

SUNDAY MORNING NO. 27

On several notable occasions, God has interfered in the affairs of men. Upon all these occasions, the interference was looked for by a few, and indicated by signs not discernible by the world at large. Our near relation to a greater interference than any, makes it profitable to look back, that we may learn the lessons of a waiting attitude. A certain old man who was a pilgrim and a stranger and who worshipped an unknown God, went down with his family, under perfectly natural circumstances, to a certain strange country, which was a prosperous country, and a powerful country in its day. That old man, the days of the years of the life of whose pilgrimage reached to 147, by and bye, went to the dust, and his family increased to a nation, a nation within a nation, a community living among the Egyptians, but not of the Egyptians.

At the end of a certain 400 years, of which mention had been made to that old man's grandfather, some of the more intelligent of his descendants began to look up. They began to speak one to another of the time of the fulfilment of the promises having drawn near, when they would no longer serve the stranger, but come out from him with substance, and return to the land of their fathers, to which Joseph, dying, had commanded them to carry his bones. Knowing the time was near, they were intent upon the signs of the times. They looked for something happening that would lead to the promised redemption.

The world at large saw nothing, knew nothing, suspected nothing. The bulk of Israel were equally unintelligent in the matter. The sun rose and set, the ordinances of nature went quietly on; there was nothing unusual to be seen on the surface, and those who looked only on the surface were lulled by the apparent absence of indication. To such as were instructed, there were broad features characteristic of the situation and indicative of the divine purpose. There was, in the first place, Israel in Egypt; in the next place, Israel had been there a long time. In the minds of the discerning, these facts led to the expectation of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, because they were part of a known programme, of which that would be the upshot. Upon the undiscerning, the opposite effect was produced. Israel's presence in Egypt, in the capacity of bondsmen, was a familiar fact of long standing. It was to them a matter of course, a something they had known from childhood, and which brought with it no token of approaching change. They knew the Hebrews as a race of bondmen, and as a race of bondmen expected they would remain.

A very little band in Egypt were looking on with very different eyes, how large or small does not appear; but we know that Moses was one of them, for, at 40, he expected that his brethren would have understood how God would deliver them by his hand (Acts 7:25), and we know his father and mother were other two; for they had been the teachers of Moses, of whom it is testified that by faith he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God; and, of them, it is testified that **by faith**, they were not afraid of the king's commandment. They were, doubtless, of those who treasured the word spoken by Joseph before he died. He said—

"God shall surely visit you; ye shall carry up my bones from hence."

They treasured up that prophetic tradition, and they united with Moses and others in expectancy. But there was nothing beyond general expectancy. God had not spoken, and in the light they had, there was no revelation of details. God had revealed nothing beyond the great fact that deliverance would come at a certain time broadly indicated.

Well, how was this looked-for deliverance brought into shape? By a very commonplace occurrence. Moses, who had been introduced into the family of Pharaoh, through the apparent accident of being found by Pharaoh's daughter, when left to perish on the banks of the Nile, under the brutal decree of the king, and who, putting all things together, had

concluded he was, providentially, in that position, with reference to the promises—Moses, nursed and instructed by his mother, and afterwards educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, brought up at the court of Pharaoh, and known to the great people of the land, killed an Egyptian who smote a Hebrew. This was murder, some may say; superficially it may appear so, but let us look closer. Murder is the unauthorised taking away of life. When God, who makes alive, commands to kill, it is not murder. Did God command in the present instance? We have no evidence that He did directly; but Moses now was forty years old, the four hundred years were nearly up, and Stephen gives us to understand that he regarded himself in the position he occupied as providentially raised up for the deliverance of Israel. —(Acts 7.) Under this impression, which, however derived, turned out to be a right impression; it was, therefore, no excess of power to interfere between the Egyptian and the Hebrew, who was being wronged.

We may have a difficulty in realising the righteousness of Moses' act, from our being placed under a law that forbids violence of any kind. But our difficulty will disappear on reflection. The Lawgiver varies the law as it pleases Him. That is a right which God requires, and he may require one thing at one time and another at another. The offering up of Isaac was righteousness in Abraham, and, in us, would be murder. We are commanded not to take the sword but to suffer. This is our present trial. We have to resist not evil: to be submissive to the destroyer. This is one of the ordinances of the house of Christ, doubtless, designed to train all who are of that house to submission to the will of God, even at the expense of our strongest instincts: but it is merely as a preliminary trial. The time will come when the people of God will not always be under the heel. The time will come when they shall be released from this bondage. It is not the will of God that righteousness should always bow before the sinner. It is an evil thing that justice should have to be trodden under foot. The sword of judgment will, at last, be put into the hands of the saints, and then woe to the destroyers of the earth.

Moses, when the death of the Egyptian had been reported, fled out of the country, and went away into the deserts of Arabia, where he sojourned with a certain family for nearly forty years. At the end of that time, while he was feeding the flocks at the back of Horeb, as was his wont, the message of the Almighty came to him. In the flaming bush, the God of Abraham, by His angel, appeared, and gave the word of command which began the work of setting up the kingdom of Yahweh in the midst of the earth. Of this great event no one knew. The interference of God had commenced, and the world was ignorant of the fact. Upon the strength of that message, Moses went to Pharaoh, and began a series of operations which inflicted great judgment upon the Egyptians, and delivered Israel. That was the first great interference of which I wished to speak.

The next occasion was the appearance of the Messiah in the flesh—the next greatest interposition of God in human affairs to the one we are now looking for. And who knew about that? A very little band. There was nothing to tell of it to the people who discerned not the signs of the times. Externally, the course of things was apparently natural. Mary was delivered at the end of nine months, but few were aware of the marvel, or were looking for anything out of the natural course. There were one or two like Hannah and Simeon in expectation of the Lord's Anointed, but the mass were undiscerning. Thirty years after, John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, but his appearance was not understood by many. Led by the Pharisees, the people regarded him as a fanatic, yet that fanatic was the man sent to prepare the way of the Lord. John himself was one of the expectants. He knew not the Great One through whom the Father was to show himself to Israel. His testimony was:

"There standeth one amongst you whom I know not, whose shoe latchet I am not worthy to unloose, and I know him not, but He who sent me to baptise with

water, the same said unto me, upon whomsoever the Holy Spirit shall descend, the same is he who baptiseth with the Holy Spirit."

By and bye this Great One was manifested to Israel, but what was there in his appearance to excite or to incite common people who knew nothing of God's word? Nothing. Isaiah had said beforehand—

"He hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him."

He was a plain, grave, quiet man, teaching with an air of authority, but not answering to the popular conceptions of the Messiah. So little was there to appeal to the merely sensational and sight-seeing order of the mind that the multitude, who for a while were taken with the novelty of his miracles, joined in the clamour for his destruction.

"He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief . . . who shall declare his generation, for he was cut off out of the land of the living."

And what was there in that death which we are met this morning to commemorate, to mark that an extraordinary man had been nailed to the cross? True, the heavens were overcast, darkness prevailed over the land, and the rocks rent, but in a few hours all agitation subsided; apparently the power of the Jews had triumphed; and yet that significant event, as it appeared to the common eye, was the greatest event the world has ever seen.

Subsequently to this, another event exemplified God's operations where none could recognise it but those instructed. Jesus, while with his disciples in the flesh, foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, and gave them directions for their individual preservation.

"When ye see Jerusalem encompassed with armies, know that the desolation thereof is nigh; and let them which are in Judea flee to the mountains, for these be the days of vengeance," &c.

This encompassing of Jerusalem with armies, He represents as a divine visitation; for he speaks of it in parable as the Father—

"Sending forth His armies to destroy the murderers of His Son, and burn up their city."

But he could not tell them when it would occur; he said,

"Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father."

He however gave them to understand it would be in their generation, and that they were to deliver themselves by flight when certain signs were visible.

Well, Jesus went away, and forty years transpired, and the disciples were looking for the threatened disruption of the Hebrew commonwealth, as an event necessary before the reconstitution could take place. They well knew that the ministration of Moses, as existing in the system of the law must pass away before that of the Messiah could come into force; therefore it was to the disciples a practical expectancy, this looking for the passing away of the then existing constitution of things. It was a something for which they looked before the kingdom of God could come. They did not know the length of time that would elapse between one and the other; they knew the one would follow the other, and probably thought it would do so immediately: *"they thought the kingdom of God would immediately appear;"* their thoughts were concentrated upon their own day.

Time went on; things took their course, and as Jesus had predicted, the love of many waxed cold. Business, family cares, persecution, and one thing and another, began to cool the ardour of many who started well; iniquity abounded, hate came into play, social chaos prevailed, to the discouragement and subverting of such as had no root in themselves, and were not root in themselves, and were not training themselves in spiritual development. The number of the faithful became comparatively few; the signs of the times thickened; and the

hand of God appeared, but only to such as discerned. An ordinary quarrel sprang up between the Jews in Jerusalem and the Roman army that garrisoned the country. As the result of the quarrel, Cestius the governor of Syria, invested Jerusalem, the Jews resisted and by violent sorties broke up the investment and drove the Romans out of the country. The whole nation then revolted and appeared to establish a successful defiance of Rome.

Unbelief said "There! This is very like what you were looking for, isn't it; where is the destruction of Jerusalem? Where is the promise of His coming?" But the faithful reasoned the other way. They took warning from the fact of Jerusalem having been surrounded. They took this as the sign, and quietly retired; they as much as said this, "the Jews are successful now, for which we were not looking, but the city has been surrounded, and we know what that means." And they accordingly left the city. Three years afterwards, events showed they were right. At the expiration of that time, the very thing that Jesus had foretold occurred; Jerusalem was hemmed in and destroyed, and the faithless perished with her. That is the third event that stands out prominently, as a lesson for us who live in the neighbourhood of the most interesting manifestation of all. Eighteen hundred years have rolled away since Jesus departed, leaving behind him a promise that He would return.

In the prophet Daniel, we have indications of the time and the purpose for which Jesus will reappear viz: —for the destruction of the political system represented by the fourth beast of Daniel 7., at the end of the career of that element of the system represented by the Little Horn. These indications have been made intelligible by the unlocking power of history, and we know we are near the great culmination, when the Lord will be manifested as the little stone to smite Nebuchadnezzar's image upon its clay and iron feet, bringing about the disruption of the great despoticisms of the earth, substituting His own authority over all. The time has gone drearily on; the fourth beast has slowly developed itself in history. Its most remarkable feature has been shining conspicuously in the political heaven for twelve centuries past—the Little Horn with eyes; and the most remarkable predicted performance of the Little Horn is of recent occurrence. It has opened its blasphemous mouth, and spoken "*great words*" which have stunned the world with their audacity and been followed by terrible calamity. It has declared the old infatuated occupant of "St. Peter's chair," to be the incarnation of divine wisdom in the earth, whose individual opinion is to be taken as the settlement of all religious questions.

Then have we not seen the great sign that Jesus indicated to his servant, John, in the Isle of Patmos, eighteen hundred years ago; the activity of the frog-power towards the European nations, causing war? We have seen this sign—this intermeddling of French diplomacy, in operation for twenty years, and we see the result in the present complicated state of European politics—the present confused state of the world—the present armed condition of the nations. Then during the past year, we have seen Europe plunged into war, in the midst of a cry of "*peace, peace,*" through the machinations of the same power.

We do not know the exact time when the Lord will come, any more than the disciples at the beginning of the Christian era knew when Jerusalem was to be destroyed. The details are not revealed, but we do know that we have reached just that point of time when He may come any day. Every true heart will say with John,

"Come Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

"Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching."

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