

525 Filled with the Glory of God

“But be of good cheer” was the title and theme of our last week’s Reflection, based on Jesus’ precious words of encouragement found in John 16.33. This state of “good cheer” can be ours whatever may be our current circumstances, for it is grounded in the deep, unchanging spiritual realities so freely granted to us by God our Father in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence Paul could write under the Holy Spirit - “for I have learned, in whatever state I am, [therewith] to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound ... I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (from Philippians 4.11-13, KJV).

Our here-and-now “good cheer” is also grounded in the wonderful realities that are yet to come. Arthur Ainger’s best-established hymn, written in 1894, is “God is working His purposes out, as year succeeds to year”, with each verse ending with the refrain based on Habakkuk 2.14 - “when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea”. Arthur was from a comfortable background, he lived in prosperous times for the country and had a settled teaching career at Eton. Despite all these present material blessings, by God’s grace “he knew the Lord”, and in the light of the various scriptural prophecies yet to be fulfilled, he fully appreciated that the Lord was indeed graciously “working His purpose out”, whether that divine work was being heeded or not.

We, as Christ-redeemed “faithful sheep” of God the Father, similarly look around and look ahead in the light of Scripture, albeit now in times very different and far more dangerous than in the late Victorian years. Under the Lord our “good cheer” is strengthened by our seeing the Lord steadily working towards the fulfilment of His prophecies. One typical promise is found in Isaiah 25.8 - “He (that is, the Lord of hosts, verse 6a) will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people (in this case, the Jews) shall he take away from off all the earth: for the Lord hath spoken it”. Again to His original covenant people the Lord has promised, “Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall the moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended” (Isaiah 60.20). (Incidentally, such scriptures, being confirmed by current world events, clearly show that the Lord is very far from being finished with the Jews).

Then in Luke 16.19-31 Jesus speaks of “a certain rich man” and “a certain beggar named Lazarus”. The present earthly blessings for the rich man are exchanged for future torments for him after his physical death; and the present torments for the beggar are exchanged for future blessings after his physical death, when he “was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom” (v.22a); tragically for the rich man, in his death he knew no such blessing (vv. 22b-23). He cried out for mercy, but the “die was now cast”: on the wrong side of “the great gulf fixed”, the rich man was now tormented (vv. 25-26). Jesus’ message is simple: those in step with the Lord on earth can be sure of abundant future blessings, whatever may be their trials now – an all-too-timely truth in view of the recent devastating earthquakes in Turkey and Syria.

Further future blessings are foretold in the Book of Revelation, culminating with the glorious victories of the Lord and His armies over all Satan-inspired opposition. Those who have come to faith in Christ during “the great tribulation”, (these are “post-Church” saints), will be mightily blessed, (from 7.13-17). After the awesome judgments of “the great white throne” (20.11-15), and the establishment of “a new heaven and a new earth”, and the coming-down from heaven of “the holy city, new Jerusalem” (from 21.1-2), we read of God dwelling with His people – “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (21.4).

God’s promises abound as to future blessings for all those whose names are written “in the Lamb’s book of life”, the very existence of which is another great assurance! (Revelation 21.27b; (see also 3.5; 13.8; 17.8; 20.12,15; 22.19 / Exodus 32.31-33 / Daniel 12.1 / Philippians 4.3)). But equally these promises serve as clear, solemn warnings from the Lord God to all who spurn both His sovereignty over their lives and His love held forth for them in Christ.

Of course the present and future blessings we are granted in Christ are to be made known day by day as we are able, in life, deed and word. In so doing we are playing our little, God-bidden part in hastening that certain day “when the earth shall be filled with the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea”.