

Blessed Hope

by James H. McConkey

The Blessed Hope

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

One summer morning we were awakened at a very early hour. The first faint flush of dawn was painting the horizon. Back of the mountain summit a strange light was shining. As seen through the patches of foliage in the treetops it seemed like a brilliant, electric arc-light. The swaying leaves caused it to shimmer and gleam, appear and disappear with puzzling regularity. By and by it reached the skyline. As it tipped the treetops a stray telephone wire moved across its face, bisecting it like the cross-hair of a telescope. In a moment it had shaken itself free, even from this partner, and stood out sharp and clear in all its beauty above the scarp of the mountain. And then as it flooded the scene with light like molten silver we recognized the day star. Never had it seemed so large, so radiant, so flooded with glory as when it broke forth from the forest that summer morning in a new and strange place to us, and with unfamiliar and unaccustomed surroundings.

So, emerging from the pages of this Book of God, is the splendid truth of the return of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, to this earth. It shines with the coming glory of Him who says of Himself, "I am the bright and Morning

Star." Prejudice and dullness of spiritual vision have hidden it from the eyes of multitudes. But the cross-hairs of God's telescope of prophecy are centered upon it as the supreme and absorbing event of the end of this age. It has grown in beauty and radiance to God's own children until now it fills the horizon of their thought and expectation as never before, and God calls upon us to be "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour, Jesus Christ" Concerning it, let us note first that—

It Is the Hope of the Word.

Throughout the entire New Testament the one supreme hope to which the heart and mind of the believer is constantly turned is the return of His Lord and his own glorification with Him. We cite but a few of the many passages pointing to it:

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

"Your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Col 3:3-4).

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that *hath this hope in him*, purifieth himself" (1 John 3:2-3).

"Unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28).

"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).

"And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

"Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him" (Rev. 1:7).

It Is the Hope of the Heart

It is now more than eighty years since the emancipation of the slaves of the British West Indian colonies. Historians tell a beautiful story of this momentous event. The day set for their emancipation was the first day of August. The night before, many of them, it is said, never slept at all. Their hearts were so eager with expectation they could not close their eyes. Thousands of them gathered in their places of worship for prayer and praise to God for bringing to them this freedom. Some of their brethren were sent to the nearby hilltops to view the first gleams of the coming dawn. These reported by signal to the waiting ones below when the dawn of the fateful and jubilant day was breaking. Day of all days was it to them, when they should pass from the thralldom of human ownership to the liberty and independence of the new life. Who can

picture the hope that thrilled their innermost hearts as they watched for the dawn of that day.

Likewise a great emancipating day is coming for the children of God. The enthralment of sin is to be forever broken; infirmities are to give place to infinities; corruption is to be changed to incorruption; mortality is to clothe itself with immortality; feeble and changeable fellowship is to be transmuted into endless and unbroken communion with our Lord; limitation and imperfection of service is to give way to boundlessness and perfectness of ministry throughout all eternity. And all this is to come with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now the supreme and unerring witness of the coming of our Lord is the Word of God. The Spirit tells us (2 Peter 1:19) that

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed.”

To this Word of prophecy we are to take earnest heed. As we brood, meditate and pray over it, the blessed hope will become increasingly real and precious to our souls. And the witness of the Word of God is, as we have seen, most clear and emphatic as to this great truth. But by and by is to come another witness. For we are admonished in the same verse above that we are to take heed to this word of prophecy “*until*” a certain time. Until what?

"Until the day dawn and *the day-star arise in your hearts.*" Jesus Christ is the Day-Star. "I am the bright and Morning Star," He says of Himself.

These West Indian slaves, when they saw the first streaks of dawn of their day of freedom, sent back witnesses to their fellows that the long looked for moment was at hand. So, just before Jesus appears, the witness in the Word to the blessed hope will culminate in a special witness in the heart. Just before He comes, God will give to us an overwhelming jubilant, intense consciousness that Jesus is about to break forth from the heavens which have so long contained Him. The Spirit of Christ within will witness to our spirit, that the moment has arrived. The Day-Star will arise *in our hearts* as the fore-running witness of His rising in the heavens. God will give to us a fore-thrill, as it were, of the power of the Spirit of glory which in a moment more shall transform the bodies of our humiliation into the likeness of the body of His glory.

It is the Hope of Heaven.

"*Being the children of the resurrection*" (Luke 20:36).

Do you remember our Lord's wondrous statement about these resurrection bodies when the Sadducees tried to entrap Him by one of their foolish questions? They had supposed the case of a woman having seven

husbands in succession, and then sought to bring Him to confusion before the multitude by asking Him whose wife she would be in the resurrection. Back came His marvelous teaching that in heaven there would be neither marrying nor giving in marriage, but that all of God's children would be "children of the resurrection." Do you note that striking phrase and its significance? Plainly it is this: Marriage was given by God for the perpetuation of the race. Through its holy relationship children are born into the world with their natural bodies. The pangs of birth and the long slow years of growth fashion these natural bodies of ours. But neither marriage, nor natural birth, nor the long progress of years will be needed to fashion the new, glorified bodies of His redeemed children. That body is fashioned in an instant, the glory-instant of the resurrection. It needs no human union for its creation. It leaps into being at the supernatural touch of God's resurrection power. Heaven shall be filled with a race of beings, who, as to the body, will flash into it in a second of time, "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye." It shall be peopled with millions of glorious bodies of God's children. Thus they are "children of the resurrection." And heaven itself is waiting for the blessed hope of the Lord's coming which shall bring to it myriads of its children whose new bodies are swift-born by the Spirit of God from the womb of the resurrection of glory.

It Is the Hope of Creation.

"For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth" (Rom. 8:19).

"The creation itself shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption" (Rom. 8:21).

God rears the mighty oak through years of patient growth, yet though it stands for centuries it crumbles at the last under the touch of time and decay. God fashions the lilies in all their grace of contour and stainlessness of white, yet they nod and sway for but a few passing days until corruption withers and lays them low. God carpets the mid-summer field with miles of pink and fragrant clover-bloom, but decay prostrates it in sere and blackened death upon its mother earth. All of nature's beauty and grace which the spring breeze breathes upon in its unspeakable loveliness, the winter winds find lying in death and hopeless decay. But the creation is to be delivered from this bondage of corruption into the "glorious liberty of the sons of God." As the sons of God shall be set free from death and corruption, so also shall nature. She shall blossom and bloom in perennial beauty and undecaying glory. The earth itself is to share the deathlessness of God's own children. Hence the beautiful personification of the physical creation itself "waiting for the revelation of the sons of God" because that creation itself is to be delivered from the same limitation of death and corruption that now fetters and hampers the physical

being of the sons of God themselves. The flower shall no longer fade; the grass shall no longer wither and be cast into the oven; the giant oak shall not then crumble into the dust of decay. No wonder then that "the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:19). For when Jesus shall come again physical creation shall share the same glorious deliverance from death and corruption which come to God's own.

The exact thought of John 1:11 is: "He came unto His own (things) and His own (people) received Him not" The sea yielded to Him and bore His sacred feet in triumphant disregard of all its laws. The fish crowded into the nets of His disciples at His word of command. The loaves changed, and multiplied and fed the perishing thousands as He brake them. The winds ceased from their wild and boisterous sway as He spake to them. The sea caused to rage and threaten His fearful followers, and sank into peace and quiet when He spoke. All His creation received their Lord and confessed His power. But His own people received Him not. So here. There is a touch of pathos in this word that the whole creation of God is waiting for the coming of His Son while that hope has slipped from the hearts of so many of His people.

It is a Blessed Hope

The man who cherishes this hope at once throws himself open in the popular mind to

the charge of pessimism. Men say he looks upon all things with sober, sombre view. There are no sun-tipped mountain peaks of promise for him: all is shrouded in darkness and gloom. But there could be no greater mistake. For the Word of God calls the hope of the Lord's return a "blessed hope." That is a "happy" hope, as the word literally means. It brings joy to the heart of the believer. It gladdens the soul of him who cherishes it. For there is no truer optimist than the man who is looking for His Lord to come. True, he, as none else, realizes that dark and perilous times are coming. His Guide-Book warns him there are breakers ahead for this old world of ours. He knows that Jesus Christ's statement about it is not that it is growing better, but that "the whole world lieth in the evil one" and is rapidly nearing the fiercest crisis of all its history. But none of these things move him. Being forewarned he knows no discouragement because of conditions or circumstances. For back of all the sombre shadows of coming days, looms up the glorious figure of His coming Lord and King, whose victory is as certain as the eternal Word of God can declare, and the eternal love of God bring to pass. His hope is therefore indeed a blessed hope. It is sure and steadfast. It steadies his heart amid the most trying and desperate circumstances. And it inspires him to service, too, with new zeal and fidelity. For that this blessed hope of the Lord's return "cuts the nerve of service" is but another one of the manifest fallacies which find birth in the

theories of its critics instead of the lives of its lovers. Nothing could be farther from the truth. It stimulates to fervent zeal and earnestness for lost souls as they who cherish it do well know. Almost to a man the great evangelists and soul-winners of the age are lovers and preachers of the blessed hope. Spurgeon, Moody, Chapman, Torrey, Sunday, Whittle, all have cherished with warm and earnest hearts the hope of the again-coming of their Lord. The greatest coterie of Bible teachers this continent has ever seen, the men of the famous Niagara Bible Conference, were given up wholly and fervently to this truth. Brookes, Scofield, Erdman, Moorehead and Parsons—every man of this quintet of princely teachers found joy in believing and in propagating this blessed truth. And not only these, but thousands of God's messengers in the mission field testify to it as one of the mighty inspirations of their lives to eager, incessant service. If that great truth makes day-dreamers and star-gazers of men, then it is strange indeed to find Jesus Christ Himself exhorting His own, as they serve, to be "like unto men that wait for their Lord."

It Is a Purifying Hope.

"He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself."

Years ago we were standing with a friend on the deck of a great ship. We had both been abroad for a year. And now our ship's prow

was pointed toward the homeland. As we stood we talked of the wondrous sights of that memorable year. We saw again the glory of Switzerland's sun-tipped peaks: we heard the murmurous surf of the Mediterranean; we walked through famous galleries and feasted our eyes upon paintings and statues of world-wide fame and matchless beauty; we stood upon lofty mountain summits where the whole world seemed to lie at our feet; we wandered by the banks of lakes and inland seas which would be a never-ending dream of loveliness in all the years to come. As the moments went by, the more we talked, the more enthusiastic we grew. But we were forgetting something. It was the homeland. We needed something to turn our hearts thitherward. And presently it came. God laid His hand upon sea and sky in one of the most gorgeous sunsets our mortal eyes had ever beheld. A lake of gold, fringed with meadows of blue, lay embosomed on the evening sky. Above it over-arching clouds flooded with silver radiance formed a gateway through which the setting sun poured the splendid light of parting day. Through this gateway in the golden west our good ship seemed to be sailing onward. And then came a rush of joy unspeakable. Back of the golden gateway of glory through which we were sailing was—home! Then a great hope swept into our hearts. It was a hope that went out to the homeland, and the dear ones there. And as it laid hold upon us with imperious sway everything else was swept out. The beauties of

Italy and Switzerland were forgotten in the unspeakable joy of *hope*. And we learned that day as never before the searching, separating, expulsive power of a blessed hope.

So it is with us who are God's children. We are drawn unconsciously into the swift stream of the world's thought, activity and power. We live, move and toil amid intensely worldly surroundings. Engrossed in these we forget something. We forget that it is the things which are unseen that are eternal. So God thrusts into the horizon of our daily thought and meditation this blessed hope of our Lord's return. And amazing indeed is its separating power in the life. It is an other-world truth. With a tremendous tug upward, it lays hold upon our thought and spirit. It has a special blessing pronounced upon its study (Rev. 1:3). And any child of God who comes to know and love it is at once conscious of the nature of that blessing. Its searchingness and effectiveness in separating us from the power of worldliness in our lives is astonishing to us as we realize how vain our own self-efforts have been to accomplish this longed-for result. This wondrous power to purify and detach the heart from worldly engrossment is convincing proof that it is God's divinely appointed truth for effecting that purpose in the hearts and lives of His children. In very truth is it that "he that hath this hope in Him, *purifieth himself* even as He is pure."

It Is the Only Hope of Victory.

Picture to yourself a great kingdom belonging to a wise and loving king. That king goes away for a long absence bidding his people to occupy until he comes again. While he is absent a strong hostile king is in possession of the land. That false king is Satan. He holds most cruel and tyrannical sway over the people of the land. Hating with relentless hatred the true king, he ravages the country with all the malignant power he can command. With fiendish hatred he injects into the blood of the people a deadly poison. That poison is Sin. Think of the awful havoc of sin in this world of ours. "For by one man sin entered." That was an awful entrance! Heaven must have wept tears of agony, and perdition held fiendish jubilee on that black day when "by one man sin entered." And what a record it has made! It has swept like a mighty tidal wave for centuries over a world engulfed in its black depths; who shall stay its flood? It has scorched and consumed like a volcano of flame all that have felt its fiery touch; who shall extinguish its fires? It has eaten like a great canker into the very vitals of all human life; who shall find a healing ointment for its leprous touch? It has stabbed to the innermost heart the innocent and the guilty alike; who shall quench the crimson streams which gush from its murderous wound? And this deadly virus in the soul ceases not from its ruinous work until it has destroyed the body also. For as by one man sin entered, so also came

"Death through sin." Sin follows in the wake of Satan; Death follows in the trail of Sin. And what a monster foe is he. He baffles our plans; he blasts our hopes; he withers our strength; he fills our cup of sorrow to the full, and, until Jesus comes, he brings down into the dust of decay and corruption the mortal body of every being that walks God's beautiful earth. Thrice in every century does he sweep a thousand millions of human beings from life to death, from mortality to corruption.

What think you? Can final victory ever come to this earth until this false, usurping king is cast out; this deadly malady of sin healed; and this ruin of body and souls of myriads ended? Surely not. And the final victory over this deadly trio of foes, Satan, sin and death, is to be won by the coming and personal presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nor does this imply any failure of the work of the Holy Spirit in this gospel age. God never designed that He should finish the work which Jesus alone can complete. The Spirit may deliver us from the power of Satan, but only Christ can banish Satan from this earth. The Spirit may break the mastership of sin in our lives, but only Christ can drive sin from the earth. The Spirit may give us solace and comfort under the stroke of death, but He will never exile that dread foe from this world. All this is the triumphant work of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will conquer Satan, banish Sin, and tread Death under foot only after He Himself shall come again to reign in righteousness and universal peace.

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