

“Behold, Thy King Cometh ...”

About the time of the first appearance of our Master upon the earth, certain of the Jews were anticipating the coming of a Messiah to deliver them from the hand of Roman occupation, and restore to them their freedom. So two of his disciples spake: “we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel” (Lu. 24:21). So convinced were the Jews that Jesus was to be their champion against the imposition of Roman occupation, that at one stage they even sought to take him, and make him King by force (Jno. 6:15). And even after the resurrection of Messiah, and immediately prior to ascending in to the cloud, the Disciples asked him: “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

With this anticipation in mind, we can readily see how the hopes and aspirations of Christ’s disciples were dashed with his death. That was not at all expected by them – even though he had told them plainly enough beforehand. They expected a military champion, or mercenary to lead them in warfare against the Romans, whereas what they got was One who was meek and submissive, and who yielded himself before the Romans as a Lamb before the slaughter.

What went wrong? It was not so much their expectations of Christ that the disciples erred in, rather it was the *timing*. They did not realise that in order to wear the Coronal Wreath of Victory, the Captain of their Salvation had to firstly wear the Crown of Thorns. The Salvation that would come through him would be from the greatest enemy – even death itself, and not only the destruction of a foreign power. Yes, that destruction will indeed come, and the kingdom will be restored to Israel, and the Jews to their God – but all things according to the divine order.

In our readings today from the prophecy of Zechariah, we have a picture presented to us of our Messiah’s first coming:

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: ***behold thy King cometh unto thee ...***”

But how was their king to come? With great prowess as a mighty man of war? By no means, for the prophet continues:

“... he is just, and having salvation; ***lowly, and riding upon an ass***, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass” (Zec. 9:9).

Rather than to come unto Jerusalem as a powerful warrior sitting astride a mighty war horse, Messiah chose a colt, the foal of an ass. Being “meek and lowly in heart” (Mat. 11:29), he chose a lowly animal for his carriage into the City of the Great King. In these things, we see a pattern of behaviour for us to follow. Of the Master it is written that he:

“thought not equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:6-8).

And this, according to the apostle in verse 5, is the Mind, or disposition of thought that we must adopt, if we would be his disciples. Whereas Moses was “very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” in his day (Num. 12:3), our Master was even more so, exhorting his disciples to “learn of me; for ***I am meek and lowly*** of heart ...” (Mat. 11:29). He “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mat. 20:28). Throughout his life, he displayed the spirit of a servant, doing his Father’s will, and devoting himself to meet the needs of those who would trust in Him. And in his death, he “laid down his life for his friends” (Jno. 15:13). We know the grace of our Master Jesus Christ, that “though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we, through his poverty might be rich” (cp 2 Cor. 8:9).

The picture portrayed to us in these verses, is not one of a mighty conqueror, or a victorious king subduing his enemies, and establishing his dominion. Rather, it is one of a suffering servant; a man of low degree, void of any natural beauty that we might desire him. In the mortal life of Messiah, we see a man “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ... he was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, he openeth not his mouth ... he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, nether was any deceit in his mouth” (Isa. 53:3, 7, 9).

But it had to be this way. In order to overcome the greatest enemy of all – death itself – Messiah had to bear in himself the same corrupting principle as those he came to save – a nature that we call “mortal” - in order to overcome it. A proud and magnificent warrior would, doubtless be pleasing to the flesh – yet even such an one would eventually succumb to the sentence of death that is passed into the physical make up of all men. He would be impotent to save men from the grave. But in Jesus the Christ, we see a true strength of character, and an ability - shared by no other man – to overcome the law of sin that was in his flesh (Rom. 8:3). One of his Titles is “*El Gibbor*” (Isa. 9:6), or “*Mighty Warrior*,” an appellation which describes his warfare, not after the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Even as “the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh” (Gal. 5:17), our Redeemer was led of the Spirit to overcome evil by doing good, taking him through the grave to emerge victorious, having destroyed that which has the power of death. “though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God” (2 Cor. 13:4).

Though the disciples had a distorted view of what Messiah’s work was, and how it would be accomplished, there is another, equally distorted presentation of Christ by the World at this time of year, in the semi-pagan festival of Christmas. Reducing Christ to being merely a baby, meek and mild, men suppose that they have nothing to fear from him. Year after year, the babe never leaves his manger; he always remains an infant, always harmless, and inoffensive to the sensibilities of men who may, or may not believe that he ever existed. In this way, the World robs Christ of his power and authority, and reduces the idea of him coming as a righteous Judge of the Earth to be but an old-fashioned theory held by those few eccentric individuals who also believe he will one day return. This is not the picture of Christ as presented by Scripture. Though he had a humble beginning, and a lowly mortal life, he shall come again with power and great glory: “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thes.1:7-8).

That is the testimony of the Spirit. Try showing this passage to those who sing “*Away In A Manger*,” and see what kind of response the flesh shows against such things! Far from seeking the bread of life, they will almost certainly balk at such ideas, condemning those who teach them as “extreme”, “unloving” and stirrers up of trouble. For those who sing “*O little town of Bethlehem*,” show them how the Bible passage in question describes Christ as “Ruler in Israel” and being “Great unto the ends of the earth” (Mic. 5:2). Show the Carol Singers these things, and watch them melt away with active disinterest, as snow before the morning sun. Yea, the flesh can cope with “baby Jesus, meek and mild,” for such a picture is non-threatening, unobtrusive, and harmless. But speak about the “judgements” and “wrath to come”, and the flesh being immediately challenged, will either seek to resist the teaching of such ideas, or (more likely) will seek a quick exit, that they might be soon forgotten. “Baby Jesus, meek and mild” is all that men of the flesh can take, and as a smattering of religion amongst the tinsel wreaths, cut down trees, and flashing lights, even that is minimised to the point of being just part of the drapery of a semi-pagan festival, designed in the main, to be for the fulfilment of the desires of the flesh.

That this is so can also be seen when we come to consider the god of tinsel-time, who masquerades under the names “Father Christmas” or “Santa Claus”. Here is modern-day idolatry, and plainly so. Rather than to teach the children **that “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights”** (Jas. 1:17), folk instead teach them that an immortal, omnipresent and omniscient benevolent old man brings gifts to them each year. By this means, they substitute the position of Yahweh for that of “Santa,” and all the paraphernalia that goes along with it. Whilst it may, to many so-called

“Christians” be but harmless entertainment for the children, there is no evading the Biblical view that it is subverting the proper place of the Father of Lights in their hearts, and is therefore idolatry.

Indeed, this aspect can also be seen when we consider that in the lead-up to Christmas, children are encouraged to *want*. Rather than to be content with such things as they have (Heb. 13:5), they are positively seduced by the wiles of modern media to want more. Compiling lists to *Santa*, they are brought up to want the trivial things with which they can feed their growing desires, and without a recognition that “covetousness is idolatry” (Col. 3:5), or that the real source of all that they have is the “Father of Lights”.

So we find then, that modern Christendom, not unlike the Jews of old, has a grossly distorted view of the True Messiah. The Jews did not consider the humiliation of Messiah, which had to come before the Glory; and Christendom today is ever astray in reducing the Coming Judge and King of all the earth to being but a tiny inoffensive baby, “meek and mild,” harmless and unthreatening.

But rather than to gloat over the misunderstandings of others, in a self-righteous feeling that we know better than them, we ought to humble ourselves under the knowledge of Israel’s Saviour. A knowledge of the Truth of the matter is not an end in itself: that knowledge must be exercised in works that show forth shining of the Word of Life to the darkened generations in which we live. We know that Christ is soon to return, to execute the judgment written, and rather than to lift ourselves up in pride against those who do not share our understanding, we ought rather to consider ourselves, and how we will fare in that day.

There were those in the days of Amos who desired the “day of Yahweh” to come, assuming that in that day, they would be commended and not condemned. Forgetting that they stood by Grace only, they trusted in their own works to deliver them from the wrath to come. But for them, that day would be a day of darkness and gnashing of teeth, and not of light and splendour:

“Woe unto you that desire the day of Yahweh! To what end is it for you? The day of Yahweh is darkness, and not light ... shall not the day of Yahweh be darkness and not light? Even very dark, and no brightness in it?” (Amos 5:18,20).

“Wherefore let he that thinketh he standeth take heed, let he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12) is the exhortation of the Apostle. The case of Peter provides an example for us to heed: he thought that he would stand fast in whatever circumstance would be brought to bear upon him. “though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee” (Mat. 26:35) were his confident words. Yet when the came time, he denied his Master three times, in order to save himself from being condemned with Christ. Doubtless, this experience remained with Peter for the rest of his life, and would be a real impetus for him to follow the Master in all his ways, even sharing his death of crucifixion.

So then, there is a day to come when Messiah shall be revealed from heaven to judge the world. The prophecy of Zechariah, in the 9th Chapter speaks of that time to come: “**he shall speak peace unto the heathen:** and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even unto the ends of the earth” (Zech. 9:10).

This reference to the Master speaking “peace” to the heathen give us an interesting insight into the events that will transpire when he comes. When Israel of old marched forward to take possession of the Land, they were told:

“When thou comest nigh unto a city to fight against it, **then proclaim peace unto it.** And it shall be, if it make thee answer of peace, and open unto thee, then it shall be, that all the people that is found therein shall be tributaries unto thee, and they shall serve thee. And if it will make no peace with thee, but will make war against thee, then thou shalt besiege it: and when Yahweh thy Elohim hath delivered it into thy hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword ...” (Deut. 20:10-14).

So it was, that the nations were given an opportunity to submit themselves willingly, and be tributaries to Israel. From the words of Zechariah, it would seem that his pattern is to be repeated in the future. Messiah shall come, and “speak peace to the heathen”, who will then have a choice of whether or not they should submit to his reign, or rebel and be destroyed. Many, we are told, will not submit, but will rather fight against the Righteous Judge, bringing his rebuke upon themselves: “he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off ...” (Mic. 4:3). Other nations, however, shall submit, and bring gifts to the Master as tokens of their servitude: “The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts”. But whether or not the nations shall readily submit, the outcome will be the same: “All kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him” (Psa. 72:10-11). At the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that he is Master, to the glory of Yahweh (Phil. 2:11).

Truly in that day, the kingdom shall be restored to Israel with Messiah reigning over the 12 tribes thereof (Luke 1:32-33). His dominion shall extend globally, to “the ends of the earth,” and Jerusalem, as “the city of the Great King” shall become a praise in all the earth. In that day, there shall be no misunderstanding as to the nature of the King. He will be neither “baby Jesus, meek and mild”, or a mercenary only intent on warring against a foreign power. He will be the Son of Yahweh with Power and Great Glory, having led captivity captive, and receiving gifts for men. He, with his saints, shall “execute the judgement written” (Psa. 149:9), and destroy “the throne of the kingdoms.” He will “destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen, and will overthrow the chariots and those that ride in them” (Hag. 2:22). Having the keys of the grave (Rev. 1:18), he shall cause his brethren, who have sought to be like him during the days of their probation, to physically bear the image of the heavenly, their bodies being “fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21).

When Messiah appears in glory therefore, the situation will be very different to that at his first appearance. No longer being under the dominion of death, and bearing the weakness of mortality, he shall be altogether glorious, showing forth the splendour of immortality. And whereas his work at the beginning was focused in the main, on preaching the glad tidings that pertain to the coming age, when he comes again, “he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off” (Mic. 4:3). The world at large will not be expecting the Great King to come. To them, he shall “come as a thief” (Mat. 24:43-45). What of ourselves? Only we can know.

We, therefore, who long for the coming of our Master, and who love his appearing, ought to take heed, having our loins girded, our lamps shining, and our vessels full of the oil of the Spirit-Word. Both Jew and Gentile come together in their lack of understanding in “the things concerning the name of Jesus Christ,” and we must take heed, lest we also fail in this regard. Let us devote ourselves to searching the Testimony of the Word, so that there will be no misunderstanding, and we ourselves, prepared for the coming of our Master.

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