

## INTRODUCTION

### "The Budding of the Fig-tree"

"Now learn a parable of the fig-tree: When his branch is yet tender and puts forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh. So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors" (Matt. 24:32, 33).

In this instruction of our Lord to His disciples, He shows them the manner in which their expectation was to be directed to coming events. He had told them of the condition of things, in connection with Jerusalem, which should immediately precede His coming in the clouds of heaven; and He then employs this illustration in order to show the real practical use which there was in the things which He had thus unfolded.

Centuries have passed since the discourse on the Mount of Olives, but still the intimations which our Lord gave have not taken place; in other words, the fig-tree has not yet budded. If we then desire to use the truths which Christ then spoke, we have still to turn our eyes to the spot which He has marked out for us and wait to see the appointed intimations.

It may be said, "What use can it have been to the Church to have had to wait for so many years? What profit is there to us in being directed to that which for eighteen hundred years has not taken place?" If Christ has commanded it, that is enough. He will always vouchsafe blessing to those who are doers of His will. But further, here is profit which a spiritual mind can apprehend! For if this word had been heeded by saints, it would have kept them from many of those associations and objects which are contrary to the leadings of the Spirit; for thus they would have had before their minds the character and close of this dispensation and the place of Christ's faithful servants in the midst of the nations--holding the gospel of the kingdom as a witness, but seeing the world's corruption as a thing which flows on unchanged in its nature (while souls are gathered one-by-one out of it) even up to the coming of the Lord Himself. Had this exhortation been rightly heeded, the hope of the coming of Christ would not have passed away from the minds of saints, so as to be looked at as a thing which, at all events, is not a practical doctrine.

Suppose I were cast upon some uninhabited isle in a clime in which I could not (from my ignorance of its situation) count the seasons by months. And if the object of my hopes was the summer, and I found a fig-tree and knew that its budding forth would intimate the approach of that season, [then, naturally] I should watch the tree. I should often examine whether it was beginning to bud forth. I might look week after week and see nothing. I might *think* I saw some indications of sprouting, and then find it all come to nothing. But still I should watch on. Now, if I also knew that a ship came to the island at a particular time in the summer, this would be a point of hope to me, for it would hold out the prospect of deliverance; and this would make me doubly diligent in watching and waiting for the budding. Hope would connect itself with those things which indicate its accomplishment. And these things occupying my mind, I should be preserved from the thought of regarding the solitary isle as my abode. I might find long patience to be needful, but at length the buds would come forth; and then, according to the indication of the season, the wished-for vessel.

Thus is it with regard to the Church. God has given us a point of hope, and He has also instructed us with regard to indications of its accomplishment. The point of hope is that to which the soul tends, while the detail of intervening circumstances affords the needed instruction from which is learned the practical walk of those who possess such a hope. If held in the Spirit, these things cannot take away from the power of the hope; they were revealed for the directly contrary purpose. The early Church knew them and found them to have a practical and separating power. And in the body of detail with which the epistles (especially the later ones) are furnished, the dark statements of coming evil are given in order that the evil may be avoided, and the bright hope of the glory of the day of Christ might shine through it all and in contrast to it all. Had not the Church been so taught, that the taunt--"Where is the promise of His coming?--might indeed be felt as troubling the soul? But when we know that we have been warned of deeper darkness before the morning, we may indeed feel that, the more conscious we are of deepening gloom, the more rejoicingly may we look onward to the dawn.

Nothing gives us any indication of the immediate introduction of the latter day except this to which Christ directs us. We may see many things to make us expect that the fig-tree would soon bud; but when we see the buds (and not till then) can we speak with certainty as to what is forthwith to come to pass. We might see attempts of the nations to set the Jews in the Holy Land--this ought to make us look carefully to Jerusalem--[and] God might hinder those efforts or He might allow the fearful closing scenes of this dispensation to issue out of them, as at length He will do.

The importance of the *detail of prophecy* is very great to the believer. It certainly is a sad thing to see this extensive portion of God's truth overlooked and neglected. It is by the detail of prophecy that we learn how to walk in the midst of present things according to God. It is thus we learn His judgment about them, and what their issue will be. Many Christians directed their minds much to this a few years ago; but it cannot, I believe, be denied that this portion of revealed truth has more recently been neglected and overlooked. Those who have done this have surely omitted to see how important its present bearing is on the conscience and conduct. What other portion of revelation shows so clearly the separateness from all that is opposed to the Lord, to which believers are called?

There is such a thing as having held truths and then let them slip. This shows a want [lack] of Christian watchfulness. There is such a thing as having set truths before others, and when the time of their application arrives, failing in using them ourselves. Most spiritual minds feel conscious of the power of Satan being great at this time and his workings peculiarly dangerous. But if I see from the word of God that these things are to be, I shall be one of those who know these things beforehand; and this knowledge is to be used as my safeguard, that I be not carried away with the error of the wicked. The voyager who knows from his charts those parts of his course in which danger most exists, should be found the most prepared to act in the emergency; it will not take him by surprise.

But it may be said that if results are rightly known, nothing more is needed. But surely then we should be using our own thoughts as to all the things connected with those results. The mere knowledge of a coming deluge would never have led to the construction and arrangement of the ark. The knowledge of a result may lead to presumption of the most fearful kind. The whole testimony of the word is our safeguard.

The following *Remarks on the Prophetic Visions in the Book of Daniel* are intended especially to

direct the mind towards some of the important portions of the detail of prophecy with which the Scripture furnishes us. Should they be found helpful to Christians who desire to learn from the prophetic word, and to know for themselves what that word teaches, their object will be fully attained. To this end may the Lord vouchsafe His blessing!