1 Thessalonians 1:10 (John Gifford Bellett) 57343

Miscellaneous Papers, Signs, and Waiting for the Son From Heaven (1:10)

In the calculations of men, events unfold themselves as the effects of causes which are known to be operating. But, while this has its truth, to faith it is God who, in His supremacy, holds a seal in His hand, to stamp each day with its character or sign.

This gives the soul a fresh interest in the passing moments. Some of them may be more impressively stamped than others, but all are in progress, and each hour is contributing to the unfolding of the coming era. Like the seasons of the year, or the advances of day and night. Some moments in such progresses may be more strongly marked than others. But all are in advance. Every stage of Israel's journey through the desert was bringing them nearer to Canaan, though some stages were tame and ordinary, while others were full of incident. And so, all the present age is accomplishing the advance of the promised kingdom, though some periods of it have greater importance than others.

These "signs of the times," or sealings of God's Land upon the passing hour, it is the duty of faith to discern. Because they are always according to the premonitions of Scripture. Indeed, current events are only "signs," as they are according to, or in fulfillment of, such previous notices.

The words of the prophets made the doings of Jesus, in the days of His flesh, the signs of those days (Matt. 12:22-23). And have we not words in the New Testament which, in like manner, make all around us at this moment, or in every century of the dispensation, significant? Have not words, which we find there, abundantly forecast the characters of such dispensation, and given beforehand the forms of those corruptions that were to work in Christendom? They have told us what now our eyes have seen. They told us of the field of wheat and tares—of the mustard seed which became a lodging place for the fowl of the air—of "the unmerciful servant," or of the Gentile, not "continuing in God's goodness"—of the great house, with its vessels unto honor and dishonor, and of other like things. They told us of "the latter times," and of "the last days," and they still tell the deadly character which that hour is to bear that is to usher forth the man of sin, and ripen iniquity for the brightness and the power of the day of the Lord.

All this is so. And let me ask, if every hour be, after this manner, bearing its character, or wearing its sign, what mark are we, individually, helping to put upon this our day? Is the purpose and way of the Lord ripening into blessedness, at all reflected in us? or, are we, in any measure, aiding to unfold that form of evil which is to bring down the judgment? If the times were to be known and described according to our way, what character would they bear; what sign would distinguish them?

These are inquiries for the conscience of each of us. We cannot be neuter in this matter. We cannot be idle in this market place. It may be but in comparative feebleness, but still, each of us, within the range of the action of Christendom, is either helping to disclose God's way, or to ripen the vine of the earth for the winepress of wrath.

The Lord tells us that the sign on which our faith must rest is that of a humbled Christ, such a sign as that of Jonah the prophet. Our faith deals with such a sign, because our need as sinners casts us on a Savior, or a humbled Christ. But hope may feed on a thousand signs. Our expectations are nourished by a sight of the operations of the divine hand displaying every hour the ripening of the divine counsels and promises, in spite of the world, and in the very face of increasing human energies.

These signs may be watched, but watched by the saint already in the place and attitude assigned him by the Spirit. They are not to determine what is his place, but they may exercise him in it. His place and attitude is beforehand and independently determined for him—waiting for the Son of God from heaven.

This posture the Thessalonian saints assumed on their believing the gospel (1 Thess. 1:9-10). The apostle seems afterward to strengthen them in that posture, by telling them that from it they were to be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17). And again afterward, he seems to guard them against being disturbed in that attitude, against being tempted to give it up, by further telling them, that that place of expectation should be exchanged for the place of meeting before the day of the Lord fell in its terrors on the world and the wicked (2 Thess. 2:1). And still further. This very posture of waiting for the Son from heaven had induced a certain evil. The Thessalonian saints were neglecting present handiworks. The apostle does not in any wise seek to change their posture, but admonishes them to hold it in company with diligence and watchfulness, that, while their eye was gazing, their hand might be working (2 Thess. 3).

Other New Testament Scriptures seem also to assume the fact, that faith had given all the saints this same attitude of soul; or, that the things taught them were fitted to do so. (See 1 Cor. 1:7; 15:23; Phil. 3:20; Titus 2:13; Heb. 9:28.)

Admonitions and encouragements of the like tendency, that is, to strengthen us in this place and posture of heart, the Lord Himself seems to me to give, just at the bright and blessed close of the volume.

"I come quickly" is announced by Him three times in the twenty-second of Revelation—words directly suited to keep the heart that listens to them believingly, in the attitude of which I am speaking. But different words of warning and encouragement accompany this voice.

"Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book" (Rev 22:7). This warns us, that while we are waiting for Him, we must do so with watchful, obedient, observant minds, heedful of His words.

“Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every one according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:12). This encourages to diligence, telling us, that by the occupation of our talents now during His absence, on the promised and expected return He will have honors to impart to us.

“Surely, I come quickly,” is again the word (Rev. 22:20). This is a simple promise. It is neither a warning nor an encouragement. Nothing accompanies the announcement, as in the other cases. It is, as it were, simply a promise to bring Himself with Him on His coming again. But it is the highest thing, the dearest thing. The heart may be silent before a warning and before an encouragement. Such words may get their audience in secret from the conscience. But this promise of the simple personal return of Christ gets its answer from the saints. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

Thus the Lord, after this various and beautiful manner, does the business of the Spirit in the apostles. His own voice, in these different and striking announcements, encourages the saints to maintain the attitude of waiting for Him.

Great things are a doing. The Church, the Jew and the Gentile, are all in characteristic activity, each full of preparation and expectancy. But faith, waits for that which comes not with such things. The rapture of the saints is part of a mystery, a part of “the hidden wisdom.” The coming of the Son of God from heaven is a fact, as I judge, apart altogether from the history or the condition of the world around.

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