Isaiah 21:11-12 (P. Compain) 72056

Bible Treasury: Volume N10, Voice Out of Seir, A (21:11-12)

It is not our purpose to dwell upon the literal accomplishment of this prophecy, but rather to take out of its what may be applied to our own times. We also urgently need to set ourselves upon the tower, and watch to see what He will say unto us, and what we shall answer when we are reproved (Hab. 2:1).

“Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?” The enquirer repeats his question so as to impress us with its solemnity. Man's day, already so long, has been but a dark night since he fell into sin. Scripture gives us his true history; and, as read there, where is there a shining of light as out of him? It pleased God to give glimpses of it now and then, and Very refreshing are they when we find them; but to faith alone are they visible and manifest.

Toward the middle of man's night God raised up. a great light for the people which sat in darkness, and for them which sat in the region of the shadow of death, light sprang up. He sent His Son into this world, and in His Son was life, and the life was the light of men. This true light so bright and resplendent, was that which, coming into the world, lighted every man; but the darkness, by which the mind of man is blinded through sin, comprehended it not. Alas, it was willful blindness on his part. The Lord tells out the secret of it, “Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.”

The full light went back with him to heaven. Essentially and absolutely, He is the light, remains that in heaven as he was that on earth; but how misty this poor world has become again since He is, as we learn from Col. 3, hid in God! Blessed be His name, out of tender pity and goodness He would not give up this poor world to total darkness, as will be the case in the second night the watchman announces. He has set up luminaries in whom, by the power of His Spirit, light shines. However, these are but frail vessels, often wanting in transparency. Time was when they were mightily resplendent, as in the days of the apostles or of the church in its primeval state. Since its early days, however, the church has gradually declined, and lost its brightness in proportion as it merged into the world. And now where is it?

We speak of “the church” (as set forth in. scripture), not of the countless independent churches, for these, in principle, are a denial of that, inasmuch as they are distinct bodies in contrast with the one body. They represent a divided Christ and as such can only be an imperfect reflection of the light which Christ is. We do not deny for a moment that there are saints in whom the heavenly light shines brightly, but they are mere individuals, burning and shining lamps, if you please, faithful in their day and measure, but isolated. Rather were they and are they those who own the ruin of the church and mourn over it. Still, we may be thankful for the light they give, and may assure ourselves in our God that there will be such to shine forth till we are removed from this world.

It is night indeed, but the darkness is not total. It will be, for a time at least, when we are gone. But we do confess that the present time is night already. Hence the anxious inquiry, “What of the night,... what of the night?” This is the cry of souls who stiffer in the dark but want to be out of it, and the watchman lets them know that the night is far spent, that the day is at hand, that their deliverance is near. Blessed message! May we give a more attentive ear to it!

“The morning cometh” —the morning without clouds. This may lead us to Hab. 2. There too, the prophet is on the look out, and not in vain, “I will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.” And he is given to see a vision, and told to write plain upon tables, that he that readeth it may run. The vision was “yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie.” “Though it tarry,” says the Lord, “wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” And for us the vision is written plain upon tables in Heb. 10:37. It points most distinctly to the coming of our Lord. It is not, as with the prophet, “it will surely come,” but “He that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” So “the morning cometh,” says the watchman. He does not describe it, but it is described for us in 1 Thess. 4, “The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God” —a threefold call which all his saints will hear, the sleeping ones and the waking ones alike.

He will descend not yet to the earth that cast Him out, but, as it were, half-way between heaven and earth. His saints will be caught up to meet Him there, and He will forthwith take them to His Father and God. He will see then of the travail of His soul and be satisfied. During the present time his poor wavering saints often grieve His loving heart by their inconsistencies. It will be otherwise when He has called them up and fashioned them like unto Himself. Then He will have all His joy in them as they in Him. It will be all His own doing: salvation of soul by His suffering and death on the cross, salvation of the body by power at His second coming (Phil. 3:21).

We shall be caught up “in the clouds.” That is exactly how the Lord Himself ascended up to heaven, as it is written, “A cloud received Him out of their sight.” This cloud He had been in once before, with three of His disciples, on the holy mount. Then His disciples feared as they entered into it. They could not stand the sight of the glory of their Lord. It will be very different with His saints when they meet Him on the resurrection morn. No fear then, but rather a shout of gladness, “This is our God; we have waited for Him.” Would that we lived more in the power and reality of this blessed hope, of that glorious morning! What is this poor world without Christ? And what more shall we want when we are “ever with the Lord"?

But the watchman, after having heralded the coming morning, adds another solemn word. It is this, “And also the night.” A dreadful and dark night, darker than has ever been seen on earth for those who will be left behind when the Lord calls away His saints. The New Testament as to this is in full accord with the watchman's acacia. The morning, as we have seen, is described in 1 Thess. 4; the night that is to follow is described in 2 Thess. 1, 2.

In 2 Thess. 1 we are told that “the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and on them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” This implies that the gospel of God's grace, as now preached, will have been thoroughly given up by those who now hear it heedlessly, and alas, they are the mass. The apostle could say that even in his day “the mystery of iniquity (or, lawlessness) doth already work.” It has made terrible inroads since, and it will culminate in what is called “the falling away” or open apostasy. Of this we have already many features under our own eyes. A distorted gospel, a different gospel which is not another, is proclaimed from many a pulpit and in many a book. But for a certain restraint, which is not of man but of God, it would soon have sway over all the minds of men in Christendom.

There is one that letteth, and will let, until he be taken out of the way; but for that, the rationalists and infidels of to-day would be the apostates of tomorrow. Alas, are they not that already? The hindrance, which is none other than the Spirit of God, may be removed at any moment; and then, how dark the night!

We read that God will send them a strong delusion, or rather (as in the New Version), a working of error, that they should believe the lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. They are punished for not having believed the gospel, which they must have known, and for not having loved the truth, by which they might have been saved. They are not heathen, judged on the ground of ignorance, but apostates, judged for having given up what in earlier days they professed to accept as the truth. God's gospel leads to God's Christ; their gospel leads to antichrist. It is the setting aside of God in Christ and the setting up of man to be God. Satan has been working at this ever since the days of Gen. 3:4, 5. And this awful crisis is fast approaching. “Even now there are many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last hour.” These precursors—who are they? “They went out from us.” They are men who have known and preached the gospel without faith in it. By degrees they perverted it, and at last denied it, substituted for it one of their own invention. Christians by name and profession; they become anti-christians. The truth that is not loved is sure to become unpalatable and opposed.

Thus it is that book after book, page after but page, of the Bible, has been assailed. What is there that remains to pull down? The very personality of God has been denied by so-called Christian teachers. The Christ of God has been lowered to man's level, or at least to such a level as man can reach to. The fall of mart through sin a myth! As a consequence, no redemption by the cross, no atoning death, no resurrection! On the other hand, no judgment either in this life or after! Eternal punishment a fable! Total extinction in death is far more convenient! Or, if they admit an after life, they make it to be a time of probation, of gospel preaching in hades, giving you an ample chance to come out all right! When Christ and redemption work is thus done away with, men are ready for antichrist. Popery has already decreed the infallibility of at least one man, has made , and Protestantism, so largely permeated with “damnable heresies,” will be swamped by the flood of infidelity.

Doubtless God has His own people in the midst his appalling declension; but He will remove them ere the night announced by the watchman comes. They are children of the day, not of the night. As long as they are here they will bear witness to the truth, however feebly, and by their testimony prevent the lying spirit from having free course. How solemn the thought that we have already under our eyes most of the elements which go to make up a full apostasy! Can Christians be so insensible as to put up with what they see of it in the present day? May God rouse them both in heart and conscience, and may they remember that the morning—their morning—comes between two nights!

The last word of the oracle should be pondered over, “If ye will enquire, enquire ye.” People say, ‘This is a subject on which opinions differ,' and that is their excuse for neglecting it. Yet there are sure and safe means of enquiry. Sit before God's word. Let it rule all your thoughts. Have it to control minutely whatever you may have heard and received outside it. Use it in dependence upon the Spirit of God, your safe guide. We say not that you are to reject systematically all you hear, but to submit all to the criterion of the Scriptures of truth. Thus in proving all things will you hold fast that which is good. “If you will enquire, enquire ye.” You must be willing to be instructed by God's word. “If they speak not according to His word, it is because there is no light in them.”

Then, finally, “Return, come.” This is a gracious call to repentance just in accordance with God's wonted way. “Say unto them, As I live, saith the LORD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel” Life and death are set by God before men—life, on condition of believing and keeping His word; death, if, to the last, men resist the truth.

P.C.

clickbible.org