

## **A Sunday Morning Exhortation (31)**

To everything there is a time, and a season to every purpose under heaven—a fixed season and an appointed time; so spake the preacher, the son of David. And about a thousand years later the same great truth was reiterated by the apostle Paul upon Mars Hill, when he said, "God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed and the bounds of their habitation." And while it is true that Jesus declared to his apostles, "It is not for you to know the times and the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power"; that is to say, not to know beforehand the duration of such times and seasons, yet by means of the Scriptures the true servants of God have always been able to recognise the epoch in which they have lived in relation to the fulfilment of Gods promise; and of the times and seasons, they, like the Thessalonians of old, have needed not that Paul or any other inspired writer should write unto them.

Now this thought, that the Most High rules in the kingdoms of men, equally as regards their political geography as to their history, is a most comforting one to us, the servants of the God of heaven and of His dear Son, who have gathered as we have this morning around these emblems of His love. The world from which we have for the time being withdrawn that we might remember our absent Lord in the appointed way, is in an agony of despair. Trouble, fear and anxiety are everywhere apparent, a time such as never was truly; and humanly speaking there is no way out, no solution, but here there is—there should be—no trace of these fears and these anxieties that have overtaken the world, for these matters are all in the hands of the God of Israel under the shadow of whose wings you and I, though we are by birth and by nature sinners of the Gentiles, have come to trust. By virtue of our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, whose name we have the honour to bear, and whose name we have put on in baptism, we are God's children, God's sons and daughters by adoption through the Anointed One, and if we truly recognise that high position, if we really love our Master, and are endeavouring to serve Him faithfully, then that saying of Jesus spoken in the first place to his apostles is true of us also, that "the Father Himself loveth you because ye have loved me." Beloved of God—that is a beautiful thought. Are we worthy of it? No, we are not, except just in so far as one thing is concerned, just in so far as we are prepared to bow to the word of our God. And so, these things being as they are, we need not, as the world around us, be terrified or alarmed at the events we see transpiring, for these are the times before appointed which God has pre-determined. These changes and threatened changes of frontiers and the like, will only be in accordance with the bounds of their habitation, which have already been divinely preordained and are controlled, preparatory to that greatest of all changes, that mightiest of all earthquakes, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, never more, as we know, to assert themselves save just for that one brief moment prior to their final and complete annihilation.

In the midst of a world rapidly hastening to its doom, we, the true servants of Jesus, must remain calm, calm in the confidence that we have in the word of our God. Surely it would indicate a serious lack of faith to be concerned or apprehensive, when our Father has expressly declared that all things are for our sakes, that all things work together for our good, not only in our private lives, but in the world around, that He will never leave us nor forsake us. Surely it ill becomes those who have for years possibly been constantly warning the strangers of the terrible events ahead, and of the time of trouble to come — and when those times do come to show signs of panic or of fear, or to hazard guesses as to the risks from possible air attack or any other sort of attack, or anxiety it may be for what those in authority may be or may not be going to do. Such things are beneath the dignity of the servants of Christ; they are unworthy of the faithful servants of Jesus who are awaiting his immediate personal return. Let it be the daily resolve of every one of us that whatever measures those in authority may see fit to take, that we, with God's help, will stand firm to the trust which has been imposed upon us, of upholding the Truth in its purity, in doctrine and practice, and witnessing for it in these last of the last days, respectfully and courteously, but firmly and courageously. In times of especial emergency, should ever such arise, it will be quite sufficient for the servants of God if they just take reasonable precaution, and, for the rest, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, and they that be with us are more than those that be with them.

That is the working out of a practical faith, a faith in the hand of God, and let us show it. How suitable are the words of the Psalmist to our position in these closing days: "My times are in thy hand . . . save me for thy mercies' sake . . . Oh, how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men. Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of man; thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." And the conclusion of that Psalm, "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord." Our Master has bidden us to take no anxious thought for the morrow, but to seek first the Kingdom of God, and this applies as much to the judgments which our Father has in store for the ungodly world as to the daily food and clothing which comes to us from His hand. Our beloved brother Frank Jannaway had to tell the authorities on more occasions than one that the Christadelphians were under the law of Christ, that they could not bear arms or vow allegiance to any earthly king, and that, if necessary, they were prepared to be shot rather than deny Christ. "Fear not them that kill the body" — those are the words of our Master; and what if our Father in His wisdom should see fit to require the laying down of a life as a testimony? To confess Christ before men is to ensure that Christ will confess us before his Father, for he has said so; and, moreover, he will not suffer us to be tried above what we are able to bear. And what a glorious hope for mortals whose tenure of life is most uncertain at the best, and who are so sadly reminded of it from time to time. "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life"—that is the promise, and so, "Fear them not therefore."

But there are other ways of looking at this matter. Consider for a moment some of the instances of the way in which God works in the completion of a predetermined time. For example, you will remember he told Abraham that in four hundred years his seed should be delivered from their affliction, and so, as we read in the 7th chapter of the Acts, when the time of their promised deliverance drew near, he raised up Moses, that meekest of all men, faithful in all God's house, under whom Israel marched out of Egypt in triumph about four hundred and thirty years later. Again, when Judah were carried to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar the prophet, Jeremiah was inspired to write that it should be for seventy years, and when that period had almost elapsed Daniel, a man greatly beloved of God, was studying the Scriptures and he knew the time had come to return. He understood the number of the years, and set his face to seek the Lord in prayer. Daniel himself was given a prophecy of the seventy weeks to the appearing of the Messiah the Prince, and when the time drew near there were watching those who were waiting for the consolation of Israel. Men were musing in their hearts of John whether he were the Christ or not, and what happened? As we read in our New Testament reading in the fourth chapter of the epistle to the Galatians: "When the fulness of the time was come God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Daniel had been told that the Messiah must be cut off but not for himself, and here before us are the emblems which remind us of that great work which the Messiah accomplished, the wonderful redemption which he gained for us, those glorious promises of immortality and inheritance which he confirmed; and of nothing have there been more signs divinely given than of His promise to return to complete the mighty work of gathering together in one all the people of God and rewarding God's servants both small and great.

Let us think of one or two of them. God declared that He would punish Israel seven times for their sins, and without going too closely into dates, if we commence 2520 years from the captivity, that period has about elapsed. The seven times of the kingdoms of men, if they be dated from the vision of Nebuchadnezzar, are due to terminate in a few years time, about 1945, until which time Jerusalem was to be trodden down of the Gentiles until their times should be fulfilled. The downtreading of the saints for 1260 years commencing from 606/8 finished in 1866/8 with the loss of the temporal power of the Pope, one of the landmarks in the prophecy; and if the Holy Spirit dates the 1335 years of Daniel from the same epoch— though, of course, we do not know whether this be so— then Daniel should stand in his lot in 1941/3. But apart from dates, concerning which there is no certainty in advance, we have the signs that the Lord Jesus Christ gives, and we can look around the world and see them being fulfilled before our eyes. We tell the stranger that, but let us remember it ourselves.

And if we look within, that is to say, among those who profess the name of Christ, then, with the warnings concerning these last times in our minds, we cannot but be filled with the conviction which amounts almost to a certainty, that the Lord Jesus Christ is at the very door. The time, whenever it may be, is fixed and set and determined beforehand, and at the time appointed he will come. In the fulness of time God sent forth His Son, who lived and suffered as it had been written of Him, to redeem them who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons, and in like manner in the fulness of times he will return as he has promised. And what was his warning concerning that? We know the words very well indeed: "When ye see these things begin to come to pass, then lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh." God sent forth His Son to redeem us — Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh. Do we see these things begin to come to pass? Is there any one in this room that doubts it? Then are we looking up? Is it possible that we are looking down? We want to hold up our heads at a time like this. Then let us not be terrified. The judgments that are fast closing in on the world of the ungodly are no cause for the sons of God to be alarmed; rather are they to be regarded as a certain sign that our trials are nearly ended. We are a privileged people. Unto us has been made known the mystery of the gospel, the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself; as we read in the letter to the Ephesians: "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ." That is the position in which we stand. That is the central idea which holds us together as an ecclesia, as members of a brotherhood which binds us together until Christ shall come. In the meantime, we show forth our faith and love by doing this until he come. There is a time and a season for every purpose under heaven — said the preacher. This is a time — a time of self-examination. This is a season—a season of comfort. Let us use them as God would have us use them — such times and seasons as these. Let us turn our thoughts and minds within, each one of us, as we are here this morning, in the presence of our Master. What are we doing with our time? Seeing that we should be lifting up our heads for our redemption draweth nigh, in these last few days, or it may be hours, before our Lord shall return, how are we spending that time which may be available to us after the day's work is done? Are we spending any of it at all in the company of the world, and there are more ways than one of doing that. Now is the time to replenish our lamps with oil. There are many—God grant that none of us may be among them—who will wait right until the Bridegroom comes, and then they will realise the shortage and will run to the Spirit's oil stores to replenish their stock. But—it will be too late, then. Now is the time.

Are we making known to our friends and neighbours on every possible occasion the outline of our faith and belief in the imminence of the return of Christ? Never mind whether we think they are suitable people or not—are we witnessing for the Truth? This is the time when men's hearts are failing them for fear, and they will be more inclined to listen than on other occasions.

Are we manifesting a proper keenness for attending the meetings, for helping in every possible way our brother and our sister to gain the Kingdom which we are trying to gain? Are we visiting the sick and comforting the weary as opportunity allows? And looking right down deep within the heart of each one, each for himself and herself, is there any trace of pride or root of bitterness that needs to be cleared away before Christ comes? Now is the time—to-morrow it may be too late. We all need to pay the more earnest heed to the things which we have learned, especially as we see the day approaching. But given a genuine regard, a genuine love for Christ, and an earnest desire to serve him faithfully, which surely every one here present has, then what a season of comfort such an occasion as this provides. Think of the prospect of gathering together in that vast multitude which no man can number, in the company of our beloved Lord and Master, and of those dear ones from whom death has for the time being separated us, in the youth and vigour of immortality, and with the wisdom, the knowledge and the power of the divine nature, to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. Think of those words, that will assuredly be sung in that day. Will each one of us be singing them? God grant that we may; "We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in. . . . Trust ye in the Lord for ever; for in Yahweh is the Rock of Ages." That is the song that will be sung in that day. Cunningly devised

fables? No, a thousand times no; but words of soberness and truth based upon the impregnable rock of God's word.

These emblems remind us that Christ died for us, that his death and resurrection are the guarantee of the fulfilment of these glorious promises; and the words of Jesus are, "If I go away I will come again and receive you unto myself." And so let us do this in remembrance of him until he come.

C. H. LINDARS.

---