

FULFILLED PROPHECIES THAT ENCOURAGE

It is made an objection by some concerning those who are ardently in love with the things represented by this “Table of the Lord,” that they are always living either in the past or in the future; that they do not live enough in the present. The complaint is not a well-founded one; it is not a reasonable one. Yesterday and tomorrow are always a part of today in a wise treatment of things. Today cannot be lived wisely, in any line of things, without reference to yesterday and tomorrow. Yesterday has its facts—its obligations—its covenants—which shape and colour the proceedings of today. Tomorrow has its hopes and aims, which can only be realised by the needful adjustments of today. The man who should forget yesterday, or be heedless of tomorrow, even in worldly matters, would be esteemed a fool by the most worldly of people.

If this be the case in small matters, it is not less so in large matters, though it may not be so common or so easy to recognise the fact. The 19th century is part of the 18th, in so far as it is by reason of what the 18th century was. You cannot explain the England of Victoria without reference to the England of the Georges. And the 19th century is part of the first century in so far as its shape and contour have sprung from the events and influences that were active in the first. These general considerations would have no urgent practical application were it not for the fact that things occurred in the first century having a governing effect on a remote future reaching to our time, and going over our heads into endless ages to come. Those things are represented by the bread and wine on the Table. They centre round the man concerning whom a surging crowd in Pilate’s presence fiercely shouted,

“Away with him! Crucify him! Crucify him!”

We are here to be reminded of the reality of these things. The act of breaking bread is for this very purpose:

“Do this in remembrance of me.”

Upon this remembrance depends so much that every help to its attainment is precious and every hindrance an evil to be avoided.

One powerful means of this valuable act of memory is not only to read the record of them regularly, but to remember as we read that we are reading words of actual truth, and not the words of imagination or fiction. They are words that have been in the hands of the world for 1,800 years. If by means of the great libraries you peep in upon the world at any time during the past 1,800 years, you find the New Testament just as we have it. They are the very words written by the men who were the Lord’s companions and witnesses of the things they record, for they were in circulation during the very lifetime of the writers, and not a whisper of contradiction as to their authenticity was ever raised. It is the testimony of men whose integrity is guaranteed by the work they did in turning men to righteousness, and by their submission to death for their work; and whose capability of giving an accurate testimony is shown by the testimony itself. The people have been too easily blinded to the enormous value of the New Testament as actual evidence of the things it records. The result is due to the persistent dogmatisms of unscrupulous enmity on the part of the enemies of the bible; a predisposition on the part of the people to disbelieve, and the actual neglect of almost all people of the New Testament itself. We have been delivered from this blindness. We shall only remain delivered by walking in the light by regular reading of the apostolic testimony for ourselves, and those meditations on co-related things which the reading is sure to engender.

Familiarity is apt to prevent our getting the full benefit of our reading. There is a prevalent feeling to the effect that the New Testament is very useful for Sunday schools and “pious” people, but of no serviceableness for mature and practicable people; a good sort of book to get mottoes and texts from, but of no authority as proving the truth of anything. This idea is nothing more than popular infatuation. When the mind fully opens to the actual facts as they are, not only surprise, but indignation, hot to the explosive point, is the predominant feeling produced. Such feelings are of no particular use perhaps, but they are the inevitable and growing effect produced by the full apprehension of the actual situation of things with regard to this important matter. Let us say to ourselves as we read, “I am reading a true record. I am reading a recital of things that actually occurred. I am not reading cunningly-devised fables, but the sober testimony of earnest men who were *eye witnesses*—who saw what they describe, who heard what they report; and whose very method of

recording their testimony is of itself a proof of the presence of that superhuman guidance which Jesus promised when he said,

'It shall be given you what ye shall say; for it is not ye that speak but the spirit of the Father that speaketh in you.'

For who ever before wrote such a graphic story in such few and simple words, and with such majesty and chasteness of style?"

Reading in this mind, we shall read with attention and with faith, and will come under the power of the things read because believed. Many are the things having great power to help us rightly to live today with reference to that tomorrow of which Christ's yesterday is the guarantee. We take them by turn as they come. Let us on this occasion take the words,

"When ye see these things come to pass, look up and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh."

There was a moment when these words were fresh out of the mouth of Christ. That moment was when he and his disciples were resting on the western brow of the Mount of Olives, overlooking the city of Jerusalem, and the temple outspread at their feet. They had just come from the city, and in passing through the temple Jesus had said something that excited the curiosity of the disciples. When called on to admire the beauty of the buildings, instead of joining in the conventional sentiment, he said the time was not far off when the whole structure of the temple would be in ruins. As the disciples were *"expecting that the Kingdom of God should immediately appear"* (Luke 19:11), this was naturally a difficult intimation for them to understand. So when seated together on the ascent of Olivet, they asked him about it. In answering the question, he embraced the opportunity of outlining to them in a brief way the course of events from the destruction of Jerusalem onwards to his coming again in power and great glory. He had before spoken of his absence being for "a long time." He now tells them of things that would happen at the end of the long time, and just before his coming, concerning which he makes a general remark to the effect that when they saw the budding of vegetation they knew that summer was near.

"So likewise, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand."

Now, had we been there, should we not have felt strong in his words? Standing by his side, should we not have looked forward with him to a long period of confusion and darkness, at the end of which things would show themselves that would justify the saints then living in *"looking up and lifting up their heads,"* because of the manifest approach of the Kingdom of God? There is no doubt that such would have been our feelings under the influence of all that we should have seen and heard, in company with the other disciples, during the three years and a-half journeying with the Lord in Galilee and Judea. Under the shadow of Christ and his very loving presence, we should have felt very bold and confident, and regarded everything as it appeared to him. It is very certain that as we looked forward and thought of the people that should be living in the world at the end of the times of the Gentiles, that we should have felt that it wouldn't matter in the very least what they might think about Christ and the Kingdom of God. We should very likely have said, "Very likely the people living then will think the Kingdom of God a dream, and the coming of Christ an impossibility; but that will only be their ignorance, however much they may know about other things." We should have looked forward expecting that that would be the general temper of men's minds in relation to the things of God, in view of what we had heard Christ say:

"As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be when the Son of Man cometh."

Now then, we are not there but here. We are living at the end of those very times of the Gentiles that Jesus spoke of, and not in the first half of the first century looking forward to that end. We are just where Christ contemplated some of his disciples would be when events would show that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand. What, then, is the right attitude for us? Is it not the attitude he expressly enjoins:

"Look up; lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh?"

Has anything happened since Christ spoke these words to take away from their force? It is just entirely the other way. Everything that has happened since then has proved the truth of what he said. See the temple demolished in less than forty years afterwards; see Jerusalem laid in ashes, and its teeming population decimated by the sword; see the city *"trodden down of the Gentiles"* from that day to this; and see another thing that people generally little reckon as a pledge of Christ's return.

If there is one class of prophecy that more than another proves the divinity of the predictions of the prophets and apostles, it is that in which the corruption of the work of Christ is foretold. The natural tendency of speculation would have been to anticipate progress, improvement, reform. Start a powerful civilising agency of any kind, and the ordinary probability is that it will work like the path of the just:

“Shining more and more unto the perfect day.”

In the unparalleled performances of Christ, the words of Isaiah received an incipient fulfilment:

“The glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.”

What was more likely than that the Word of the Gospel having received such a tremendous impetus that it would go on from strength to strength till it had brought the whole world into enlightened and happy subjection to God? Such an anticipation would have been in harmony with the universal idea of the millennium being brought about by the gradual prevalence of the gospel principles. It is such an anticipation as the apostles left to themselves would doubtless have indulged in. Instead of this, the Spirit of God by them forecast the gloomiest failure—not only declension but monstrous abortion; not only apostasy but abomination, repudiation, and spiritual folly, comparable only to inebriation. Consider the combined prophecies of Paul, John, and Daniel. According to Paul, *“evil men and seducers”*—already active in his day—were to *“wax worse and worse.”* Believers were to turn away their ears from the Truth and turn unto fables. There would be a falling away so complete that a public official would be developed who could only be fitly described as *“the Man of Sin and Son of Perdition,”* lording it over the consciences of mankind, and giving himself out as the representative of God upon earth (2 Timothy 4:3-4; 2 Thess. 2:3-8). According to John, a false church (symbolised by an unchaste woman) would be established at Rome, holding close relations with the governments of Europe, and constituting in alliance with them, a destroying tyranny (comparable only to a wild beast), which should exercise power over *“all peoples, nations and languages,”* and use that power hurtfully against the saints of God for 42 months or 1260 days or years (Rev. 13:5-8; 17:1-5, 18). According to Daniel, an ecclesiastical sprout should shoot forth from the head of the fourth beast (or Roman universal monarchy), and subvert three secular governments, and *“make war with the saints and prevail against them”* for time, times and the dividing of time, which is reducible to 1260 days or years (Dan. 7:19-25).

Nothing is more striking in the European retrospect than the fulfilment of these prophetic foreshadowings. The history of Europe has been an ecclesiastical history. The work of the apostles has been inwrought with it, in a nominal form. A church has been founded at Rome professedly on their principles, but conducted in violation of them in every particular. The names of the apostles are on all their buildings, but the doctrines of the apostles are absent from their systems, which is mainly a structure of tradition and fable. As the crowning feature of this false church’s organization, visible to all the world for ages, has been a titular head, reputed infallible, assuming the name of God (Holy Father), and exercising an oppressive secular jurisdiction in all countries for centuries, either direct or through tools, working particularly against the saints of God, whom in all ages it has described as heretics.

Here is this notable prophecy now all a matter of history, and proclaimed to all the world as a fulfilled prophecy by this unmistakeable circumstance, that the power to make war with the saints has departed from the Pope within the lifetime of the present generation, after having been possessed by him, directly or indirectly, just 1,260 years since it was accorded to him by imperial decree. But the world has no ear for such matters. Its foolish heart is *“overcharged with the surfeiting and cares and pleasures”* of this fleeting life. Consequently, this crying fact of the dispensation makes no impression upon it, although so far as the logic of facts is concerned, it is proclaimed with the tongue of the trumpet.

Instead of the lapse of time having weakened the words of Christ, it has greatly strengthened them. Do we not see “the things” which he said would characterise the end? Look at the roaring sea of nations, agitated democratically by a ground swell which has never before passed over the face of political waters. See the universal distress of nations with perplexity. Note the doleful forebodings generated in every reflective mind by the endless and unappeasable demands of the people, the intrigues of anarchism, and the hellish activity of dynamiters and Nihilists. Mark the shaking of the powers of the political heaven in all countries. See the *“signs in the sun, moon and stars”* of the political system—the dying Turk, the dried Euphrates, the restless Franco-frogs, the portentous

arming of nations everywhere, the ascendancy of England in Egypt, the beginning of revival in the Holy Land, the formation of Jewish colonies; the stirring of the Jewish question in all lands.

We see these things *“coming to pass.”* They have been steadily coming to pass before our eyes for 40 years past. They may have various meanings, but this one meaning they do have: They are the fulfilment of the words of Christ; and we have Christ’s interpretation of them.

“The Kingdom is nigh at hand.”

We have his own proclamation in connection with them:

“Behold I come as a thief; blessed is he that watcheth.”

We have his own assurance beforehand as regards the world in general, that “as a snare” the crisis will burst upon all them that dwell upon the face of the whole earth. What is the course of wisdom on the part of his friends but the one he prescribes when he says:

“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord when he will return from the wedding, that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open to him immediately. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching. Verily, I say unto you that he shall gird himself and shall make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them . . . But if that servant shall say in his heart, my lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to beat the men-servants and maidens, and to eat and drink and be drunken, the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.”

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