

be made manifest as time passes. So, to Him belongeth all the praise and glory for what has been accomplished. Amen.

We are believing God in prayer that Beulah Camp this year will witness the greatest moving of the Holy Spirit upon a group of people in His efforts to carry out the great plan of Redemption. And, that such a wave will not lose its force but increase in power, as it spreads out over such a needy field.

God bless you all.

His servants and the servants of His people.

R. L. AND MRS. SABINE.

THAT BLESSED HOPE

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Text: "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ". (Titus 2:13).

NOWADAYS it is the fashion, in many circles both inside and outside the Church, to look back upon the early Christians and to say, in a superior sort of voice, "Well, yes, of course those first Christians believed that Christ was coming again, but we know quite well by now that they were mistaken." To which it might not be amiss to reply that we and not they, might possibly be the ones who have missed our way.

I. The Total Picture

Speaking for myself and, I think, for most of you, I am ready to witness to my faith in the primitive Christian doctrine that the return of Jesus Christ in power and great glory is still what the Apostle Paul declared it was when he told Titus that it is the "blessed hope" of those who are still alive in Christ. Let us see then how Paul views this hope and the setting in which he exalts it.

Our text is only a part of one of those long and glowing sentences of which Paul was so fond. That whole sentence, therefore, needs to be grasped as clearly as possible. It covers four verses (11-14) as follows: "For the grace of God has displayed itself with saving power to all mankind, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly desires, and to live sober, upright, and pious lives in the present world, awaiting fulfilment of our blessed hope—the appearing in glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us to purchase our freedom from all iniquity, and purify for Himself a people who should be His own, zealous for good works". (Weymouth).

Three Major Facts

Thus, in its over-all treatment of the truth, the sentence that contains our text sets before us three major facts; first, the Display of God's grace in Christ at His first coming; second, the Disclosure of God's glory in Christ at His second coming; and third, the Discipline of the believer's life which is involved in his acceptance of the grace and is inspired by his hope of the glory. It is, you see, a magnificent picture, broad in its conception, vivid in its colors, and really breathtaking in the vistas it opens up to us.

II. The Triumphant Prospect

Having looked at our text in its relation to the larger setting out of which it comes, we are concerned now with this appearing of Christ in glory which the Holy Spirit declares to be the "blessed hope" of the Christian Church.

However, before I say anything about its being a thoroughly blessed hope, I want to remind you that the personal return of the Lord Jesus Christ is a solidly based hope. Did not Jesus Himself speak positively about it? Shall we not believe Him when He says, "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according

to his works"? (Matt. 16:27). Shall we not accept it when He declares, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory"? (Matt. 25:31).

"This Same Jesus"

Or, passing from the promises of Jesus take the witness of the early Church as found in the New Testament. In the first chapter of Acts the historian Luke sets his seal to the record that as the disciples were looking upon the ascension of the Lord Jesus, "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).

As for the apostles, since our text is from Saint Paul, and since it could be paralleled by scores of references to the Second Advent of our Lord as found in other of the Pauline epistles, let's listen to some of Paul's associates in the early Church. Here is Peter, for example, in a charming passage, exhorting the ministers to be faithful shepherds, for, says he, "when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Peter 4).

Here is James, calling to his fellow Christians and saying, "Be patient therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord" (James 5:7).

And here is John, aged and mature and tender, writing to younger Christians, "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." (1 Peter 4).

"Lo, He Comes!"

To all of this might be added a vast volume of testimony from the theologians and hymn writers of the Church of Christ universal. The glowing essence of that testimony can be sampled, I think, in the lines of Charles Wesley's noble hymn:

"Lo, He comes with clouds descending,  
Once for favored sinners slain;  
Thousand, thousand saints attending,  
Swell the triumphs of His train;  
Hallelujah!

Jesus comes, and comes to reign."

I want now to carry a bit further this discussion of our triumphant Christian prospect—"the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." The fact of it, as constituting the hope of the church, is freshly before us; but it is the richness, the many-sidedness, of the fact, that we need to appreciate. For therein lies the blessedness of this hope.

For one thing, Christ's return is a "blessed hope" because of what it says to us about the goal of history. The other day I ran across this sentence: "Every thoughtful person has, I suppose, some philosophy of history, some theory as to the meaning and end of organized life on earth." Has history a meaning and a goal, and if so, what is it? Is this immense drama of humanity, this huge welter of war and peace, of hate and love, of death and life, to go on forever, with no victory for either side, or with a final fate in which evil and madness triumph?

Over against that grim hopelessness set the view of Jesus and the view which Paul received from Jesus. They tell us that history is a conflict moving toward a crisis. They forewarn us that to the end of the age we shall have a mixed condition—wheat and tares, love and hate, peace and war, faith and apostasy, righteousness and iniquity. At the same time they assure us that the final word in this conflict rests with God, and that such a word will be spoken in judgment

through His son. There will be, in short, a reappearing of the Lord Christ at a time which no man exactly knows. This reappearing will be the signal of judgment upon all evil forces and evil men everywhere and the signal of rapture and reward for the forces and the friends of righteousness. That, without going into any disputed details, is the victorious goal of history as seen on the pages of the New Testament. It is a thrilling thing to believe. It is an inspiring thing to announce. With Paul we may say, "He (God) hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead" (Acts 17:31).

"The world is very evil;  
The times are waxing late;  
Be sober and keep vigil,  
The Judge is at the gate—  
The Judge that comes in mercy,  
The Judge that comes with might,  
To terminate the evil,  
To diadem the right."

The "Last Enemy"

Furthermore, the return of the Lord Jesus Christ is a "blessed hope" because of what it says about the grief of death. The Holy Scriptures refer to death as an "enemy" as indeed the "last enemy." They tell us that this enemy is going to be "destroyed." Now what is important for our present discussion is the fact the Scriptures connect this destruction of death with the coming again of the Lord Jesus. Turn to the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians for evidence. It is "at his coming" that this "corruptible shall . . . put on incorruption." It is "at his coming" that "this mortal. . . put on immortality." It is "at his coming" that there "shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." It is "at his coming" that we shall prepare an epitaph for death and shout it across a wide and wasted world of grief, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

The other day I saw a picture which had been taken on a recent night by a newspaper photographer in New York City. Beneath the marquee of a theater, policemen were unfolding newspapers with which to cover the body of a man who had just been shot dead. Directly above the crumpled body, lying graceless on the sidewalk, was a sign that formed a leering irony. There was the name of the play that happened to be running in that theater—"The Joy of Living."

This Is Death's Day

Is that not a parable of life? Dress up life in just as bright colors as you can. Make it as gay a performance as you are able. Still, death is sprawled out just below you—stark, ugly, inevitable! That is the order of things in this sin-twisted, death-wracked world of ours. What is more, it will continue to be the order until Christ steps down from His heavenly throne, reveals Himself in the glory and majesty of His judgment and His reign, and casts death with its tears and agonies into the outer darkness where it belongs.

III. The Tested Preparation

Jesus told us in one of His parables that getting ready for His return was like making preparation to attend a wedding—one must come in suitable attire. Paul is true to that picture of things when he tells us here that we must have the grace which the Lord Jesus Christ provided in His first coming if we are to share the glory that He will reveal to us at His second appearing.

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