

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 185

We have been reading this morning (Oct. 31) that Philip being commanded to join himself to the chariot of the Queen Candace's eunuch, who was returning from a worshipping visit to Jerusalem, and having done so, and finding him reading a certain portion of Isaiah, "*began at the same scriptures and preached unto him Jesus.*" We cannot do better than do so ourselves with regard to the portion of Scripture brought under our notice in the daily reading. Let us "*begin at the same scripture*" and go where it may lead us.

But first, it is worth while noticing that the man honoured thus with divine attention at the hands of Philip was found "*reading the Scriptures.*" God has given us the Scriptures that they might be read; and in reading them, we are paying attention to him. In honouring them, we are honouring Him; and it is a declaration of His own—

"Them that honour Me, I will honour."

This is illustrated in the case of the eunuch before us. It is illustrated in many other cases. The first presentation of the truth to the Gentiles as such was made to a man who "*feared God and gave much alms to the people and prayed to God always.*" It is written:

"They that seek me early shall find me."

"If thou seek him, he will be found of thee."

The principle holds good to the present day. Men earnestly seeking God, in the right appreciation of His Sovereign greatness and their own littleness (which is not always the mood of modern 'piety')—are the men who are led out of the Babylonian jungle of obfuscating modern theology, into the way of truth—simple, pure, beautiful truth.

"*Beginning at the same Scripture,*" we are in the 8th chapter of Daniel which has been read this morning. It might not seem at first sight as if there were much in this chapter connected with Jesus whom Philip preached, and whom we have met this morning to call to remembrance. A right understanding of its contents will, however, reveal a different state of things. Even the last verse of the chapter but two, will show a connection. The power spoken of was foreshown as "*standing up against the prince of princes.*" It is, the prince of princes—the king of kings—we have met to remember this morning, so here at once we connect the chapter with the object of our assembly.

The connection becomes very apparent when we take a comprehensive view of the chapter. This comprehensiveness takes in the beginning and the end and the details between. Though the vision astonished Daniel and puzzled all to whom he submitted it (as we gather from the last verse), the lapse of time has placed us in a different relation to it. The protracted period which it covers having run out—its symbolic prophecy having become the facts of literal history—we are in the position of being able to understand it easily, as anyone of an ordinary capacity giving attention to it will see.

The date of its communication to Daniel is given—"the third year of the reign of King Belshazzar." It was, therefore, before the Babylonian empire had fallen before the prowess of Cyrus. All the events shown in it were therefore future, but some of them just impending. Daniel, in fact, lived to see the fulfilment of the opening prophecy of the vision—viz., the advent of the Persian empire.

What he saw was—first, a ram with two unequal horns, which the angel explained to him (verse 20), stood for the joint dynasty of the Medes and Persians. This ram he saw push in all directions in a very formidable and irresistible manner, till it became master of the whole field. While considering its movements, he saw coming from the west, with bounding speed, a strong energetic he-goat, with a formidable horn between his eyes. It was explained to him (verse 21) that this meant the Greek power under its first imperial chief, "Alexander the Great." The goat, quickly clearing the ground, rushed at the ram and overthrew it, and

stamped it to death. The goat, in its turn, became master of the situation. Daniel, however, observed when the conflict was over that the formidable horn in the head of the goat was broken, and that four smaller horns had come up in its place. It was explained to him (verse 22) that the meaning of this was that the head of the Greek empire would fall shortly after its establishment, and, in consequence of this, the empire would be parcelled out into four parts. While he considered the four horns, he saw come out of one of them another horn, which, in a manner we cannot well realise apart from seeing the vision itself, "*waxed exceeding great towards the south, and towards the east, and towards the pleasant land.*" It was explained to Daniel (verse 23), that this meant that in the latter time of the four Greek kingdoms, another power—a destructive power—should establish itself in the territory of one of them, and assume a menacing attitude towards the Holy Land and people, which it should ultimately destroy and "*cast down the truth to the ground, and practise and prosper*" (verse 12). The merest glance backwards at history shows us what power this was. We have but to ask by whom was "*the daily sacrifice taken away and the place of the sanctuary (Jerusalem) cast down?*" By whom did God thus punish Israel "*by reason of transgression?*" What power "*destroyed the mighty and the holy people?*" By whom was "*the truth cast to the ground?*" There is but one answer—ROME. She answers to the prophecy on all points. She manifested herself Holy Land-wards first in her encroachments on the territories and jurisdiction of the Greek kingdom of Syria—one of the four. She absorbed the others at last—Greece, Macedonia, Egypt; but it was in the Syrian division of the Greek Empire where her power first overshadowed and then eclipsed and extinguished "*the mighty and the holy people.*" Christ's prophecy of the approach of the Roman arms, and his allusion to the reason of their permitted triumph (Matt. 24; Luke 21), furnish the finishing evidence of the identity of the little horn of the goat with the Roman power, whose outlined mission is not yet accomplished. It is nearly so but not quite. Having destroyed Jerusalem A.D. 70, it "*cast down the truth to the ground.*" It did this in two ways. First, under the Pagan Caesars, it persecuted the witnesses of Christ's resurrection, and employed its power against all who received their testimony. Secondly, when the Pagan form of Rome's Government was overthrown, when Christianity became nominally the religion of the State, it nullified New Testament Christianity by promulgating fables in its name, and persecuting and destroying to the ground all who opposed its corrupt doctrine, and contended for "*the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ.*"

"Through policy it caused craft to prosper in its hand."

Religion became a craft of the most advantageous description, and through the corrupting influence of prosperous peace for all who conformed, it destroyed many; This power has "*magnified himself in his heart.*" The city has come to arrogate the title, "The Eternal City." Its living head claims to be the head over everything on earth that is worshipped, receiving and accepting the title, "Holy Father," which belongs to God alone.

This power has but to "*stand up against the Prince of Princes,*" to completely fill the programme. This it will shortly do as revealed in the Apocalypse, where at the coming of Christ we see "*the kings of the earth and their armies* (with the false prophet of Rome in their camp) *gather together against him.*" Although Russia is the head of the confederacy that receives its shattering blow in the Holy Land when Christ appears, we must not forget that Russia at that time is but the clay that holds the materials of the Roman feet together. The "*kings of the earth*" that oppose Christ are the "*ten kings,*" and the ten kings are the Roman kings, the kings of the Roman earth as shown by the ten horses appearing on the head of the Roman dragon. In their last essay, they are headed up under the pontifical power of Rome. Rome thus, in its last appearance on the stage, "*stands up against the Prince of Princes.*"

We are interested in all these particulars because of what come last in the vision. The time of its duration was stated in Daniel's hearing—2,300 or 2,400 days. This period, which

ever of the two statements of it we select, is expired. It is 2,400 years ago since the Persian ram appeared on the historic arena. We are, therefore, close under the shadow of the finishing event of the vision, which is thus announced,

"Then shall the sanctuary be cleansed."

Or to take the other form of it at the close of the chapter,

"He (the power standing up against the 'Prince of Princes') shall be broken without hand" (without human instrumentality: by divine power direct), for "at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince that standeth for the children of thy people, O Daniel; and there shall be a time of trouble . . . and many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake."

What succeeds this display of divine power, we know: the setting up of the Kingdom of God in which—

"The wise shall shine as the firmament and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever."

Consequently, this 8th chapter of Daniel, instead of being unconnected with Jesus, leads us directly to his presence at his coming in power and great glory. It supplies us with the historic framework to which that event is related. It connects the times and events in which we ourselves are embraced with the great event of events in which God's plan with the earth has its issue. It shows us that the night is far spent, and that the day is at hand. How bracing that view is every one can bear witness who has at any time felt the force of its power as a conviction resting on evidence clearly discerned. Nothing more easily reconciles us to the disagreeables or the sacrifices of the present life (when subordinated to divine requirements), than the knowledge that the swiftly fleeting present is bearing us onward to a time when life will become a beautiful and a glorified thing. Nothing appeals more powerfully to human motive than the certainty that human life will shortly come under the review of an unerring and omnipotent judge whom God has ordained to *"give to every man according as his work shall be."* Nothing more powerfully nerves a man to the endurance of the hardships of a faithful service than the prospect of Christ's approbation of that service, and his practical recognition of it in the promotion of the faithful servant to a position of honour and love among myriads of the Father's perfected sons in a day of power and gladness. Nothing more thoroughly enables a man to cheerfully resign himself to the position of a stranger in the earth abdicating political privileges and foregoing political benefits and distinctions than the conviction that not only are all human politics ultimately vain, but that there waits at the door with Christ, the solution of every problem that affects the well-being of man, whether physiological, social, spiritual or political.

All this spiritual comfort and moral power comes with faith in the visions shown to Daniel. To the superficial eye, they may seem sterile and uncouth, hard, unattractive and dry. The superficial eye is not the eye of the wise, but the eye of the wicked, and it is written in Daniel—

"None of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand."

Pierced with the eye of wisdom—discerned by the spiritual understanding that comes with the docile heart that fears God and keeps his commandments, the visions of Daniel appear much otherwise than unattractive. They are the authentic exhibition of God's purpose—a purpose to bring order out of confusion, good out of evil, well being and glory out of the affliction that has lain heavily on the human lot since human life appeared upon the earth. They show us the mode to be observed in the accomplishment of this gladsome result. They enable us to trace the hand of God in the evolution of the plan so far as it has been unfolded in the history of the world hitherto. They present the holy land and people as the pivot of operations, concurrently with *"the truth"* sent to them which Rome has *"cast down to the ground."* They therefore give us all the zest of Jewish feeling infinitely strengthened by the

love of the God of their fathers and of Christ their King. We come, without any trace of what people call “sentimentality,” to “*mourn for Jerusalem*” and to be glad at the prospect of her returning day. We pray for the peace of Jerusalem with a fervour that comes with a discernment that with her peace is bound up every good that the most enlightened human heart can desire—the wellbeing of man and the glory of God in all the earth. Without “cant” at all, but in the language of sober sense, in the robust-minded discernment of cause and effect; in the sensible appreciation of that which is true and actual and good, we can make the language of Psalm 137 our own;

“If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.”

Are these things disconnected with “*Christ our Passover?*” On the contrary, they all converge in him. They are all grouped around that table at which he said—

“I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine till that day that I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom.”

He himself is the centre of all the things shown to Daniel and of all the hopes adumbrated in his glorious visions. He is the substance and end of the Law of Moses; the power-centre of the current Providence that directs events into their appointed groove; the kernel and root of the glory to be revealed. He is the heir to David’s throne, the lord of Jerusalem, the king of the Jews, the head and possessor of all the earth. Our breaking of bread reminds us that it pleased the Lord first to put him to grief. It was not without imperious necessity. The Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all. The foundation of the purposed glory had to be laid in righteousness. Every stone of the edifice had to be laid on that foundation. It was designed that every ransomed heir of the glory should bow the knee to the “*Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world;*” and with rapturous gratitude, take part in the song ascribing—

“Blessing and honour, and glory and thanksgiving unto the Lamb who was slain,” and who should redeem them unto God by his blood.

Therefore the hour of darkness had to precede the hour of glory. Jesus had to take the cup of sorrow into his hand before the anointing of the oil of gladness above his fellows. It was the Father who gave him that cup. It was a terrible ordeal, the drinking of it: but he went through it saying,

“The cup which my Father hath given me to drink shall I not drink it?”

True, it broke his heart:

“My God why hast thou forsaken me?”

But it was only for a moment. He brought him joyfully from the power of death, no more to see corruption, and exalted him far above all principality and power, the angels being subject unto him. At the right hand of power he waits till the arrival of the moment, now near at hand, when his enemies will be made his footstool, through the sending forth of the rod of his strength out of Zion. For this hour we also wait, —not in his strength and gladness, but in the frailty of mortal nature, and in the sadness inseparable from the state of evil that now prevails in all the earth—yet with the sweetness of hope that rests in God, and the comfort that comes with the conviction that even the affliction of the present time are divinely regulated, and even divinely ordered for that discipline which is necessary to circumcise the natural man and bring him into subjection to the divine will, in preparation for that glorious state in which there will be no conflict, no weakness, no pain, no death.

Taken from: - “The Christadelphian” of 1887
Sunday Morning No. 185

Pages 548-552
By Bro. Robert Roberts