

321 Near of Time and Place – 4

In recent Reflections we have considered some of the yet-to-be-fulfilled scriptural prophecies in the light of what we see around us in the world today. We have noted firstly that the Jews now dwell once again in their own land, in the face of all conceivable odds and after centuries of dispersal and ill-treatment; and we have noted secondly the state of the world being one of steadily increasing turmoil. Both of these situations give us reason to believe that “the end may well be nigh”.

That “end” involves the unfolding of various scripturally-foretold events and periods, as yet in the future, all of which are to do with the judgments of Almighty God on His fallen and sinful creation. This is the context in which the Christian Gospel, of salvation by faith in Christ alone, starts to make sense to people! – for why should anyone be bothered about all this talk of “a Saviour” if there is nothing for us to be saved from?

The great Gospel preachers of years gone by, such as John Wesley and George Whitefield, never shrank from convicting their many hearers – at times, thousands of working men at the end of their work shift, just imagine that! – with the reality of sin and judgment. Whitefield writes of an occasion in 1739 when he preached to a great number of coal miners – “The first discovery of their being affected was to see the white gutters made by their tears which plentifully fell down their black cheeks”. How the Holy Spirit moved in divine power among those crowds, provoking conviction of sin, arousing faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and thereby bringing “many sons unto glory” (egs., Matthew 11.25-30 / John 6.37 / Romans 10.9 / Hebrews 2.10)! Grown men would be crying out for mercy in front of their workmates, and bursting forth in praise as the reality of their salvation began to sink in. Lives surrendered in obedience to Christ were deeply changed – and then in turn the Christ-blessings spread, into marriages, families, homes, towns, cities and nations.

That is what Almighty God seeks, “who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (I Timothy 2.4). To achieve His will, He has given us “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time” (I Timothy 2.5-6).

So, while prophesied events may well now be “near of time”, we for our part need to remain “near of place”, in readiness for Christ’s coming. We think of the Good Shepherd and His sheep in John 10, and of the Vine and the branches in John 15, each passage in its way speaking of the constant closeness between the Lord Jesus Christ and His blood-redeemed brethren – people like us (egs., John 6.35-40, 47-58 / Acts 20.28 / Romans 3.22-25 / Ephesians 1.7 & 2.13 / Hebrews 9.12 / ...).

In this nearness to Christ we remember that in one sense we are already near to heaven too, our true home. Our citizenship is in heaven, right now (Philippians 3.20), and, “For here have we have no continuing city (Hebrews 13.14): that is, in this stage of our lives we are pilgrims, simply passing through, 100% by God’s grace, to our heavenly home. Along the way we remain completely involved right here, as salt-and-light citizens (that there be no truth in the old jibe – “He’s so heavenly minded that he’s no earthly use”!), showing forth the Lord’s saving love in our lives and

“holding forth the word of life” to “those who are without” (Philippians 2.16 and I Corinthians 5.13).

A nearness to Christ, a nearness to heaven – and a nearness to one another. We are all in the Christ-flock as Christ’s sheep; we are all in the Christ-Vine as fellow branches; we are all in the Christ-Body as individual members: in other words, the Christian life is just as much about US as it is about ME, even if that does not always suit me! Caring for each other, getting along together, worshipping and praying and serving together – such conduct has of course always been “part and parcel” of the Christian life. But these days, with the internet giving us live access to thousands of Christian occasions, it is easy for us to opt out of meaningful membership of a local Christian fellowship with its usual joys and sorrows, successes and failings, and “log in” instead to a church of our choosing on the internet. The answer is obviously “both-and” – with membership of the local church remaining the first priority (as it always has been, eg., Hebrews 10.25), supplemented by Christian input from the internet, using appropriate discernment.

“Near of Time and Place”: we know that Almighty God will play His part – “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (I Thessalonians 5.24, KJV). May we indeed be found faithfully playing our part, being “preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5.23).

For - praise the Lord - in Christ, the best is yet to be!

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