

The Fact Itself

from *Papers on the Lord's Coming* by C. H. Mackintosh

In approaching this most glorious subject, we feel that we cannot do better than to lay before the reader the distinct testimony of holy Scripture to the broad fact itself, that our Lord Jesus Christ will come again—that He will leave the place which He now occupies on His Father's throne, and come in the clouds of heaven, to receive His people to Himself; to execute judgment upon the wicked; and set up His own everlasting and universal kingdom.

This fact is as clearly and fully set forth in the New Testament as either of the other two facts to which we have already referred. It is as true that the Son of God is coming from heaven, as that He is gone to heaven, or that the Holy Ghost is still on this earth. If we admit one fact, we must admit all: and if we deny one, we must deny all; inasmuch as all rest upon precisely the same authority. They stand or fall together. Is it true that the Son of God was refused, cast out, crucified? Is it true that He has gone away into heaven? Is it true that He is now seated at the right hand of God, crowned with glory and honor? Is it true that God the Holy Ghost came down to this earth, fifty days after the resurrection of our Lord; and that He is still here?

Are these things true? As true as Scripture can make them. Then just as true is it that our blessed Lord will come again, and set up His kingdom upon this earth—that He will literally, and actually, and personally come from heaven, take to Himself His great power and reign from pole to pole, and from the river to the ends of the earth.

It may perhaps seem strange to some of our readers that we should deem it needful to undertake the proof of such a plain truth as this; but be it remembered that we are writing on this subject as though it were perfectly new to the reader; as if he had never heard of such a thing as the Lord's second coming; or as if, having heard of it, he still calls it in question. This must be our apology for handling this precious theme in so elementary a manner.

Now for our proofs.

When our adorable Lord was about to take leave of His disciples, He sought, in His infinite grace, to comfort their sorrowing hearts by words of sweetest tenderness. "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" (John 14:1-3).

Here we may have something most definite. Indeed it is as definite as it is cheering and consolatory. "I will come again." He does not say, I will send for you. Still less does He say, "You will come to me when you die." He says nothing of the kind. To send an angel, or a legion of angels, would not be the same thing as coming Himself. No doubt it would be very gracious of Him, and very glorious for us, if a multitude of the heavenly host were sent, with horses of fire and chariots of fire, to convey us triumphantly to heaven. But it would not be the fulfilment of His own sweet promise. And most surely He will do what He promised to do. He will not say one thing and do another. He cannot lie or alter His Word. And not only this, but it would not satisfy the love of His heart to send an angel or a host of angels to fetch us. He will come Himself.

What touching grace shines in all this! If I am expecting a very dear and valued friend by train, I shall not be satisfied with sending a servant or an empty cab to meet him; I shall go myself. This is precisely what our loving Lord means to do. He is gone to heaven; and His entrance there prepares and defines His people's place. Amid the many mansions of the Father's house, there would be no place for us if our Jesus had not gone before; and then, lest there should be in the heart any feeling of strangeness at the thought of our entrance into that place, He says, with such sweetness, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." Nothing short of this can fulfil the gracious promise of our Lord, or satisfy the love of His heart.

And be it carefully noted that this promise has no reference whatever to the death of the individual believer. Who can imagine that, when our Lord said, "I will come again," He really meant that we should go to Him through death? How can we presume to take such liberties with the plain and precious words of our Lord? Surely if He meant to speak of our going to Him, through death, He could and would have said so. But He has not said so, because He did not mean so; nor is it possible that He could say one thing and mean another. His coming for us, and our going to Him, are totally different things; and being different ideas, they would have been clothed in different language.

Thus, for example, in the case of the penitent thief on the cross, our Lord does not speak of coming to fetch him; but He says, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." We really must remember that

Scripture is as divinely definite as it is divinely inspired, and hence it never could and it never does confound two things so totally different as the Lord's coming and the Christian's falling asleep.

It may be well, at this point, to remark that there are but four passages in the entire New Testament in which allusion is made to the subject of the Christian passing through the article of death. The first is that passage in Luke 23 already referred to: "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." The second occurs in Acts 7, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The third is that most familiar and lovely utterance in 2 Corinthians 5, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord." The fourth occurs in that charming first of Philipians, "Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better."

These most precious passages make up the sum of Scripture testimony on the interesting question of the disembodied state. There is a passage in Revelation 14 often misapplied to this subject: "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord *from henceforth*: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." But this has no application to Christians now, though no doubt all such who die in the Lord are blessed, and their works do follow them. The reference, however, is to a time yet future, when the Church shall have left this scene altogether, and other witnesses make their appearance. In a word, Revelation 14:13 bears upon apocalyptic times, and must be so viewed if we would avoid confusion.

We must now resume our subject, and proceed with our proofs, and in so doing we shall ask the reader to turn to the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. The blessed Lord had just gone up from this earth, in the presence of His holy apostles. "And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by him in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (verses 10, 11).

This is intensely interesting, and furnishes a most striking proof of our present thesis. Indeed it is impossible to avoid its force. Alas! that any should seek or desire to avoid it! From the manner in which the angelic witnesses speak to the men of Galilee it would seem like tautology; but, as we well know, there is—there can be—no such thing in the volume of God. It is, therefore, lovely fulness, divine completeness, that we see in this testimony. From it we learn that the self-same Jesus who left this earth, and ascended into heaven, in the presence of a number of witnesses, shall *so come in like manner as*

they had seen Him go into heaven. How did He go? He went up personally, literally, actually, the very same person who had just been conversing familiarly with them—whom they had seen with their eyes, heard with their ears, handled with their hands—who had eaten in their presence, and "showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs." Well then, "He shall so come in like manner."

"He who with hands uplifted,
Went from this earth below,
Shall come again all gifted,
His blessing to bestow."

And here we may ask—though it be rather anticipating what may come before us in a future paper—Who saw the blessed Lord as He went up? Did the world? Nay; not one unconverted, unbelieving person ever laid his eyes upon our precious Lord from the moment that He was laid in the tomb. The last sight the world got of Jesus was as He hung on the cross, a spectacle to angels, men, and devils. The next sight they will get of Him will be when, like the lightning flash, He shall come forth to execute judgment, and tread, in terrible vengeance, the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God. Tremendous thought!

None, therefore, but His own saw the ascending Saviour, as none but they had seen Him from the moment of His resurrection. He showed Himself, blessed be His holy name! to those who were dear to His heart. He assured and comforted, strengthened and encouraged their souls by these "many infallible proofs" of which the inspired narrator speaks to us. He led them to the very confines of the unseen world, just so far as men could go while still in the body; and there He allowed them to see Him ascending into heaven; and while they gazed upon this glorious sight He sent the precious testimony home to their very hearts. "This same Jesus"—no other, no stranger, but the same loving, sympathizing, gracious, unchanging friend—"whom ye have seen go into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

Is it possible for testimony to be more distinct or satisfactory? Could proof be more clear or conclusive? How can any counter argument stand for a moment, or any objection be raised? Either those two men in white apparel were false witnesses, or our Jesus shall come again in the exact manner in which He went away. There is no middle ground between those two conclusions. We read in Scripture that, "in the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established;" and therefore in the mouth of two heavenly messengers—two heralds from the region of light and truth, we have the word established that our

Lord Jesus Christ shall come again in actual bodily form, to be seen by His own first of all, apart from all others, in the holy intimacy and profound retirement which characterized His departure from this world. All this, blessed be God, is wrapped up in the two little words "*as*" and "*so*."

We cannot attempt, in a brief paper like the present, to adduce all the proofs which are to be found in the pages of the New Testament. We have given one from the Gospels and one from the Acts, and we shall now ask the reader to turn with us to the Epistles. Let us take, for example, the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. We select this epistle because it is acknowledged to have been the earliest of Paul's writings; and further, because it was written to a company of very young converts. This latter point is valuable, inasmuch as we sometimes hear it stated that the truth of the Lord's coming is not suitable to bring before the minds of young believers. That the Apostle Paul did not think it unsuitable is evident from the fact that of all the epistles which he wrote not one contains so much about the Lord's coming as that which he penned for the newly converted Thessalonians. The fact is, when a soul is converted and brought into the full light and liberty of the gospel of Christ, it becomes divinely natural for such a one to look for the Lord's coming. That most precious truth is an integral part of the gospel. The first coming and the second coming are most blessedly bound up together by the divine link of the personal presence of the Holy Ghost in the Church.

On the other hand, where the soul is not established in grace; where peace and liberty are not enjoyed; where a defective gospel has been received, there it will be found that the hope of the Lord's coming will not be cherished, for the simple reason that the soul is, of necessity, occupied with the question of its own state and prospects. If I am not certain of my salvation—if I do not know that I have eternal life—that I am a child of God—I cannot be looking out for the Lord's return. It is only when we know what Jesus has done for us at His first coming that we can with bright and holy intelligence look out for His second coming.

But let us turn to our epistle. Take the following sentences from the first chapter: "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.... So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. 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*, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come" (verses 5-10).

Here we have a fine illustration of the effect of a full clear gospel, received in simple earnest faith. They turned from idols, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son. They were actually converted to the blessed hope of the Lord's coming. It was an integral part of the gospel which Paul preached; and an integral part of their faith. Was it a reality to turn from idols? Doubtless. Was it a reality to serve the living God? Unquestionably. Well then it was just as real, just as positive, just as simple, their waiting for God's Son from heaven. If we question the reality of one, we must question the reality of all, inasmuch as all are bound up together and form a beautiful cluster of practical Christian truth. If you had asked a Thessalonian Christian what he was waiting for, what would have been his reply? Would he have said, "I am waiting for the world to improve by means of the gospel which I myself have received? or, I am waiting for the moment of my death when I shall go to be with Jesus?" No. His reply would have been simply this, "I am waiting for the Son of God from heaven." This, and nothing else, is the proper hope of the Christian, the proper hope of the Church. To wait for the improvement of the world is not Christian hope at all. You might as well wait for the improvement of the flesh, for there is just as much hope of the one as the other. And as to the article of death—though no doubt it may intervene—it is never once presented as the true and proper hope of the Christian. It may, with the fullest confidence, be asserted that there is not so much as a single passage in the entire New Testament in which death is spoken of as the hope of the believer; whereas, on the other hand, the hope of the Lord's coming is bound up, in the most intimate manner, with all the concerns and associations and relationships of life, as we may see in the epistle before us. Thus, if the apostle would refer to the interesting question of his own personal connection with the beloved saints at Thessalonica, he says, "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy."

Again, if he thinks of their progress in holiness and love, he adds, "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you; to the end he may stablish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, *at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* with all his saints" (chap. 3:12, 13).

Finally, if the apostle would seek to comfort the hearts of his brethren in reference to those who had fallen asleep, how does he do it? Does he tell them that they should soon follow them? Nay; this would have been in full keeping with Old Testament times, as David says of his departed child, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:23). But it is not thus that the Holy Ghost instructs us in 1 Thessalonians—quite the reverse. "I would not," he says, "have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that [not they which shall be, but] *we* which *are* alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [come before or take precedence of] them which are asleep. 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. 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. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (chap. 4:13-18).

It is impossible for any proof to be more simple, direct, and conclusive than this. The Thessalonian Christians, as we have already remarked, were converted to the hope of the Lord's return. They were taught to look out for it daily. It was as much a part of their Christianity to believe that He *would* come, as to believe that He *had* come and gone. Hence it came to pass that when some of their number were called to pass through death, they were taken aback; they had not anticipated this; and they feared lest the departed should miss the joy of that blissful and longed-for moment of the Lord's return. The apostle therefore writes to correct their mistake; and, in so doing, he pours a fresh flood of light upon the whole subject, and assures them that the dead in Christ—which includes all who had or shall have fallen asleep; in short, those of Old Testament times as well as those of the New—should rise first, that is, before the living are changed, and all shall ascend together to meet their descending Lord.

We shall have occasion to refer to this remarkable passage again, when handling other branches of this glorious subject. We merely quote it here as one of the almost innumerable proofs of the fact that our Lord will come again, personally, really, and actually; and that His personal coming is the true and proper hope of the Church of God collectively, and of the believer individually.

We shall close this paper by reminding the Christian reader that he can

never sit down to the table of his Lord without being reminded of this glorious hope, so long as those words shine on the page of inspiration, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till"—when? Till ye die? Nay; but—"till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26). How precious is this! The table of the Lord stands between those two marvellous epochs, the cross and the advent—the death and the glory. The believer can look up from the table and see the beams of the glory gilding the horizon. It is our privilege, as we gather, on each Lord's day, round the Lord's table, to show forth the Lord's death, to be able to say, "This may be the last occasion of celebrating this precious feast; ere another Lord's day dawn upon us, He Himself may come." Again we say, How precious is this!

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