

CHAPTER 12

"On the Millennium, and the Scriptural Testimonies to the Doctrine of It"

by
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Part 1 Sixth Proposition

(Condensed and Paraphrased)

We may now proceed to the consideration of our sixth proposition, consisting of several particulars: *a conformation of this kingdom to a state or condition of society in which Christ will be the head and faithful believers, both Jews and Gentiles, the members. This includes a distribution of rewards and dignities made in proportion to their respective merits or good deserts. The resulting state of things, though transacted upon earth and adapted to the nature and conditions of human society, will leave nothing to be desired for its perfection and happiness.*

With respect to the first of these points, *a conformation of this kingdom to a state or condition of society in which Christ will be the head and faithful believers, both Jews and Gentiles, the members*, we look first at the transfiguration of our Lord. It was an event which took place shortly after he said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matt. 16:28). It seems a natural inference that the transfiguration's primary design and purpose, then, was to verify this prediction. It was, in some sense, the coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom. But in what sense? It was as a type, symbol, or emblem of what his coming would be in its literal sense. It was a representation *beforehand* of what the *actual* coming of the Son of Man into his kingdom was destined to be when it arrived.

At the transfiguration, Jesus himself was revealed in a new and glorified form. Moses and Elijah were manifested in glory also, and the first person in the holy Trinity was himself likewise declared as taking a part in the same scene. Surely the grandeur and solemnity of such a spectacle point out this whole phenomenon as a striking representation beforehand of a corresponding future truth--the coming of the kingdom of God in power, the appearance of Christ in his glory, the simultaneous appearance of the saints who follow, and the permanent establishment of a state of things upon earth visible to the eyes of sense in which heaven and earth shall be indissolubly united in communion.

This view of the final end of the transfiguration, as a type and earnest of the millennium kingdom of Christ, derives much support from 2 Peter 1:16-18:

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.

No one who reads this passages needs to be told that St. Peter is referring to the transfiguration, at which he himself had been present. We may reason, therefore, as follows. First, Peter had made known to his converts a future event, which he calls the power (*δύναμις*) and presence (*παρουσία*) of the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, he had confirmed the certainty of this future event by the testimony of a past event--the transfiguration. Third, the nature of the future event was such that without the attestation that the transfiguration supplied of its possibility or its futurity, it must have been accounted a cunningly devised fable (*μῦθος σεσοφισμένος*); but with that evidence, both its possibility and its futurity were placed beyond a question. No one who believed in the past fact of the transfiguration could hesitate to believe in the future coming of Christ in power and glory.

The connection between the two events--the final end of the transfiguration and the coming of Christ in his kingdom--is thus established by the testimony of the eyewitness Peter. And this may justly lead to the inference, that the representation which took place at the transfiguration was purposely intended as a prototype of the state of things to ensue upon the coming of Christ. In this case, the past event of the transfiguration might naturally be appealed to as the best evidence of the truth of the doctrine of the future kingdom, not only by showing such a kingdom to be possible in general, but as delineating beforehand what sort of kingdom it would be in particular when it arrived.

It must be confessed that the doctrine of a millennium, when first stated, has much of the air and appearance of a cunningly devised fable. It looks more like a romance or fiction of poetry than a grave matter of faith to be realized at some time in the future. Well, then, might not a special, matter-of-fact illustration be needed to render the futurity of such an event both possible and probable?

The coming of Christ to *the general judgment* after the thousand-year millennium can scarcely with propriety be thought of as the coming to which Peter appealed to the transfiguration as a type. Is it conceivable that the doctrine of a final judgment would be compared by a Christian apostle to a cunningly devised fable? This is a doctrine that the wisest and best of heathen philosophers had all but penetrated by the light of reason. But the doctrine of a millennium in particular, like the fables of the poets with respect to their golden age, might naturally appear to have no foundation except in the imagination of its teachers, until it were demonstrated by some proper evidence of its own founded in truth

and soberness.

Let us now look at the account of the celebration of the last supper in Luke 22:15-18:

Then He said to them, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

And in the course of the evening afterwards, at the time of the institution of the cup in the sacramental ordinance, a similar declaration is found on record in both Matthew and Mark: *"But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom"* (Matt. 26:29).

In common language, such modes of speech as saying "I will not do so-and-so until such-and-such a time arrives, or such-and-such a thing comes to pass," are equivalent to saying, "I will do so-and-so when it does." It follows by our Savior's pledging himself not to taste again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God came, that he must be understood to promise that he would taste of it again when it did. And the future drinking of the fruit of the vine in company with the same persons must be something as real as the present was.

Another interesting passage is that of Luke 22:28-30:

But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Will Christ, then, indeed have a table upon which to eat and drink in his kingdom? If he will, we may well believe in the literal import of his other declaration, that he should again drink of the fruit of the vine at some proper time along with the disciples. A millenarian has no difficulty in comprehending these literally, for it is entirely in harmony with his system, namely, that Christ's kingdom upon earth will agree in outline with the present condition of things upon it as far as the social state is concerned, and it will exhibit the ordinary phenomena of a state of society transacted among men with nothing supernatural to characterize it, except the absence of evil and imperfection. We will return to these verses a bit farther down.

We turn now to our second point: ***This includes a distribution of rewards and dignities made in proportion to their respective merits or good deserts.*** First, it will be helpful to remember the celebrated petition of the two sons of Zebedee, and the time when the petition was addressed to Jesus is not unimportant. Jesus had just entered Judea from Perea on his last trip to Jerusalem, when everybody confidently expected that his kingdom

was about to appear and be openly asserted and established as soon as he arrived there.

Second, the petition is substantially the same in the account given by each of the evangelists, yet there is some difference between Matthew and Mark. In Matthew it is the mother of the two sons of Zebedee who speaks, while in Mark it is the two brothers themselves.

She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom" (Matt. 20:21).

And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory" (Mark 10:36,37).

Doubtless they all three took part in it, and both forms of application were very probably used by them. But James and John had already seen the *glory* of Christ at his transfiguration. In their minds, therefore, the idea of his kingdom was strongly and inseparably associated with that of his glory. They thus asked to sit on his right hand and on his left in his *glory*. Their mother, Salome, however, had never witnessed any visible display of the glory of Christ and asked therefore merely that her two sons might sit on his right hand and on his left in his *kingdom*. In other words, his future glory is the kingdom.

It must be taken for granted that their petition implied that there were to be honors and dignities in that kingdom, that there might be places of peculiar distinction in reserve for the apostles in particular, and the highest of honors might be set aside for themselves if they could prevail upon their Master to promise that they would receive them. What was Jesus' answer? Did he tell them there was no such thing as the kingdom which they expected, no such thing as honors and dignities to be had in it of any kind, much less such places of peculiar distinction and eminence as a seat on his right hand or left? By no means. He tells them first of all, that they did not know what they were asking for. Were they able to drink of *his* cup and be baptized with *his* baptism? Did they know they were petitioning for a degree of honor and exaltation so like his own in asking to be seated on his right hand and on his left?

When Jesus told them they did not know what they were asking for, he did not mean that they had a false or erroneous notion of the thing itself but only of the mode and conditions by which it was to be obtained. They were not ignorant of the high value of the good which they were coveting, but they were as yet ignorant of the price that must be paid to procure it. A share in the glory of Christ was to be obtained only by a participation in the sufferings of Christ; and if they aspired to sit on his right hand or on his left hereafter, they must be prepared to drink of his cup and be bathed in his baptism first. This truth they did not as yet fully understand. The Lord concludes by telling them they should indeed taste of his sufferings, and by implication be entitled to partake in his glory. But as to the

particular object of their plea, "to sit on My right hand and on My left," Jesus states it is not His to give, "but it is for those for whom it is prepared."

To summarize, the following is plainly admitted even by our Lord himself: (1) that there was such a thing as a seat on his right hand and on his left in his *glory*; (2) that there was a degree of preeminence, second only to his own; (3) that there were persons for whom it was already in reserve by the appointment of the Father; and (4) that it was so unalterably and inalienably in reserve, even then, that it was not Christ's to bestow or award.

We shall now consider 1 Corinthians 6:1-4:

Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge?

This passage asserts in plain terms that *the saints shall judge the world* and that *the saints shall judge angels*. This cannot be understood of anything but a literal judging. Why? Because the nature and subjects of this future judging are of so exalted a character that they are urged as the compelling reason why the Corinthians must be competent for the office of judging in the ordinary concerns of life. How could they be unfit to judge between two brothers in some trifling matter who should hereafter be found able to judge the world? How could they be unworthy to decide upon the controversies of common life who should in the future sit in judgment on angels?

Let us return now to Luke chapter 22:28-30.

But you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Christ is here speaking of the apostles sitting on thrones judging the twelve tribes of ethnic Israel. This promise made at the time of the last supper was but the repetition of an assurance first given them a week before:

Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:27,28).

To understand the precise meaning of this assurance, we must have regard to the circumstances of the time and occasion under which it took place. Jesus had just been approached by the rich young ruler who wanted to know what he should do to inherit eternal life. The turn of the conversation led to Jesus making the well known declaration that the rich should hardly enter into the kingdom of God. In fact, he said it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter. It was plainly understood from this that the rich would have so much reluctance to part with their earthly possessions in this life should such a sacrifice be required of them for the sake of the Gospel, that any consideration of the return proposed in another life would hardly be powerful enough to induce them to make it. In other words, to what extent will the sacrifice of earthly goods go in entitling the giver to not only a return but an ample and full return in the next so that men will not hesitate to make it?

Peter declares that they, the disciples, had forsaken all things! They had already made the utmost sacrifice of earthly possessions that was in their power and followed Christ. What then should be theirs? What could they expect in return? The question was not simply whether the sacrifice of earthly goods for the sake of the Gospel was entitled to a return, but to a return in proportion to what had been sacrificed--in this case, their all. This can be deduced from the bitterness in Peter's voice, who was speaking only of the sacrifice of earthly goods and expecting to hear of only a corresponding return. Jesus replies,

Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life (Mark 10:29,30).

The sacrifices here specified are all of a earthly nature, and the returns promised to them are all of a similar description; but the one exceeds the other in measure and degree. The thing to be sacrificed was something limited and definite; the thing to be returned was the same thing without limit and without measure. If earthly good was in some respect or other the thing sacrificed, earthly good also in some sense or other must be the thing to be expected in return.

In each of the evangelists who record this transaction, Peter is the person who asks the question; but in Matthew only do we find that part of our Savior's answer which applies directly to the apostles: "*Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*" (Matt. 19:28). Let us consider then the terms of this memorable prophecy.

First: "***In the regeneration***" (παλιγγενσία), that is, the time of making things new. Our

Savior has called the millennium the time of making things new, no doubt because none of the alloy and imperfection of the old or present state of things is retained, but all the good is wonderfully increased in degree and intensity.

Second: "***When the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory.***" The Son of man is never spoken of as sitting, or to sit, on his throne of glory except at his open assumption upon earth of regal power, pomp, and state worthy of the incarnate divinity, before and during the millennium.

Third: "***You who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.***" The number of the apostles was *twelve*; the number of the tribes was *twelve*; the number of thrones is *twelve* also. Will anyone say that these things are not critically adapted to each other, that each apostle as a judge has one throne for the seat or symbol of judgment and one tribe for the province or subject of his jurisdiction, and both concurrently with the session of the Son of Man upon his throne of glory ruling over all as Supreme?

When Christ shall sit down on his throne of glory for judging mankind after the millennium has concluded and the eternal state begins, no one we know of will then sit down with him in any concurrent jurisdiction, even though it were to be subordinate to his. It is the peculiar and exclusive prerogative of the Son that *all* judgment is committed to him because *he* is both God and man. But Paul has taught us that the saints will judge the world, and the advocates of the millennium believe that while Jesus Christ will rule over all as Sovereign of his kingdom, yet certain subordinate jurisdictions of power and trust will be committed to others subordinate to him.

At the final judgment, Scripture informs us that *all nations* are to be gathered together before him; it says nothing of the twelve tribes of Israel in particular. But during the millennium the twelve tribes in particular will yet be restored to their country, living alongside the Gentiles. Christ will be seated on his own throne of glory as supreme King of all, both Jews and Gentiles, the subjects of his happy reign. And as there may be tribes to govern, so there may be appropriate governors to be appointed over them. Upon the strength of our Savior's assurance, we have no difficulty in believing them to be the twelve apostles.

Let us now turn to Revelation 20:4, which describes the beginning and continuance of the millennium dispensation itself. "*And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. . . . And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*"

What thrones were these which St. John saw? Who were they who sat upon them? What judgment was it that was given to them? John furnishes no answer to these questions other than this--*that they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years*. Since they reigned with Christ, their thrones must have been the insignia of regal power and state; they who

sat upon them must have been kings or representatives of kings; the judgment given to them must have been the authority and jurisdiction committed to governors over subjects, though subordinate to Christ's jurisdiction as supreme. Can we ask for a better comment upon the nature of the prophetic promise of our Lord to his twelve disciples than what is supplied by this description in Revelation, which may so obviously be referred to its literal fulfillment? His promise to them was that when Christ himself should sit upon *his* throne, they also should sit upon *their* thrones; and when all power should be exercised by Christ as supreme and as Lord of all, a subordinate trust and authority should still be committed to them.

The third point of this sixth proposition is that ***the resulting state of things, though transacted upon earth and adapted to the nature and conditions of human society, will leave nothing to be desired for its perfection and happiness.*** The millennium is ushered in by the confinement of Satan, which will last as long as the millennium itself. Thus, while the millennium continues, Satan is unable to operate in producing evil; and the result will be that the good is retained but none of the evil. The earth will exhibit all the freshness, the beauty, the vigor of youth superinduced on the decay, the deformity, the decrepitude of age. The subject would remain the same, only the attributes and properties of it would be distinct. There will be no other difference between the former state of things and the millennium than between what was ruinous and what is repaired; what was decayed and mutilated and what is fresh and entire; what was once imperfect and what is now perfect; what was old and long past its prime and what is young again or in its maturity.

The state of things during the millennium is described in the parables as the celebration of a great supper, as the consummation of a nuptial solemnity. It is destined to be nothing less than a heaven transacted upon earth; that is, a scheme and economy, which though in their local bounds necessarily confined to the earth, are characterized by the closest communion with heaven.

In proof of this assertion, consider the Lord's assurance to Nathanael in John 1:50,51:

Jesus answered and said to him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And He said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

It is scarcely necessary to remind the reader that we have here a reference to the dream of Jacob and the ladder between heaven and earth, with the angels of God ascending and descending it. The final representation of this dream must be to symbolize the truth of a constant and familiar intercourse between heaven and earth carried on by the angels in their instrumental capacity of ministering spirits; and from this it is an obvious inference that if they were to come down to the Son of Man, then he himself must be on earth, and if they were to go up, then it must be to someone in heaven. Consequently, we may presume

the intercourse carried on by the angels is between Christ as the Son of Man upon earth and the Father as God in heaven.

Now I ask, *when* was this to pass visibly before the eyes of Nathanael and the others addressed on this occasion? Was it when the angels ministered to Jesus in the desert after the temptation? No, he was alone then. Was it when an angel appeared in the garden of Gethsemane to strengthen him? No, for only three of the apostles were witnesses on that occasion. Was it when the two angels descended on the morning of the resurrection? No, for none of the apostles saw them. Was it when the two angels appeared to the twelve on the Mount of Olives immediately after the ascension? No, for Jesus himself was no longer upon the earth.

If it was upon none of these occasions, and if it is ever to take place, then it must be during the millennium when Christ is personally reigning upon earth. At that time he is endued with all power, solely as the delegate or representative of the Father. We should therefore expect to see a constant communication between the Father in heaven and the Son upon earth, and this will be perceptibly carried on by the angels.

The splendid and magnificent promises of temporal happiness, peace, security, and prosperity during Christ's millennial reign are abundant throughout the Old Testament prophets and the Psalms. They describe a state of things among the people of God in which all shall be innocence and all shall be harmony, both in the natural and moral world. There shall be neither sin nor sorrow, neither privation nor suffering, and no fear any longer of alienating the favor and protection of God because no danger of displeasing him by disobedience and unrighteousness. These promises have never yet been realized in such a manner as answers to the truth and plainness of the promises themselves. Therefore, if they are still to be fulfilled upon earth, it must be in some future state of human society.

An Exposition of the Parables and of Other Parts of the Gospels, Vol. I. Oxford: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1834. Liberty taken for paraphrasing.