

Christ is Coming – But Will You Be Ready?

In the New Testament portion of our Daily Reading Plan, the inspired Apostle describes the Hope of the faithful of all ages, by way of reference to his own expectation:

“there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).

Yahweh is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6), and the reward is here offered to those who view the Master’s return with a particular disposition of mind. We may all know as a matter of fact, that the Bible plainly speaks about the Return of Messiah to the earth – but how do we really respond to that fact? Is it something that we seek, and long for above all else – or do we secretly hope that he doesn’t come just yet, to allow us longer to enjoy the pleasures of this life, and the fulfilments of the desires of the flesh and mind? Doubts will almost certainly arise in the minds of all men, but the faithful are those whose disposition towards Messiah’s coming is that of love, that day being the great climax of all their desires, with no tinge of regret. Our considerations in this exhortation will be of some of those passages of Scripture that reveal the mindset of the faithful towards the appearing of their Master from heaven, so that we, knowing what is required of us, might walk forward towards the Kingdom in hope, and a sure confidence.

Romans chapter 8 describes how that the “earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope. Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom. 8:19-21).

In these words, we have a most apt portrayal of man’s natural state: subject to vanity, in the bondage of corruption, and in need of deliverance. The position of groaning in travail is not one of man’s choosing, but by force of circumstance – the circumstance created in the first instance by the sinfulness of the first human pair. But the Father has not left us without hope: we can be delivered from the bondage of corruption into which we are born, by being reborn: begotten by the Word. By this means, sinful sons of Adam become righteous “Children of God” - and they wait and long for the time when they may bear the image of the Heavenly, being delivered from the corruption that is in the world through lust.

There is then, a patient “waiting” for the coming day of liberty. A considerable duration of time was to elapse between the days when Messiah walked among men in mortal weakness, and the time when he shall sit as Judge of all the earth. Of course, the delay is only apparent, for whilst in man’s terms 2000 years is a long time, to the Father in whom all things exist, a thousand years is but a day (2 Pet. 3:8). Even so, there is a need to patiently continue in good works until the dawning of the Millennial Age – and that requires endurance of pressures, both without and within.

There are 2 ways of looking at the apparent delay. Matthew 24 reveals the disposition of the unfaithful servant:

“ ... But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellowservants, 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” (Mat. 24:48-50).

Here, rather than considering the time elapsed as having provided further opportunity to get ready, and to minister to his servants, the unruly and rebellious servant instead seeks to smite his fellowservants. Drinking from the cup of Babylon, he fraternises with those whose desire is to fulfil the lust of the flesh, saying, “let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (cp Isa. 2:13). Favouring the Babylonish cause as being suitable for the outworking of his own sinful desires and inclinations, he adopts the position of being the persecutor of Christ’s brethren, his fellow-servants. Indeed, the volumes of Ecclesiastical history records how the Catholic system became vigorous in the shedding of the blood of the saints, and stands renowned as the great persecutor of the brethren, under the guise of extirpating the “heretics” who held the testimony of Jesus in it’s truth and purity. This is the way of the flesh – to indulge in sin to the full, convincing oneself that the Master’s coming is some way off – plenty of time to repent later.

A similar spirit is displayed by the harlot described in Proverbs chapter 7: again a symbol of the unfaithful church. “She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her own house: now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner. So she caught him (i.e. the simple – v. 7) and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him, I have peace offerings with me; this day have I paid my vows” (Prov. 7:11-14).

Not being content to remain in her own ecclesiastical house, the harlot desires to ensnare the simple; those who are wandering aimlessly in the streets. Using the sacrificial language of the Truth, she has a veneer of righteousness – a “form of godliness” – yet by her works, she denied the power thereof. Her desire is to take her fill of sin, until the master comes at some far off point in the future. This is her doctrine: “Come, and let us take our fill of love until the morning ... for the Goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey: he hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at the day appointed” (Prov. 7:18-20). Having gone on a “long” journey means that it will be some time before he returns – more time to enjoy the fruits of a sinful union with the harlot!

There is, of course, an element of truth mixed in with the error of the Harlot’s speech. The Goodman has indeed gone on a long journey, or as Messiah taught “travelling into a far country” (Mat. 25:14). But he will come back at the appointed hour to discover how his servants have occupied their time in his absence. Across the spectrum, there will be those who have faithfully sought to multiply the talents given to him, and those who did nothing, merely digging a hole in the ground to hide their talent. Excuses may abound as to why no increase was yielded by the “wicked and slothful servant”, but as the Master shows, if he could do little by his own efforts, he should have put the talent to the exchangers, so that by supporting their work, increase

may yet have taken place. The truth was, however, that this servant was “slothful”. Not necessarily given over to sin, but certainly making no effort to further the cause of the Truth, and yield increase to his Master.

This aspect of slothfulness comes out again in the Master’s parable of the ten virgins:

“then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them. But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps” (Mat. 25:1-4).

We know the outcome. Those who had made the effort to carry oil with them to keep the light glowing were found shining with the Light of the Truth when their Master came. But those who did not found that their light quickly went out, and whilst they made a belated attempt to get more oil, they were shut out. Here is the exhortation: NOW is the day of opportunity. NOW is the time that matter, for it what we do NOW that shall affect our eternal destiny. If we, as children of the light, are found bearing light when our Master comes, we shall be accepted. But if we are found walking in darkness, fraternising with the drunken Romish Harlot who persecuted the brethren - both Christ’s and ours - we cannot expect to be rewarded. So the apostle gives us the exhortation: “therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober...” (2 Thes.5:5-8). And again: “Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:14-16).

This then, is one approach to the Master’s coming and the duration of time that must elapse till he come – one “point of view” which minimises the personal preparation required to be ready to meet him. The other is to regard the time as being given in order to provide further opportunity for repentance and the development of faith. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). Again, the apostle declares that “Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back into perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb. 10:37-39).

Considering the above testimonies, it is evident that acceptance before the Master depends upon a degree of *preparation*. Men must prepare oil to take with them; they must occupy their time doing things that further Messiah’s cause. They must shine forth with the gospel-light in both word and deed, that in the day of visitation, at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that he is Master to the glory of the Father.

This aspect of preparation is alluded to in Revelation 21:

“I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, *prepared* as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

The chapter continues to describe the symbolic state of the Bride of Christ, in terms of precious stones: a treasure that a man will take to himself (cp. Mal. 3:17). Again, in chapter 19 of the Apocalypse we read:

“the marriage of the Lamb is come, and *his wife hath made herself ready*. And to her has been that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Rev. 19:7,8).

There is an interesting comparison to make between the apocalyptic description of the Lamb’s wife, Yahweh’s daughter and the description of the same woman in Psalm 45:

“The king’s daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee” (Psa. 45:11-13)

Notice this: in the Apocalypse, the woman is arrayed with fine white linen. But in Psalm 45, when she is brought to her husband, she is arrayed “in raiment of needlework”. The point has been made that the fine linen garments are those provided by “putting on” Messiah, through faith and baptism, but the “needlework” is the pattern sewn into the fabric of the garment through the collective efforts of the multitudinous Bride. This is strengthened by the fact that the same clothing of the woman is stated to be “of wrought Gold”. Gold is used in Scripture as being representative of perfected faith (cp. 1 Pet. 1:7), that is, the woman’s faith in embroidering skilful works upon the garments provided her by Yahweh.

We have considered, in general terms, the things we must do in order to meet our Master, and be approved by him when he comes. But there is another side to the matter, which is, that we can delude ourselves into thinking that we will be approved by him ... when in fact, he will condemn us, as being found wanting. That was the situation of Israel of old, as they faced the day of coming judgment. They expected to see a day of brightness, blessedness and glory – but instead there came the terrible judgements inflicted upon them by the Babylonian hordes, under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar, Yahweh’s servant. So the warning came through Amos:

“Woe unto you that desire the day of Yahweh! To what end is it for you? The day of Yahweh is darkness, and not light” (Amos 5:18).

Again, Malachi spoke of Messiah, as being the “messenger of the covenant”

“Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith Yahweh of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fuller’s soap. And he shall sit as a refiner, and purifier of silver ...” (Mal. 3:1-3).

Israel assumed that Messiah was coming to redeem them, and so they “delighted” in him, and expected to be elevated to honour, as all the prophets would indicate. But whilst that will be the ultimate position of the nation, individually, because of their unrepentant waywardness in the sight of Yahweh, Christ would come as a refiner’s fire, to cleanse his Temple of sin, and the defilement of iniquity.

The same principle is true for us. It is written that “judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?” (1 Pet.4:17-18). Those who are considered to be the “righteous” are those who love the appearing of Messiah, who obey the call of the Gospel to repentance and patient continuance in good works. It is common among men to consider oneself better than we really are (Prov. 20:6), but those who find forgiveness before the Judge of all the earth are those who tremble at His Word, and who confess their sins before him (Lu. 18:14).

As we consider the fact of Messiah’s coming again to the earth, we ought thereby be encouraged to consider our walk in the Truth, knowing that we shall be called upon to give account of ourselves to the Son of Man. But we can also take comfort, knowing that whatever difficulties or tribulations we might experience, our Master was touched with our infirmities, and will forgive those who repent before him. We recognise the Return of our Master to the earth – but do we look at that fact with love, longing for his coming? Or are we fearful that our works might be exposed for what they really are? It is written that:

“some men’s sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand, and they that are otherwise cannot be hid” (1 Tim. 5:24-25).

For some, their walk in life is openly seen to be contradictory, and in opposition to the steps of faith required of those who follow the Great Shepherd. But for others, their wickedness shall be revealed in the coming day of Messiah’s Return. Messiah shall come to purge his house first, prior to the establishment of his righteousness in the earth – let us therefore look forward in hope and repentance, seeking to lay aside every weight and sin that doth so easily beset us, that when our Master comes, we will be found seeking first his Coming, his Kingdom, and his Righteousness.

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