

A.B. Simpson:

"Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God." (2 Peter 3:12.)

We have the apostle Peter's testimony to the preciousness of Christ, the blessedness of trial, the calling and life of the believer, the spirit and reward of true ministry, and now it remains to hear what he has to tell us about the coming of the Lord. His first epistle repeatedly refers to this blessed hope as a matter of course, but his second letter might almost be called a special treatise on the Lord's Coming, and a manual of warning and teaching peculiarly for the last days.

His testimony is the more impressive from the fact that he tells us in the beginning of his second letter that the Lord has shown him that he is not to live to see the advent, but is shortly to put off his earthly tabernacle. He speaks of it, therefore, under no bias of eager personal enthusiasm, but in the most calm and disinterested spirit, and gives them the message of the Lord as one who is to stand face to face to give his own account to God. This leaves no doubt, whatever, that Peter in no degree confounded the coming of the Lord with the experience of death. His going to be with Christ was a very different matter from the coming of Christ for His own. It would seem that up to a certain period, at least, even Paul had almost expected personally to live to meet the Lord in the air, and even John writes in the first person in expressing the blessed hope of seeing Him when He should appear. But Peter has no such expectation. Therefore, his message is an entirely disinterested one, and is one of the Lord's last words to us, the people of the last days. Let us gather up these solemn and impressive teachings about the theme of all others most momentous in these crisis times.

#### I. GENERAL REFERENCES TO THE LORD'S APPEARING IN HIS FIRST EPISTLE

In 1 Peter 1: 7, he speaks of it as the goal of hope for the tried and troubled ones, and he cheers them by the assurance that the trial of their faith shall be "found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." Again, in the first chapter and the fifth verse he speaks of the salvation that is "ready to be revealed in the last time." It is only when Christ shall come that we shall fully know the length and breadth, the height and depth of the great salvation. It is hidden now; then it will be revealed. Again in the first chapter and the thirteenth verse he tells us of the "grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." This is the same thought as expressed in the last citation. In the fourth chapter and the thirteenth verse he assures the martyrs of Rome, who were about to be made blazing lamps, by Nero's cruel order, to light the streets of Rome, that when their Master's "glory shall be revealed," they shall be made "glad also with exceeding joy." In the fifth chapter and the fourth verse, he holds out to the faithful minister the coming of the Lord as the time of his great reward, for he says, "When the chief Shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away." And in the fourth chapter and the seventh verse he addresses to the whole flock of Christ this serious admonition: "The end of all things is at hand: be you therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."

Thus we see that the coming of Christ was a sort of undertone in all his messages, and is constantly assumed as the ground of warning and comfort, of faith and hope, of holy living and faithful service -- this, the one supreme incentive and inspiration of everyday life, "unto the coming of the Lord."

#### II. THE TRANSFIGURATION A FORESHADOWING OF THE PAROUSIA

Passing now to the second epistle, with its more explicit teaching on this subject, he first tells them that the transfiguration of the Lord was a rehearsal and foreshadowing of the greater event of the Lord's Parousia. He uses this very term, which has come to be almost the technical term for the coming of Jesus for His saints, when he says, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming [parousia] of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount." (2 Peter 1: 16-18.)

This word, parousia, describes the first stage of the Lord's coming. Literally it means presence," and it denotes, not the sudden and glorious epiphany in the clouds, but the gentle and secret appearing of the Bridegroom for His Bride, the presence which is already drawing near, and which, ere long, shall be fully manifested to His waiting ones as they are caught away when He comes as suddenly "as a thief" to gather His treasures from the earth.

Now the Transfiguration was a rehearsal, we have said, of all this. First, it manifested the Lord Himself in His glory, as He shall come in that day. Next, it brought the risen dead, in the person of Moses, to represent the great multitude who sleep in Jesus who shall be brought forth in resurrection glory at His coming. And further, it revealed the presence of the translated ones, who, without death, shall be caught up to meet Him, represented on the Mount by Elijah. All the parties are there, and the steps that lead to it are beautifully significant of the coming parousia. First, the little company, Peter and James and John, are detached and drawn a little closer to the Master. Then they rise with Him a little higher through the darkness of the night as they slowly ascend the heights of Hermon, and then, quietly, imperceptibly, while they almost slept, the glory has descended, and the Transfiguration is there. So He is calling apart His little flock today; so He is taking them nearer and higher in the darkening shadows of these last times; and so, some night or morn, suddenly they will find that He has come and that they are with Him in glory. Oh, that we may understand and be ever ready for that happy consummation!

### III. THE WORD OF PROPHECY BETTER THAN THE TRANSFIGURATION

Next he tells them, chapter one, nineteenth verse, that, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto you do well that you take heed, as unto a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." That is, we have something better even than the Transfiguration scene which only the three disciples saw. We have the whole Word of God, which is a Word of Prophecy, its one burden being the coming of the Lord, and which is more sure than any vision or personal revelation that we could have. From Genesis to Revelation this Word continually unfolds the blessed hope. Even in Eden it was foreshadowed by the cherubim, the tree of life, and the lordship of man over nature. In antediluvian times Enoch was sent with this word of prophecy to proclaim to his age that "the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints." Abraham saw this day afar and understood his covenant as reaching on to millennial times, for the land was given to him for an everlasting possession. Jacob foresaw the coming of Shiloh and the going of the nations to Him. Joseph died giving commandment concerning his bones, because he wanted to have a part in the better resurrection. David sang of it in his triumphant songs. All the prophets from Isaiah to Malachi are crowded with this message. Daniel gives us the whole panorama of history, with this one supreme outlook, and John takes up the thread where Daniel left it, in his grander Apocalypse, and finishes the scroll of prophecy with the repeated echo, "Behold, I come quickly!" The teachings of Jesus and His apostles continually repeat the message, and the whole Bible is a "more sure word of prophecy" from beginning to end, concerning the coming of the Lord. Let us so study it, understand it, and use it, for "blessed is he that read, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." (Revelation 1: 3.)

### IV. THE LORD'S COMING AN OBJECT LESSON

Next, the Apostle Peter gives us an object lesson of the Lord's coming from the Fall and the days of Noah and Lot. There are two passages; 2 Peter 2: 4-9, "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds;) The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished."

And the other one is 2 Peter 3: 5-7. "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

These passages combine to teach us:

1. That a great catastrophe has more than once already overtaken this sinful world, and give us evidence that such a catastrophe may yet await ungodly men. The very strata of the globe tells the story of the Flood; and the Dead Sea yonder, as it rolls its sluggish waves over the ruins of Gomorrah, is one of the gates of hell, and both proclaim the coming of a day of judgment.
2. The elements were ready for the Flood. The waters were there, awaiting God's hand; and so the element of fire is stored up now, and only needs the touch of His hand to involve the terrestrial system in final

conflagration.

3. The wickedness of man ripened as the judgment drew near; and so it is ripening again for the last cataclysm. "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man." As it was in the days of Lot, so shall it be once more. The crimes of violence and blood, the defilements of lust and unnatural crime, these are the increasing signs of our age, and these were the provocations of God's former judgment. The very shadows of our time are tinged with rays of light, for they betoken the coming day.

4. The longsuffering God waited in the days of Noah, and gave the race one hundred and twenty years of warning and mercy. So today, as Peter says, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise . . . but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3: 9.) This is the reason that His coming waits.

5. The catastrophe came at last, sudden, swift, irretrievable; and so it will be then. It was too late to enter the ark when the flood came, and so, "When they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." (1 Thessalonians 5: 3.)

6. A remnant was saved. "Noah the eighth person," Peter says, was saved, and he "delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked." And so once more shall it be true: "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." The little flock shall be saved. They shall be caught away before the tempest breaks. That is a thrilling word in the Master's announcement of His coming. "Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory." (Luke 21: 27.) But remember, beloved, that the emphatic word is "they"™. It is not for you. God grant that you may never see this awful sight, for "then shall all tribes of the earth mourn." You should be nearer to His side that day. Your word is: "Watch, therefore, and pray always, that you may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass and to stand before the Son of man." You are to escape these things. They are to see them, but you shall be above them all.

## V. THE FINAL CATASTROPHE -- HOW AWFUL IS THE PICTURE

1. It will be sudden. "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." (2 Peter 3: 10.)

2. It will be awful. "The heavens shall pass away with great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." The word here translated "melt" means "dissolved." The thought is not that the elements shall be destroyed, but they will be melted, dissolved, and then reformed.

3. It will be by fire as once it was by flood.

4. It will be followed by "new heavens and a new earth; wherein dwells righteousness." This is the Palingenesis, the beginning again, the new creation, "the times of restitution of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began," as Peter said once before, in Acts 3:21.

## VI. PETER'S ANSWER TO THE OBJECTIONS OF THE SCOFFER AND THE SKEPTIC

The apostle tells us that in the last days, this old prophetic Word will be rejected. The cultured science and philosophy of these times will not believe anything so absurd. Certain schools of science have been telling us that nature is uniform and invariable, and that there is no room for a crisis, for the principle of evolution has been established, and one thing just grows out of another, "and all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." This is a fine statement of evolution, and Peter's prophecy has already been fulfilled in the teaching of these doctrines in our day. That is just what men are saying. But Peter answers them from the simple fact that nature is not invariable, that once already the waters have overwhelmed the land in the deluge, and that once again the pent-up fires of the earth's own bosom or the elements of combustion that fill the universe, will overwhelm the earth and heavens. Science furnishes her own answer. We know that it is one of the late discoveries of scientific philosophy that motion is convertible into heat. The coming of a meteor to our atmosphere sets the meteor immediately on fire. Were one of yonder worlds to strike the atmosphere of this globe, long before it reached the solid earth, the air would be a blaze of destruction. Yes, they tell us truly that were the earth's own motion to be arrested for an instant, that instant would set the whole earth on fire by the sudden shock of her swift movement of a million miles a day. Nay, from yonder heavens science has furnished the testimony of just such conflagration and dissolutions in the realms of space. Years ago, in the constellation Perseus, there blazed into prominence a star of the first magnitude and shone for many nights brighter than any

other star in the heavens, and then it faded away, and it was pursued by the astronomers into invisibility. Several times since just such startling things have happened in yonder sky. In the constellations Auriga and Bootes, two such remarkable stars suddenly blazed before the eye of the telescope and then disappeared, and later one of them was rediscovered in an entirely different form floating on the sky as a planetary nebula. What did these things mean? Probably a great sun, perhaps with his attendant planets, burned out in some awful conflagration, and then reformed on a new plan, even as the earth and the heavens shall be dissolved, and then made new. Some day, from yonder stars, they shall behold just such a spectacle. This earth shall blaze into awful brightness, and then shall fade away. New scenes shall afterwards arise, perhaps not only this planet, but also on the larger system of worlds of which it is to be in the coming ages, perhaps, the center.

## VII. THE PRINCIPLE OF TIME IN CONNECTION WITH THE COMING OF THE LORD

The apostle lays down a great principle with regard to our calculations of dates and chronologies. "Beloved," he says, "be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." (2 Peter 3: 8.) That is, we cannot fix the date of the Lord's coming by our chronometers or chronologies. It is fixed rather by spiritual conditions. One of our days may hasten it a thousand years, and one of our decades may mean little or nothing to bring it near. For a thousand years the Church slept, and the coming of the Lord did not move forward perceptibly. In these last times it is being intensely hastened. God says, "I will shorten the days"; and we may help to shorten them.

## VIII. THE PRACTICAL PREPARATION FOR THE LORD'S COMING

Finally, this leads us to practical preparation for the Lord's coming which devolves upon us in view of these considerations. How may we hasten it?

1. It should be with us a matter of earnest longing and personal hope. "Looking for," means longing for and expecting. Do we "love his appearing"? Are we longing for the Bridegroom?

2. We can hasten it by preparing the world for His advent. "Hasting unto," literally means "hasting forward the coming of the Lord." We can do this by sending forth the Gospel as a witness, for when this shall have been accomplished in all the world, then shall the end come.

3. By personal purity and spiritual holiness we can be ready for His coming. "What manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" (2 Peter 3: 11.) "Seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless." (2 Peter 3: 14.) This is the personal preparation that He claims from each one of us. It calls for the utmost diligence and vigilance. The language is very suggestive: "That you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless." Do not wait until the signal comes to get ready. Be ready. Be found of Him, not flurried and alarmed, but calm, waiting, ready and longing for His call.

4. "Account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation." That is, remember it means salvation to some that you love and that He loves, and some that He wants to have in that happy company. He is giving you another chance to bring them in. Let it be your loving and intense concern that none shall be left out, but that through the long eternity to come their heaven shall make your heaven complete.

5. Finally, the beautiful phrase, "Until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." (2 Peter 1: 19), suggests the inner revelation of Jesus Christ to His waiting Bride through the Holy Ghost, as the deepest and dearest of all preparations for His coming. The day star before the day dawn. It means that inner whisper of the Master's own voice, that secret presence of His Spirit in the soul which will give intimation and intuition of His coming even before the world shall see Him. It is "Christ in you the hope of glory." O beloved, claim it, cherish it, and hearken to the whispered message, speaking tenderly, solemnly in these last days to those that are close enough to His heart to hear Him.

"Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus."