that which is nigh at hand.

Ere closing this chapter one other question claims our attention-- 4. Why is it that our Lord has tarried till now? Why has not the Redeemer returned long ere this? At first sight perhaps this inquiry might appear almost irreverent and some may feel inclined to remind us that "secret things belong unto the Lord." In response we would say, It is not in any spirit of idle curiosity nor is it to indulge an inquisitive speculation that we take up this question, but simply because we believe that a humble examination of it will prove profitable to our souls, inasmuch as the answer to our inquiry demonstrates the wisdom and grace of Him with whom we have to do.

Of old, the mother of Sisera cried concerning her son, "Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" (Judg. 5:28). We might well appropriate these words to our present inquiry. On the eve of His death, the Lord Jesus 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," but eighteen centuries have run their weary course since then and He has not yet returned!

Is not this deeply mysterious? A world in which iniquity abounds more and more; an Israel without a home and without a king; a church rent by divisions and, like Samson, shorn of its power; a groaning creation and a war-stricken earth, all unite in crying with the souls under the altar "How long, O Lord!" (Rev. 6:10). Why then such delay? Why has the millennial era of blessedness been thus postponed? Why has not the Redeemer returned to enter into His blood-bought inheritance long ere this?

Stupendous questions surely. Questions which sometime or other exercise the hearts of all the saints of God. Is it possible to discover a satisfactory answer? A complete answer--No; for now we "know in part." But an answer--yes, an answer that will at least enable us to see, even though it be through a glass darkly, something of the meaning of our Lord's delay. Why this protracted interval since the time of His departure? Why has He not returned long ere this? We answer-- First, because God would give man full opportunity to develop his schemes and thereby demonstrate the world's need of a competent Ruler.

Man cannot complain that God has not allowed him full opportunity to experiment and test his own plans. Man has been permitted to do his utmost in ruling and regenerating the world. God, as it were, has put the reins of government into his hands, and withdrawn for a season. Why? To show whether man was sufficient for these things. To show whether or not man was capable of governing himself. To show whether man was competent to grapple successfully with the powers of evil which war upon his soul.

Throughout the ages man's efforts have been directed toward ruling and regenerating the world. Man has been given full scope. With what results? With the result that the incurable hatred of the human heart to God and the utter depravity of human nature have been fully displayed. How has man used the freedom, the opportunities, the privileges, the relents with which his Maker has endowed him? To what profit has he turned them? Have they been used with the purpose of glorifying God or of deifying himself?

To ask the question is quite enough. Loud have been man's boasts. Lofty have been his claims. Pretentious his vauntings. Such terms as improvement, advancement, enlightenment, evolution, civilization, have been his favorite slogans. But the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, and the folly of the world's wisdom and the vanity of man's claims are now displayed before our eyes. What has 'civilization' effected? With all our so-called enlightenment and progress unto what have we attained?

Let the records of our Law-courts tell us. Let the columns of the daily newspapers make response. Let the economic, political and moral conditions of the day make answer. Let the world war with all its inhumanities, its barbarities, its fiendish atrocities, give reply. And mark, it cannot be said that these things are clue to man's ignorance and inexperience. Man is not just starting out to make history. We are now living in the twentieth century of the Christian era. Man then cannot--complain that God has not given him plenty of time to mature his plans.

No; God has given ample time, time enough to show that he is an utter failure, time enough to demonstrate that he is totally incapable of governing himself, time enough to prove that if relief comes at all it must come from outside of himself. Here then is the first part of our answer. Christ's return has been delayed in order to provide opportunity for man's plans to fully develop. God waits till harvest-time. He has been waiting for the harvest time of man's schemes and efforts.

He has been waiting patiently with sickle in hand, and as soon as the crops of human industry have fully matured, the word will go forth--"Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe" (Rev. 14:15). Why has not our Lord returned long ere this?--We answer--Second, in order that God might fully display His long-sufferance. "But, 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.

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:8, 9). All through these nineteen centuries the Lord has been saying, "Come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Ever since the Savior left the earth, God has been dealing with the world in mercy instead of visiting it with judgment. God's patience toward our wicked race has been truly marvelous.

Wonderful it is that the vials of His wrath have not been emptied upon the nations long ere this, What long-sufferance Jehovah hath shown in bearing with such rebels these twenty centuries! Why is it that the Day of Salvation has lasted until it now exceeds in length every dispensation that has preceded it? Why is it that the door of mercy still stands open wide and God is yet be, seeking sinners to be reconciled to

Himself? Why is it that Christ has not long, long ago returned in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not His Gospel?

Why is it that He is not now seated upon the Throne of His Glory and saying to His enemies, "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels"? Why? Ah! why? Because the Lord God is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish. Suppose that Christ had returned five, ten, twenty, fifty years ago, then, in such case, how many who read these lines rejoicing that they have been accepted in the Beloved, would have perished in their sins!

Join, then, with the writer in returning thanks for the marvelous longsufferance of our gracious God. Why has not the Lord returned long ere this? We answer-- Third, in order that God might fully test the faith of His own people. This has ever been His way. Why those years of waiting before Abraham received Isaac? Why that protracted bondage in Egypt, when the chosen people groaned beneath the burdens imposed on them by their cruel task-masters? Why those four centuries of silence between the ministries of Malachi and John the Baptist?

Why a four thousand years interval from the giving of the promise of the woman's Seed until its realization? Why?--to test the faith of His people, to demonstrate the reality of their confidence in Him. So in this dispensation. Why has our Lord tarried so long in the Father's house? Why these eighteen centuries for His church to journey through the wilderness of the world? Why is it that the first, the second, and the third "watch" has passed and yet our Lord has not come? Why did God permit the Blessed Hope to be recovered almost a hundred years ago, and still the Bridegroom tarryes?

Why this earnest expectation on the part of His own for three generations past and even now the heavens are silent? Why tarry the wheels of His chariot? Why?--because God would fully test the faith of His people. Why is He pleased to do this? To the praise of the glory of His grace. Perhaps to demonstrate to the angels, to whom we are "made a spectacle" (1 Cor. 4:9), that God has a people who by His grace can trust Him even amid the darkness of a profound mystery! Wonderful are the ways of our God.

Scoffers may cry, "Where is the promise of His coming?" Evil servants may exclaim "my Lord delayeth His coming," and our own wicked hearts may sometimes be tempted to murmur against the long delay, nevertheless, it shall yet be seen that He "doeth all things well."

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