

"PRAYER FOR THE SECOND ADVENT"

from

Plain Sermons *On Subjects* *Practical and Prophetic*

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"Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. But let the righteous be glad: let them rejoice before God; yea, let them exceedingly rejoice." Psalm 68:1-3.

THAT the Jewish church of old lived in continual hope of, and continual earnest desire for, the advent of the Saviour, we can have no doubt. Whatever the obscurity that may hang over unfulfilled prophecy, or whatever degree of doubtfulness may attend its interpretation, it is evident, from the universal expectation of the coming of Messiah which prevailed amongst the Jewish people at the time of our Lord's appearance, and which from them had communicated itself to the Gentiles, that the prophecies were so far understood as to afford warrant for their faith in a coming Redeemer, and to give them a tolerably correct idea as to the time in which he was to be expected. From Jewish tradition it also appears that the ancient Jews expected a Messiah, who before his entrance into glory was to suffer for the sins of the people. But how far they were able to distinguish between the first and second advents, often so intimately united even in one prediction; how far the predictions concerning them were understood by the humble and devout student of the prophetic word, and concealed from the careless multitude, it is impossible to ascertain with certainty. It is probable that the hopes of Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the prophets, were not entirely forgotten; and that the symbolic representations of the way of salvation contained in the Mosaic ritual were partially understood. But whether the Jewish church fully comprehended the meaning of the predictions or not, it is absolutely certain that her members were taught, in more places than one, earnestly to pray for Christ's second advent; and to one of these prayers I would now direct your attention, considering,

I. THE PRAYER OF THE JEWISH CHURCH FOR THE SECOND ADVENT OF CHRIST.

II. THE DUTY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH TO JOIN IN IT.

I. The Psalmist, moved by the Spirit of God, adopts the words used by Moses in the wilderness, when the ark, in which God dwelt between the Cherubim, set forward; for we read in the 10th of Numbers, "It came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Lord, and let thine enemies be scattered, and let them that hate thee flee before thee; and when it rested, he said, Return, O Lord, unto the many thousands of Israel." But the wanderings of Israel were now over, and the ark of the Lord had found a place of rest. David had already sought out a place to build a temple, and the materials were prepared. The people of God were in the land promised to their fathers, their enemies were subdued, and the ark went forth no more with the armies of Israel. It is not therefore the removal of the ark to which the prophet alludes in his prayer. The context of the Psalm, and the expressions used, carry us on far beyond the days of David, and refer us to times still future. David prays for the return of Him, of whom the ark was a type, and whose glorious advent he beheld by the spirit of prophecy. The words of the text contain a prayer for the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. "Let

God arise," says David, "let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him. As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish in the presence of God."

Never has this prayer been yet answered in its full extent. The Lord has oft interfered in behalf of his people, or to rouse the wicked to repentance; but these interpositions were temporary, and the world was left again to the government of His providence. God has often given tokens sufficient to shew the world what he will do, when the day of his wrath is come. In old times he destroyed the world by water; he consumed Sodom and Gomorrhah with fire; and caused the earth to swallow up Dathan, Korah, and Abiram. From that time to this, he has occasionally called upon the elements to preach repentance, and rouse a slumbering world. Lightning and tempest, floods and earthquakes, famine and pestilence, have scared the guilty race of man, and executed judgment upon the ungodly. But yet the world and the church abound with wickedness, and mourn because of sin. They that hate the Lord flee not before him, but are still suffered to open their mouths in blasphemy: nor have the wicked perished in the presence of God.

These petitions lead us at once to the great day of the wrath of God. "For behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branches." The verse following the text directs us especially to the advent described in the 19th of Revelations: "Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him." Here we find the same image employed by St. John, when he describes the second coming of the Lord Jesus: "I saw heaven opened," says he, "and behold a white horse, and he that sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness doth he judge and make war."

The whole psalm refers us to times still future; for this rising up, for which the Psalmist prays, is connected with the restoration of Israel, the establishment of universal peace, and the conversion of all nations. In the 22nd verse we find the restoration of Israel alluded to: "The Lord said, I will bring again from Bashan, I will bring my people again from the depths of the sea:" but we know that the conversion and restoration of Israel will not be completed until after the appearance of the Lord Jesus. For then it is, as St. Paul tells us, in the 11th of Romans, that "there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob, and so all Israel shall be saved." In the 30th verse we find a prayer for the termination of war: "Rebuke the company of spearmen; scatter thou the people that delight in war." But we know, that until the Prince of Peace is invested in his kingdom, war and discord shall continue; but "in His days shall the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth." In the 29th and 31st verses we read of the conversion of all nations. Because of the temple of Jerusalem shall kings bring presents unto thee. Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God. "Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord." But we know that until the Lord return, many nations shall sit in darkness, and will not join themselves to him. Thus he saith, by Zechariah the prophet, "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people." (Zech. ii. 10,11.) Then it is, "That many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord." (Zech. viii.22.) Thus we see, that the events prayed for, the expressions used, and the whole context of the psalm, point us to the second advent of Christ, as the subject of the Psalmist's prayer, and refer us to that day, "When all flesh shall be silent before the Lord, because He is raised up out of his holy habitation."

II. As members of the Christian church we continually profess our faith in the second coming of Christ; and, it may be, that we sometimes meditate upon his glorious appearance; but have we, like David,

adopted it as one of the subjects of our addresses at the throne of grace? We pray for forgiveness of sin, for God's Holy Spirit, for renewal of heart; but have we ever prayed that Christ might come to judgment? On many occasions we thankfully adopt the language of the Psalmist, and are glad to repeat his prayers, and say, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant," "cast us not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from us:" but has our faith ever enabled us to take up the language of the text, and say, "Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered; let them also that hate him flee before him?"

This leads me, in the second place, to point out our duty to join in the Psalmist's petitions. If it were a prayer suited only to the individual case of David, no obligation could rest upon us to unite in it: but it is a prayer for the universal church, for every one who loves the Saviour, and desires to see the "King in his beauty,"—for every one who mourns over the state of the world and the church, and is anxious for the promotion of God's glory. It is a prayer frequently repeated in Holy Scripture of the Old Testament taught by our Lord, now offered up by saints in the presence of God, and with which the Scriptures of the New Testament conclude. Read that beautiful prayer which begins in the 15th verse of the sixty-third of Isaiah, and is continued to the end of the sixty-fourth chapter, and learn the earnestness with which we should present our petitions for the coming of the Lord. "Oh that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, as when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil; to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence."

This prayer is sometimes used as if it expressed nothing more than a petition for the supply of grace, or at the most for the Lord's spiritual communion with his people; whereas it is a most urgent suit to the Lord to come down visibly and personally, as he once did for the deliverance of the Jewish people from Egypt; to reveal himself in flaming fire, and take vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel. Compare this prayer with the xcvi [97]th Psalm, and you will see that it relates altogether to Christ's glorious coming. Here the prophet prays that the Lord would make known his name to his adversaries, by revealing himself in fire: so that the mountains may melt, and the waters boil. In the Psalm you will find a prophecy of the literal fulfilment of these petitions: for it is said, when the Lord shall reign, "A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about. His lightnings enlighten the world: the earth saw, and trembled. The hills melted like wax at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth."

In the prayer which our Lord hath taught us, we offer the same petitions, at least if we understand the words aright. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," is a petition that the Lord may take unto him his kingdom, and begin that reign of righteousness, during which God's will shall be done on earth as in heaven. It is plain that when we say, "Thy kingdom come," we pray for something that is not yet come; for if it be already come, it is folly to pray that it may come. And the Scriptures tell us positively that there is a kingdom which is not to commence until the Son of God cometh in glory. Daniel vii. 13, says of this kingdom, "I saw in the night visions: one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him; and there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom." And he says expressly that God's will shall then be done on earth; for he declares that his kingdom, given to the Son of man, is of such a nature, "that all people, nations, and languages shall serve him." The Lord himself speaks of a kingdom which is not yet come, for he is gone to receive it. "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return." (Luke xix. 12.) St. Paul speaks of a kingdom which is not to come, until the Lord appear to judge the quick and dead. He says to Timothy (2 Tim. iv. 1), "I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and kingdom." All these passages show us, that when the Lord taught us to say, "Thy kingdom come," he taught us to join in the prayer of David, "Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered."

It is remarkable that only one prayer of the departed saints has been made known to us, and that this one should be a prayer to the same effect. In the fifth chapter of the Revelations the Lord is pleased to give us a view of the state of those who have died as martyrs. St. John says, "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" Though removed from this scene of woe and misery, safe from all the attempts of the wicked, and in the enjoyment of God's presence, their happiness is not yet complete, and they still find subject matter for prayer and supplication. They still long for that day when the Lord shall arise to judgment, and put an end to the triumph of the wicked.

With this prayer also the New Testament concludes. The Lord's last words in the last book of Revelation refer to the second advent. "He which testified these things, saith surely, I come quickly." And John replies, "Amen, even so, come Lord Jesus." John had himself experienced the awfulness of the Lord's presence; for he tells us, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead." All the troubles that should precede the coming of Christ had been made known to him; all the terrors of judgment had been presented to his view; but none of these things moved him, nor could restrain the prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus." We cannot, therefore, doubt but that it is our duty to join in a prayer which the Holy Ghost has dictated, which our Lord has appointed, which the saints in heaven use, and which the beloved disciple offered up. The nature of the prayer presents another argument to enforce this duty. We are bound to pray for those things which promote the honour of Christ, and the eternal happiness of his people. But never shall the honour of Christ be complete, nor His people be happy, nor the righteous be glad and rejoice exceedingly, until God arise and his enemies be scattered. Until then iniquity shall abound, yea, and increase more and more; until then wicked men will deny and blaspheme the Lord that bought them; his followers shall have tribulation; sickness and sorrow and death retain their cruel sway; tears still continue to flow, and none can dry them.

Brethren, have you never withdrawn your thoughts from the cares of this life, from the treachery of present joys, or the oppression of transitory griefs, to look upon the church and the world as they are? Have you never lifted up the veil of deceit, in which the world, and all things therein, are shrouded, that you might behold its form in truth? If you have, you will understand why Christ's advent is so desirable. The sight of all the manifold forms of human misery, of all the various gradations of human depravity: the view of a world that lieth in the wicked one—of a once blessed creation subject to curse and vanity because of sin—of Christ's church, that was once as a pure virgin, now corrupted with superstition, led astray by error, and rent to pieces by divisions—of Christ's most holy religion perverted by men's imaginations—Christ himself, the Saviour of the world, dishonoured and crucified again in every spot of Christendom: the sight of all this must have made you wish that this present state of things were past, and taught you to pray that Christ might come to deliver his church and to redeem the world.

Some expect that this change shall be effected by means now in operation, and that the general diffusion of knowledge will of itself change the world, and introduce the kingdom of peace and righteousness. But the Christian has only one object of hope held out to him in Scripture, and that is the coming of Christ. The Scriptures nowhere hold out the hope of a gradual reformation of the world, or of an awakening in the church which shall become abiding and universal; and experience is against it. The church, that was once so pure and holy, became wicked and corrupt in a few centuries: a few centuries more plunged it into almost total darkness. It pleased God in his great mercy to produce a partial awakening, so as to leave the world without excuse. But the effects of the Reformation, partial as it was, and never extending to the eastern churches, have long since evaporated; the piety and faith and power of the Reformers have vanished, and coldness and infidelity appear in their stead.

Have we any reason to hope that the ordinary means, now in operation, will be effectual to accomplish the great work of rectifying doctrinal errors; reforming practical abuses; healing sectarian breaches; stemming the torrent of infidelity; stopping the mouth of blasphemy; and uniting all the conflicting parties of Jew, Turk, infidel, heretic, into one body, bound together in love and keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? What has been the uniform course of the history of man since the Fall? It has been this. To prevent total darkness—total oblivion of himself—God has been obliged repeatedly to interpose: that his interposition has produced a temporary effect; which, however, gradually grew weaker and weaker, until another interposition became necessary. At the Fall the Lord interposed personally, and gave to Adam the Gospel promise of a Redeemer. But in a few generations the almost total departure of Adam's children from God, made another interposition necessary. God cleared the world of the apostate race of men, and raised up a church in the righteous family of Noah. Besides the personal knowledge of God which the great tragedy of the Deluge, acted before their own eyes, and their own miraculous preservation afforded them, they received a covenant. Yet in a few generations more, the world was covered with idolatry. Another interference was necessary. God appeared personally to Abraham, made to him a more perfect revelation of himself, and appointed an indelible sign of the covenant between himself and Abraham's posterity. Yet in four hundred years this favoured family was involved in Egyptian idolatry. The effect of the next stupendous interposition—the destruction of the Egyptians, and the giving of the written law—was soon lost. The Lord then condescended to dwell in a splendid temple, the very existence of which preached all God's mercies to the Jewish people. He also sent them a succession of prophets. But the only result of all these extraordinary means of grace was an incorrigible idolatry of the people, so that the destruction of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel was the consequence. The return from Babylon was a new interposition which was concluded by the most incomprehensible of all God's mercies—the gift of his Son. The Lord himself became incarnate; became man's teacher, and spake as never man spake. But the end was the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the people. The grace vouchsafed to the Gentiles has been abused in the same way. There is not one of all the churches founded by the Apostles which has remained pure: many are altogether lost; and those that remain are all corrupt. Such is a history of the means of grace for near six thousand years; have we any sound or scriptural reason to show that they must now be more efficacious? or that they will now, without any interposition of the Lord, accomplish that which in sixty past centuries they have been unable to effect?

The Scriptures tell us, that the last days shall be the worst; so that when the Son of man cometh he shall not find faith on earth. Our only hope, therefore, is in the coming of Christ; and shall we not pray for that which is our only hope: or if hope be not sufficient, will not love unite with it? Have we no desire to be united to Him who died for us? Have we no longings of heart after Him who hath loved us even unto death? The eyes of faithful servants look for the return of a kind master: children long for the presence of their parents; and shall not We pray for the return of Him who is more to us than master, father, or brother, the propitiation for our sins, and the Saviour of the soul? If therefore we would follow the example of the saints, or obey the instruction of the Saviour: if we have any zeal for his honour, or any desire for the happiness of his people and our own: if we would attain that which is pointed out as our hope in Scripture: if we would hearken to the dictates of love, it is our duty to join in the Psalmist's prayer, "Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered:" or to take up the language of our church, and say, "We beseech Thee, of thy gracious goodness, shortly to accomplish the number of thine elect, and to *hasten thy kingdom*, that we, with all those that have departed in the true faith of thy holy name, may have our perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, in thy eternal and everlasting glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

As I have now considered the subject of the prayer, and pointed out our duty to join in it, it remains only to apply the subject to ourselves; and—

1. To those who are still impenitent, and have never turned to the Lord Jesus Christ by a true and

lively faith. You cannot use this prayer; you cannot say, "Let God arise:" for if he arise he will arise for your condemnation. You cannot say, "Let the wicked perish in the presence of God," for you would thereby pray for your own destruction. But remember whether you pray for it or not, these things shall surely happen: God will arise, and the wicked must perish in His presence. What will become of you in that day? Do you think that you can hide yourselves from his wrath? He has declared that though the wicked should dig into hell, thence shall his hand take them; though they should climb into heaven, thence will he bring them down. Do you hope that God is merciful, and will not condemn you? This hope is altogether vain. The heathen who has never heard of the true God, the Jew who has never been instructed in the faith of Christ, may have some hope of this kind, but you have none. If you remain hardened against the love of God in Christ Jesus; if you can believe that on account of your sins Christ became incarnate, and suffered, and died, and still continue impenitent, there is no hope for you. Hear, then, the warning of God, which is addressed to you this day in mercy, and turn unto the Lord, that when he cometh you may not be of that number which shall wail because of him.

2. But there are others who flatter themselves that they have repented. To such I would repeat one question that I have already put, Have you ever prayed for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ? And I would add another, Have you ever wished for it? or do you feel a secret misgiving that all will not be well at that great day; an internal conviction that all your profession of religion is but hollowness and hypocrisy? There is a vast difference, brethren, between these feelings and the humility of the true penitent. The true penitent does indeed feel that the day of Christ's appearing will be a tremendously awful and overpowering season. All his own unworthiness and sinfulness rise up in remembrance, whenever he meditates upon it: but still his conscience bears him witness that, whatever he once was, he has forsaken the love of sin, and turned to the Lord with all his heart. Faith assures him that his sins are forgiven; and love—for he knows and feels that, however imperfectly, he loves his Saviour—love casts out that fear which hath torment. He has an affectionate though humble desire to behold his Lord, and he has an ardent and earnest desire for that time, when, before Him who was once despised and rejected of men, every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Are these your feelings, or are you afraid to pray that Christ may come to judgment, because ye fear that he will come for your condemnation? Deceive not yourselves by saying or thinking, "I cannot pray that Christ may come, and the wicked perish. I would rather pray that he might defer his coming until all repent." There is a show of love and compassion in this, but it is self-deceit. You are not more merciful than the spirits of just men made perfect: yet they pray that Christ may arise, and judge and avenge their blood on those that dwell on the earth! You are not more long-suffering than the Spirit of God; yet he has dictated this prayer. Let us, then, prove our ownelves; let us remember that what we love we desire, and what we consider as a blessing we pray for. Let us not try to deceive ourselves further; but if we find that we cannot join in the Psalmist's prayer with a quiet heart and an assured mind, let us acknowledge our insincerity to ourselves, and let us confess it before God, and repent of it. Christ's blood was shed for all sin; so that if we are willing to forsake it, we can hope for forgiveness. Let us all seek to be assured of our state; let us not be content with a faint hope, or wish that we may be saved in the day of Christ; but let us endeavour after that blessed assurance by which Paul was animated, when he said, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of glory, which the Lord the righteous Judge will give unto me, and not unto me only, but unto all them that love his appearing." We may have this assurance as well as Paul. If we seek it by the same diligence and the same faithfulness, we shall find it as well as he; and shall then be able to unite fervently in the Psalmist's prayer, and to say, with a hope that we are of the number, "Let the righteous be glad: let them rejoice before God, yea, let them exceedingly rejoice."

Lastly, To all those who are in earnest in the fear of the Lord, and in the desire to please Him, I would say, Be not alarmed at the dark cloud which is gathering over the world; nor shaken by the manifest

impotence of all human effort to dissipate the gloom. The Scriptures assure us that these things must be: "Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people." The concluding scene of the world will be one of hopeless confusion. "Upon earth distress of nations, with perplexity; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth." "There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time." But as this time draws near, it will not be your business to allay the confusion, nor to deliver from trouble; but, as the Lord himself directs, "To pray always, and not to faint;" remembering the declaration, that He will avenge his own elect, which cry unto him day and night, though he bear long with 'them. "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him." And it shall be said in that day, "Lo, this our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him: we will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation." The Lord grant that this may be the language of us all in the day of his appearing: and now unto God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, might, majesty, and dominion, world without end. Amen.