

The Christian Hope and the Sure Word of Prophecy.

by William Kelly

The Christian hope is a special heavenly presentation of the truth of God, a fit and seasonable expectation for every child of God, and a blessedly adapted hope for young converts.

Scripture: Matthew 24:44, 1 Corinthians 15:51, 1 Thessalonians 4:17, 2 Peter 3:9, 1 John 3:3

Topics: "Christian Hope", "Eschatology"

Description

William Kelly preaches about the importance of distinguishing between the Christian hope and prophecy, emphasizing that while prophecy is good and to be heeded, the Christian hope is a superior, heavenly revelation that brightens as the believer's foundation deepens in Christ. He highlights the significance of the Christian hope in the lives of believers, urging them to eagerly await the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, which should purify their hearts and lead them to live in holiness and readiness for His coming. Kelly refutes the misconception that the apostle Paul and early Christians were mistaken in expecting Christ's imminent return, asserting that the hope of Christ's coming is a vital, purifying truth that should influence every aspect of a believer's life.

Transcript

Lecture 1 of 'The Second Coming and Kingdom of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The hope of the Christian has suffered much from being confounded with the prophetic word. It is not denied that prophecy is of God. As this very passage tells us, we do well to take heed to it; nevertheless it remains true that the Christian hope has another character, though they are both from the same source of goodness and truth. They are not of man, but revealed of God. But the importance of distinguishing between the hope of the Christian and prophecy will be felt as we traverse the ground of some of the Scriptures which treat of them both. Indeed, we need not go farther than the passage before our eyes tonight, in order to see how strongly the Holy Ghost distinguishes between them. Nay, He even contrasts the one with the other. As the passage is often misconceived and its force lost through not apprehending the very distinction which the Holy Ghost here lays down, I may just preface the present lecture by a few words on this subject.

"We have also," the apostle says, "the word of prophecy more sure," or more confirmed. He means that the scene upon the mount of Transfiguration was a confirmation of prophecy. The Old Testament saints

had the prophetic word. We have in this a decided advantage over them. That which God was pleased to vouchsafe to chosen witnesses upon the holy mount presented livingly before their eyes the central scene to which all prophecy tends -- the coming and kingdom of our Lord Jesus, of which we read in the 16th verse. Upon that mount not a mere prophetic delineation was given, but as in an actual scene before their eyes the great substantial features of the kingdom of God. There were the dead saints represented as risen in Moses; there were the translated saints who had not passed through death seen in the person of Elijah; there was the Lord Jesus, the head and centre of all blessedness and glory. Besides, there were saints in natural unchanged bodies represented by Peter and James and John. The whole group therefore was a kind of seal confirming that which the prophets had given the people of God to expect. Thus "we have," as he says, "the word of prophecy more confirmed; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed as unto a light" rather a lamp, or candle "that shineth in a dark place." But he shows us something more, and not this only, but different and superior in character -- "until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." This does not mean till the day of the Lord Jesus shine upon the world. Such an interpretation destroys the entire value of this part of the sentence; indeed it leads souls into, and leaves them under, the confusion of the Christian hope with the prophetic word. Prophecy, it is intimated, is good, and to be heeded; but then there is something better still. You are quite right in profiting by that word. Christianity, and the hope which it puts before the soul, in no wise impairs the worth of the ancient oracles, but rather confirms them, as we surely know; but then Christianity does bring in not only a more blessedly revealed and known foundation for the soul, not only a higher walk for the believer now, but as the foundation becomes deeper and enlarged, as the walk becomes more heavenly, so does the hope proportionately rise and brighten. Therefore he says, "until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." Indeed, it is never said that the day-star rises upon the world, nor could it have any just sense. It is really a question of the heart, and of daylight dawning, and the day-star arising there.

Is it not evident that the power of the Holy Ghost is meant, giving the Christian now to lay hold of the hope proper to him, as one belonging to Christ in heaven? When the believer is led by grace into his due place of liberty as a Christian, the light which shines round about him is no mere glimmering of a candle or lamp; but, as it is said, "we walk in the light;" and this, because we are brought to God. We walk in divine light, and, as we are children of light and of the day with respect to our Christian privilege and responsibility, we are just the same as to our hope. So daylight dawns in the Christian's heart before the day shines upon the world; and the day-star, Christ Himself in heavenly grace, is by faith apprehended in his personal affection, before He arises as the Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings for those that fear his name among the Jews of the latter day. In a word, Peter allows that the lamp of prophecy is excellent, and quite right it is to heed it; but then it must be carefully borne in mind that there is a superior light, without disparagement to prophecy and its office. Again, when the Christian enjoys heavenly daylight for his soul, it is evident that he must be aware of despising this further blessing of God; and despising it surely would be not to follow and accept that which casts, I will not say a greater degree of brightness only, but another and far better light upon all God has given us in Christ.

It may help some if I point out a clear proof that the day-star here introduced differs essentially from the day-star of the prophetic word. The latter, far from being Christ, is His enemy, and so judged and destroyed. The prophet Isaiah (Isa. 14) shows us this day-star; but who is he? "O Lucifer, son of the morning!" This is not Christ. Hence, if we go to the word of prophecy and look for its day-star, we find that the king of Babylon is meant, the enemy of the Lord of glory, destined to destruction by the power of God; whereas that which is vouchsafed to me in the special revelations of Christianity is, I repeat, not merely the lamp of prophecy disclosing the fearful end of human pride in the world's and Satan's day-star, but

Christ exalted on high, the heavenly day-star. Here we find the glory of One who is above the sun, moon, and stars, who needs not to say in His heart, "I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God . . . I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High." For He was and is the Most High -- the lowly Man who once came into this world, by suffering in atonement to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; that He, not snatching at any glory which was not His, but, on the contrary, stooping down and renouncing His own glory for God's glory, in obedience even unto the death of the cross, might have by grace the guiltiest reconciled to God by His death, and made companions of His glory as the risen ascended Lord -- might be able to receive the glory of heaven, not take it in His own right as that which belonged to Him in the communion of the Godhead, but rather receive it as redemption's prize from God, the Head of a family given also to Him, even those who believed on His name. From His heavenly seat He sends down the Holy Ghost, who is to us the power of present fellowship with Christ, and makes good this new and incomparable light, the full and proper Christian hope, a portion with Christ Himself in that sphere into which He is entered, to which we in no sense belong naturally, to which Christ alone has called us, which His own glory alone could fill, but to which by His death and resurrection He has acquired the fullest title for us, that we might share it in peace, though adoringly, along with Him.

It is in this way that the true force of the passage is made apparent. We have the prophetic word more sure or confirmed by the vision on the holy mount, and in no wise neutralized by Christianity. This could not be. In truth all the Old Testament derives stronger sanction from the New, and is seen by us to be still more blessed than any Jew ever saw it, no matter how real a saint he might be. The coming of Christ, with its vast and eternal results, did not fail to stamp a new value on every part of God's word, beyond what any soul conceived who had no experience beyond those earlier days. But at the same time the very passage which asserts not only the confirmation of the prophetic word, but its present importance, shows that there is a better light to be looked for, because it is not only divine but heavenly -- a light which shines in the person of Christ, flows from Him in virtue of His work and glory on high, and associates us in heart and hope with Himself there.

That Christ is the true light, no one who knows Him will dispute. Rejected from earth, He is at God's right hand, whence He shines on the soul, and gives it to behold Him thus, attracted and united to Himself in heaven. This is precisely the great truth which is lost where the prophetic word is confounded with the Christian hope. The Christian, therefore, it will be seen from these preliminary remarks, lacks none of the prophetic truth in Old or New Testament. Prophecy pertains to him as part of the precious heritage of revelation that God has given him. These lively oracles are surely in no sense taken away from us; but at the same time we must carefully remember also that, while we inherit what the Old Testament saints possessed, we have, as the present gift of God's grace, a bright hope that is suited to the new condition into which we are called. There need be therefore no hesitation in saying that this is the point in the mind of the Holy Ghost here. "We have the prophetic word more confirmed, whereunto ye do well to take heed, as unto a lamp" (I venture to translate literally, because thus the contrast is given better) "which shineth in a dark place." This does not dispel the darkness, as may be observed. No doubt, when no more could be had, the Spirit of God graciously made the lamp of prophecy sufficient to guide the benighted pilgrim; but now there is another light. Now we find, in Christ revealed above, the strength that keeps the soul from being weary, and the light which drives out all darkness from before it; or, as is said here, "until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation; for the prophecy came not in old time [or ever] by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." That is, if you insulate prophecy, if you take it as a

mere statement independently of the purpose of God, you cut the divine thread of truth. It is not of private interpretation; it does not furnish its own solution, but must be taken as a necessary part of the entire sum of God's testimony to the coming kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. God has the glory of His Son before Him: as in all else, so in the prophetic word, such is the key. This is above all what He aims at. Take it therefore merely in fragments, make each part, as it were, explain itself and be limited to itself, and while one may find ample, interesting, weighty facts in prophecy, which history corroborates and thus proclaims as evidences of prophecy, still the mind of God is missed if it be read thus. Rightly to profit the soul and glorify God, one must take it as His testimony to the glory of Christ; for in truth it never was in any way the will of man. Man is competent to give me a fact, but not the truth on any subject, and still less on that vast scene of glory which God has formed, and which He has revealed too for the glory of the Lord.

Having made these few prefatory remarks, I hope tonight, in a brief and simple way, to direct attention to the testimony that Scripture renders to these two things, and more particularly -- as my great object and desire -- to dwell on the Christian hope, that special heavenly presentation of the truth of God respecting Christ's coming for us, which is of such unspeakable moment for every child of God.

Looking at the New Testament, there is one portion which claims our especial attention on such a theme as this. Need I say I refer to the two epistles to the Thessalonians? 1 Thess. 1 gives us the character of those saints from their earliest reception of the gospel. You will remember that the Thessalonians were but a freshly gathered assembly of believers. They had not long known the gospel. They are viewed as simple and withal earnest witnesses, in all its great practical qualities, of the Christian life. There were, no doubt, some things wanting as to outward order, and further instruction that they needed deeply. Errors too there were floating near, if not then among them, which in some respects menaced them. But, spite of all this, they stand conspicuously before us as a choice and fragrant gathering of God's children in this evil world. Now, let me ask, what is the prominent truth that characterizes them? They had, like others, Christ as the deliverer and rest of their souls; they had, as all have, Christ their life and their righteousness; but what was it that gave them the special bloom of beauty which I think must be apparent even on a casual acquaintance? What drew toward them so remarkably the affections of the apostle? I admit you have those Christian affections fresh, and full, and strong, between him and the Philippians, and under strikingly different circumstances. They were veterans; and most sweet it is to see that these who were mature in the truth and experienced in the work could be as redolent of Christ, and as hearty and simple, as those that were in the vigour of youth. But as for the Thessalonians, they had needed no rude and humbling lessons to show them their path of separation from the world. From the first they had broken with it decidedly. Now, what was it that so attracted and refreshed the apostle's heart as he looked on these young saints? What was it that more than anything else in the mind of the Spirit of God stamped a peculiar character upon them? Alas, that it should be peculiar! But so it was: so it is. Is there anything that so shines, in the inspired account both of their condition and of the apostle's own appreciation of them, as the simplicity of heart with which they were filled with Christ as the hope of their souls? Hence, there is not a single chapter in the two epistles which does not, in some way or another, bring the coming of the Lord before us; and in some more than once. No matter what may be the theme, somehow the Spirit of God comes round to Christ's coming. It was the hope in which they lived; it was the prospect which He sanctioned as the strength and joy of their life. Far from weakening this mighty spring that wrought in their souls, on the contrary, He confirms it to them, praises them for it, gives them to see the truth as to it more perfectly, and establishes them in it as a sacred deposit which they had received thus cordially of the Holy Ghost.

Hence then we find that, from the beginning of the first epistle, the Spirit spreads our hope before us in connection with them. Thus, in the 8th verse He says, "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." A remarkable testimony! And what was the reason or ground of it? The very world bore witness to the power of the apostle's work among the souls brought to God in Thessalonica. "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." It impressed men's consciences, and occupied their minds and mouths. The world was full of the change in these Gentiles, and gave its very unconscious testimony to the power of grace in their conversion to God. People told one another that these men had turned away from their idols, and were now worshipping one God, the living and true God, nay, that they were actually awaiting His Son from heaven. In this way they were themselves testifying to the truth of God and to the return of the Lord Jesus from heaven, because of the powerful and profound effect that had been produced on their spirits. They might at times reason against or ridicule it; they might consider it strange and vain. Still impression enough was made on them to set them talking of those that expected Jesus, the Son of God, to come from heaven, that Jesus "whom He raised from the dead, our deliverer from the wrath to come."

One important inference we ought to draw from this Scripture is, that the Christian hope is a fit, and seasonable, and divinely warranted expectation for a young convert's soul. Whatever may be said about the propriety of prophetic study for such an one, the coming of the Lord Jesus is certainly suitable. The Lord thus intimates His approval that it should be proclaimed to and received by even the youngest saint. I press this; for there are many who think otherwise, but they are wrong.

God's word is wiser than all the reasons of men -- wiser than all the thoughts and feelings of Christians. God's word alone is right, as it is also as clear as He can make it that the Thessalonian saints from their very conversion waited for His Son from heaven. The Holy Ghost, instead of treating this as meddling with that which was unfit for them instead of regarding these as unripe for it, on the contrary mentions it to their praise as a component part and happy feature of their conversion, a result of God's mighty power which wrought on them from the very first.

Thus, we have it on the sure authority of God's word that it is never out of season to bring before the simplest soul "that blessed hope" of the Lord Jesus Christ's return. When I say "blessed hope," beware of construing it into the hope of knowing the forgiveness of sins, or that we are justified. If the gospel be set before old or young according to God's mind, it proclaims salvation; it affirms with divine authority the certainty of the Saviour's work, which has for ever blotted out sin before God.

Jesus is a deliverer, Jesus risen from the dead, as we are told in this very verse. He is a deliverer not only from guilt now, not only from present condemnation, but from "the wrath to come." In a word, He is a perfect and everlasting Saviour. But this is quite different from our hope. We believe that He has delivered and will deliver us; but then this is not what we await from heaven. It has already been done on earth in the cross. Our hope is Himself -- nothing short of it.

Our hope is Christ -- not of course to die for us, neither is it to live for us. We know that He died to reconcile us to God; and we know that, risen from the dead, He lives for us, and that we shall be saved through His life. We believe and are sure, and we hope and long for it, that He will come, and that we shall see Him as He is. For this the Thessalonians were waiting, and they were right. May the Lord grant that all

those who have to do even with the youngest children of God may heed this first lesson which the Spirit of God gives in chapter 1.

The Christian hope is not only true and blessed in itself, but blessedly adapted even for the youngest confessor of Christ; and so far indeed from its being an unsuitable thought, any one who has observed the young (I do not speak now of those who are merely young in years, but of such as have been recently brought by the gospel to the knowledge of Christ and redemption) must, I think, have observed that there is a childlike readiness to look and long for Christ. It was a remarkable feature that was noticed in the work of God which overspread another country a few years ago.

It was noticed by many, if not by all, that it seemed to be a necessary companion to the conversion which God was then effecting, that they looked for the coming of the Lord, that they were filled with the expectation of His presence, that it was not merely a mighty blessing that had reached their souls -- as indeed it was; but along with this, and above this I may say, there was the fixing of the heart on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. They desired and hoped to be with Him shortly.

This then I would press on those listening tonight, that they may not be in any wise discouraged by persons who, I am persuaded, have not gathered their thoughts on this subject from the word of God. We all know that there is a continual tendency to regard the hope of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ as unsuited food, at least for those that are but recently brought to the knowledge of Christ. Here we have God Himself meeting this difficulty, as in grace He corrects every error of the human mind. Here we have a divine warrant for turning the babe in Christ to his Lord's coming as His people's hope. Let me express my belief that the more usual defects and the too common dangers are far more on the other side. There is too great a shrinking from bringing the hope of the Lord's return before the family of faith, whether newly converted or not. With some there is the thought of a certain time in which they must become established in the gospel, and then be regularly trained in the general truth of God first, so that by degrees they may be fitted to receive "that blessed hope." Now far be it from me in any way to question the wisdom of the gradual unfolding of the mind of God in Scripture. But here His word is clear, peremptory, and decisive, showing most plainly the secret of the spiritual freshness in the young Christians whom the New Testament commends to us as so remarkably distinguished by their brightness and vigour of faith, or, as it is said, their work of faith, their labour of love, their patience of hope. We have the real reason found in this -- that they who had believed the gospel, preached by the apostle himself, had not only received the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, but were led into the blessed hope of the Lord's returning in glory and His kingdom. You may recollect that it was a part of the charge brought against the apostle Paul at Thessalonica, that he was an enemy of the Roman constitution, and setting aside Caesar by proclaiming another king, even Jesus. Thus we have in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 17) facts clearly corresponding with what we have here. The history of Luke lets us see that the bright future of the kingdom was not withheld from these Christians when Paul first visited and preached to them, just as here, from their very conversion, they waited for God's Son from heaven. The apostle set forth the fundamental truth of a suffering and a risen Christ, even Jesus; but besides, from the inspired history, and from his own epistles, it is plain that he insisted from the first on the coming and kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

Here then is the first weighty practical inference I would now draw from this epistle to the Thessalonians. God is our warrant, who makes it to be our responsibility (if we bear in mind and respect the apostle's ways in Christ, as he taught everywhere in every assembly), to set the Lord in His coming glory as the object of hope before the babe in Christ. Be assured that we all need it. Even the soul that is only just brought to God has wants met nowhere else. The reason is manifest. You can no more hinder any one,

even the new-born soul, from thinking of the future, than you can command your natural eye not to look before you. Was it not made so to look right onward? It is wrong to cross the bent of its original constitution and its habitual aim. It is not merely that you can look into what you like of things open; but you cannot without violence avoid looking before you. And so it is spiritually. As the natural man, audaciously confiding in himself, or even worse, would pry into the dark unknown before him, the heart of the child of God cannot but look onward; but he is privileged so to look - humbly, believingly. How is the future for him to be filled? Is God to occupy him with His future? or is the believer to imagine a future of his own? This seems to me the real question. And what does God answer? That He who hung upon the cross, "that same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven."

The hope of the Christian, it thus appears, is worthy of his foundation. As there is but one Lord and one faith, so God has given him but one hope: it is Christ. If the true hope be not presented according to Scripture to the inexperienced believer, he is in danger from, nay, he will inevitably fall into, the various thoughts and expectations with which human tradition has peopled the future. What is it that you find many an old Christian looking for? Are not some labouring, not merely to gather souls to Christ in heaven, but to get the world better now? Is that the Christian hope? Others again seem to look for little more than, when they die, to go and be with Christ. Precious truth it is, that departing we shall be with Him above. God forbid that I should slight it, or say one word to weaken its importance; but it is not the Christian hope. However sweet to be thus with Christ, my part of it is assuredly but an imperfect condition, my going as a separate spirit, even to be with the Saviour. Blessed as it is, and far better even so than abiding here away from Him in the sorrows and failures of the world, still it is not the hope as God speaks of it. The Christian hope is not our going to be with Jesus, but Jesus coming from heaven for us, that we may be caught up, and so may ever be with Him. Is there no difference? or is it a mere secondary matter? Is it a trivial distinction, whether it be each individually after death going to heaven, or Jesus coming for us all from heaven, when mortality shall be swallowed up of life? Do you say, it makes no difference either way, for it will be all well with you? Ah! I see what is the root of the objection pressed: you are occupied with your things. If it be well with you, is this the one and only consideration? What poverty of thought, what lowness of feeling for the soul of the saint, when thus his hopes are limited to the horizon of his own well-being! Well with him! Has not the cross made it well with you? The blood of Christ has washed you from your sins, and you are made kings and priests to God, who has sealed you in Christ with the Holy Spirit of promise, the earnest of our inheritance for the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory. Is it not, as far as present object is concerned, for the very purpose of leading your heart, enlarged and free, to enter into His thoughts and His glory?

And where and on what does His glory shine? Upon you? Upon me? Thank God, it is upon Christ, the only worthy One! Will it not then be even for us infinitely better, than if it shone only on you or me, to show out what we are in our weakness, in our selfishness, in our little thoughts and hearts, so unworthy of His grace? God has not left it to us to decide. He has not made it our business to form our hope, any more than to define the proper object of our faith. He has given us Christ everywhere -- Christ our hope no less than Christ the object of our faith.

Allow me to put the case otherwise. You suppose that there is, practically, no difference; for it is but a small matter with you, whether it be your going to Christ, or Christ coming for His saints: in short, you think that, after sin and salvation are settled, all else must be but secondary questions. But I answer, if there be a fact above all others of primary moment; if a truth which, most majestic in itself, will embrace within its

range, beyond dispute, delay, or concealment, every creature of God; it is that change, most mighty in its character, which will be ushered in by the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. A secondary thing! Heaven, earth, and all that are in them, not to speak of the unseen world, the lost, with the devil and his angels, -- the entire universe of God, throughout time, must bow virtually at once, formally in due season, to the Lord Jesus in that day. Never since time began has there been anything comparable to it, save one hour; that hour I grant most entirely, with all my soul, to be, beyond all compare, solitary, exclusive, standing unrivalled in time, yea, which will stand alone throughout all eternity -- the hour of the Cross, when the Saviour died for our sins. But the coming again of the Lord Jesus will be no rival of the cross, but its triumph -- will in no way detract from, but rather prove and display to all, the full power and blessedness of the cross. Impossible that God could ever introduce any scheme even of good, which would come, I will not say, into collision with the cross, but into the smallest independence of that scene, the weakness and suffering of our great God and Saviour. On the contrary, the second coming of Christ will not be as once God glorifying His Son in Himself at His own right hand in heaven, which no doubt is the present joy of faith, and was, we know, a debt paid in raising Jesus up from the dead, and setting Him at His own right hand in heavenly places: the Lord's advent will be the introductory, or first act, of that mighty change in which God will never allow a return, stop, or check, until His glory is established both in the heavens and earth, and in every part of His creation; and therefore, I must repeat, so far from its being in any respect a doubtful or subordinate question, it is not only the sure truth of God but second to the cross alone in weight and solemnity. In point of fact it is the application, as far as it goes, of the reconciling power of the cross; it is the beginning of God's display to every eye of what the cross of Christ is, which faith knew before, but which God will then manifest by degrees to every creature. Therefore manifestly no objection can be less founded in truth than the notion that the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ can be shelved and slighted, as if it were an insignificant matter, even if true.

Hence we see in 1 Thess. 2 that the joy and hope of the apostle's heart in his labours of love is no present honour, recompense, influence, or gratification; it is the saints he here cherished and led on as his crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at His coming. In 1 Thess. 3 he prays the Lord to make them exceed and abound in love toward one another, and toward all, in order to confirm their hearts unblameable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. In 1 Thess. 4 it is the especial consolation, yea triumph, in presence of the death of brethren. As Jesus died and rose, resurrection will be the portion of those who die; for God will bring with Jesus those who have slept through Him. In 1 Thess. 5 the day of the Lord is supposed to be familiarly known, and about to come as a thief in the night with destruction for those who are of darkness, which is in no way the characteristic of the Christian, but of the condition out of which the knowledge of Christ takes him. Also, in verse 23, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and not death, is presented as the time and circumstances in which the desire for the entire sanctification of the saints, wholly and in every part, inwardly and outwardly, will be realized according to the faithfulness and power of Him who calls the saints.

2 Thessalonians 1 brings into prominence the retributive character, not of Christ's coming to receive the saints, but of His day when He will be displayed in judgment of the troublers of His people, strangers to God and rejecters of the Gospel, and withal in publicly-awarded rest to those now troubled for the sake of righteousness and His name. 2 Thess. 2 dispels the alarm created by the pretence that the day of the Lord was actually come, by showing that this cannot be; for the Lord must come and gather His saints to Himself above, and the apostasy and man of sin must be revealed fully before that day. In the last chapter (2 Thess. 3) the apostle prays the Lord to direct their hearts into the patience of Christ as well as God's love. Christ patiently waits to come, and the saints should cultivate communion with Him in this.

Enough has been said to prove how contrary to the mind of God it is to push aside the truth of the Lord's return. I will draw attention to a few Scriptures, not only the epistles to the Thessalonians which have passed before us, but other parts of the New Testament, in a cursory manner, as tonight's lecture is simply prefatory. I hope to show, by the word of God, the exceedingly practical character of Christ's coming. It matters little what is taken up first. There are scarce any epistles of the New Testament which do not present the great truth in some form or another, and the Gospels, in fact, do the same, and, of course, the Revelation.

Again, as elsewhere, so in the Gospels, the coming of Christ is presented according to the special design of the Spirit in each book. For instance, the Gospel of Matthew depicts Jesus as Jehovah-Messiah, according to promise and prophecy; but also as the rejected Messiah, with its incalculable consequences both for Israel and the Gentiles, the divine vindication of Him as the Son of Man returning in the clouds of heaven with power and glory, to be the judge of all the nations of the earth, as well as of Christendom and the Jews, while delivering and gathering the elect of Israel. These are the topics presented in accordance with that point of view. (Matt. 24, 25)

So also in Mark, to give an instance, we find a similarly suitable connection with the object of his Gospel, where the prophetic work or ministry of Christ appears. Thus, he only, in his account of the prophecy on the Mount of Olives (Mark 13), mingles with it the warning against a pre-meditated self-defence (v. 11); he only describes the Son of man as giving authority to His servants and to every man his work and as commanding the porter to watch (v. 34).

Again, in Luke we come to what more particularly illustrates, on the one side, the grace of God, and, on the other, the heart of man. The coming of Christ, therefore, is there put, just as we might expect, in close contact with the affections and the conscience. The reason is obvious. Luke is the great moralist among the four, and therefore the announcement of Christ's return partakes of a corresponding character. Accordingly, in Luke 12, we have the right attitude of the believer in relation to the Lord's advent.

This is the way in which the Lord presents it in verses 35, 36: "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 unto him immediately." The thought is entirely peculiar to St. Luke. To "open to him immediately," as expressive of constant expectation, is a phrase found neither in Matthew, nor in Mark, nor in John; but only here.

Why so? Because it supposes a condition of the heart, and therefore falls in with the province of Luke, who traces not only what God is to man in His grace, but also the effect of His grace upon the heart. Let the lesson not be in vain. Observe how the Lord singles out this readiness, inwardly and outwardly, to receive Himself, as the right condition for the saint to cultivate in awaiting His return. It is clear and certain that this supposes the Lord's coming as the proximate hope, and the believer waiting for Him, not knowing when He is coming, but constantly expecting Him to come; certain that He is coming, though uncertain, if you will, when He comes.

What is the effect of this on faith and unbelief? The faithless heart goes to sleep; the evil servant says in his heart, "My Lord delayeth His coming," and takes advantage of His absence, eating and drinking with the drunken, and beating his fellow-servants. But what of the faithful heart? What does he who is fresh in the enjoyment of the Christian hope? He waits in readiness of soul that, when the Lord knocks, he may open the door immediately, with nothing to hinder it, with no object to detain the heart, with no plans that

have to be accomplished first, without thought of rising in the world, or settling the family, or helping to build up some tower of human pride, in a lesser or a greater degree.

He is outside the interests and schemes and hopes of men. Were his heart ever so little there, the return of the Saviour could not be welcome; it would ruin the interests, spoil the plans, and frustrate the hopes. The saint that longs for Him, and desires nothing so much as His coming, has already found in His precious blood redemption, the forgiveness of sins, is alive to God through Him, and has received in the Holy Ghost new power to glorify God through realizing himself one with Christ and the rich and eternal interests of His love.

Where Christ is not thus simply and intelligently looked for, there is the danger of making a little world even out of Christian service. The religious life, of which Christ's coming is not the hope, has its energies and its objects where one often detects some such tincture; but surely this is the abuse of that field which the Spirit of God affords to the believer; for He prompts the Bride to say, Come, to her Lord, leads us to wait for God's Son from heaven; yea, not merely so, but, when the Lord knocks, would have us open to Him "immediately."

In the Gospel of John, the coming of Christ is presented after another style, and of course in accordance with the general character of that Scripture. It is not so much the right moral condition of the earth towards the Lord which is put to the test, but His coming as connected with the personal glory of the Lord and His love. What was suitable for the only begotten Son, full of grace and truth, the Son of the Father? He would win the disciples there from their earthly and Jewish thoughts. They were looking for the glorious Messiah to come, put down the Romans, and deliver them from the Gentiles, whose kings and queens should nourish and bow down to Israel. So ran the prophetic warrant; and it is most true. He will come, He will judge the world, He will put down the Romans and all other Gentiles, He will exalt the Jews; but none of these things is day dawning and the day-star rising in the heart. Solemn and just as we know it is, and to be desired for God's glory and man's blessing, there is no heavenly light, brethren, in the judgment that will be executed upon the nations of the world. There is nothing here to lift the heart now from earth to Christ above, great and righteous as is the power of God that will thus deliver the godly Jews of that day and tread down the proud oppressor. It is most sure and holy, and we cannot but delight in the thought, that the day is coming when wickedness must disappear under the mighty hand of God, and the poor in spirit shall be exalted here below, and the glory of Jehovah shall fill the earth, as the waters cover the sea. But, blessed as the prospect may be, it is the earth. Wondrous the change, and bright the condition for the world when the Lord, Jehovah-Messiah, shall be undisputed King; but it is not the heavenly joy, the Father's name, the light of heaven that has shone into us, even now; and we cannot be satisfied with anything short of it. Our hearts desire to be with Him, not merely in the place where His light shall then come, and His glory rise, dispelling at last the darkness of the world, the gross darkness of the peoples. Then and there Israel shall be set on high, according to the sovereign choice of Jehovah, and Gentiles shall come to the light of Zion, and kings to the brightness of His rising. But for us, the hope of our hearts is the Son in the Father's house: it is to see Him, to hear Him, and be with Him there. Is this too high an expectation? Is it presumption? On the contrary it is faith, it is the real and proper hope of the Christian. It were unbelief, and to despise the love and truth of Christ, for us to be satisfied with anything less or different. He has been pleased to open this scene for us, and He is not going to close it. He has told us of heaven, and of the Father's house: we cannot rest on the earth longer, but go forth to meet the Bridegroom. (Matt. 25)

We know that He is coming to receive us to Himself, and to have us where He is, for He has told us so. (John 14) "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." Ye believe in God, though you have never seen Him; I, too, am going to be invisible. I am not now about to be displayed in the world as your glorious Messiah, I am going to be unseen on high with My Father, to be simply and exclusively an object of faith in heaven. Christ was doubtless One to be believed on, and not seen only, while here below. It was faith alone that saw what was under the veil of flesh; but now He was going to be nothing but an object of faith, even as God always is. And, more than this, He discloses a new scene, He opens the door into a region of love and glory beyond all ken or thought of man. "In my Father's house are many mansions." Whoever before heard of the Father's house? Yet, divine as it is, He intimates that He spoke not of it for Himself alone. Love gives, and delights in giving. His love delighted in giving the best; and so with this, the best and only proper sphere of the Saviour's glory, the place where He had been the eternal object of the Father's love: there will He shortly bring us. He will introduce us, strangers there, to no stranger God, to His and our Father's well-known love. "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." In John 13 He lets us know how He was preparing us in every way for that place. It was not enough for Him to shed His blood for us: He must occupy Himself even in glory with us; for we are still in this world in the midst of its defilements, and thus in danger of soiling that which Christ has cleansed with His blood. No doubt such lowly persistent love is entirely beyond our nature, as it was beyond the thought of Peter when he said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet." But if not, he had never been prepared for a place with Christ in the Father's house. "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Observe, it is not merely a part in me, or by me; it is a part "with me." It is communion with Christ that is in question, and by water, not here by blood. Thus John 13 is the revelation of Christ -- preparing us for the place, as John 14 reveals that He is going to prepare the place for us. When all is done, He comes again. "If I go away, I will come again, and receive you unto myself" -- not merely into heaven, but receive you unto myself -- "that where I am, there ye may be also."

This is the Christian hope, and far beyond the word of prophecy. Search the Scriptures for yourselves. Search the word of prophecy from beginning to end; search it from Genesis to Malachi, yea, to the Apocalypse of John. Search where you will, the word of prophecy, though it is a blessing provided of God for His people on the earth, is but a lamp for the dark place; but this is the bright light of heaven for that glorious home above where we are going. This is the suited light for the heaven from which it springs. It is of the Son bringing many sons unto glory. It is for those that are heavenly, though they be yet on the earth. It was given to mould and fashion their hearts according to that heavenly hope. By and by we shall be there with Christ ourselves, when we shall no longer need its conforming power. But we do need this blessed hope now; and while we value the prophetic word of God, we ought to value yet more -- I was going to say, infinitely more -- that which is the sweetest, highest, most intimate word of the Son of God revealing to us from God our Father His own house in heaven, and our place with Him there. Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. To have the Christian hope before us now, and nothing short of this, is the day dawning, and the day-star arising in the heart.

We may now pass on, surveying some scriptures, as it were from a distance and briefly, in this preliminary lecture. You will find in the New Testament that we have presented the hope or the prophetic word -- as the case may be -- according to the exigency of the circumstances, or rather as the grace of God gave it suited to each particular case. Take for instance the epistle to the Romans. We have the Jewish question raised and answered. If God was so good as to send His gospel freely to the Gentiles, what becomes of the distinctive promises He had of old given to the Jews?

These at once lead us to the word of prophecy, and there we behold in vision the display of God's counsels for His people Israel on the earth. The Redeemer is to come out of Zion, and to be the deliverer of the Jew. But is this the Christian hope? It is a question of Zion; it is the word of prophecy. There is no difficulty whatever in distinguishing between the peculiar proper hope of the Christian and the predicted events he cannot but expect, because they are according to the word of prophecy.

In sober truth it is evident that, if I am still waiting to be delivered, if I do not know the Saviour already come and I am only looking for a deliverer to come out of Zion to take away my sins I ignore or give up Christianity altogether. The deliverer coming out of Zion, who shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob! Is this what you have sunk into? Undoubtedly it is where the confusion of Christian hope with the word of prophecy is in danger of carrying its victims. The instance given may be palpable; but, be assured, in one degree or another, this is the great snare as to the present subject.

The effort of Satan is to Judaize the Church in everything. He is not content with assailing the foundation, and bringing in the law wholly or in part (sometimes pressing it on the utterly dark, as the only way to be saved; at other times more subtly lowering the work of the blessed Lord Jesus Christ himself to a bare keeping the law, even when He died for our sins). If this were so, Christ on the cross was only doing His duty! What ignorance of sin and its judgment, as well as of redemption!

What utter blindness to the infinite grace of Christ even in His earthly path, not to speak of His death! What preference of mere imagination to the Scriptures! Never have I read in God's word that Christ by the law but by "the grace of God" tasted death for every creature. No doubt He accomplished the law; but was it the law that the only begotten Son should come from heaven, should be born of the virgin, should go about doing good, and, healing all that were oppressed of the devil, should die for sinners?

No; it is the express contrast of divine love with any affection of man's. Make it an affair of nothing but law, and I affirm that it is the devil blotting out and debasing the love of God as much as possible, under pretence of honouring His law. And then, as to the walk too, Satan would blind you lest you should be imitators of God as dear children. Just so would he lower the hope. Alas! it is too painfully consistent with the sounds one hears. Are there not men who declare that heaven is opened for us, in virtue not of, the precious blood of Jesus, but of the law kept or so much duty rendered in full tale?

In the face of the cross, of God's most solemn judgment of sin in the agonies of the Son of God, they prefer what the law demanded, and what every man under law was bound to give. It is true and certain that Christ, as a man and an Israelite, was subject to the law, and glorified His Father here as everywhere. But is this what Scripture calls the righteousness of God unto all, and upon all them that believe? It is here Israel fell. Is this the place where the Christian is called to stand?

Is this, after all, the true grace of God wherein we stand? Is it by grace through faith we are saved? Or is there some other and better way than Scripture speaks of? Even if we look at Christian practice, is there no such thing as grace giving a believer to suffer in well-doing? Or is it come to this, that the Christian walk is to be taken away too, as well as falsifying, we have seen, the foundation? Alas! it is too true. It is not surprising then that, if the enemy has sought to rob the Christian of all these, he has not failed to breathe his pestilential breath on the object of our hope also.

The allusion to Romans 11: 26, 27 has shown how ruinous to the Christian would be the full adoption of the Jewish hope. But in point of fact such is, to a large extent, the hope as many view it. The consequence is, that those who receive it in any measure are just in the same proportion uncertain whether, after all, the

Lord has taken away their sins or not. They are still seeking, anon striving, often repenting, ever learning, and never seeming to come to the knowledge of the truth. God (blessed be His name!) is more faithful to them than they are to Him or His truth. Assuredly His mercy endures for ever! He pities His children thus painfully beguiled, and refuses to take them at their word. Assuredly He will bring them through, spite of their unscriptural conceits. But it is none the less a watchman's duty to put every soul on his guard against the Judaizing that is going on, -- against the words and ways of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not but do lie. One can scarce name a single branch of Christian truth which they do not darken, deny, or destroy, to the detriment of God's honour, and to the lowering of His Christ.

In Rom. 13: 11, 12, the character and the proximity of "the day" are pressed as motives to holy earnestness in our practical ways. It is already time "to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us cast off, therefore, the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." It is ours to walk becomingly as in daylight.

As to the rest of the epistles, we find the coming of the Lord according to prophecy, or according to the Christian hope -- just as the context requires. Thus, in 1 Corinthians, our Lord's revelation (not "coming") is presented in 1 Cor. 1: 7. It will then be seen how each gift has been used. -- The apostle exhorts them (1 Cor. 4: 5) not to judge till the Lord come, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God. Before that it is vain to expect praise, and wrong to judge dark things. -- So again we find the Lord's coming presented in connection with the remembrance of Him in the Eucharist. (1 Cor. 11) It is our congregational hope, so to speak, and not individual only, and thus in strict keeping with the Epistle. Then (1 Cor. 15) we have the resurrection of those who are Christ's, bound up with His coming when they reign with Him over a delivered earth, not with the white throne before which the rest of the dead stand and are judged, nor with "the end" when all judgment is over, and He gives up the kingdom and God is all in all. Thus, you see, we have light cast upon each part of the Christian walk and the truth, all that God saw to be then needed by the saints addressed, yea by saints at all times.

Take again indirect allusions to the coming of the Lord. Some brethren were going to law one with another. (1 Cor. 6) What is the weapon of the apostle? Is it merely the unbecoming sight of brother suing brother before a court of law? The apostle urges not the moral propriety which any one ought to feel, but lets in the light of that day upon the litigants. "Do ye not know," he says, "that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" How could they then go before the world to be judged? He shames them by the incongruity of Christians, the future judges of the world, seeking its judgment upon their matters. May I venture to say, that the incongruity of the Christian going before the world to punish the world was a thought reserved for a day of yet darker confusion? -- From the next chapter, again, we learn that there were some who wanted to better their condition than -- slaves, who were impatient to be free; men and women, who were in a hurry to change their condition by marrying, etc. What is the language of the apostle? what does the Holy Ghost counsel? "The time is short." The moral was plain to the Christian; the great truth of the Lord's coming underlies it. Be it that trial abounds: if He is at hand, why be anxious? why let your will work? What matter the circumstances of the present time? It is not merely that the Lord can lead the master to give his slave liberty, which he may use, value, and be thankful for. But if not, what then? The Christian slave has already a better emancipation, and soon the scene will be over; "for the fashion of this world passeth away."

Thus we see the large use which is made of the Lord's coming, and the manner in which it insinuates itself into the most ordinary matter in hand. The indirect mingling of that truth with the various elements of the Christian life I conceive to be very important to take note of in reading the word of God. The apostle assumes it as a truth constantly before the eyes of the saints. So far from being a debateable matter, or, even if allowed, an uninfluential theory, it was, on the contrary, the great living hope which suffering believers had and needed to sustain them, which filled them with joy, patience, triumph, and heavenly separateness. (Acts 3: 19-21; Rom. 8: 18-25; Phil. 1: 6, 10; Phil. 2: 16; Col. 3: 4; 1 Tim. 6: 14; 2 Tim. 1: 18; 2 Tim. 4: 1, 8; Titus 2: 13; Heb. 9: 27, 28; Heb. 10: 25, 37; James 5: 8, 9; 1 Peter 1: 5, 7, 13; 1 Peter 4: 7, 13; 1 Peter 5: 4; 1 John 2: 28; Jude 14, 24.)

You will tell me perhaps, that Paul and the early Christians were mistaken in thus expecting Christ from day to day. (1 Cor. 15: 51, 52; 2 Cor. 5: 1-4; 1 Thess. 4: 17; Phil. 3: 20, 21; 4: 5.) Is it possible that such language can come from the lips of a Christian man? The apostle mistaken! Nay; but he reaped the blessing of his hope in his soul every day. Was his power of gracious endurance, and of separation from the world, was this a mistake too? No; it is you who make the statement who are yourselves mistaken. And sure I am that you reap no blessing from your hope; otherwise you would know, that never is the soul mistaken in looking for Christ. Does the apostle anywhere intimate that Christ was coming at any particular date? In the word of God there is no fixing of years or days for His coming to receive us to Himself. No system is right which takes it for granted. But is it wrong therefore to wait for Christ? Do you object that Christ did not come while Paul was alive? But this does not weaken the hope. The apostle has only changed his place of waiting. He is not the less (perhaps, the more) waiting for Christ because he is now with Christ. He has not given his hope up. That blessed man of God then made no mistake, none whatever in this respect. The only difference, we have seen, is, that he now waits in heaven for Christ to come, instead of awaiting Him upon the earth; and who can doubt that that is much the better of the two? Thus you see that, instead of the apostle having missed his way, the only error is on the part of unbelief, which ventures to judge where God calls us to delight in a precious and purifying truth. No, Christ is still coming, and coming quickly: in this hope the apostle lived and died.

And why is it that the Lord has not come? Is it because He is slack concerning His promise? The Spirit of God has refuted the libel firmly, lovingly, solemnly. (2 Peter 3) His purposes of grace alone hinder for the moment. He is bent on saving souls. He shrinks, so to say, from exchanging the present work of salvation for the strange work of judgment. He wants to fill heaven with the guests of grace that are suited to it; but He is not slack concerning His promise. Whatever scoffers may say, the day of the Lord will come as a thief.

The eminently practical power of the hope of the Lord's coming, in purifying the heart and ways, is shown in 1 John 3: 3: "Every man that hath this hope in Him" (i.e. founded on Christ) "purifieth himself, even as He is pure." Scripture never uses the coming of Christ to weaken present responsibility to the Lord in holiness. We too often hear people say now-a-days, "Oh, you cannot expect a perfect church; when Christ comes, He will set all to rights. Such language, such thoughts, never came from the Spirit of God. Do you believe that Christ may come at any time; and can you, with that hope as a present thing before you, go on with what you know to be wrong? Do you believe that Christ, when He comes, will not only correct what is wrong, but sanction and approve your allowance of it? Is this the way of one espoused as a chaste virgin to Christ? I should have thought that the bride, who was living and looking for the bridegroom, if conscious of anything amiss that could not suit the beloved's eye and heart, would be animated by the power of her love and her hope enough to leave nothing undone to please him that she expected to come, -- she knew

not how soon. And if this holds good in earthly relationship, is it not true of the saint in view of Christ's coming? It is the way of easy-going unbelief to shrink from the cross and every present duty on the plea that, when Christ comes, He will set all to rights; but it is to abuse, not to believe, the truth. Indifference to His will now, in presence of the full revelation of His mind in the word, is the clear evidence that the heart is filled, not with the hope, the true and blessed hope of His coming, but with our own vain imaginations about it. It is the proof that we are feeding on husks, on mere phantom or shadow, and not on the truth itself.

In a similar way we might refer to the epistles minutely, indeed to all save Galatians, Ephesians, and Philemon; but time would fail even to glance at much that is given us. The last book of the New Testament largely deals with both these subjects -- the word of prophecy in the central parts of it, and the Christian hope after the visions are ended. (Rev. 22: 7, 12, 16, 17, 20.) This I only indicate in a general way; for one need not say more on the present occasion. Other opportunities will offer, if it please God, in which we may meet together and examine what the Scripture discloses to us on the more important branches of this large subject. May He deign to bless His own truth now, and to prepare hearts for the fuller understanding and enjoyment of His word through the Holy Spirit; that He may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever.

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