

POINTS TO PONDER

Bro. Norman Rice

Our subject suggests what we would like for you to do--ponder the points presented--consider them carefully and prayerfully. As we read the New Testament, we are impressed by the faith and hope of the early church. Faith was the foundation work, but it is their hope that is so noticeable as it is woven throughout the New Testament. With the eye of faith they looked backward to Calvary, realizing that that phase in the plan of was completed. Now they looked forward with hope for the blessings that were to come as the result of that great gift, the sacrifice of their Master. And so we detect an attitude of anticipation, seemingly an attitude of almost daily expectation. Someone was coming, something was about to happen. They know the sequel to the great event of Calvary would bring the consummation of their hopes. It was constantly referred to as "a lively hope," "that blessed hope," "this hope," "our hope," "the hope of our calling," "the hope set before us." Thus, their hope was the dominating influence in their lives.

What was this hope that so completely filled the hearts and encouraged our brethren of the early church? It was the blessed hope in "the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ." (Titus 2:13) With all their hearts they believed in Jesus Christ, in the example of his wonderful life, in the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth, in the miracles he had performed; and they believed in his sacrificial death on Calvary's cross. They believed he had triumphed over the grave even as he had foretold that he would rise the third day. And they believed he had come forth, Many of them had seen him in his various manifestations following his resurrection, and had been witnesses of his ascension to heaven.

They recalled the words of the Master, "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." (John 14:2, 3) They had heard the "two men in white apparel" say, "this same Jesus, which is taken from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." (Acts 1:11) To them, the meaning of these precious promises was clear. With simple faith they accepted their meaning—the Lord had gone, but he would come again. Thus this hope became the guiding influence in their lives, the center around which revolved all of their communion with each other and their testimony to the world.

Reviewing the New Testament one cannot escape the importance of this doctrine and that it is one of the most precious truths in the whole Bible. Someone has taken

the trouble to count the ratio of Scriptures in the New Testament that deal more or less directly with the subject of the Lord's second presence and found that one verse in every 13 refer to it. In the epistles the proportion is even greater, being 1 in 10. Everything in the early church was made to center around the return of our Lord. One cannot fail to sense the feeling of urgency on the part of the early church--that the Lord's return was near. Even the Apostles shared this feeling. For instance Peter wrote, "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." (1 Pet. 4:7) And James wrote, "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts; for the coming (presence) of the Lord draweth nigh--behold the judge standeth before the door." James 5:8. 9.

The Apostle Paul said, "brethren, the time is short." (1 Cor, 7:29) And John wrote, "Little children, it is the last times and as ye have heard that anti-Christ shall come, even now there are many anti-Christ, whereby we know it is the last time." (1 John 2:18) But we do not discount their ministry and discredit their writings because they did not discern the long period ahead. This was a difficult period for the early church. Christianity was far from popular and there was much Judaizing activity on the part of the Jews as well. Furthermore great distress and trouble were brewing. The time was not far off when Titus would lay siege to Jerusalem and utterly destroy it. Thus the feeling, "the end of all things is at hand," Perhaps they even thought it was the time of trouble which would indicate the presence of the Lord to establish His Kingdom. In fact some seemed to interpret these conditions as an indication the Lord was present, and they began to unsettle the brethren by teaching at that time that the Lord was present. Paul dealt with this problem in 2 Thess. 3:1-4, "Now with respect to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering to meet Him, we entreat you, brethren not readily to become unsettled in mind or trouble, either by any spiritual revelations or by word or letter alleged to come through us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here, Let no one in any way deceive you, for it cannot come unless the apostasy comes first, and the appearing of the man of sin." (Weymouth)

In all their exhortations, the Apostles interwove this beautiful thread of hope in the second presence. Their exhortations to be filled with the spirit; to not judge one another; to have confidence and trust; to develop love, patience and forbearance with one another;--all pointed to this blessed hope. The burden of all their exhortation to faithfulness was to the end that they "might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing (Apokalupsis—revelment) of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 1:7) Yes, it was important to the early church, but how much more important this great doctrine of the second presence is to those who are now living in the days

of the presence of the Son of Man. It should be the burden of our conversation, of our thoughts and meditation. It should cause our hearts to rejoice as never before. And has not this truth and the activity it generated been that which has united the brethren during the harvest time? In fact, has it not been the central theme of the harvest?--the reason for the harvest also--the chief reaper being present to oversee the great work of gathering his elect?

The prophet Daniel wrote, "Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days." (Dan. 12:12) In Luke 12:35-37 our Master said, "Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat and will come forth and serve them." Rev. 3:20, "-Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him, and he with me." We have received the special blessings that were to come at the culmination of the 1335 days. We have heard the knock of the prophecies and therefore have received special blessings of truth. Our returned Lord has come in and supped with us, has girded himself and spread before us a great feast of truth, things both new and old from the storehouse. And so every feature of the divine plan has been made clear as never before. Things that were old--justification, sanctification and redemption have taken on a new beauty in understanding.

Also: The doctrine of redemption, the philosophy of the ransom--how the death of Christ is justification for our sins--how his merit is imputed to us to make our sacrifice acceptable; and how that in due time when the better sacrifices are completed, his merit will be applied on behalf of the world of mankind. The meaning of the term: Body of Christ. What sanctification of the church really means. The begetting of the holy spirit. The explanation of the term "new creature" and how it differs from the old creature. Further: the understanding of the church's share in the sin offering. The call, development and glorification of the New Creation. How that the first resurrection is to bring the New Creation glorious privileges and divine blessing--glory, honor and immortality. The philosophy of God's dealings--how the Logos was made flesh and dwelt among us for the suffering of death. How that he was born of an earthly mother yet he was holy, harmless and separate from sinners. All these truths, and many more have become clearer to us. These are a cause for rejoicing--and these are an indication that our Lord is indeed present and has girded himself and is serving us from his precious

storehouse of truth, through that wine and faithful servant--the writer with the inkhorn.

In the parable of a certain nobleman that went into a far country to receive a kingdom and to return (Luke 13:12-26 and Matt, 25:14-20) our Lord indicated that his first work upon returning would be to reckon with his servants. The Lord has been judging among his people just as he said he would. This reckoning with his servants must begin with the resurrection of the sleeping saints. "For we which are alive and remain unto the presence of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep." (1 Thess. 4:15)

The first Adam was accorded a thousand year day. Almost immediately the first Adam plunged the human race into sin and death. The second Adam also has been accorded a thousand year day. Likewise the second Adam almost immediately--we believe 3 ½ years after--the beginning of this thousand year day--brought life and blotting out of sin: the resurrection of the sleeping saints and the blotting out of their sins. The Scriptures assure us that the blotting out of sin will be accomplished at the Lord's second advent--in the times of restitution. (Acts 3:19-21) The meaning is clear. The resurrection of the sleeping saints cannot begin (the first resurrection) until the second Adam's 1,000 year day (the Millennium) his reign begins. Let us note the wide distinction between the blotting out of sin and the forgiveness of sins which is now enjoyed by all who have received the imputation of the merit of Christ to cover their sins. The blotting out of sins at the second advent will be applied first to the sleeping saints, then to the balance of the saints as they are changed "in-a -moment, in the twinkling of an eye."

Not a trace of sin in any degree in any sense whatsoever will remain upon these when they share in the glorious blessing of the first resurrection. At the present time, though our sins are forgiven, we are actually imperfect, marred by sin, Continually we need the covering of the robe of Christ's righteousness. But with the resurrection changes all blemishes are gone--no longer will there be any need for the imputed righteousness. An the Apostle writes, "It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body; it is

raised a spiritual body, (1 Cor . 15:42-44) In the case of the World's sins, they will not be blotted out instantaneously "in the twinkling of an eye but will be blotted out gradually throughout the Millennial age.

We understand through the testimony of God's word that the first resurrection began in 1878, The time had then come for this great event. No longer will the saints sleep in death, but at the moment of death will be changed instantaneously. For the Apostle wrote, "Behold, I shew you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eyes at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed." (1 Cor. 15:51,52) In harmony with this, the writer of Revelation declared, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: (marking a particular time before which it would not be a blessing to die but after which it would be a blessing) yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them, (Rev. 14:13) According to the Apostle, this time would be at the "last trump," the seventh trumpet--the trump of God, As in the type the jubilee trumpet was sounded at the close of the day of atonement, so also the antitypical jubilee trumpet began to sound at the very close of the 6th days at the beginning of (early in the morning of) the 7th day and will continue to sound throughout the Millennial day. In this connection it is interesting to note that it was early "about the dawning of the day" on the 7th day when the priests blow the trumpets causing the wall of Jericho to fall, (Jos. 6:15, 16) Thus we read, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, (a shout of encouragement or incitement) and with the trump of God; (the jubilee trump, the 7th trump) and the dead in Christ shall rise first." 1 Thess. 4:16.

In the scriptures the 7th day or Millennial day is sometimes referred to as the last day. And the scriptures indicate that the resurrection will not begin until the last or millennial day. "Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again." "Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day," (John 11:24) Jesus said, "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last." (John 6:40) In addition, our attention is called to the picture of the three days. (Exod. 19:11, 12, 14-16) "And be ready

against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mt. Sinai. And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, take head to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it; whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death. And Moses went down from the mount unto the people and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes. And he said unto the people, Be ready against the third day; And it came to pass on the third day in the morning that there were thunders and lightning, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud: so that all the people that was in the camp trembled."

In this picture Moses typified Christ Jesus, the Head and the Church, his body complete. The smoke, the fire, the voices and thunderings picture the great time of trouble which will precede the inauguration of the New Covenant. The 3 days of purification in which the bounds were set about the mountain represent the period of the Gospel age from the first advent down to the glorification of the church--pictured by the going of Moses up into the mount to be the representative of the people, for the purpose of receiving God's law and to bring it down to the people. Counting the 3 days according to the days of the week—1,000 years to each day, we see that our Lord a first advent occurred early on the 5th day. The 5th day has passed, the 6th also and we are now in the early morning of the 7th or "Millennial day," Thus it is in this 3rd day "early in the morning" that Christ and the church--the antitypical Moses--is to ascend into the mountain, the kingdom of the Lord.

Again the 3rd day, Hos. 6:1, 2. "Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us; in the 3rd day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight ." Here again the 3rd day is a picture of the 7th or Millennial day giving the promise of restitution. Jesus also used the illustration of the 3rd day, "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in 3 days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, 46 years was this temple in building, and wilt thou raise it up in 3 days? But he spoke of the temple of his body." (John 2:19-21) Here again we understand these days to be of the larger week, 1,000 years to each day. Referring to the 7 creative days, each of which has

7 thousand year days, we see that Jesus died in the year 4161 of the 7th creative day. Four 1,000-year days had passed. It was early on the 5th day that the destruction of the temple of his body began with the crucifixion of the head. And this destruction of the temple has continued throughout the remainder of the 5th day and throughout the 6th day. Now we are in the beginning of the 7th day. Thus the 3rd day is symbolic of the 7th day. The body of Christ will be raised on the 3rd day, early in the morning, "God shall help her when this morning appeareth. (Psa. 46:5, margin) "God will help her at the break of dawn." (Goodspeed)

In Luke 12:37, 38 the Master gives us a clue concerning the time of his return. Vs. 38, "And if he shall come in the 2nd watch, or come in the 3rd watch, and find them so (watching, i.e.) blessed are those servants." Again we have the number 3 mentioned. How long is a watch? Let us turn to Psa. 90:4. "For a thousand years in thy sight are but an yesterday, when it is past, and an a watch in the night." Thus we see that a watch in the night represents a thousand years. Remembering the teaching of the 3rd day thus far in our lesson, we suggest the 3rd watch is synonymous with the 3rd day. Our Lord did not come in the 2nd watch but at the juncture of the 2nd and the watch-the 3rd day which as we have seen is symbolic of the Millennial day. Another reference to the 3rd day which we feel should be interpreted in the same way was the Lord's answer to Herod, "I do cures today and tomorrow, and the 3rd day I shall be perfected." (Luke 13:32) We do not see how this scripture can be interpreted in any other way than has already been suggested in our discussion. Cures and blessings of divine grace prevailed during the 5th day--the day in which our Lord and the Apostles lived, and likewise also in the 6th thousand year day. And on the 7th (the 3rd day from the 5th) his church will be raised incorruptible, his body perfected, Then cures will issue forth to mankind on a grand scale. We have great cause for rejoicing in these marvelous truths which our Lord has brought forth from his storehouse to gladden our hearts and enrich our faith. They are evidence that the promised times of restitution began with our Lord's second advent.

Another evidence is the return of favor to Israel which had a marked beginning in the year 1878, when, as a result of the Berlin Congress of

Nations, and the efforts of Lord Beaconsfield, a Jew, and also Prime minister of England, the Jews enjoyed greater privileges in the land of Palestine than had been accorded them for centuries--again they could own land in the land of their fathers. But someone might say that was a very small incident to denote the commencement of such an important aspect of God's plan. However, we suggest this incident marking the return of favor was far more prominent, more publicized than the event marking the beginning of the period of their disfavor--when our Lord declared over Jerusalem--"Behold your house is left unto you desolate." (Matt. 23:38) From this small beginning of the return of favor, we have seen the dry bones of Ezek 37 begin to put on sinews and come together --Israel is now an established nation.

Yes, with the beginning of the times of restitution, the time had come as prophesied by Isaiah to "comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God, speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins." (Isa- 40:1, 2) This did not mean that all her trouble had passed but that her double had ended--her period of disfavor had come to an end. As Israel was repeatedly in trouble, in captivity, during her period of favor, it should not surprise us to find her in difficulty after her favor returned. Prophesying concerning the trouble to come upon Jerusalem, Jesus said, "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled." "Times of the Gentiles"--Kairos, a fixed time, a period of specific length. We have seen this prophecy fulfilled, Israel is no longer subject to the Gentile nations. Hence, more scriptural testimony that we are in the times of restitution.

We know that when Adam was sentenced to death, a curse was pronounced--a promise of hardship. (Gen. 3:16-19) We have seen a turning back of the curse to a marked degree. In much of the world today man does not toil from sunrise to sunset. The 7 hour day is becoming commonplace, a 5 day week the accepted rule. Child labor and sweat shops have been abolished. Labor saving devices have removed much of the back-breaking toil, Women have obtained a more equal status with men; to name only a few of the blessings which have come to mankind since 1874. It should not be difficult for us to accept these blessings as further indications that we are in the times of

restitution. Consider with us for a moment the case of a young man possessing the full vigor of youth, having a brilliant mind--noted for his scholastic ability. Everything to live for--a brilliant career stretched before him. Suddenly through a tragic circumstance he is taken in death. What a great loss. Now the heights of success he might have attained would not be known--his potential was lost. So it was when Adam plunged the human race into death. Not only was life lost, but the potential of a perfect man as well. Thus the achievements that might have been possible for perfect man in a perfect environment were lost through sin. Imagine the achievements possible for a perfect man in science and the arts.

Thus we have a cause for rejoicing when today we see part of that potential now being realized in the marvelous inventions and scientific achievements that have come as a result of the increased knowledge promised with our Lord's return. And we further rejoice in the realization that in due time this knowledge will all be turned to peaceful purposes for the benefit and blessing of mankind. What a blessing we receive when we consider how much the Lord has done, how great are the evidences of his return.

A reflection upon history helps us to view these matters from God's standpoint and appreciate more fully the element of time in the outworking of God's plan. Furthermore, as we become acquainted with our Father through His word, we see that many times he "callet those things which be not as though they were." (Rom. 4:17) Thus we are able to see that the chronological dates we have, mark the beginnings of events and not the full accomplishment of those features of God's plan. Reflecting on these beautiful truths causes us to rejoice all the more in the glorious proclamation we are privileged to herald forth--"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" (Isa. 52:7) This message of truth has been going forth during this harvest time--a message of comfort and hope. A message of peace--"they shall beat their swords into plowshares"--a message of salvation--"a ransom for all to be testified in due time."

Could we believe this scripture refers to the feet of Jehovah? We think not, for the thought of Jehovah's feet speaking is without precedent. Instead we read statements like "my word that goeth forth out of my mouth," etc. Nor could we suggest that this scripture should read "Thy God shall reign." The concordance fails to support such a rendition. The word "reigneth" is from the word Malak which means to ascend the throne. Reason also suggests otherwise. This glorious proclamation is one that is peculiar to the last members of the body of Christ this side of the veil --pictured by the "feet of him." The feet members are the watchmen of vs. 8 and they are raising their voices and singing the glorious message of Isa. 52:7 in the harvest time. If the proclamation were "thy God shall reign" how would this be a special message given by the feet members? How would this proclamation differ from the proclamation of the early church --for did not the apostles declare that he shall reign? And we sing this glad song with Divine Authority, by Divine commission; for the "feet of him" are pictured on the mountains--not subject to the direction of earthly kingdoms in their glorious proclamation.

The Psalmist declares "the high praises of God be in their mouths and a two edged sword in their hand." Thus with the two edged sword in our hands (the message of truth) we are privileged to cooperate with our Lord and the risen saints, our Lord being pictured as having the two edged sword not in his hands, but in his mouth. (Rev. 19:5) Here a distinction as to the degree of delegated authority is made--while a similarity in the work is shown. Thus, as one by one the saints in the harvest time pass beyond the veil there is no interruption in their work--"they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." (Rev. 14:13) With the strength and power afforded with their glorious divine body, their work is no longer laborious. This honor, this privilege have all the saints, and the ultimate end is the destruction of all unrighteousness. The two edged sword is the only weapon to be used; "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds." (2 Cor. 10:4; see also Eph. 6:17)

These many years this glorious proclamation of truth--liberty to the captives, salvation and peace--not only has stirred the hearts of the consecrated and served in the gathering of His elect; but the light of

truth has also had a profound influence on mankind, bringing to light oppression and creating a desire for better things to come. Therefore we rejoice in the declared fact and purpose of his reign.

The Apostle Paul wrote (1 Cor. 15:25, 26) "For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet, The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." Here the Apostle tells us the purpose of Jesus' reign --the destruction of all enemies, all unrighteousness. And in this he is Jehovah's representative (together with his bride) in the accomplishment of this great work. "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit thou on my right hand (position of power and authority), until I make (through your delegated authority) thine enemies thy footstool" (trod them under foot) --completely subjugate them."

In harmony with this, let us turn to Rev. 11:17, 18: "We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which are and wast and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power and hast reigned. And the nations were angry and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great, and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth." Again let us appreciate the element of time in this scripture and see that it covers the entire period of Christ's reign, all that will be accomplished during the Millennial Age.

The nations became angry because our returned Lord took unto himself his great power and began his reign. Furthermore we are told that the whole dead world will be dealt with during Christ's thousand year reign. And what is the object of dealing with the dead? "That thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets (the ancient worthies) beginning at the proper time. They are to be earthly princes in the kingdom in all the earth, "And to the saints:" the saints will be changed in the first resurrection, "right early in the morning." "And them that fear thy name small and great." Thus all mankind who come into harmony with the kingdom arrangements are promised the reward of life. "And shouldest destroy them which destroy (or corrupt) the earth." Here we are given assurance that those who give forth a corrupting influence and refuse to come into harmony with righteousness during the thousand years will be destroyed from among

the people. Thus these two verses span the entire work of the thousand year reign of Christ.

Because God knew that impatience is inherent in all of us, and we would sometimes become discouraged at the length of time required to carry out the various features of His plan--in his wisdom and kindness he caused the prophet Habakkuk to write--"For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie: though it tarry wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." (Hab. 2:3) So then, dear brethren, let us rejoice in the glorious truths we have been served at the hand of the Lord. Let us rejoice in these evidences of his presence. Let us rejoice in the glorious proclamation which is our special privilege to proclaim--"Thy God Reigneth." And let us be diligent to make our calling and election sure so that we may be associated with him in bringing the blessing of life to mankind--"which groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God.