

The Relation of the Church to the Second Coming of Christ by H. A. Ironside

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, *there* ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him." (John 14:1-7).

I need not read further for these verses give us that which I have particularly upon my heart: What we may call the heavenly side of the truth of the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is, His return for the Church, which is His Body and His Bride, an event which is clearly distinguished in Scripture from the actual second Coming of the Lord to this world.

In the so-called synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, our Lord speaks again and again of the coming of the Son of Man, a term which always refers to His coming back again to establish the long promised Kingdom of righteousness on the earth. If you bear this in mind when you are reading the warnings in the Synoptics as a preparation for that Coming, you will not read the Church position into them.

To understand them aright, you must put yourself in spirit where the disciples were when Jesus was speaking to them, remembering that at that time nothing had yet been revealed concerning

The Mystical Body of Christ,

or the Heavenly Bride of the Lamb. Of Israel as the wife of Jehovah now divorced, but by and by to be brought back into the nuptial relationship with Him, they knew something from the Old Testament, and the teaching of the Lord fitted into that. But they knew nothing whatever of the precious truth which means so much to us to-day—*the relationship of the indwelling Spirit of God to a glorified Man in Heaven*. That was never revealed in Old Testament times nor yet during our Saviour's ministry on the earth. Therefore, when He, for instance, says to His disciples, "Pray that ye may be counted worthy to

escape these things that are coming upon the earth, and to stand before the Son of Man," He speaks to them of that which they could understand. In other words, He addresses them as the remnant of Israel, the people of whom we read in Isaiah and elsewhere, who will be preserved and kept by the grace and power of God in that day of awful Judgment upon the earth, in order that they may enter into the displayed Kingdom, which will have its capital on Mount Zion, in the land of Palestine. The great tribulation of which He speaks is the precursor of His second coming in this sense. We are told "immediately after the tribulation of those days, they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with power and great glory." But the promise to the Church is "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

Again, take such a passage as

"He that Endureth Unto the End,

the same shall be saved." What is the end here referred to? Surely the end of the age; that is, the close of the great tribulation, and the Lord's reference is to the awful experiences so many of the Jewish remnant will be exposed to, and the efforts that will be made by Satan, and his minions to turn them away from the path of devotion to the coming Messiah. In that day, by divine power, they may be kept to the end, no matter what the enmity of the evil agencies here on earth may bring forth. So with all other Scriptures that seem to cast a doubt, perhaps, on the Church being kept out of the great Tribulation.

When we turn to the second part of John's Gospel, and come as here to the upper room, it is as though Israel's day for the time being was looked upon as already ended. To that little group of believers, the nucleus of the coming Church, those who on the Day of Pentecost were to be baptized by the Spirit into the one Body and thus begin a new dispensation, our Lord

Reveals Certain Things

which had never been made known before.

Not a word is said about the Holy Spirit as Comforter in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, nor yet in the first thirteen chapters of John. We never read about the Spirit of God as a divine Person, dwelling in believers, until in this section we hear the Lord Jesus say, "He hath been with you, He shall be in you." There you have a great dispensational change intimated.

The Holy Spirit ever Active

All through Old Testament times, and during the days of our Lord's ministry on earth, the Holy Spirit was with all who believed. He was with the antediluvian saints for Noah, by the Spirit, bore testimony in the days before the flood. He it was who guided the Patriarchs, and was with Moses empowering for testimony. We read that God gave His good Spirit to be with Israel, and guide them through the wilderness. David from the depths of a broken and penitent heart cried, "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." The Spirit of God fell upon men in the days of the Judges, and of the kingdom afterwards. He filled certain individuals for particular service. The prophets predicted the glorious outpouring of the Spirit in the days of the Messianic kingdom. But nowhere in the Old Testament, or in the Synoptics, or in the first part of John's Gospel is there set forth the truth of a divine personal Holy Spirit coming from Heaven to dwell in believers, baptizing them into one Body, and linking them to their glorified Head above. This is just barely intimated in John 7:37 -39.

But these truths are first introduced here to prepare the disciples for the new administration so soon to begin. It is in this connection, He speaks for the

First Time Clearly of His Return

for His Own in an altogether different way than that of His coming to Israel. Instead of speaking of the Son of Man coming in the glory of the Father with the holy angels like a lightning flash; instead of His glorious apocalyptic manifestation; and instead of His coming to earth, and sending forth His angels to gather together the elect of Israel, and bring them back to the city of the Great King, you find the Lord giving them a wonderful revelation, though in few words, that He has something else in view for them. Of this they will learn more fully in due time, for He says, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now." That might be rendered, "You cannot apprehend them now." It was as though He said, "You are not now ready for them; you have not been cut loose from Israel's dispensational hopes. After the Holy Spirit is come and the new economy has been ushered in, you will be prepared to comprehend these things; then you will understand."

But He tells them, "I am going away, and where I am your heart should be. I am going to the Father's House; there are many resting places there, but none are suitable for you. I am going to prepare a Place for you." I think we have a revelation of that later on. That is the

place in the immediate presence of God, in the holiest of all inside the rent veil; that never could be until after an accomplished redemption.

It was better than the wildest dreams of the Old Testament saints,—that redeemed men should actually dwell with the glorified Christ in the immediate presence of God in Heaven.

Jesus, by going to the Cross, opened up a new and living way "through the veil, that is to say, His flesh." So to-day in spirit, we already enter into what shall be our portion for eternity. The veil is already rent, and our souls draw near with boldness to a Throne of Grace. That is the prepared place, and that will be our portion for ever.

How Are We Going to Reach All This

actually? Well, He says, "If I go and prepare a Place for you I will come again"—and do what? Set up my Kingdom on earth? No, that is not what He is speaking of here. Execute judgment on the wicked? No, it is not that which He has in view. What then?—Redeem Israel as a nation? Not now,—but "I will come again and *receive you unto Myself*, that where I am there ye may be also."

How their hearts must have thrilled as they heard this first mention of what we now speak of as the Rapture. He does not unfold the nature of it. He simply declares the truth. *He is Coming again to receive His Own unto Himself*. I know you might get a beautiful picture of this in the parable of the ten virgins and, of course, that parable sets forth the proper attitude that His people should have during all the time of His absence; and the joy that will be theirs when He returns, if they are ready to meet Him. But strictly speaking, here in John 14, we have the first clear definite instruction concerning the Rapture.

We have to turn to the writings of the Apostle Paul to get a fuller unfolding of this glorious event. How will the Lord receive us to Himself? How will He fulfil this promise? We turn to the great resurrection chapter, 1 Corinthians 15, and we read from verse 51, "Behold,

I Show You a Mystery."

Mystery! I hardly need remind you that this word as used in Scripture, does not refer to something difficult to understand. It is not something that is in itself mysterious. But it means something that has been *kept secret until the time for its revelation* had come. The word was commonly used among the Greeks, in the day the New Testament was written, for the secrets of the various oath-bound religious

organisations, that were revealed to the initiates after they had passed through certain ceremonial rites. And people use it to-day in exactly the same way. You hear a lot of the mysteries of various secret oath-bound lodges.

Here I may turn aside to say a word as to these. Possibly many of you are members of such societies. Three Scriptures have kept me out of anything of the kind, though I have often been urged to apply for membership in some of them. Many come up to me at the close of meetings, and shake hands with me in peculiar ways, and look to see if I respond. But the only hand-shake I know anything about is a good straightforward Christian greeting. I belong to the G.A.R., the

Grand Army of the Redeemed,

and to no worldly society of any kind! The three Scriptures I refer to are these: First, "Jesus said, in secret have I said nothing." Second, "He left us an example that we should follow His steps." Third, "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers." These Scriptures leave no place in an esoteric hidden cult for saved and unsaved alike to participate. The precious mysteries of the Word of God are now made known to all who will believe.

Just as those who are on the inside know the secrets of the lodges and religious cults, so believers should be familiar with the Mysteries of God. All through Old Testament times He had precious and wonderful secrets of which Moses spoke, when he said, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed are for us, and for our children for ever."

Now in this glorious dispensation of the Holy Spirit, many hitherto concealed mysteries have been made known. The complete revelation of the will of God comes later. We read in Revelation 10:7, "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets." This will be at the close of the Great Tribulation, whereas the mystery of which Paul speaks in First Corinthians 15, will precede that time of trouble.

So, if you have any unsolved problems as to

God's Age-long Toleration of Evil

or other difficulties, you will have the explanation then. Everything will be perfectly clear in that day. But God has already opened up to us some very wonderful mysteries and this is one of them. "Behold, I

show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51). He is speaking of believers, but, of course, when he uses the term "sleep" he means "death." Do not make the mistake of thinking that Paul was a soul sleeper. He has made it very clear elsewhere that for the believer, death means "absent from the body, present with the Lord." But when He speaks of sleep, he refers to physical death. All down through the ages, death has claimed the bodies of believers, but there are some here, perhaps, who will not taste of death until they see the blessed Lord coming to call His own to be with Himself.

"WE SHALL NOT ALL SLEEP, BUT WE SHALL ALL BE CHANGED."

Changed! Transformed!

"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." We cannot enter upon the full enjoyment of the Heavenly side of that kingdom in these bodies and under present conditions. We must be transformed. Our bodies of humiliation must be made like unto the body of His glory. And when will it take place? "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." Just as quickly as the flash of light appears in the eye, this change will take place when our Lord returns.

"FOR THE TRUMPET SHALL SOUND, AND THE DEAD SHALL BE RAISED INCORRUPTIBLE, AND WE SHALL BE CHANGED. For this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." Notice again the two classes of believers. This corruptible—those who have *died*, whose bodies have all been seized upon by corruption. This mortal—those who are *living* when the Lord returns, living on the earth in their mortal bodies—shall immediately become immortal. So when these two changes take place—when "this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." Therefore, in the light of this hope, the apostle can

Challenge Our Great Enemy:

"O death, where is thy sting? O grave [Hades], where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law." Sin was settled for at Calvary's Cross, and the believer is no longer under the law.

"THE STRENGTH OF SIN IS THE LAW." What an astounding expression! Is not the law the strength of holiness? If you want to live

a holy life, must you not put yourself under the law, and strive with all the energy of your being to keep its commandments? No, the Word of God declares, "The strength of sin is the law," because the law stirs up everything that is evil in the heart of unregenerate man, and he finds himself hopeless to obey its commandments.

You say, "Yes, that was true of us in our unconverted state, but when we were born of God everything changed, and now the law has become the strength of holiness." But, no; the strength of holiness is the indwelling Spirit of God, He who is spoken of characteristically as the Holy Spirit. He fulfils the righteousness of the law in us, "who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit." And so we can say, "Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Observe, then,

The Rapture Takes Place in a Moment,

and at the last trump. There are those who think of this as the last of the seven trumpets, the Judgments in the Book of Revelation, but there is no connection whatever between the two. They are trumpets of doom; this is a trumpet of blessing. But the last trump, I understand, is that which winds up the church's history in the earth.

Some think, possibly rightly, that it is really a military term, which was used of old in connection with the Roman army. There were three trumps. Suppose the camp is wrapped in darkness, and the legionaries are all sound asleep. An enemy is approaching; the warning word comes to the commander who calls the trumpeter to sound an alarm. At the first trump every one is aroused. At the second trump all fall into line. At the last trump they march away. So you and I who are saved heard the first trump when we were sound asleep in our sins. That was the Gospel trump: it awakened us from our sleep, and we sprang to our feet as new creatures in Christ Jesus. I trust that we have also heard the trump which calls us to take our place in the ranks, of yielding ourselves in ready obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. Now what wait we for? For the last trump—not to march away, but to be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

Turn to the corresponding passage in 1 Thessalonians 4:14. You notice this trump is spoken of there as "THE TRUMP OF GOD;" not, therefore, to be confounded with

The Trumpets of Angels

in the Book of Revelation. It is God Himself summoning His own to meet His blessed Son in the air. Let us read the passage: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again"—and we do, if we do not we are not Christians, according to Romans 10:9. On the authority of that Scripture we dare to say without any unkindness, that *no man is what the Bible calls a Christian if he denies the physical resurrection of the Lord Jesus*. Everything for us depends upon that blessed fact that "He was delivered for our offences, and *raised again* for our justification," and so we read, "If we believe that Jesus *died* and *rose again*, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him."

Now this is most striking. Bring with Him where? When He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. You see this event links up with the revelation given concerning the Coming of the Son of Man in the Synoptics and the Old Testament prophecies concerning the same event. We read in Zechariah 14 that in the darkest hour of Palestine's distress the Lord God shall come, and all the saints with Him. Some might think of those saints as simply angels, but the New Testament shows us that there will also be redeemed men and women in association with Christ in glory. True, He will come with the holy angels, but also with the saints, once poor sinners, but saved by grace. These will shine forth with Him. But how can that be? Their bodies throughout the centuries have been corrupting in the grave, and those who come with Him will not merely be unclothed, but resurrected, or changed believers.

How Will This be Brought About?

The next verse tells us. "For this we say UNTO YOU BY THE WORD OF THE LORD, THAT WE WHICH ARE ALIVE AND REMAIN"—meditate on that expression. How blessed to realise that these words may refer to some who are now living on the earth. Throughout this dispensation this event is ever treated as imminent, though never declared to be immediate. "We which are alive and remain unto the Coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them which are asleep." The old English word "prevent" means, of course, "precede." We shall not enter into Christ's train before the saints who have died. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. "

In other words, if we are living on the earth when the Lord returns, we will not go into the Kingdom one moment ahead of anybody else, for

"the Lord Himself" is first to descend to the air, and His voice will raise the righteous dead. We read of the shout of the Lord, the voice of the archangel, and in the book of Daniel he is particularly linked with the destinies of Israel, "the great Prince which standeth for the children of thy people." So in the same instant the thousands of the Israel of God who have died in faith all over the world, and the redeemed of the Lord of all other dispensations will be raised.

"Stand Up" and "Caught Up"

"The dead in Christ"—no one else—"shall rise first;" literally *stand up first*. The word for resurrection throughout the New Testament has this meaning. They will stand up from the graves in their resurrection bodies, an exceeding great army. "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord." In this way the Church and Old Testament saints will all be with the Lord in their resurrection or changed bodies, prior to His descent to take the Kingdom. So at God's appointed time He will bring these with Christ when He returns to earth again.

Others have pointed out that that word "meet" does not merely mean "casually running into some one," as, for instance, on the side of the roadway, as we say, "I met So-and-so. " But rather, as we say, "So-and-so is coming, and I am going out to meet him." When you meet him, possibly you go immediately home, or, perhaps, there is something else to occupy you before you take him to the house. Now the word used here has that meaning. We will be caught up to meet the Lord, not in order to return with Him immediately, for certain events must take place on earth before His manifestation, when we shall come back with Him. There are others that take place in Heaven: the Judgment Seat of Christ, and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. It will be after this that He will descend to take the Kingdom and all His saints with Him.

Just one other passage, the first chapter of Thessalonians, verse 9. Speaking of the conversion of these Thessalonians, Paul writes, "For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for His Son from Heaven." This certainly suggests the imminent Coming of the Lord. There are no events that must necessarily take place first.

The Spirit of God was not pleased to reveal at that time the course of the last nineteen hundred years. Every believer living before, and all

through the centuries since, was entitled to look up in

Daily Expectation of the Lord's Return,

an expectation which has a sanctifying effect upon our hearts and lives as we read in 1 John 3:3, "And every man that hath this Hope in Him [Christ] purifieth himself even as He is pure."

It is important, however, to note that, while Scripture clearly teaches the imminency of the Lord's return, it never insists on the immediateness of that event. We cannot say when it will take place, but we should always be looking for it.

But now let us finish the passage. "To wait for His Son from Heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from

The Wrath to Come."

The past tense is used here, but scholars tell us it hardly conveys the full thought. It is rather "which shall deliver us from the wrath to come." What is that? Eternal judgment? No, we have been saved from that already. We shall never come into judgment. "The wrath to come" is that which is yet to fall upon this world when the wrath of the Lamb, and the wrath of God will be visited upon the dwellers of the earth, and when Satan shall be cast down from Heaven, "having great wrath because he knoweth that his time is short." At that time the Church will no longer be here. We shall be delivered from that wrath to come. How? Snatched away when our blessed Lord descends from Heaven with a shout. This is the believer's Hope. God grant it may be yours, and that you may ever live in view of this glorious event.

"Midst the darkness, storm and sorrow,
One bright gleam I see;
Well I know the blessed morrow,
Christ will come for me.

"Oh, the blessed joy of meeting!
All the desert past!
Oh, the wondrous words of greeting
He shall speak at last!

"Meet companion then for Jesus,
From Him, for Him made;
Glory of God's grace for ever
There in me displayed.

"He who in His hour of sorrow
Bore the curse alone;
I who through the lonely desert
Trode where He had gone.

"He and I in that bright glory
One deep joy shall share—
Mine, to be for ever with Him!
His, that I am there!"

Copied for www.WholesomeWords.org from God's Unspeakable Gift... by H.
A. Ironside. London: Pickering & Inglis, [no date].