

Nearer the Crisis

Every breaking of bread brings us one week nearer to the great crisis so vividly brought before us in the vision of Nebuchadnezzar's image, which we have had under our attention during the last week, in our daily readings. It is about 2,500 years since Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar, "*Thou art this head of gold.*" The things that were at that time matters of prophecy are now nearly all in the past. The golden empire of Babylon; the silver empire of the Medes and Persians; the brazen dominion of the Greeks, and the two-legged iron power of imperial Rome are all affairs of history. We stand in the days of the clay and iron feet—the day when the Europe-ruling, ancient, iron Rome is a divided and weakened mass of independent sovereignties; and we are living late—very late, in these days—at the end of them, in fact, as we know from other visions and many contemporary facts, such as the complete disappearance of the coercive power of the Papacy. We stand on the verge of the catastrophe represented by the destruction of the symbolic image. We live in the era of the Lord's appearing to destroy all the kingdoms of men, and set up that one universal dominion of which there will be no end.

It is profitable to realize one fact. During all these centuries, the vision of Daniel has been slowly and surely working itself out in the affairs of men, without our assistance—yea, without our existence. When Daniel stood before Nebuchadnezzar you might have searched the measureless universe round and you would not have anywhere found the persons who are assembled here this morning. Five hundred years afterwards you might have renewed the search with no greater success. A thousand years—two thousand years afterwards, we were still unborn; yet the hand of God was slowly writing on the page of history the record of His purpose accomplished. Does this not enable us to feel how unnecessary we are to God: how certainly His word will come to pass independently of us? Yet we must not shut our eyes to the importance of our own relation to the matter. Our turn has come at last: here we find ourselves at the most interesting period of the entire vision; called in the grace of God to be hearers of the joyful sound, with a view to our being "*doers of the word*" and heirs of the glorious kingdom about to appear. In this position, it is of the first consequence that we seek to gauge our prospective relations.

When the moment arrives at which it will become clear that the great culmination of the vision has begun—when it is announced that the Lord is actually in the earth, the anxiety that will press itself home with overwhelming force on every mind will be, "What is my individual relation to the crisis?" "Am I favourably connected with the great matters about to

be transacted?" It will be evident by a moment's thought that mere intelligence in the signs of the times will not be of great value in the dreadful situation. The signs of the times are valuable only as indications of the approach of something. It is the something whose approach they indicate that is the standard of our position amid the closing scenes of the Gentile times. What is that something?

Brethren and sisters, it is a kingdom **of heaven** that is coming; a kingdom founded upon the principles of God in contrast with those now recognized among men; a kingdom not of this world. Who will be admitted to it? Only those who belong to it in the sense of partaking of its principles, and being prepared by the present individual operation of these principles for the political enforcement of them, which is to characterize the operation of the kingdom of God. This fact is made abundantly evident in the New Testament. Jesus speaks of many who will come to him in that day, seeking admission, to whom he will say, "*I never knew you.*" The reason of their rejection he discloses in the words, "*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that **doeth the will** of my Father which is in heaven.*" Hence the great question of the hour, when the Lord has come, will be, "Have I acted in harmony with the principles on which the kingdom of heaven is to be set up?" The Lord will have no use for us, unless our wisdom be according to his standard. Many men are wise according to this world, whose wisdom will turn into great folly under the scrutiny of the Lord. Kings and captains; bishops and great men; professional men and merchants grown rich, with their much honouring of each other, and their much provision for their own well-being, and their neglect of the poor, and their despising of the Word of God, will appear in the dread and confusion of that day as the greatest of fools; and so will all professors who have caught up and acted out their worldly-wise principles. The only men who will appear wise will be those who have made themselves fools and poor for Christ's sake, who have incurred reproach and poverty in the carrying out of the work he has given his servants to do in his absence, in the sounding abroad of his name, and the comforting of his brethren, and the succouring of his poor.

In view of that time to which we shall all presently stand related, whether we live or die, let us glance at the principles of the kingdom of heaven as brought before us in the portions of Scripture read this morning. The kingdom is not of this world. Christ said, "*I am not of this world*": the application of which is brought home to us in the words of Paul: "*Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" Let us look at the principles which distinguish the accepted of God from the present evil world in all its departments.

First, turn to the reading from Job. There we find Job saying, "*I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*" Here we have one of the first principles of the kingdom of heaven. Remember who Job was. God said of him, "*There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil.*" Yet he says, "*I abhor myself in dust and ashes.*" He had just had a glimpse of the divine majesty, and as in the similar case of Daniel (10:8), all his beauty in him turned to corruption. He was overpowered by the sense of the inferiority and uncleanness of human nature created within him by his vision of the glory of the divine nature. Now, though we are not permitted to see this glory with the eye, we have so much recorded pertaining to it, that with due attention to what is written, we may easily attain the same profound sense of worthlessness and insignificance. We must attain to this if we are to enter the kingdom of God. It is one of the first things exacted of such. "*Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity ... to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word.*" It is written, "*The **fear of the Lord** is the beginning of wisdom*". The fear of the Lord produces a strong sense of self-abasement where it is effectual. It is a logical result; for where a man adequately apprehends the greatness and majesty of God as the SELF-EXISTENT and the Creator of all, he will easily realize how little he is in himself, and how inferior as a piece of earthly defiled animal mechanism. The mind that is equal to the grasping of the glory of God will readily feel the dishonour of man. This sentiment is the first characteristic of the family of God. It is enunciated with emphasis in every part of the Scriptures. Jesus declares that except a man **humble himself as a little child**, he shall in no case enter into the kingdom of God. Peter and James both quote Solomon's declaration that "*the Lord resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.*" It is written many times, that He knoweth the proud afar off; that those who walk in pride, He will abase; that he that exalteth himself shall be brought down; that the meek and the lowly, and the modest, and the child-like, and the humble He will receive, approve, bless, honour, and exalt.

This is, in fact, the distinguishing feature of the principles revealed from heaven, as contrasted with those that originate in the thinking of man. This is seen and felt by those who intelligently advocate the latter. There is a good illustration of it in a recent magazine article, in which the teaching of Christ is opposed explicitly on this point. The writer argues that self-reliance is the root of all nobility and virtue, and that because Christianity inculcates self-abasement, it is an ignoble and demoralizing religion. The writer is a believer in human immortality and innate human excellence. This explains his insane opposition to the most true and (in the true sense) philosophical religion of Christ. Any man with a practical knowledge of human nature, unobscured by the false sentiments generated by false

philosophy, will be prepared heartily to endorse the declaration of the New Testament, that in the flesh dwelleth no good thing; and to admire the foundation principle of the Gospel system—the glory of the Creator, and the humiliation of poor man.

Suffice it on the present occasion to realize that at the approaching reappearance of Christ, no man need go before him with the expectation of his approbation who is not supremely characterized by this first principle of the house of God—personal smallness in his own esteem, and a "*minding not high things, but condescending to men of low estate*" (Rom. 12:16). It need not be said how totally different is the state of things prevailing in society around us. Our danger is great from this circumstance. We are apt to catch the spirit of the world in all the haughtiness and mightiness of carriage that is to be seen everywhere, and to be ashamed of the soberness and smallness and rationality that belong to the profession of the truth. Let us beware. The truth calls us to "live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world." Any other life will make our destruction certain, when we come to stand before that judge, who is no respecter of persons.

The second reading brings before us the next family characteristic of the sons and daughters of God. "*Unto thee will I cry, O Lord, my rock; be not silent to me.*" David, the man **after God's own heart**, was a man of prayer: so was David's Son and Lord, who frequently retired from the crowd that thronged around him, and in some cases "*continued all night in prayer to God*" (Luke 6:12). It is a standing precept of his house "*to pray to God without ceasing,*" whose house are we IF we continue steadfast in the faith of obedience of Him. And it is natural for sons of God to pray for as sons of God, their first love is the love of God—not a feeble, moderate love, but a love of the sort expressed by the words, "*with all thy strength, soul, and mind.*" This being their love, it impels them, as all love does, to intercourse with its object. Their fears impel them in the same direction: for they have fears, as David had, and Jesus in the days of his flesh had. The triumphs of the enemy and their own experience of evil, and the awful greatness of God, make them afraid, and drive them to prayer. This mixture of love and fear gives earnestness to their prayers, and hope makes the light to shine. The men that Jesus will summon around him in the work of God will be men of prayer—not praying men in the mechanical sense, like Mohammedans and Papists, but men in whom ripe reason, acting on the facts revealed in the Word of God, has brought forth its fruits of daily and hourly incense to the Most High. None else need hope for acceptance. This is the fact to be looked at and applied now.

Let everyone fall back on self-examination. If we come short in this matter, let us not give way to dejection and hopelessness. Let us rather take courage from the other fact

exemplified in both the Scriptures read, and indeed in all the Scriptures continually—that *"there is forgiveness with God."* *"He that confesseth his sins and forsaketh them shall have mercy."* To neglect prayer is a Sin, because it is a transgression of the law which commands us to pray. If any man convicts himself secretly of this neglect, let him put an end to his neglect, let him forsake his sin; let him *"pray always, and not faint,"* as Jesus taught at his first appearing. In everything giving thanks, for this, says Paul, is the will of God concerning us.

In the third portion read, we have another point illustrated. Jesus is brought before us in the attitude of *"having compassion on the people,"* and ministering to their need, and in this, as in everything else, we have to remember that it is written, *"He hath left us an example that we should follow his steps."* Mercy is one of the greatest attributes of the Almighty. "Merciful" was the reported characteristic of the kings of Israel (1 Kings 20:31); it is the quality of the kings of the future age. Without mercy a man is without hope, whatever his intellectual attainments: *"He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy"* (Jas. 2:13). On the other hand, the accepted of the future age are described as *"the merciful."* *"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy"* (Matt. 5:7). *"With the merciful thou, O Jehovah, wilt show thyself merciful"* (Psa. 18:25). Kindness, forbearance, magnanimity, patience, are characteristics that belong to the house of God, and must be cultivated by those who hope to be accepted by the Lord of mercy in the coming day of his glory. In the day of his humiliation, he showed these qualities in the highest degree, and we are poor disciples if we cannot show our discipleship in our compassionateness as well as in our knowledge. The Lord's example is also useful in exhibiting compassion in practical manifestation. It is easy to say, "Poor thing!" What you will **do**? That is the question. The Lord not only had compassion on the multitude, but he made them sit down, and supplied them with food. Are we his disciples if we say, *"Be ye warmed and filled,"* but give not those things that are needful? It may be said, "We have not so much in our power as he had." True, but we shall be held responsible for what **is** in our power. We are only **stewards** of the manifold grace of God, and the day will come, though it linger, when we shall have to give an account thereof. The criticisms or commendations of our brethren we may escape or be misled by, but the judgment-seat is at the end of the journey, where there is no escape.

These are some of the principles upon which the approaching kingdom of God will be founded. Now is the time to be leavened with them in the diligent attendance thereon in the reading of the Word of God and prayer. Let us take care that we waste not the time in barren disputation, in which the old man and not the Lord Jesus is served. Let us take care, lest

after much profession and preaching and contention, the Lord Jesus stand suddenly on the earth in this latter day to say to us, "I know you not. Ye have called me, Lord, Lord; but ye have not addicted yourselves to the obedience of my commandments. I have no use for you in a kingdom to be conducted on principles to which ye have proved yourselves reprobate. *Depart from me, ye cursed.*" Let us rather be of those who, serving him in deed and in truth, under however much odium, will be addressed in the cheering words, "*Ye have been faithful in a very little—enter ye into the joy of your Lord.*"

(Taken from "Seasons of Comfort" Volume 1, Pages 111-115 by Bro. R. Roberts)