

The Advent Hope: Its Practical Value

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[Suggested references:—Matt. 16: 26-7, 24: 42-4, 25: 19-21; Philip. 3: 20-21, 4: 5; 1 Thess. 5: 2-6; Titus 2: 11-13; Hebrews 10: 36-37; James 5: 7-8; 1 Peter 4: 13.]

LET me in a word state what is meant by the Advent Hope, viz., The Personal Pre-Millennial Imminent Return of the Lord Jesus Christ—first, for His people at the Rapture, then with His saints at the Revelation, when He comes to usher in the Millennial Reign. This hope links us up with the Apostles and Saints of the New Testament period, and with the Church of the first three centuries. Thank God for the revival of that Hope in these latter days.

(1) **Is it of Practical Value?** This is the question sometimes asked by, shall we say, some who have not given the subject much thought. If I am to live my life in the immanency of Christ's coming will that not disorganize my life? How can I plan, in fact is it right to plan for the future? If the Lord is liable to come to-night why not sit down by the window and wait for Him?

It is a fact moreover that some sincere but misguided souls have actually done this, but in nearly every case this is because men have been foolish enough to set a date for Christ's coming, and so they have lost both the Scriptural conception of and attitude towards this truth.

We know that the Master has stated very definitely what our attitude is to be, but it is well that we should emphasize the lesson set forth by contrast with the mistaken notion referred to.

(2) While truth is absolute, truths are relative, and this blessed truth concerning the Second Coming holds its rightful place in the whole body of truth.

He Who said by His inspired messenger, "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner, as ye have seen Him go," also said, "If a man will not work neither shall he eat." "Be diligent in business." He Who told His messenger to say, "Our citizenship is in heaven, whence also we look for the Saviour," also said, "He that provideth not for His own, especially they of His own household, hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel." This means planning.

Of course, this truth will affect our plans, for we shall plan as those who belong to and look for the Coming One. But what is more important, it will affect our motives and spirit of both life and service.

(3) **The Divine Purpose** is that every truth is to have a practical bearing on life. And that is emphatically true in connection with the blessed hope. It is not a commodity to be stored, but a power to be put into circulation and to affect the daily life.

The Divine intention stands out in nearly every reference to the Second Coming in the New Testament. It is intended to be a practical sanctifying force in the Christian life. It calls us to watchfulness, sobriety, fidelity, moderation, patience, submission to self-sacrificing service. It tells us of our heavenly citizenship, and calls us to live the separated, other-worldly life. Here, then, is a power already in existence. We do not create it but we must discover, appropriate and use it.

For centuries the mighty volume of water has been pouring over Niagara Falls, but it is only within the last twenty years that men have utilized that force for the practical benefit of humanity. And now it is lighting our streets and homes, running our cars, and doing a hundred and one other things. The power was there. It needed to be applied. So with regard to the power of Christ and that of His Second Coming.

As we consider the Divine purpose concerning the advent hope, let us with prayerful sincerity ask the question,—Is the Divine purpose being fulfilled in my life? Is the blessed hope a practical factor? Consider, then, the practical value of this hope.

I.—The blessed hope itself of seeing Him "Who loved us and gave Himself for us," should be an unspeakable joy and a purifying influence. Apart from every other consideration the prospects of seeing Him face to face in His fulness of glory which even the departed saints who are with Christ do not yet see.

Are we not at times absorbed with the details of His Coming—with what He is going to do—with the mighty transformations that He will work—with the gifts He will bring us, that we almost lose the inspiration that should be ours because of the simple, blessed and glorious fact that we shall see Him? I heard somewhere the story of a father who was frequently away from home and whenever he returned he brought a present for his child whom he loved dearly. As soon as he arrived home the question would be, "Daddy, what have you brought me?" Ultimately it seemed as though she thought more of the present than her father. And so on returning from his next visit he did not bring a present, and when the usual question was asked, the father said, "I have just brought you myself." This was enough. The child realized her mistake she had been making, thinking more of the gifts than the father's presence. So, not the gifts but the Giver, not the presents but the presence of the Master is what we long for. "In Thy Presence is fulness of joy."

"I shall see the King in His beauty
In the land not far away,
When the shadows at length have lifted
And the darkness has turned to day."

The blessed hope is of practical value because:—

II.—It makes the **spiritual presence** of Christ more **real to-day**.

"Lo, I am with you all the days." Who says this? Why, He Who was manifest in the flesh, and Who said, "I go away . . . but I will come again." It is not an impersonal, intangible force that is present with me to-day, but the spiritual presence of One Who did reveal Himself and will reveal Himself again. The fact, then, that Christ is coming back makes His presence to-day more real, and surely that is intensely practical to be able to say because of His coming that His presence now is—

"More real, more intimately nigh,
Than even the dearest earthly tie."

III.—This hope is practical because it helps to true **Scriptural orthodoxy**. It helps me to understand better and accept the other facts concerning the Person and work of Christ. It is a rare thing to find a believer who has accepted and appropriated this blessed hope, who does not believe in the inspiration of the Bible, the Deity of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Birth, the Atonement, Justification by Faith, the real Resurrection of Christ, the missionary obligation. This hope rounds out and completes the system of Divine truth and makes the other truths intelligible, and, shall I say, more credible.

IV.—This hope is practical, because it is the **key to the understanding of the Bible**. Some of you may remember an incident that Dr. Simpson mentions, as an illustration of this point. Dr. Simpson tells of having visited a cathedral in Europe, on the ceiling of which the most famous painter of past centuries had patiently employed his brush. Upon entering the building his eyes sought the ceiling, and he saw what seemed a bewildering colour of incoherent daubing. He looked long and earnestly, but no figure appeared, not a design was evident. The old sexton was passing by and the visitor expressed to him his disappointment, whereupon he smiled, and said, "No wonder, sir! you have no fit position from which to view this work of art. Come with me." And he led him to a place in the cathedral where the artist of all the centuries had evidently stood and bethought his design, and to which he had returned again and again as he wrought them into being. And lo, the visitor saw such a masterpiece as to bring tears to his eyes, and he bowed his head with gratitude to the God Who had granted to one of His fellow-servants such genius. And what that position was to the study of the fresco painting the pre-millennial position is to the understanding of the Word of God. It is necessary to the understanding of the doctrines, ordinances, promises and types of the Bible. The Bible becomes a new book in the light of the Second Coming. This is the universal testimony of those who make the wonderful discovery of the blessed hope. Is there anything more practical than that. The purpose, trend and object of the book be-

come intelligible in the light of the objective fact of the Lord's return.

V.—This hope is practical because it defines **missionary work**, and is the **great incentive** to all Christian service. This is the exact opposite of what we often hear said, viz.:—"Such a doctrine discourages work and missions." Just the reverse is true. It is of the very essence of the blessed hope to wait, watch and work for the coming of the King. One is safe in saying that the great majority of missionaries accept this hope. In stating that this truth defines missionary work, I mean that it shows the Master's plan, viz., not the conversion of the world, but its evangelization in this generation. The very things that discourage the worker who looks for the conversion of the world, encourage the worker who looks for the evangelization of the world in this dispensation and its conversion under the personal reign of Christ.

Some years ago a young missionary went out to his field filled with high hopes, looking for the conversion of the world. He became discouraged and returned home. There he got into touch with those who believed in the blessed hope; he accepted the truth and went back to his field a new man, with a new vision of the Coming One, a new plan, a new conception of his own relation in the world, viz., that of a herald or witness, a new **incentive**, to work as never before, a new **objective**—the personal return of the King. Can you conceive of any truth more practical than this, that so relates itself to the supreme business for which we have been called and separated.

VI.—Is not the practical value of the blessed hope seen in relation to the **present international conflict**? We all recognize that war is of the devil, that it was conceived in hell, but brought forth through human instrumentality. Well may we cry in the spirit of the Master, "Woe, woe, to the human causes of this diabolical conflict." Oh the awful sacrifice of life and money, the broken hearts, the bereaved homes, the shattered bodies, the cry of the widow and fatherless. We hear of Christian people whose faith is destroyed, asking the question, "Is God dead?" A friend of mine said to me in effect, "My conception and grip of Christ and Christianity is not sufficient to account for or to explain the present awful conflict and problem, or to bring the comfort I long for." Surely there is something wrong with such a conception. Some people tell us that Christianity has failed. If Christ fails us at this present juncture there is nothing between us and black despair. **But Christ has not failed!!!** Here, then, comes to our aid the comfort and steadying influence of the **Blessed hope**. Has not the Master told us that "there shall be wars and rumours of wars, nation rising against nation, and Kingdom against Kingdom," and that this is to be a characteristic of this age right down to the end of it? And as the end draws near, so the shadows shall deepen. We know, moreover, that Christianity has not failed because it has not been applied. Here is a sick man, the doctor comes, diagnoses the case, prescribes the remedy. The patient admires the physician, talks about, but does not take the remedy, and then pronounces the doctor a failure. Men have admired Christ, talked about His message, but have never fairly applied His remedy. We have learned at last that civilization has failed, and civilization without Christ is bound to fail; educated, scientific, cultured, aesthetic though it may be.

Arbitration has failed, for the past twenty-three years; a slogan of Kings, Emperors, Presidents, statesmen, literary men and smaller folk. Let us have arbitration; let us do all we can in God's name to prevent war, but let us never lose sight of the fact that while tribunals of international arbitration may prevent some wars, they do not get down to the root of the problem. War is a heart disease, not a mere skin disease. War is one of the many expressions of sin; one of the results of the more awful and wore deadly war against God. Every life in which Christ is not Saviour and Lord is at war with God, and every nation which does not recognize Jesus Christ as Supreme Lord of its national life and policy and action is at war with God. Only Christ can bring men and nations into peace with God and with one another. The real solution of the problem, the real remedy for the disease is not agreements, but Christ. Christ received as Saviour and Lord by individuals and nations. The blessed hope gives us the ultimate and fundamental solution to the problem of war.

As we stand to-day amid the ruins of a fallen civilization, amid wars and rumours of wars, let us appropriate the practical steadying, glorious influence of the advent hope. Let our hearts be lifted up above the smoke of battle, and

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