

CRUCIFIED TO LIVE

“I am crucified . . . nevertheless I live”

by

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CHAPTER SIX

PAUL'S BELIEF IN THE BLESSED HOPE

“**Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ**” (Titus 2:13)

Paul was not an extremist for the simple reason that he majored only in the revered tenets of the faith, not one of which is susceptible to over-emphasis. All are important and all are profound. Had he stressed certain doctrines to the exclusion of others, his would have been an unbalanced theology. But he was a genius in matters of proportion and perspective, each precept in his pedagogical presentations assuming its rightful relation to the divine economy as a whole.

The second coming of Christ received a perceptibly impressive treatment in his letters of instruction. It was to him a towering truth, the magnitude of which should afford the greatest of inspiration for the people of God. Its practical value was clearly developed in his epistles.

Paul looked upon the Parousia as an incentive to holy living.

With all the subtle and deceptive evil devices which lie in ambush along the Christian's journey, any encouragement to press on is to be welcomed. Of course, there are many encouragements. To uphold the dignity and honour of the family of God, to be a challenge to the wayward, to win the lost and hopeless, to anticipate the reward of the faithful—all these prove invaluable as an impetus to godly exercise; but to contemplate a face-to-face meeting with the Lord of Glory, the spotlessly pure One, the Lover of our soul, is incomparable as an appeal to holiness in the realm of earnest Christian practice. The Apostle John reminds us that it could well be a time of regrettable shame if we are not abiding in Him.

In counseling the Thessalonians, Paul made this passionate plea:

“**And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love. . . to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ**” (I Thessalonians 3:12, 13).

Unblameable holiness is contingent upon established or stabilized hearts.

Love is the means to such an end and the appearing of Christ is the incentive. In this whole coveted experience, the Lord is the able Agent. The part which the believer plays is simple when once sincere willingness begins to operate.

With his eyes upon the Holy One, the Christian begins a voluntary dismantling of the false or fleshly structures in his life, a denouncing of the dissimilitudes.

“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (II Corinthians 7:1).

Such a housecleaning is the invitation for the divine Agent to enter with His pure and wholesome furnishings, visiting the life with a manifestation of Himself. In view of the certainty of the Lord’s coming, Paul urged upon all Christians a thorough dedication and a complete yieldedness.

“For God hath not called us unto uncleanness,” he contended, **“but unto holiness”** (I Thessalonians 4:7).

Paul looked upon the Parousia as an inducement to patience.

Patience is undeniably a virtue, while impatience is a common trait, and readily provoked. Paul witnessed the hindrance of impatience in the testimony of many in his day. With John Mark, the road was too long. With Demas, it was too narrow. The former forsook Paul and the latter forsook the Lord, all through impatience. The children of Israel, in their wilderness journey were impatient when they desired the meal of Egypt in preference to the menu of Jehovah. These same people were impatient because Moses delayed his return from communing with the Lord on the mount, and demanded gods of Aaron.

Achan was impatient when he coveted the Babylonish garment and the wedge of gold. Had he waited a few days, he might have enjoyed even more in the conquest of Ai. This treacherous trait has exacted an appalling toll down through the years and is, today, most prevalent among God’s people.

Impatience,

- Curtails training,
- Hinders answers to prayer,
- Jumps at conclusions,
- Fosters ill-feeling,
- Foments rage and
- Gives up in despair.

Patience may either be forced or induced.

We are scripturally informed that tribulation worketh patience, and the trial of one’s faith produces a like result. However, there is a precious inducement which is far better.

“And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patient waiting for Christ” (II Thessalonians 3:5).

Here, Paul shows to us something of the present, practical value of belief in the second coming. By the word “**waiting**”, he meant to convey the thought of full expectancy, a definite looking for the Lord.

A passive, half-hearted assent to the doctrine, as such, does not produce patience; but he who believes with his whole being in the assurance of this glorious event, finds it to be a soul stabilizer. And what is patience but a calm inward resignation to the Lord, regardless of the situation, knowing that He will make all things right at His coming. The Apostle expressed the thought in different words when he testified, "**I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.**" Let us apply Paul's formula and wait patiently for the Lord.

Paul looked upon the Parousia as a stimulant to action.

Whether or not the plural imagery disqualifies the five wise virgins from typifying the Church, it nevertheless remains true that the second-coming message aroused them out of their slumber and stirred them to action. There is a time to sleep but there is also a time to wake and to work. Our day has had no parallel for such a pronounced "off schedule" complex. People are shifting when they should be sleeping, rushing when they should be resting, playing when they should be praying.

That the Church has suffered through conformity to the world is without argument. While the world is all-out for pleasure, the Church has all but gone into leisure, until a Rip Van Winkle sleep has clamped a quietus upon the passionate urge to draw men into the Ark of Safety. The slumber of believers is too sound to be interrupted by present-day pastoral appeals, and their complacency is too deep to permit the cries of the lost to register.

Paul waxed dramatic in his alarm over the indifference of believers in his day.

Rising to the fullest height of his persuasiveness, he appealed, "**The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore CAST OFF the works of darkness, and let us PUT ON the armour of light**" (Romans 13:12).

It has been a night period ever since the Sun of Righteousness went down behind Calvary's mountain. He came as "**a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Israel**" (Luke 2:32). A Gentile government gave its consent to extinguish the light and the sons of Israel heaped indignities ingloriously upon Him.

Jesus, Himself, declared "**As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.**" He is no longer in the world, bodily. He ascended through the heavens to sit as a glorified man at the right hand of God in the most excellent glory. His going brought the assurance of His certain return as two witnesses affirmed, "**Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven**" (Acts 1:11).

If, in Paul's day, the night period seemed far advanced, how much farther has the night progressed? Surely it has gone through the even watch, the midnight watch, the cockcrowing—perhaps, we are well along in the morning watch. The wise and always dependable Apostle insists that "**It is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed**" (Romans 13:11).

Since Christ is our salvation, then He Himself, in His coming, is nearer than when we accepted Him as our Saviour.

Paul looked upon the Parousia as a time of rejoicing.

“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?” he asked. **“Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?”** (I Thessalonians 2:19).

This is a superb expression of sacred sentiment. Paul was thwarted in many attempts to visit the saints at Thessalonica although his desire was expressed as great. In company with Silas and Timothy, he was detained at Corinth, from which point he wrote his earliest epistle which he commanded to be read to all the brethren. He lamented his separation from them, but assured them it was in presence only and not in heart. Then, he once again relied upon the advent doctrine for some timely comfort, writing that all remorse would become rejoicing at the coming of Christ.

Scarcely more than a hasty perusal of the foregoing quotation is necessary to detect a similarity between Paul and his wonderful Lord, **“Who for the joy that was before Him, endured the cross.”**

Prisons, stocks and flogging posts were hardly to be accounted with such a day in prospect, a day that would reveal the unbounded rejoicing of men in the glory, saved by the grace of God, all because a faithful servant on earth was willing to run the gauntlet of evil forces to tell them Jesus saves.

There, in the presence of a joyful Saviour and before a rejoicing band of sinners he had pointed heavenward, Paul knew he would be filled with eternal exultancy. The blessed hope proved a bulwark to the beloved Apostle because disappointment disappeared in the promise of its joyful compensation.

Paul looked upon the Parousia as the time of surcease from groaning.

It may seem like an unpardonable paradox to term believers free men in bondage; and, yet, Paul looked longingly for the day when we **“shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God”** (Romans 8:21). The thrall of decay will yield to the enjoyment of the liberty attending the glory of Christ’s return. Now the flesh wars against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, for the two are contrary one to the other. The tendencies of the flesh are toward the beggarly elements and away from God. In this realm of change and decay, there is much everywhere to aggravate this condition. This whole world lies in the evil one, and the eyes must see sin in much of its manifestation and the ears must hear much that is distressing and distracting. Thus, there is a groaning within for the time of sweet release—the time of His planning, the time of His coming. Paul saw a restlessness in creation that suggested a groaning for the lifting of the curse, a restoration of Eden’s glorious character.

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fading together, and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. They shall not hurt nor destroy . . .” (Isaiah 11:6-9).

Paul said, “even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23). No one knew better than the Apostle the many wonderful aspects associated with Christ’s return. It was because of his heavenly enlightenment and firmness of faith that he could joyfully call it “the blessed hope.”

Paul looked upon the Parousia as the terminus of the Lord’s Table.

As Paul touched upon the solemn and sacred remembrance of the Saviour’s atoning death, he laid special stress upon the fact that his instructions came direct from the Lord Himself (I Corinthians 11:23). He related how the Lord Jesus informed him about the circumstances incident to the inception of the memorial feast—the betrayal, the bread, the blessing, the breaking, His body, His blood, the cup and the covenant.

How impressive it must have been to Paul, that he should receive a recital of such sacred facts from Him Who was the very center of the matter. Second only to the privilege of being present at the table the night of its institution was the rare honour of gaining a descriptive report from the divine source. This enabled Paul, the eminent advocate of church polity and practice, to teach and to encourage the observance of the supper which was an exceptional joy to him.

“For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup,” he solemnly intoned, **“ye do show the Lord’s death till He come”** (I Corinthians 11:26).

A proper observance, then, is substantially a symbolical proclamation of the Saviour’s sacrificial death.

It is to draw our hearts back to Calvary for a renewed appreciation that it was for our sakes He was **“put to death in the flesh”** and that His blood was shed for the remission of our sins. The blessedness of **“breaking bread”** with believers has had its ennobling effect upon the true Church these many long years; and yet, today, the sublime associations are just as tender and touching.

Sincere hearts are searched and dedicated lives are deepened as those in the Lord feast upon Him, looking back to the cross and forward to the coming when the new covenant in His blood shall issue in full fruition and the reserved and fadeless inheritance shall be realized. These holy meditations and happy contemplations are inspired by the ordinance of remembrance and the unseen but promised presence of the true Bread of Heaven. The memorial continues **“till He come.”**

Being with Him will obviate both the value and meaning.

We meet as those who love the Lord
To take the bread and wine,
The ground-up grain by fire baked,
The crushed fruit of the vine.

For these betoken Him Who bore
The heat of wrath divine;
Who felt the bruise for sin’s dark curse,
And saved this soul of mine.

We break the bread and drink the cup,
And bow our hearts in prayer;
It was not for Himself He died—
Our guilt had put Him there.

And then we lift our souls in joy,
For symbols He'll replace,
When for His purchased bride He comes
And we behold His face.

Paul looked upon the Parousia as a mystery.

As Paul approached the climax of his classic on the resurrection, he tightened his grip upon the Corinthians' interest by asserting, "**Behold, I show you a mystery**" (I Corinthians 15:51).

This was a fascinating introduction to the captivating capstone of Christian expectation —the coming of the Lord. It was, in a sense, an exception to his resurrection doctrine, for the coming of Christ will cancel death for the believers then living; and, with the removal of death for them, resurrection will be obviated. But his main contention here has to do with the supernatural accompaniments.

His revelation of the mystery shows a cataclysmic change.

This will consist of:

- (1) the dead being raised incorruptible;
- (2) the living putting on immortality.

It will transpire "**in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.**" It is a mystery which lends itself to explanation without losing its supernatural complex.

In a multiplicity of manners, the second coming is consonant with victory which it so strongly bespeaks

"Then shall come to pass the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'"

Death with its sting will then be eternally abolished for those who took refuge in the procurements of the death of Christ, and the grave will relinquish its prey even as the tomb released its Divine Occupant.

- It will be the glorious Victor in His triumphant march against the last enemy to be put under foot, the one which plagued His bride in her pilgrim journey.
- It will be a victory for the Saviour;
- It will be a victory for the saved.

In the midst of his revelation of this mighty mystery, the Apostle personifies despicable death and the grim grave, and demands, "**O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?**"

The resurrected saints and the changed believers in their heavenward transport may concertedly propound these unanswerable queries; but not until the mystery transpires will the time for this interrogation be ripe.

Paul looked upon the Parousia as a means of uniting the family of God.

When Paul referred to the family of God as being “**in heaven and earth**” (Ephesians 3:15), he was acknowledging his acquaintanceship with broken family circles.

Into many homes, where his travels carried him, there were vacant places and wounded hearts. Some loved ones were with the Lord while others yet journeyed on in the course. Such farewells are frequent, putting some members beyond the veil of human contact though not beyond sovereign surveillance. What news could be more welcome than that of a great reunion with departed loved ones and the localizing of the household of faith in fairer environs never again to be torn asunder? This is what Paul saw in prospect at the appearing of Christ.

How wonderful and how encouragingly informative are the apostle’s commentaries on eternal matters. “**But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep,**” he advised, “**that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope**” (I Thessalonians 4:13). Then, he presented what he assayed as being a most precious phase of the blessed hope, how “**the Lord himself shall descend from heaven**” to raise those who died in Him and to catch up the believing ones who then remain.

It will be a climactic, coordinated operation with a meeting in the air and a never-to-be-severed union with the glorious Head of the Church. Tears will forever cease and grief will eternally go. Our home will be celestialized, our house will be immortalized and our hope will be realized. This is why Paul could commend the message of Christ’s return as words of comfort for one another. This is why it was to him the glorious appearing and the ever blessed hope. It is the appointed time for Christ to change these our bodies of humiliation and to fashion them like unto His own body of glory. If cold unbelief raised a question as to how these things could be, Paul had the answer—

“**According to the working whereby He is ABLE even to subdue all things unto Himself**” (Philippians 3:21).

~ end of chapter 6 ~

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