

Expectation

by H. A. Ironside

IN the eighth chapter of the Epistle of the Romans, reading from verse 18, we have the words:

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

Then if you will also turn to Philippians, chapter 1, verses 20 and 21:

According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

The Christian has a wonderful expectation. Our Lord Jesus Christ while He was here on earth had a great deal to say about His second coming. I have never been able to understand why some persons who profess to be Christians (and I would not dare doubt in some instances but they are really such) seem to have no interest whatsoever in the truth of the return of our blessed Saviour. I have often heard people say, "I am not interested in the second coming of Christ. The only thing that concerns me is to be ready when He comes."

Of course it is very important that we should be ready when He comes, but to say, "The only thing that concerns me is to be ready for that event," seems to me to be the quintessence of selfishness. Am I only concerned about my personal readiness? Do I not have a deep, warm expectation in my soul, looking forward to that glorious day when the Saviour shall return? Am I not longing to see Him?

He has said that He is coming back, and He told us to watch and to wait for His coming, to be like men that wait for their Lord when He will return from the wedding. And surely if we have learned to love Him, if we know Him as the One who died for us and washed away our sins in His precious blood, we certainly ought to be looking

eagerly for His return.

Some people think of the second coming of the Lord as though it were a dreadful event, an event from which we might well shrink, because they confound the second coming of Christ for His people with the day of judgment for a godless world; but these are two very distinct events. When He said, "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," He was not referring to the final day of judgment. He was speaking of the time when He will come back and raise the dead and change the living, those of His own redeemed people, and take them up to be with Him in the Father's house. Surely there is nothing to dread about that. It is no fearful portent, the thought of the Lord's coming.

On one occasion I was asked in a certain Canadian city to give an address to the ministerial union on the second coming of the Lord Jesus, and so I went down with a heart and mind full of the subject, and found nearly seventy of the city's preachers gathered together. It was my privilege to talk to them for about forty minutes on what I believe the Word of God teaches concerning this great expectation of the Church. When I had finished, the moderator of the meeting, who was a Presbyterian minister, rose and said, "My friends, I want to give my personal testimony concerning this subject. I was a minister for a great many years before I ever took the time to study what the Bible has to say about the second coming of the Lord, but some years back I became deeply interested and I searched the Scriptures for all references to the subject. You know, as that truth opened up to me, I got a new Bible. It just seemed as though my Bible was entirely different. So many things were plain that had been dark before." Then he said, "Now I would like to have you tell us how this subject appeals to you."

There happened to be present a very venerable old gentleman, an Anglican clergyman, who had received a great many honors because of his scholarship and ability. He had written a great many books and I had read all of them, so I was quite interested when he was pointed out to me. The moderator knew he was in the audience that day and because he seemed in a certain sense to be a dean of them all, he turned to him and said, "Doctor, wouldn't you like to speak to us on the subject?" The dear old gentleman stood up and in that fine, cultured way that is so characteristic of Anglican clergyman, said something like this: "Well, my dear brother, I am really sorry that you referred to me at all, because I never like to take issue with a visiting speaker. I would far rather have just said to our brother at the close, 'Thank you,' and left it at that; but since you put me on the spot, it is necessary for me to express myself, and I regret to have to say that I do

not find myself at all in agreement with the speaker who has addressed us today. Of course, I think there is something in the Bible about the second coming of the Lord, but just what it is I do not know and I do not think anyone else does. In fact, I have listened carefully to what he has presented and I have been thinking that if his presentation of the subject is the correct one, it must be an awful thing to believe, as he says he believes, that Christ may come back at any moment. Why, if one believed that, it would unnerve him completely. Suppose I were out making pastoral calls and the awful thought came to me that Christ might come today! I would not be able to continue my work, but would want to get back to my study and read the prayer book and try to get ready for that awful event."

Well, you know it was a little difficult for me. I was much younger than he and I did not want to be discourteous, but I said to him, "Doctor, I hope that you do not mean us to infer that one could have been a member of the great church to which you belong and have taken all the ecclesiastical and academical honors that you have and yet never have been washed from his sins in the precious blood of Christ! For Doctor, if you have been saved through what the Lord Jesus did when He was here the first time, whether you realize it or not, you will be ready when He comes the second time." Because it is not our understanding of the doctrines of the Lord's return that makes us ready to meet Him, or our growth in holiness, but the fact that Another has, in the blessed will of God, shed His blood and died for us, cleansing us from all sin.

To me the expectation of the Lord's imminent return is one of the most precious hopes that I have. I think this is what the apostle meant when he said, 'According to my earnest expectation and my hope.' He was looking for the coming of the Saviour, and he said, "I do not want to be ashamed. I want to be found, while I am watching for him, laboring always for His glory, endeavoring to bring others to Him, and seeking to manifest Christ in my daily life so that I can always say, 'For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.'"

This poor world needs the coming Saviour. Suppose our Lord had come ten years ago. Then the world would never have known the dire conflict that is prevailing at the present time. Why do we see the nations engaged in bloody conflict one with the other? It is because when the Prince of Peace came here to dwell amongst men in lowly grace He was not recognized. He was rejected. He came to bring peace but men said, "We will not have this man to reign over us"; and so, according to Hosea He said, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early." He has gone back to the Father's right hand and is

there preparing a place for His redeemed. Some day He is coming again and His coming is going to mean the rapture of His Church and our presentation before the Father in fulness of joy.

This is one aspect of it, but the other aspect is this: He is coming back to this poor world and He is going to reign in righteousness for a thousand wonderful years, and then will be fulfilled the prophecy, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Micah 4:3). Oh, how the world needs Christ, who is that "blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords!"

That is what the apostle is referring to, especially in the eighth chapter of the Book of Romans, when he says that "the earnest expectation of the creation [rather than simple creature] waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." And we know by the context of this passage that this expectation is shared by the entire creation, for creation's blessing will come with that manifestation. And when will the sons of God be manifested? The sons of God are already in the world at this time, but their manifestation has not come yet. They are in the world but the world knows them not, even as it knew Him not; but we read that when He is manifested, then shall we be manifested. When He reigns, then we will appear with Him in glory! That will be the time when earth's blessing will come, when creation will be liberated from the bondage of the curse.

Look at John's Gospel, chapter 14, the passage we all love and the portion which I think fits in so well at every Christian funeral. I do not know that I have ever been called upon to say a few words at the burial of a saint of God but that I have felt I must read these words: "Ye believe in God, believe also in me." That is, Christ is saying in effect, "I am going away from you, so you won't be able to see Me; but you believe in God the Father, though you cannot see Him. Now I want you to believe in Me, God the Son, when you cannot see Me." And so He has gone back to the Father. We cannot see Him, but we love Him and we love to serve Him, and we wait for His return.

"In my Father's house are many mansions," many resting places, many abodes. It is the same word as the one translated "abode" a little farther down in the chapter: "We will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (verse 23). So He says, "In my Father's house are many abodes, many places of rest." Many of God's dear children know very little of rest here, but they will rest there in the presence of God and His Son when they put on their resurrection bodies.

"If it were not so, I would have told you." There are so many things

that the saint of God longs for that perhaps are not based upon positive scripture, but He says, "If this were not a fact, if this hope, this expectation were not based on truth, I would have told you. I would not want you to be deluded; I would not want you to be deceived." When we look forward to resting in His presence, when we think of heaven as the Father's house, it is not just a lovely dream, it is not mere imagination. It is a blessed, precious truth vouched for by our Lord Jesus Himself. He came from the Father and went to the cross for our redemption. He has gone back to the Father to prepare a place for us.

I love to think of heaven as a home. Some of us have not known very much of a home here on earth. It is said of the one who wrote that most beautiful of all songs about home, that he was a wanderer all his life. I refer, of course, to John Howard Payne who wrote, "Home, Sweet Home." Some of us have not enjoyed much of the comforts of home down here on earth, but oh, what a home He is preparing for us up yonder!

At death the believer goes home, but that is not the final thing, that is not the fulness of our expectation, for the Lord Jesus says, "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." Dear young Christian, do get hold of this truth in the early days of your Christian life. The Lord Jesus says, "I will come again." How can anybody say he doesn't believe in the second coming of Christ in view of a promise like that? It is amazing how people twist those words to try to make them say anything but what they really say.

Some people tell us that He simply meant that He was coming to individual souls when they were converted, to dwell in their hearts. That is not what He is talking about. He says, He is going "to receive [them] unto myself, that where I am there [they] may be also." There are other folk who think that when the Lord said those words He was referring to the descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, that the Holy Spirit, being Jesus' other self, came down to make good this promise. But I think that when people talk like that, they forget that the great bulk of the promises of the second coming in the New Testament were given after the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. It was after the Holy Spirit fulfilled the Lord's words and came as the Comforter that He moved the hearts of saints to cry, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus," and to look on with eager, glad expectation to His personal return.

Then some people say, "Well, it just means that He is coming in the hour of death. When the believer comes down to death, the Lord will be there to take him home to heaven." And yet, if it is just as true now as it was before the cross that angels transport ransomed souls to

heaven, it is a very different thing from the personal coming of Christ. The beggar Lazarus died and was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom, and I suppose that angels take the saints now into the presence of the Lord. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Hebrews 1:14). But Jesus speaks of a personal coming. That is not death; it is the destruction of death for the believer.

There are some people who confound the Lord's return with the judgment day of all of the unsaved. There is nothing about that judgment here. "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." There is no hint of a judgment of the lost there. It is the returning bridegroom coming for His bride and taking her with Him into the Father's house to share the rest and the glory of the blessed place. The manner of it is described for us in the fourth chapter of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, a passage with which we are all familiar, unless it be those to whom these things are new and strange. Beginning with verse 13 we read:

But I would not 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 we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [or precede them] them which are asleep. For the Lord himself [Notice how distinctly personal that is!] 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.

See the contrast between the Lord's coming and death. Death is not the Saviour's return, but when the Saviour returns, death is destroyed for the believer.

The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.

You see, there will be the two classes of believers who will have part in the glorious event of the Lord's return. There will be those who are asleep, that is the saints who have died. The bodies of many of them have gone back to the dust from which they came, but they will be raised and those bodies tenanted again by the glorified soul and spirit of the believers. But then there is another group—the believers actually living in this world when Christ returns.

Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with

them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Would it not be a wonderful thing if we Christians who are living today should be among that number! If, before death claims our bodies, the Saviour should return and we would be caught up together with the resurrected saints in clouds to meet the Lord in the air! Of course, these bodies of ours will have to undergo a great change in order that that may be, but in Philippians 3 we read of that change:

For our conversation [or citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body.

or literally, "transform the body of our humiliation." This body, you see, is called the body of our humiliation. You know how often you are humiliated in your body, don't you? It is such a drag on the spirit at times. Well, when the Saviour comes, He will change the body of our humiliation,

that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself (vv. 20, 21).

We read of this more particularly in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 15, beginning with verse 51. There the apostle says:

Behold, I shew you a mystery [I tell you a secret, something nobody knew anything of until it was revealed]; We shall not all sleep [that is, we shall not all die], but we shall all be changed [whether living or dead, we shall all be changed], In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump [the trump that ends this dispensation of grace]: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption [that is, the dead, the corrupted bodies of the dead will be raised in incorruption], and this mortal [that is, the living] must put on immortality.

Those who are now living in mortal bodies will suddenly be given immortal bodies when Jesus comes back again, and in those bodies will live forever.

So 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.

No wonder the apostle can exult in triumph:

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? He says:

The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This, then, is our expectation; this is our hope! And the Lord would have us living day by day in view of the possible fulfillment of the promise of His coming again. When you get up in the morning, cultivate the attitude of soul that leads you to say, "Christ may come today; and if He were to come today, I want Him to find me walking in obedience to His holy Word." And when you go to sleep at night say, "Christ Jesus may come tonight, and I can rest in perfect peace, knowing that when He comes I shall be caught up to meet Him."

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