

Psalms 110:1 (W. Noel Tomkins) 145668

The Return of the Lord Jesus Christ From Heaven to Meet His Saints in the Air, Return of the Lord Jesus Christ From Heaven to Meet His Saints
Air, On the: No. 1 (110:1)

"The important thing is having Jesus in the glory as our hope; a very subordinate thing, the question when shall we be in the glory with Him. If any one's teaching made the saints value Jesus as their hope less, it would be sufficient to show their teaching to be faulty. But if it be only to the effect of making them think the time, when they shall be in the glory, farther off than they supposed, I have nothing to say. Those who have such a hope ought to be able to wait."

Fully do I consent to these words of a brother much loved in the Lord; and though I may go a little into details on the subject, nothing I trust may at all arise to contend with this judgment. But some have judged that inquiry into these details has been evaded, or at least that the word of God concerning them has been treated carelessly; and confidence upon this ground ought not to be lightly shaken. For though it may be true that, in the progress of our thoughts upon them, haste has been betrayed, and conclusions have either been assumed unguardedly, asserted too strongly, or adopted merely from the teaching of others, yet the sole and supreme authority of scripture has been, at least intentionally, upheld; and not a jot or tittle of it treated with a willfully careless mind. This, indeed, we would say, and seek for happy common confidence herein. But let me add, what I believe is very important also, that while scripture alone is to form all our thoughts, it is also to give to our minds the relative place and proportion of the different branches, if I may so speak, of divine knowledge. As to the knowledge, then, of prophetic truth, it is like every other branch to have only its due measure of importance given to it.

And upon this I would observe, that when in the course of his teaching Paul comes to touch upon it, he merely says, "I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant," (Rom. 11)—a style, surely, which he would not and could not have used, had he been about to propound some of the essential parts of gospel or saving truth. But not only is its proportionate value to be thus considered, but also seasonableness in the pursuit of this knowledge. The intercourse of the Lord with Nicodemus shows us this; for the Lord would not meet his inquiry or desire after heavenly mysteries, till the state of his own soul was called into question and settled. Paul's treatment of the Corinthians intimates the same; for he would not find them, carnal and walking as men as they were, with that hidden wisdom which was seasonable only for the perfect, (1 Cor. 2, 3).

And again, I observe that there is to be a measure in our expectations about this knowledge. For it is told us that our present knowledge compared with what it shall be, is that of mere childhood, that we know only in part, and see as through a glass darkly. (1 Cor. 13) And Peter intimates the same. For while he speaks of the prophetic word as a light or a lamp, he gives us to know that the lamp does not shed the morning, for the day-dawn is to spring in another season. (2 Peter 1) And it is morally important to remember, that our expectations are to be thus measured, for it will help us to a lowly mind, and rebuke a spirit of authority and self-complacency.

But then, I fully grant the value of prophetic knowledge. It has been again and again used to verify the claims of Jesus, and affirm our holy faith. It is of use to nourish right affections, and a godly mind. It feeds our hopes. It secures us (under the Holy Ghost) against the working of Satan and his deceits; it prepares us for the opening circumstances of the world, so that we may not be surprised by them; and it teaches us something of our dignity as saints, by letting us see, how the Lord entrusts us with His secrets, and brings us into greater nearness to Himself.

These are among the blessings to our souls which attach to this knowledge. And if I hint at the measure of importance to be given to it, the expectations to be indulged respecting it, or that there is to be a season for pursuing it, I am not daring for a moment to discourage it: that would be the enemy's work. It was the communicator of prophetic light, whom "the prince of the kingdom of Persia" would have kept from Daniel. (chapter. 10)

And let me say, that a habit of thoughtful reading of every passage, I would also cultivate.

But there may be error on the one side, as well as on the other. If the imaginative tendency of some minds is to be watched, so has the literal or exact method of others. It was an error of too much exactness in interpretation to say, "how can this man give us his flesh to eat;" because Jesus had been speaking of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. It was an error of too much liberty in interpretation to say, "that disciple should not die;" because Jesus had said, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" This is so, I believe, but I pass it, desiring now, in the first place, to notice the principal scriptures, on the authority of which it is judged by many, that we should give up the hope that the Lord may return from heaven to meet the saints in the air at any time, or the thought that the moment of that return is not made necessarily dependent on events not yet transpired: and then, secondly, though briefly, to notice the grounds on which that thought rests. May we all be conscious, in handling the precious things of God, that we have no credit of our own to sustain, and no opinions of our own to promote. May we tremble at His word, as well as rejoice in it, surrender our minds to it through the Spirit, and seek the profit and joy of all the saints. And may the Spirit who dwells in us, keep our hearts in holy charity and like-mindedness continually, Psa. 110:1. It has been said that this passage forbids the thought, that the Lord Jesus can leave His present seat in heaven, till all the earth is put in readiness for His treading down His enemies, and executing vengeance on the matured wickedness or lawlessness of the world.

If this be just interpretation, surely I must grant that this scripture witnesses against the thought, that nothing now hinders the Lord's return from heaven to meet the saints in the air. But we must patiently consider it, and in doing so, I think I have the warrant of scripture itself for more than questioning this. And here let me say, or rather remember what all of us would readily admit, that scripture must always be read in the light of scripture. In other words we must act on this principle, "it is written again." The Lord Jesus, when tempted, did not answer the tempter by telling him that he had not quoted scripture exactly, but by saying that there were other scriptures to be listened to also. The

latter light must be consulted. (See 1 Cor. 5:9, 10.) As to this very distinguished verse in Psa. 110, the inquiry is—does this language hinder the Lord leaving the seat He then took, till the moment of His exercising the power here pledged to Him? It teaches us, that His next action in the earth shall be that of taking vengeance; but does it teach us that He is to do nothing in heaven till then, but sit on the right hand of God? I believe not, on two reasons drawn from the light of other words of God.

The word of the Holy Ghost is commenting on this, is τὸ λοιπὸν “from henceforth,” and not “ἐκεῖ” “there” (Heb. 10:12, 13). That is, we are told that all along the time till the promise be made good, He would be expecting; but we are not told that He would be seated in His then place while thus expecting.

In entire accordance with this suggestion, which we get from this passage, we find that His sitting has been interrupted, for Stephen saw Him standing, (Acts 7) and John saw Him walking among the candlesticks in Asia, taking a book, descending to set His foot on sea and land, and then standing on Mount Zion with 144,000. (Rev. 1; 5:10; 14) This is all consistent. And if He come to meet His saints in the air, there will be no more violence done Psa. 110:1, than when He filled those actions which Stephen and John witnessed. So that rightly to interpret that inspired verse, (Psa. 110:1) I get two inspired commentaries. I get Heb. 10:13, which leads me to know that His present expectation is not linked with His sitting, but simply with the interval from the time of the promise to its accomplishment: and I get such passages as Acts 7:56, which lead me to see that His sitting has been interrupted.

All this is very simple, as I judge; but the passage is so full of meaning and value to our souls, that it invites and will excuse a further meditation.

The death, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, are spoken of under two very distinct characters, or looked at in two different lights.

The death is treated of as that of the Lamb of God for us sinners, inflicted by the righteous gracious hand of God Himself, accomplishing the remission of our sins. The resurrection is treated of as flowing from such a death, and furthering the ends of blessing to us; and so is the ascension. (See Rom. 4:25; 8:34; Heb. 8:1.)

The death is also considered as having been endured at the hand of man his wickedness and unmixed enmity to God. In such character, the Lord continually anticipates His death, and speaks of it in the gospel. (See Matt. 16; 17:20; Mark 8; 9:10; Luke 9; 18) His resurrection is also spoken of in each of those passages, and is anticipated no doubt in harmony with this character of His death, and, therefore, not as resurrection for our blessing as sinners, but for His vindication as wronged and rejected by man. (See also Acts 17:31.) And so also as to His ascension. As the death was at the hand of wicked men, and as the resurrection was a vindication of Jesus, so the ascension was the exaltation of Jesus in order to capacitate Him, so to speak, to execute the judgment upon wicked man. The figure of the stone made the head of the corner in heaven, for the purpose of falling and grinding the enemy to powder, sets forth this truth. (See Matt. 21)

Now Psa. 110:1 is the same. It is Jehovah welcoming Christ, after His Rejection here, to heaven, promising Him rest in that bright and holy place, that place of all honor and power, till the due season come for His putting His enemies as the footstool for His feet. And on the ground of this solemn truth, Peter warns the whole house of Israel to take care how they still reject Jesus (Acts 2:36); as Jesus afterward warns Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:5.) The ascension of the Lord is thus noticed in Psa. 110:1. Jehovah undertakes to maintain Jesus in the place of honor and power, till the day of public vindication and vengeance come. This is the view of the great fact of the ascension given there. It is not looked at as for the saints, but as against the world. It is Jesus, exalted in defiance of man, and not in behalf of sinners. And it does not hinder His acting for His people, or His sympathy with them. That word could suffer no wrong—His present vindication, in defiance of His enemies, will suffer no abatement, by Jesus rising from His seat at the right hand of God, either at the martyrdom of Stephen, or His coming down to meet Saul on the road to Damascus, or to meet His ascending saints in the air, or being present at the celebration of His own marriage supper; though such acts might take place before His enemies be made His footstool. His washing His disciples' feet, and preparing mansions for them in the Father's house, even now, are not at variance with His constant session at the right hand of God in the real divine sense of Psa. 110:1. Heb. 10:13, shows us the affection with which the Lord Jesus seated Himself in this appointed place of honor and power, or (to speak of the manner of men) how He understood the words of Jehovah in Psa. 110:1. He heard them as a promise of vengeance upon His enemies, and expected accordingly. He did not know the time, but He did the truth of the promise; and He therefore expected, and would expect: be the time long or short, He was kept by it in prospect of the day of vengeance. This, I must say, forbids our impressing such a sense on the word “until.” In every day's intercourse with one another, we use this word “until” as meaning “in prospect of” —a sense, which it is manifest the Spirit simply puts on it in 1 Tim. 6:14, and several kindred passages; where Paul did not intend to say Timothy was to continue in his ministry, up to the very moment of the Lord's return in glory, but was merely urging him to a faithful discharge of that ministry in prospect of such return, come when it may. He was speaking morally and not prophetically—to the conscience, and not to the mere intelligence of Timothy. He was stirring up his diligence, and not instructing him in the circumstances of the second glorious advent of Jesus. But I pass from this.

Rom. 11:25. The next scripture to which I will refer, is suggested by the preceding, because it depends on the value of the same word “until.” (ἕως)

This passage, strictly read, only tells us that the Lord will not deal with “the blindness of Israel,” till He has ended His work with “the fullness of the Gentiles.” It does not determine that He is to enter on the second of these actions, immediately on His closing the first. But even if that be implied, it does not interfere with any previous thoughts we may have had; because, as I have been just reminded by another, all of us own that the Spirit will begin to move the hearts of the remnant in Israel, when the moment thus marked off arrives. So far, all is consistent, and our thoughts and judgments quite in common. But on the authority of this verse, it has been asked, can we conceive that Israel will incur their time of thickest darkness (as they will when they consent to the pretensions of the willful king,) at a period subsequent to the taking of the saints out of the world; and therefore subsequent to the coming in of the fullness of the Gentiles: while this verse so clearly intimates that their darkness or blindness lasts only up to the time of the coming in of the fullness of the Gentiles.

This scripture is surely most worthy of being strongly pressed on our attention, on such a subject as the present. But I must still inquire from the whole book of God, whether the conclusion drawn from it is sanctioned by the great standard and test of all conclusions. Now I find in Gal.

3 this language, "the law was added because of transgressions, till" (ἄχρι) &c. We all glory in knowing that our blessed Lord is the Seed here anticipated; and when I remember that, and then bethink me what His life was, I find that after the Seed did come, the law both exacted and received its fullest, nay, its only answer; and by that Seed was magnified and made honorable. The very Seed Himself, when He came, said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." And the law was discharged only by the death of the Seed. (Rom. 7:4; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:14). And if the law only received its highest honor and fullest vindication, after that Seed had come, there is divine or scriptural analogy to warrant our saying that the blindness of Israel may be the thickest after the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. The error is altogether in our own minds. I need not say that, save for the joy of justifying the oracles of God; for wisdom is justified of her children. The scripture needs no apology nor defense from us, but the error is in our own minds. We have not the divine method. We are accurate after a human model merely. And I am sure that in Rom. 11:25, the Holy Ghost was only marking out large dispensational truths; taking the great landmarks, by the hand of the apostle, in the vast scenery which lay before him, and leaving it, if I may so speak, to be surveyed more particularly by others, if the Lord of the country should so please it. For such had been the divine method from the beginning. The words of the prophets must open to let in the further revelations which we get through the apostles. I need not instance this; it is known too well among us. A paper, entitled "Things New and Old," in the "Christian Witness," gives full illustration of this. And I am sure that it is so in these passages from Gal. 3 and Rom. 11. Am I offended by finding that the law was making its fullest claims and receiving its highest honors, after the period to which Gal. 3:19 refers? Not at all. I only learn by this, that the apostle is speaking of grand dispensational truths, and not of exact moments of time; and I admire the divine method suggested by all this. I can delight in the extensive view, which the more distant position up to which the Spirit led me affords, as I can delight in the more minute and varied undulations, which a nearer sight gives me to discover. "Thou son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, and if they be ashamed of all that they have done, show them the form of the house." The second discovery was more minute than the first. And this is the constant way. And we are not to say, that because the Lord is graciously telling us of grand dispensational matters (as He does in Gal. 3 and Rom. 11), that therefore the whole secret is exhausted. The house was shown, but within the house there was a form and a fashion, and ordinances, and laws, and goings out, and comings in, which the more distant and earlier sight of the building itself had not discovered, but which, in due season, were all to be exhibited. (See Ezek. 42)

(To be continued)

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