

Introductory

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

The attentive reader of the New Testament will find in its pages three solemn and weighty facts presented to his view; namely, first, that the Son of God has come into this world and gone away; secondly, that the Holy Ghost has come down to this earth, and is here still; and, thirdly, that the Lord Jesus is coming again.

These are the three great subjects unfolded in the New Testament Scriptures; and we shall find that each of them has a double bearing: it has a bearing upon the world and a bearing upon the Church; upon the world, as a whole, and upon each unconverted man, woman and child in particular; upon the Church, as a whole, and upon each individual member thereof, in particular. It is impossible for any one to avoid the bearing of these three grand facts upon his own personal condition and future destiny.

And, be it noted, we are not speaking of doctrines—though, no doubt, there are doctrines—but of facts—facts presented in the simplest possible manner by the various inspired writers employed to set them forth. There is no attempt at garnishing or setting off. The facts speak for themselves; they are recorded and left to produce their own powerful effect upon the soul.

I. And, first of all, let us look at the fact that the Son of God has been in this world of ours. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son." "The Son of God has come." He came in perfect love, as the very expression of the heart and mind, the nature and character of God. He was the brightness of God's glory, and the express image of His person, and yet a lowly, humble, gracious, social man; one who was to be seen, from day to day, about the streets; going from house to house; kind and affable to all; easily approached by the very poorest; taking up little children in His arms, in the most tender, gentle, winning way; drying the widow's tears; soothing the stricken and sorrowing heart; feeding the hungry, healing the sick; cleansing the poor leper; meeting every form of human need and misery; at the bidding of all who stood in need of succor and sympathy. "He went about doing good." He was the unwearied servant of man's necessities. He never thought of Himself, or sought His own interest in any one thing. He lived for others. It was His meat and His drink to do the will of God, and gladden the sad and weary hearts of the sons and daughters of men. His loving heart was ever flowing out in streams of

blessing to all who felt the pressure of this sin-stricken, sorrowful world.

Here, then, we have a marvellous fact before our eyes. This world has been visited—this world has been trodden by that blessed One of whom we have spoken—the Son of God—the Creator and Sustainer of the universe—the lowly, self-emptied and loving, gracious Son of Man—Jesus of Nazareth—God over all blessed for ever, and yet a spotless, holy, absolutely perfect man. He came in love to men—came into this world as the expression of perfect love to those who had sinned against God, and deserved nothing but eternal perdition because of their sins. He came not to crush, but to heal—not to judge, but to save and to bless.

What has become of this blessed One? How has the world treated Him? It has cast Him out! It would not have Him! It preferred a robber and a murderer to this holy, gracious, perfect Man. The world got its choice. Jesus and a robber were placed before the world, and the question was put, "Which will you have?" What was the answer? "Not this man, but Barabbas." "The chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas" (Matt. 27:20, 21). The religious leaders and guides of the people—the men who ought to have led them in the right way—persuaded the poor ignorant multitude to reject the Son of God, and accept a robber and a murderer instead!

Reader, remember, you are in a world that has been guilty of this terrible act. And not only so, but, unless you have truly repented and believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, you are part and parcel of that world, and you lie under the full guilt of that act. This is most solemn. The whole world stands charged with the deliberate rejection and murder of the Son of God. We have the testimony of no less than four inspired witnesses to this fact. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all bear record that the whole world—the Jew and the Gentile—kings and governors, priests and people—all classes, sects and parties, agreed to crucify the Son of God—all agreed to murder the only perfect man that ever appeared on this earth—the perfect expression of God—God over all blessed for ever. We must either pronounce the four evangelists to be false witnesses, or admit that the world as a whole, and each constituent part thereof, is stained with the awful crime of crucifying the Lord of glory.

This is the true standard by which to measure the world, and by which to measure the condition of every unconverted man, woman and child

in the world. If I want to know what the world is I have only to reflect that the world is that which stands charged before God with the deliberate murder of His Son. Tremendous fact! A fact which stamps the world, in the most solemn manner, and places it before us in characters of appalling blackness. God has a controversy with this world. He has a question to settle with it—an awful question—the mere mention of which should make men's ears to tingle and their hearts to quake. A righteous God has to avenge the death of His Son. It is not merely that the world accepted a vile robber and murdered an innocent man; this, in itself, would have been a dreadful act. But no; that innocent man was none other than the Son of God, the beloved of the Father's heart.

What a thought! The world will have to account to God for the death of His Son—for having nailed Him to a cross between two thieves! What a reckoning it will be! How red will be the day of vengeance! How awfully crushing the moment in the which God will draw the sword of judgment to avenge the death of His Son! How utterly vain the notion that the world is improving! Improving!—though stained with the blood of Jesus. Improving!—though under the judgment of God for that act. Improving!—though having to account to a righteous God for its treatment of the beloved of His soul, sent in love to bless and save. What blind fatuity! What wild folly! Ah, no! reader, improvement there can be none till the besom of destruction and the sword of judgment have done their terrible work in avenging the murder—the deliberately planned and determinedly executed murder of the blessed Son of God. We cannot conceive any delusion more fatally false than to imagine that the world can ever be improved while it lies beneath the awful curse of the death of Jesus. That world which preferred Barabbas to Christ can know no improvement. There is naught before it save the overwhelming judgment of God.

Thus much as to the weighty fact of the absence of Jesus, in its bearing upon the present condition and future destiny of the world. But this fact has another bearing. It bears upon the Church of God as a whole, and upon the individual believer. If the world has cast Christ out, the heavens have received Him. If man has rejected Him, God has exalted Him. If man has crucified Him, God has crowned Him. We must carefully distinguish these two things. The death of Christ, viewed as the act of the world—the act of man—involves naught but unmitigated wrath and judgment. On the other hand, the death of Christ, viewed as the act of God, involves naught but full and everlasting blessedness to all who repent and believe. A passage or two from the divine word will prove this.

Let us turn for a moment to Psalm 69, which so vividly presents our blessed and adorable Lord suffering from the hand of man, and appealing to God for vengeance. "Hear me, O LORD; for thy loving kindness is good: turn unto me according to the multitude of thy tender mercies. And hide not thy face from thy servant; for I am in trouble: hear me speedily: draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it: deliver me, because of mine enemies. Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonor: *mine adversaries are all before thee*. Reproach hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave me also gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them," etc. (verses 16-28).

All this is deeply and impressively solemn. Every word of this appeal will have its answer. Not a syllable of it shall fall to the ground. God will assuredly avenge the death of His Son. He will reckon with the world—with men for the treatment which His only begotten Son has received at their hands. We deem it right to press this home upon the heart and conscience of the reader. How awful the thought of Christ making intercession *against* people! How appalling to hear Him calling upon God for vengeance upon His enemies! How terrible will be the divine response to the cry of the injured Son!

But let us look at the other side of the picture. Turn to Psalm 22, which presents the blessed One suffering under the hand of God. Here the result is wholly different. Instead of judgment and vengeance, it is universal and everlasting blessedness and glory. "I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel.... My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation; I will pay my vows before them that fear him. The meek shall eat and be satisfied; they shall praise the LORD that seek him; your heart shall live for ever. All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD'S; and he is the governor among the nations.... A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the LORD for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this" (verses 22-31).

These two quotations present, with great distinctness, the two aspects

of the death of Christ. He died, as a martyr, for righteousness, under the hand of man. For this, man will have to account to God. But He died, as a victim, for sin, under the hand of God. This is the foundation of all blessing to those that believe in His name. His martyr-sufferings bring down wrath and judgment upon a godless world: His atoning sufferings open up the everlasting well-springs of life and salvation to the Church, to Israel, and to the whole creation. The death of Jesus consummates the world's guilt; but secures the Church's acceptance. The world is *stained*, and the Church *purged*, by the blood of the cross.

Such is the double bearing of the first of our three great New Testament facts. Jesus has come and gone—come, because God loved the world—gone, because the world hated God. If God were to ask the question—and He will ask it—"What have you done with my Son?" What is the answer? "We hated Him, cast Him out, and crucified Him. We preferred a robber to Him."

But, blessed for ever be the God of all grace, the Christian, the true believer, can look up to heaven and say, "My absent Lord is there, and there for me. He is gone from this wretched world, and His absence makes the entire scene around me a moral wilderness—a desolate waste."

He is not here. This stamps the world with a character unmistakable in the judgment of every loyal heart. The world would not have Jesus. This is enough. We need not marvel at any tale of horror now. Police reports, grand jury calendars, the statistics of our cities and towns need not surprise us. The world that could reject the divine personification of all human goodness, and accept a robber and a murderer instead, has proved its moral turpitude to a degree not to be exceeded. Do we wonder when we discover the hollowness and heartlessness of the world? Are we surprised when we find out that it is not to be trusted? If so, it is plain we have not interpreted aright the absence of our beloved Lord. What does the cross of Christ prove? That God is love? No doubt. That Christ gave His precious life to save us from the flames of an everlasting hell? Blessedly true, all praise to His peerless name! But what does the cross prove as regards the world? That its guilt is consummated, and its judgment sealed. The world, in nailing to the cross the One who was perfectly good, proved, in the most unanswerable manner, that it was perfectly bad. "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin; but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.

But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause" (John 15:22-26).

II. But we must now glance for a moment at our second weighty fact. God the Holy Ghost has come down to this earth. It is now over eighteen long centuries since the blessed Spirit descended from heaven; and He has been here ever since. This is a stupendous fact. There is a divine Person on this earth; and His presence—like the absence of Jesus—has a double bearing: it has a bearing upon the world, and a bearing upon the Church—upon the world as a whole, and upon every man, woman and child therein; upon the Church as a whole, and upon every individual member thereof in particular. As regards the world, this august witness descended from heaven to convict it of the terrible crime of rejecting and crucifying the Son of God. As regards the Church, He came as the blessed Comforter, to take the place of the absent Jesus, and comfort by His presence and ministry the hearts of His people. Thus, to the world, the Holy Ghost is a powerful *Convicter*; to the Church he is a precious *Comforter*.

A passage or two of holy Scripture will establish these points in the heart and mind of the pious reader who bows in lowly reverence to the authority of the divine Word. Let us turn to chapter 16 of John's Gospel. "But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart. Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will *convict* the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (verses 5-11).

Again in John 14 we read, "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (verses 15-19).

These quotations prove the double bearing of the presence of the Holy Ghost. We cannot attempt to dwell upon this subject in this brief introduction; but we trust the reader may be led to study it for himself, in the light of holy Scripture; and we are persuaded that the more he thus studies it, the more deeply he will feel its interest and immense

practical importance. Alas! that it should be so little understood; that Christians should so little see what is involved in the personal presence of the eternal Spirit, God the Holy Ghost, on this earth—its solemn consequences as regards the world, and its precious results as regards the assembly as a whole, and each individual member in particular.

Oh! that God's people everywhere may be led into a deeper understanding of these things; that they may consider what is due to that divine Person who dwells in them and with them; that they may have a jealous care not to "grieve" Him in their private walk, or "quench" Him in their public assemblies!

We shall, if God permit, enter, in our next paper, upon the third fact, which is the immediate subject of the series of papers which we propose to write, namely: The coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. May God the Spirit open this most glorious subject in living power and freshness to our souls, so that we may, in truth and reality, be waiting for God's Son from heaven.

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