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THE RETURN OF THE LORD JESUS

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For a number of years past, in writing for various publications, I have majored on the Bible doctrines of the Lord's return and associated subjects. There may be some who think I have given undue attention to such subjects to the neglect of those which may be more directly connected with personal salvation and the problems of Christian living in general. My reply would be that the Gospel age has provided such a wealth of literature on the latter subjects that to say more would be to indulge in repetition.

On the other hand, there are few books, comparatively, or periodicals, which deal honestly with the Lord's return. The fact is that the majority of books on this subject, which are read today, have been written and published during recent years. And I might say here that some of them are full of error and unsafe to read. Therefore we should be careful how we read and accept the theories of such writers. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isa. 8:20) Sometimes men indulge in wishful thinking and, like the false prophets of old, "They speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the Lord." (Jer. 23:16).

However, we do know that in recent years there have been an ever-increasing number of the most devoted followers of the Lord Jesus, those who accept most fully and believe most profoundly the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the written Word, upon whose minds and hearts God has evidently laid the urge to proclaim by the spoken and written word the Scriptural doctrine of the return of the Lord Jesus to this earth. While no man can know the day or hour of His coming, yet this would lead us to think that the end of this age is not far distant, that the return of the Lord is drawing near, and God is preparing the minds and hearts of His people for that sublime event.

More than two centuries ago that great English scientist, Sir Isaac Newton, made a statement which, as we read it in the light of today's world conditions, sounds prophetic. He said: "About the time of the end, a body of men will be raised up who will turn their attentions to the prophecies, and insist upon their literal interpretation, in the midst of much clamor and opposition."

These are indeed arresting words, spoken as they were so long ago and by such an eminent scientist and also earnest Christian and Bible student. We certainly do not claim inspiration for any man's words outside of those whom God chose to write the Holy Scriptures; yet these words describe a situation which exists today, and God does indeed

guide those who trust in Him to an understanding of His own written Word. We know that Jesus said: "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." God is indeed raising up a people today who are willing to go up and down the land proclaiming, in the midst of "clamor and opposition," that "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 1:11).

As a stirring in the tops of the trees is indicative of an approaching storm, so the awakening of true Christians everywhere to increased interest in their Lord's return would seem to indicate that the day is near when the Lord will catch away His waiting bride, the true church. Then the ungodly nations will be plunged into the terrible days of the tribulation, which will immediately precede the day when the Lord will descend to the earth, when "every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." (Rev. 1:7).

However that may be, however near we are to the end of this age, (and, personally, I do not know) I am certain that anyone whose eyes are open to recognize the apostasy prevailing in the professed church, the decadency of the moral standards of civilization, and the chaotic state of the nations of the world, must inevitably admit that there is a dire need of a change for the betterment in these ways which has never been accomplished by mere human power and management. Indeed, since the beginning of the age to the present day, there has been a gradual deterioration along these lines. True, at times there seemed to be upward trends; but these were invariably followed by sinkings to lower levels. When we look into the past history, and we also consider present-day conditions, where is the basis for the hope that such deplorable conditions can be permanently improved under human rulership?

Indeed, all the apostolic writers of the New Testament warned again and again of the evil, perilous and apostate times in which the world would end. They declared that in their days the "mystery of iniquity" was already working and the spirit of the antichrist was already in the world. The Lord Jesus, speaking of God's avenging His elect who cry to Him night and day, said: "Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" The question contains its own answer, which is an emphatic no.

I am not a prophet. I have no power to predict future events. All I know of the future is what God has been pleased to reveal and make plain in His inspired Word. I do most fully accept the assurance of Holy Writ that

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God." However, it does not necessarily follow that all parts of the inspired Scripture are equally open to the minds of men. There are some parts which God has been pleased to conceal within His own sovereign mind. When trying to penetrate some of God's hidden mysteries, it might be well for us to consider the words of Jesus to Peter, when He said, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter."

Where God has not clearly spoken, I shall be silent. Others may jump to conclusions and attempt to explain obscure passages of the Word, or fit current events into the mould of prophecy. I refuse to do so. Therefore I must say that I do not know, from anything I have read in the Holy Scriptures, how near we are to the end of this age and to the return of the Lord. I only know that He will return because the Word of God says in plain and unmistakable language that He will return. How can I be mistaken when it says: "This same Jesus . . . shall so come . . . as ye have seen him go"?

But as to the day or month or year of His coming, I have no such assurance. Neither has any other man. Yet there are some who think they can prove from certain texts of Scripture the very generation in which He will come. Others in other generations attempted to prove by the same texts that He would come in their generation; yet the heavens still hold Him. I have a book, very fine in some of its parts, in which the writer sought to prove that the World War of 1914-1918 indicated that Jesus would come in that generation. Recently I heard a man explain at great length and with much positiveness that the same texts apply to the present war. Someone is wrong. Both cannot be right; for Jesus has not yet come.

It is altogether possible to read into a text of Scripture that which is not there. At critical periods of the world's history, it is quite common for earnest and sincere Christians to conclude that because the days are evil the coming of the Lord must necessarily be very near. It seems that the world today has sunk to a very low level of iniquity. But the fact is I do not know how much longer it can go, and the Word of God does not tell me. The Apostle Paul says: "Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse" in the last days. But Paul does not explain how much worse men may become before they reach the bottom. Jesus said that the days of the Son of man would be comparable to the days of Noah, and to the days of Lot. Perhaps we may know something of the iniquity of those days because God has told us. But who is to be the judge when the days of the world have reached the limit of vileness of those days? Surely not man, but God only; and God has not told us.

I hasten to conclude by calling attention

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