

*A
Message
of
Comfort*

By James McConkey

A Message of Comfort

Many of God's believing children shrink from the thought of the second coming of Christ, because they see in it naught but awful judgments, terrible visitations of God's penalties upon sin, and execution of His wrath upon a wicked world. But however awful to the sinful world may be the coming of Christ in open glory and judgment with His saints, His coming into the air for His saints is invested by the word of God with no such terrors, but is meant by the Lord to be one of the most precious truths of His word, and to fill the hearts of His children with expectant hope, abounding joy, and unspeakable comfort. It is as such that Paul regards it when, writing to the Thessalonian believers about the Lord's return, he says (I Thess. 4:18), "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." It is as a comforting truth, a solace for the sorrowing, a message of blessing and rapturous joy, that God sends it to His children, and any one who looks upon it with dread may be sure that He wants them to search prayerfully His word until, ceasing to fear, they can begin to "comfort one another with these words." Wherein, then, is the truth of Christ's second coming

a comforting one to believers? And how shall we learn to pass from an attitude of fear and dread concerning it, to one of such comfort, joyous expectation, and eager waiting as marked the early disciples? By considering, that

It is Jesus Himself Who is Coming Again.

1. In Acts 1:11, as the disciples stood intently gazing upward at the glorified form of their Saviour vanishing into the blue abyss of the heavens, the two shining angels who accosted them 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 a like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." How often have we thought, what a privilege it would have been, walking the earth in those days, to have seen Jesus! How we would have rejoiced to gaze into His gentle face, to catch one loving glance from His eyes, to hear the tender tones of His voice, to feel the thrilling, compassionate touch of His hand! How our heart leaps at the thought of seeing the man who died for us! And yet this is the promise of God that "this same Jesus shall come again," and when He comes "we shall see Him as He is." The same Jesus who walked by the

sunlit shores of Galilee, the same Jesus who made the deaf to hear, the blind to see, the lame to "leap as an hart"; the same Jesus who had compassion on the multitude, who wept with the sorrowing, who tenderly forgave the sinning, who cheered and healed the sick and suffering; the same Jesus who bowed His bared back to the savage scourge for you: the same Jesus who stretched out His rent hands on the bloody cross for you: the same Jesus who — awfulest of all — suffered the hiding of His Father's face because your sins were upon Him, this same Jesus shall come again. Shall we not, like the Apostolic church, "comfort one another" with these words? Is the vision of our vanished Lord returning again in glory any less precious to us than to them who were constantly "looking for the glorious appearing" of Jesus Christ, "waiting for His Son from heaven," "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ?" Again, the coming of Christ is a comforting truth to believers because

The Children of God Shall be Glorified

2. At Christ's coming, Paul tells us (Rom. 8:19) that "The earnest expectation of the creation (R.V.) waiteth for the manifestation ('unveiling') of the sons of God," for

although we are now the sons of God, it is "not yet made manifest what we shall be" (I John 3:2). A great artist works patiently through the long months and years at the painting which is to be the masterpiece of his life. By and by it is finished and hung upon the walls of a famous gallery. But a heavy veil hangs over it; all its beauty and glory, the work of years, is hidden. Though exquisite in outline and gorgeous in color, yet not one glint of its grace and glory can break through the enveloping veil. "It is not yet manifested what it shall be." Throngs of people gather before it, "waiting for its manifestation." They guess at its theme – and wait; they talk of its famous author – and wait; they picture its beauty – and wait. The weary hours and days pass by, and still they wait, wait, wait. At last some day and hour the hindering veil is suddenly, by some unseen hand, drawn aside, and shouts of applause break forth as the ravishing beauty of the painting is now first unveiled to human gaze. Just so the Divine Artist, the Holy Spirit, has taken up His dwelling place in our hearts. And as the sunlight steadily works upon the sensitive photograph plate, silently, mysteriously transferring to it every detail of the face it is turned toward, so we, "beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image,

from glory to glory even as by the spirit of the Lord" (II Cor. 3:18). Steadily is the great artist working day by day, year by year, through affliction, through tribulations, through suffering, patiently, persistently, unerringly "conforming us to the image of His son." But though we know the artist — "it is God that worketh in you", and know the theme — "we shall be like Him" — yet the picture is veiled; "it doth not yet appear what we shall be." And so the whole creation is waiting, waiting, waiting for the manifestation of the Divine Artist's masterpiece, the greatest painting the creation has ever looked upon since the morning stars sang together, the picture of the unveiled sons of God — men and women — like unto the glorified Jesus Christ!

And when shall the veil of mortality be removed? When shall appear in us the dazzling outshining of him who hath called us unto nothing less than "His eternal glory?" Plainly at the second coming of Christ, for

First — The dead in Christ shall be glorified. The word of God is clear upon this. "The dead in Christ shall rise first" (I Thess. 4:16). The very first event when Christ comes will be the glorification of the Christian dead "When Christ who is your

life, shall appear, then shall ye appear in glory, with Him" (Col. 3:4). Sometimes the farmer's grain is sown too late in the autumn to germinate. All through the winter it lies in the cold earth, as it were, dead. But with the warm advent of spring there comes up from the south the sun, the life of the vegetable world, and as you step outdoors some bright morning, lo! the genial sunlight has wrought a miracle — the dead grain has appeared, and not only that, but it has appeared in glory! Far as the eye can reach hills, fields and valleys are beautiful with the glorified bodies of the grain. When the sun, which was their life, appeared, then they appeared in glory. Behold nature's parable. Our loved ones die. They, in the spirit, go to be "present with the Lord" in conscious bliss, but their dead bodies go down into the grave, and see corruption. Now, when Christ, who is their life, shall appear, then shall they appear with Him in glory. Not in the natural bodies of their humiliation, wasted with sickness, weary and worn with toil and suffering, but in the spiritual bodies of their glorification. "For He shall change the body of our humiliation and fashion it like unto the body of His glory" (Phil. 3:21, R.V.).

And how quickly will this mighty miracle

of glorification be wrought! As swift as the passage of the lightning flash across the heavens shall be the coming of Christ (Matt. 24:27). And in the same instant, in lightning like fulfillment of His word, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," shall follow the marvel of the resurrection of God's children. In that instant the Divine Artist's great masterpiece shall be unveiled; in that instant earth's graves shall be burst asunder, and, ravaged of their contents, shall yield up in incorruptible glory the bodies which went down into them in corruption.

"The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout." (I Thess. 4:16). A great army has been assaulting the works of the enemy all the long, weary day. Time and again has it been hurled back in bloody defeat, until shattered, bleeding, yet undaunted, it sinks upon the twilight field amid the foemen's shouts of victory. But imagine at midnight the heavens opened in swift vision of a descending celestial leader, the silence broken by a resounding shout, and the whole vast host of slaughtered heroes leaping into radiant life, and advancing with shouts of victory on a fleeing, terrified foe. Even thus for myriads of years have the dauntless hosts of God's children been assailing the strongholds of

evil, battling for the right, manifested, like their master, "to destroy the works of the devil," until their wearied bodies have yielded to the last enemy, Death, and gone down into the grave. But suddenly, in one swift, intense instant, the jubilee moment of the waiting centuries, the descending Lord Himself shall shout; up from the quiet valley, from sunlit hillsides, from village burying ground, from the yawning depths of the sea, from distant battle-fields where Christian patriots have laid down their lives, from the jungles of India, from the swamps of Africa, from the islands of the sea, from every lonely spot where His children have passed away in suffering and service, shall be glorified, radiant hosts spring up "like pyramids of flame," to meet their coming Lord. What a vision for tear-stained eyes; what a hope for waiting hearts; what a spur to lagging service! No wonder that Paul says, "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." As the word of God seems to quiver with joy in narrating the resurrection of Christ, so should the believer's heart thrill with rapturous comfort at this sublime picture of the resurrection of God's children. When we say that we are not concerned about the truth of Christ's coming, do we realize that we are in effect saying, "We are not

interested in the resurrection of our our own loved ones in Christ?" And yet it is even so, for as Christ is the first fruits of the resurrection, so they that are Christ's will be raised at His coming, and never before! (I Cor. 15:23). Forsooth, the resurrection of our loved ones, and His coming, are "one flesh" of truth, joined together by God, and by no man to be put asunder. There are some hearts that do not seem stirred at the thought that Christ may come at any moment, but in what heart does the blood not thrill at the quickening thought that the resurrection of the just might take place at any moment!

Second – The living in Christ shall also be glorified at His coming. "We shall not all sleep" (I Cor. 15:51). There shall be a generation of God's children alive when Christ comes. It may be this one. In the light of God's word, it is just as likely to be this as any following one. "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." Whether we are dead or alive when Jesus comes, we must all be changed, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. Not carnal, natural bodies, but only glorified, spiritual ones, shall enter there. With but a breathless instant intervening, the glorification of God's living children shall accompany that of His dead ones. The

corrupted ones will put on incorruption, but the mortal ones shall immediately put on immortality without ever seeing corruption. All through the long summer the thistle-down, while it is green, clings fast tenaciously to the parent stock. But when approaching fall brings its appointed ripeness, the time of its departure steadily approaches, and some bright day a puff of wind whirls it from its fibrous moorings, and it mounts up, up, up until it is lost to sight in the splendor of the meridian sun. So God's great plan for His children's glorification is ripening, and some bright day, as if by a rushing, mighty wind, in one outflashing of supernatural glory, living, working, waiting men and women shall be whirled up to meet the Lord in the air. So sublime is the simple statement, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air," that our feeble human imagination, striving to soar to this lofty height, falls back like a spent bird, gasping and breathless with its failure of the wing to reach the dazzling summit which the eye has scanned. Caught up! Who can picture it? While the men and women walk the busy streets they shall be caught up! While they bow in the secret chamber of prayer they shall be caught up! While with burning hearts they ponder the

Word that tells of His coming they shall be caught up! While patient, suffering ones lie on beds of pain they shall be caught up! While the living stand by the open graves of the dead they shall be caught up! – and as the startled world wonders, the only record left shall be that of Enoch's – "And they walked with God, and were not, for God took them!"

It Reunites us With Our Departed Ones In Christ

There rises in memory here a night scene years ago in Venice. On the broad reach of the moonlit canal there drifted a single dark gondola with a party of gay revellers. Suddenly the merry chatter ceased, and out from the expectant hush following there broke upon the listeners a song of such ravishing beauty as might well have seemed to float down from the blue vault of the heavens above from the lips of some celestial singer hidden therein. The boat soon passed from sight, but the sweetest strains of the song seemed to be those which floated back after the singer had vanished in the night. So in the message of Paul to those who were sorrowing for departed ones, the sweetest strain is not simply "caught up" but "caught up

together with them!" How often in the hallowed quiet of the twilight hour do we think, and pray, and talk of the heavenly reunion with the loved ones gone before, while we sorrow not as those who have no hope, yet we yearn for the time when there shall be "no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things have passed away." Yet how long it seems to look forward to this! How many years of waiting and witnessing, of service and suffering, must elapse ere we shall be "absent from the body and present with the Lord!" But if Christ should come to-night, those wonderful words, "caught up together with them," tell us plainly that we would be reunited to our loved ones, who are in Christ, right here on earth! We would gaze upon them in open-eyed vision of their glory, right here; as their glorified bodies break forth from the earth in their resplendent beauty, we shall join them right here, and go up "together with them." Together with Paul, as he shouts, "I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith;" together with Peter, as he cries, "the end of all things is at hand;" together with John, as he whispers, "little children, love one another;" together with all the rest of God's martyred ones who have yielded up their

bodies to savage beasts, fed the flames, couched upon the rack, bled at the guillotine, with all those we shall be caught up together, to meet the Lord in the air. "Lift up your heads, oh ye gates! and be ye lifted up ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in." but not alone shall He enter. No Roman triumph, no modern pageant, shall match the procession of glorified sons and daughters of God who, "as doves to their windows," shall flock unto the heavenly gates, opened wide to receive the glorified Bride, now ascending with her risen Lord. We talk often of the heavenly reunion, but do we think of the earthly one? Often of the one over there, but never of the one here. And yet while old age may whiten our heads, infirmities bow our forms, and death claim our bodies ere that one can take place, this one might come to-night! And this is the climax of this comfort wherewith we are comforted, that

The Resurrection May Take Place at Any Moment

"Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour the Son of man cometh." We look for no signs. We know of no event between us and the coming of the Lord. We know not the hour He will come, but we know not

any hour in which He may not come. It may be years from now; it may be to-morrow; it may be to-day. It may be at morn, when the first faint flush of coming day tints the horizon; it may be at high noon, when the busy world, deaf with the din of traffic, hears not His shout; or it may be at eventide, when the twilight hour is solemnizing the souls of His children with the hush of its own waiting. It matters not; no man knoweth. But "the Lord is at hand," "the Judge standeth at the door." Each generation stands in eager expectancy as on the very brink of the mightiest miracle of the miracle-working God since the resurrection of His Son from the dead. And the veil of our mortal flesh trembles under the anticipating touch of Him who may at any moment rend it asunder for the outshining of His glory for the manifestation of the sons of God. "Wherefore, comfort one another with these words."

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