13. The Ultimate Rest (3Q 2021—Rest in Christ)

Biblical Material: Rev. 1:9–19; Matt. 24:4–8, 23–31; Rev. 14:6–12; Heb. 11:13–16; Phil. 4:4–6; 1 Cor. 2:9.

Quotes

Silence

Caught in the silence of my life, I turn to you, my God. / Anxious and afraid, not knowing Any of the answers. Questions rise up to attack me:/ From day to day I live my lifeless life, Wondering, wondering whether… / If… /Or if not. Doubts and fears of an unseeing mind, the frantic thoughts of a man Whose troubled soul seeks rest, / Peace, / Tranquillity.

Come to me, and be my God. / Take away my worries, soothe my wounds, Wash me, care for me, / Heal me, remake me. /Quiet my restlessness, ease my darkest fears; And in the light of your presence may I find myself as you know me— Still with my questions and my unknowing, Yet with a sureness and a confidence that comes From knowing you; So that when the silence comes again, / I may hear your whispered voice And rest in your eternal peace. 


Questions

Is our eternal future one of inactivity, or is the “rest” something very different? How can we best share this vision of a “heavenly country”? What is the answer to the charge that this is “pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by? How can we imagine this future when we’re told that no one has ever imagined it? What kind of God would we want to spend eternity with?

Bible summary

Rev. 1:9–19 is the vision given to John of the Son of man in glory. Matt. 24:4–8, 23–31 describes the return of Jesus at the end. Rev. 14:6–12 is the third angel’s message. After detailing the many people of faith, the conclusion is that “they’re looking for a better country instead, a heavenly country.” Heb. 11:13–16 FBV. We’re told to rejoice and not to worry. Phil. 4:4–6. “No one has ever seen, and no one has ever heard, and no one has ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” 1 Cor. 2:9 FBV.

Comment

The firm assurance given by Jesus that he would come again is the promise of a loving caring Saviour, the promise of the continuing care of God that has extended from creation and will be a major part of the new creation. The second advent is the final demonstration of the reality of God’s caring love, the full expression of his character which is love.

The promise of the second coming means that God stretches out his hand to us, to help us and to lead us into his heavenly kingdom. In the beginning God. In the end God. He is always there, taking the initiative, compassionate and caring. “He first loved us.” The final coming of Jesus is the complete assurance that God loves us, the last act in the drama of “For God loves the
world that he gave his only begotten Son...” Jesus comes the second time in all his glory as majestic proof of the immensity of God’s love for us, the completing contrast to his former coming to die in love so that we might live. This is the truth of Jesus’ return; this is what it means.

If the coming of Jesus is no less a demonstration of love than his death on the cross, it is hard to see why some fear his return. Perhaps this “last day coming” is too overloaded with tones of some bell tolling the End of the World, and the corresponding doom and destruction. While it is true that in the history of the Christian church this accent on cataclysmic disaster has at times forced out hope in the return of the Saviour, we should not fall into that same error and look to Christ’s coming with fear and dread. God created us because of his nature of love, and he continues to act to help his created beings, and he wishes to restore that full communion by the ultimate act of divine intervention—the return of Jesus. God’s love and compassion demand that the chasm of sin and separation be finally ended so that we may meet him face to face. This is truly the “blessed hope.”

The second coming is firmly based in the loving, caring nature of God himself, which leaves no room for doubt. The second coming is the full assurance of God that he will be able to do all he promised. The second coming is the final demonstration of the God who cares, the God who sent his son to die so that we might live, and live in that eternal homecoming of full reunion. Jesus comes again so that he may be with us. We of ourselves cannot go to where he is, so he comes to us. The God that came, and comes, will come again. And his coming is for the very same purpose as previous comings—to make God real to man, to show God’s real character, to do his will—and to save. The God that comes always comes to save, to save those who respond to him.

There’s a book and a movie entitled “Heaven Can Wait.” Such a sentiment expresses a dismissive attitude towards heaven and God—not ready for it yet. It’s as if you’d rather enjoy here and now, your present earthly life. But although we may be prepared to make heaven wait, can heaven wait? Can God himself wait? What about the attitude from the “other side”? God’s urgency and heaven’s strong desire that we respond now!

As we look to the ultimate rest, home forever with our loving Lord, what better perspective can we have than that the God we love wants us to come to him now, and have that relationship with him that death cannot conquer and which lasts through all eternity.

Ellen White comments

It is the darkness of misapprehension of God that is enshrouding the world. Men are losing their knowledge of His character. It has been misunderstood and misinterpreted. At this time a message from God is to be proclaimed, a message illuminating in its influence and saving in its power. His character is to be made known. Into the darkness of the world is to be shed the light of His glory, the light of His goodness, mercy, and truth...The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. {COL 415}

I am cheered and blessed as I contemplate the life and mission of Christ on this earth... He came to show man the way to the haven of eternal rest. {19MR 298.2}

The word of God is light and truth. The true light shines from Jesus Christ, who “lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” From the Holy Spirit proceeds divine knowledge. He knows what humanity needs to promote peace, happiness, and restfulness here in this world, and secure eternal rest in the kingdom of God. {FE 437.1}

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