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Ransom and Restitution

"Times of Restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began."—Acts 3:19-21. *"There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus: who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."*—1 Tim. 2: 5,6.

Christ A Ransom for All.

Our text declares a great fact, which Christian people generally ignore, if they do not deny—the fact that our Lord Jesus' death was a "ransom price," whose scope covers and includes the entire family of Adam. The fact is that the Scriptures do speak of a specially Elect class which is being gathered out of the world during this Gospel Age, and which is promised joint-heirship with Christ in his coming Millennial Kingdom. The fact is also that the great mass of mankind at the present time and throughout the six thousand years of the past have been "without God and without hope in the world," without a knowledge of "the only name given under heaven and amongst men whereby we must be saved". These facts have led many to the erroneous conclusion that our Lord's death has not been and never will be a "ransom price" or "offset price" for the cancellation of the sins of mankind in general. Their reasoning has, indeed, certain logical features; for if the world in general has not and if in future never will receive a blessing at the Lord's hands, it seems the logical conclusion must be that justice did not receive and will never receive a full ransom price for Original Sin. In seeming harmony with this erroneous thought is the fact that only a comparatively small proportion of humanity has been specially favored of the Lord with an opening of the eyes of their understanding, and the privilege, through faith, of coming back into harmony with their Creator.

Seemingly supporting this view also are the Scriptural statements respecting the present "narrow way" and "strait gate" which "few" can find, and the many references to the Elect as constituting only a Little Flock. Building upon this erroneous conclusion, our forefathers of the

"dark ages" and since have proceeded to give various explanations of the eternal torture of the world of mankind—the non-Elect—those not favored by the Almighty with a knowledge of the only name given under heaven and amongst men whereby we must be saved. These false doctrines built upon the "traditions of the elders" have had a nauseating effect upon intelligent minds. They therefore contradict the Scriptural declaration that God is just, loving, wise and all-powerful. What we need to correct the nausea, to refresh the hearts, to re-inspire a love and zeal for the Lord and his Word, is to see with clearness what are the true doctrines of the Scriptures respecting these matters.

"Tasted Death for Every Man."

The Scriptures declare that our Lord Jesus "by the grace of God tasted death for every man." His death "was a propitiation for our sins (the Church's sins); and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:2). The Scriptures nowhere declare that the present Gospel Age is the only period of divine favor, the only period for the forgiveness of sins, the only period of reconciliation with God, the only period of opportunity for being taught of God and of obtaining his blessing and favor, lost through original sin in Eden. As soon as we grasp this great fact, our eyes begin to open to other facts: —

(1) That prior to this Gospel Age, during the Jewish Age and previously, all the world except that one little nation were aliens, strangers and foreigners from God and his promises, "without God and without hope in the world" (Eph. 2:12); (2) that the Scriptures clearly indicate a "world to come," a future epoch, in connection with the affairs of the world, under new and better

conditions than now prevail; (3) that the future epoch is called the "Day of Christ," the "Day of the Lord." It is indeed the Golden Age, the thousand years of Christ's reign for the very purpose of blessing and uplifting the world of mankind, for whose sins his death was the atonement price and who are to be healed by his stripes. (4) We find that every invitation and injunction of the Gospel Age is with a view to the selection of an "Elect class," who shall be joint-heirs with Christ during that Messianic Age, to share with him in the the great work of general human uplift.

At this point many good people laboring under a degree of blindness, from the "smoke of the dark ages," feel disposed to object and to insist that there can be no future probation. If we ask them why, they reply that the entire Scriptural teaching contradicts the thought of a future hope beyond the tomb. We reply that this is an error—that the very reverse is true, as we shall show. We ask them for a single Scripture on their side of the subject. To their amazement they find none, but as a last resort quote from Ecclesiastes the words, "where the tree falleth there shall it be." (Eccl. 11:3.) A very slim text, indeed, to raise up as a barrier against the entire voice of the Scriptures, against all the demands of reason and logic as well. This Scripture is in full accord with what we claim, namely, that a tree when it is fallen is lifeless and powerless, and cannot raise itself up, so is man in death—under the sentence and wage of Original Sin. The Scriptural argument is that the whole race of Adam was thus dead—without life, without power to raise itself out of its fallen condition, without any claim upon eternal life or Divine favor in any sense; but, as our text declares, our Lord Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all"—for Adam, the transgressor, in particular and for all of his race who shared in his penalty. And the all redeemed is the same all which shall have the blessed opportunity for release from sin and death bondage.

It was because man was in this helpless condition, dead, powerless to revive himself, that God went to his relief through Christ and caused the great ransom-sacrifice to be made over nineteen centuries ago. Our text assures us that the ransom-sacrifice finished at Calvary was on behalf of all mankind, and is consequently to bring a blessing to all mankind.

Salvation by a Resurrection

We are not arguing that all who have died have gone to heaven; quite to the contrary. The Bible, in its declaration is that the "dead know not anything"—that a resurrection is necessary to any future living. We hold with the Scriptures that

at the end of this age, the First Resurrection will take place—the resurrection of the "blessed and holy"—those who have pleased God both by their faith and obedience. These, the Scriptures declare, will be "kings and priests unto God, and shall reign on the earth." The object of their reign will be to bring blessings of knowledge and opportunity to "every creature." These participants in the First Resurrection are the "Seed of Abraham," our Lord Jesus, the Head, and His Church, the members of His Body. Thus the Apostle declares, "If ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's Seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:29.)

The promise to which Christ and the Church are heirs is that they shall be God's instrumentality for the blessing, instruction and uplifting of all the willing of the world of mankind. To be heirs of this promise made to Abraham, that in His Seed all the families of the earth should be blessed, would be meaningless had He not purchased or ransomed all men and provided a time and means by which His blessing should accrue to the world. Thus we perceive that He has arranged a time for granting the world a trial for life—a trial respecting their willingness to abandon the ways of sin and death and to walk in the ways of righteousness under the enlightenment of the Truth, which, we are assured, shall shine forth as the sun, and whose beams shall heal humanity. (Mal. 4:2.) The means for blessing are provided in Christ, and His Bride, the "Elect" Church of this Gospel Age; but the guarantee of the whole is fixed beyond peradventure in the fact that "Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man," or, as our text declares, became the Mediator between God and man by giving himself a ransom for all.

A point to emphasise is that the giving of this ransom price and the acceptance of it by Justice imply Divine intervention for the blessing of all mankind, in full accord with the various testimonies of the entire Scriptures. Why should a ransom be given for all if it was not intended of God that all should benefit by it, or at least have an opportunity of benefiting by it? We hold that it is beyond dispute that the giving of a ransom for all and the Divine acceptance of it, in harmony with the Divine promise, are the sure guarantee that ultimately a blessing must come to every member of Adam's race as a result.

The fact that this knowledge has not yet reached all mankind in the past and is not reaching all mankind to-day, but, on the contrary, only a small minority, and the fact that knowledge of God's favor and an intelligent acceptance of it on faith and a reasonable obedience in harmony

with that faith are the demands of the Divine Word, require no proof. Proof could be given on almost every page of the Scriptures that faith, and endeavors to obedience in harmony with the faith, are necessary to salvation; but we will content ourselves by mentioning a few. The Apostle Paul says, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." "How shall they believe on Him of Whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10: 14-17.) "Without faith it is impossible to please God." (Heb. 11:6.) "All that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God," and "the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth as the waters cover the great deep." (John 5:28; Isa. 11:9.) "All the blind eyes shall be opened and the deaf ears shall be unstopped." (Isa. 33:5.) "They shall no longer teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them saith the Lord." (Jer. 31:34.)

"To Be Testified in Due Time."

Our text is in full accord with all these statements of the importance of knowledge, declaring the fact that our Lord Jesus gave himself a ransom for all is to be testified in "due time." The present time is the due time for the Church, the household of faith, to hear the voice of the Son of God; and they who now hear live, pass from death unto life—to newness of life, to begetting to newness of nature. By and by, when the present class of "called," "Elect" ones shall have been glorified with their Lord, all the remainder of mankind shall hear. "All that are in their graves shall hear His voice" and come forth for this very purpose—that they may hear, may understand, may appreciate, and may be assisted to obey the voice of Him that speaketh from heaven—the great Ransomer, who, in that day, will be King over all the earth and will bind Satan and will put down every opposing influence, to the intent that all may come to a full appreciation of God and His righteous laws and to full obedience thereto.

This is the Apostle Peter's declaration in Acts 3:22, 23. He points us to the fact that Moses was a type of Christ—Jesus the Head and the Church His Body. This anti-typical "Priest" God is raising up from among His brethren—raising him up to the glory, honor and immortality of the Divine nature, and to the power and authority of the Kingdom—to the intent that, as the Seed of Abraham, this great Messiah shall "bless all the families of the earth" with knowledge and every opportunity for return to all of Divine favor and blessing that was lost in Eden. And those who will refuse to hear that great Prophet, Priest and King during the Millennial Age—what of

them? The Apostle answers, "It shall come to pass that the soul that will not hear (obey) that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from amongst the people"—cut off in the Second Death, from which there will be no hope of recovery, no resurrection.

In full accord with all this view is the Apostle Peter's statement respecting the blessings that are to come to mankind during the Messianic Age, following our Lord's second advent. The Apostle declares that in the meantime the heavens must receive Him, must retain Him, "until the time of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began." In other words, he assures us that these restitution times or years of uplifting of mankind will follow as a result of the Lord's second coming and establishment of His Kingdom in glory and in power. (Acts 3: 19-21).

These times of restitution signify a period — the thousand years of Christ's reign are referred to. The word "restitution" is, or ought to be familiar to everybody: it signifies to bring back something to an original or primary condition. The Apostle is speaking of humanity, and hence the suggestion is that the work of Christ and His Church in glory during the millennium will be to restore mankind to the condition and privileges and blessings and favors enjoyed before sin entered the world—before the "curse" passed upon all by one man's disobedience. (Rom. 5:12.) Evolutionists would have little sympathy with the Apostle's statement here, for, according to their erroneous theory, "restitution" to original condition would be the last thing for humanity to desire or hope for, or for God to promise as a blessing. But we are not consulting Evolutionists in this matter—we are taking the Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever. In harmony with His promise we are to anticipate, therefore, that as the world of mankind has been in a fallen and falling condition, with ups and downs, especially downs for six thousand years, so when the Lord's time shall come and "times of restitution" shall begin, the present downward or fallen conditions will give place to upward conditions, to restitution times—for the general uplifting of all mankind.

"Christ Died for Our Sins"

The great ransom sacrifice finished at Calvary is the basis upon which God can be just and yet be the justifier of those who believe in Jesus (Rom. 3:26) and release them from the sentence of death, which was justly upon them as the imperfect posterity of the fallen Adam, unworthy

of life eternal under Divine conditions. The more we look into this matter the more logical, reasonable and satisfactory we see the Divine plan to be. The first man perfect, the image of God, sinned with deliberation, and received as a penalty a death sentence; after waiting more than four thousand years, God sent a Redeemer in the person of His Son. Since man was not a spirit being but a human being, therefore, the Apostle declares, Christ took not hold upon the nature of angels, but humbled Himself and came to the still lower plane of humanity and became the "Man Christ Jesus"—"holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." Then, as "the man Christ Jesus, "He gave Himself a ransom for all," as our text declares, "to be testified in due time." The testimony has already been in the world for nineteen centuries, and it has selected the very class which God foreknew and foretold—a Little Flock of footstep followers, who are to be joint-heirs with their Redeemer and Lord. Next in order will come the testimony to the remainder of mankind—first, to those who have not yet gone into the tomb, and, secondly, to those who have already gone into the tomb, who will be awakened for the very purpose of receiving this testimony and being tested by it. In accord with this the Apostle declares that the Church is a "kind of first-fruits unto God of His creatures." First-fruits implies an after-fruitage. (James 1:18.)

Here we notice the difference between the blessing God designed for the Elect Church He is selecting during this Gospel Age and the blessing He purposes for the obedient of the world of mankind in general. The Church's blessing is not "restitution," and in harmony with this we see no evidence of restitution anywhere about us. The restitution work waits for the restitution time, which begins with the establishment of the Kingdom.

Believers of this present time, indeed, have a faith equivalent to restitution, in that they are reckoned as having their sins covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness, having passed from under the sentence of death to life in Christ, and having come again into communion with God, lost by Adam through disobedience. All this in a sense serves as an equivalent to the restitution which is to come to the world in its "due time." But the world will not get these things by faith, but will get them actually, gradually attaining to them more and more during the thousand years, until at its close all who shall have appreciated God's favors and obeyed the voice of the great Prophet, Priest and King, will be actually perfect—as perfect as was Adam in every talent, quality, power and capacity, and with increased capacity through increased knowledge.

Heavenly Reward

Not so the Church of the Gospel Age. She gets none of these restitution blessings actually. She merely has them by faith, and this for a special purpose—to sacrifice them—to permit her to present her body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, her reasonable service—her participation in the sufferings of Christ that she may be accounted worthy to participate in His glories of the heavenly nature and his Messianic work. The Gospel invitation to the Church is to lay down her life, to exchange these earthly privileges and blessings bought by the precious blood of Christ for heavenly privileges offered to her as a reward of obedience—"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My Throne, even as I overcame and am set down with My Father in His Throne." Glory, honor and immortality—the Divine nature—will be the great "change" from present earthly conditions to heavenly conditions, far beyond anything possible for the natural man to appreciate, and seen, even by the saints, as through a glass obscurely. This great change which is to come to the Lord's faithful Bride by her participation in "His resurrection," the "first resurrection," the resurrection to spirit perfection, is the great hope and ambition set before us. It is for this that we are exhorted to lay aside every weight and every besetting sin and to run with patience—sacrificing earthly things and treasures that we may have this better treasure, this pearl of great price, this participation in the Kingdom with our dear Redeemer.

The Apostle declares that these "times of restitution" which are coming are spoken of "by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began." The prophets speak of the restoration of Israel to Divine favor, of how their blind eyes shall be opened, that they shall see in very truth that He whom they pierced was the Messiah indeed Who gave His life for their ransom. The Apostle clearly points out in Romans, ninth and tenth and eleventh chapters, that not only was the falling away of Israel foretold in the prophets, but also their regathering—their restoration to Divine favor; but this, he points out to us, will be after the completion of the Gospel Church—Spiritual Israel. Again he declares, that "they shall obtain mercy through your mercy." The glorified Church, with Christ at her head as the great King, is to dispense the mercies of God to the Jew first and also to 'all the families of the earth."

Let us hold fast to the doctrine of Christ as set forth in His own teachings—that He "came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10); that He beheld mankind as a treasure in a field and bought the whole field that He might

develop the treasure. Let us note that the same Gospel is set forth also in all the declarations of the Apostles and of "all the holy prophets since the world began." While the doctrine of men would be inclined to lead us away from God—to make us think of the Almighty as unjust and cruel, heartless, loveless and powerless—the doctrines of the Scriptures open the blind eyes and give us to see the King in His beauty—the glorious majesty of the God of Love, the God of Wisdom, the God of Justice, the God of Power. They give us to see, as declared by the Prophet, that "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are God's ways higher than man's ways, and God's plans higher than man's plans." From this standpoint of greater enlightenment respecting the Divine character, we will have greater desire to serve and to please him, esteeming it a great privilege to lay down our very lives in His service, counting all things as but loss and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ our Lord—that we might know Him intimately and be found in Him, as His members, and be made sharers in His resurrection—the first resurrection—to the change of nature, to glory, honor and immortality. (Phil. 3. 8-11..)

"None Other Name"

While the Scriptures teach that the worst that can befall any of His enemies will be "everlasting destruction" without hope of a future life, there is a grand hope taught for the ignorant—that all such shall be saved from their ignorance and be "brought to an accurate knowledge of the truth that they may be saved"—in God's "due time." (1 Tim. 2: 4-6.) Let us recognise the truth of the Master's words and build a proper faith in accordance with its statement—"He that hath the Son hath life; he that hath not the Son shall not see life"—eternal. (John 3:36.) God's salvation is by knowledge and not by ignorance—"through faith in the precious blood" and not in ignorance of it. We are invited to share with our Redeemer as His Bride and joint-heirs to accomplish the uplift of all who will prove willing and obedient in the Messianic Age, in the glorious times of restitution of all things. (P.P. 9/1919)

A Cloud of Witnesses

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith." Heb. 12: 1,2.

The apostle Paul not infrequently introduces allusions to the athletic events of his day to impress lessons of diligence, self-control and single-mindedness upon his Christian hearers and

readers. The dedication and determination of the zealous athlete are excellent examples indeed for those seeking for a far greater and enduring prize than those of Paul's day aspired to; for the Christian prize is an incorruptible and unfading one.

The lesson of our text is drawn firstly from the custom of the athletes of that day of divesting themselves of all that would hinder their efforts towards the goal. This laying aside of all impediments then needed to be followed by perseverance for the whole duration of the race, with no distractions allowed to draw the attention away but rather the eyes firmly fixed upon and every endeavour directed towards the goal. For the Christian, that goal is Christ and Christ alone.

*"Awake my soul, stretch every nerve,
And press with vigour on;
A heavenly race demands thy zeal,
And an immortal crown."*

As a stimulus to these efforts, the apostle goes on to picture the Old Testament people of faith, listed in Chapter 11, as surrounding and watching the contestants. These people of old all died in faith, the apostle declares, but their lives, their faithfulness, their patience, remain a testimony, a challenge and an encouragement to us, just as a crowd of loyal, hearty supporters can urge on a competitor to greater and better efforts. It is said of Abel that "he being dead yet speaketh", so all these being dead still witness to the Lord's people.

The accounts of the faith of Abraham and Moses are given in some detail, while others are mentioned for one instance of faith only or merely by name or indirect reference but the apostle exhorts us to remember them and consider what and how they endured and how loyal to God they were. Then he would have us visualise them as though they were a gallery of witnesses watching us, to whom has been given the still greater blessing and privilege of becoming children of God and partaking of the divine nature, if faithful.

The Christian as well has the even greater example in the faithfulness of our Lord and the apostle also urges us to "consider Him" who endured so great affliction and has left us an example that we should follow in His steps of faithfulness. The apostles themselves too are witnesses to us of the life of faith that our Lord desires and which they manifested. And down the Gospel Age, men and women of faith have by their faithfulness, often under severe trial, kept alive the torch of the gospel that we in these last days are able to rejoice in. These all challenge and encourage us to faithfulness.

For some Christians in our day, this has meant persecution but generally the hindrances today to faithfulness are more subtle and insidious. How necessary it is then that each Christian also bear witness to fellow-runners for the prize. Each of us might well consider those who in our lifetime have given us support and exhorted us along the Christian way and ask ourselves whether we have been careful also for the welfare of maybe newer or younger brothers and sisters in the Lord. Has our witness, our example, always been helpful? Have we found the time to encourage or to comfort some faltering disciple?

For many, the love of God in Christ Jesus was first learnt from a loving, faithful mother or father, backed by a consistent example of Christ-like

living. For such, these dear ones were for years living witnesses to the goodness of God as reflected in their lives and in this way, perhaps silently, they urged their children on to a closer walk in Christ when the time for decision was reached. Perhaps it was a devoted Sunday School teacher or older brother or sister in the Lord, and though no longer living, their memory and faith still challenge and encourage their protegee to press on in the way that leads to life eternal. Or maybe it was a known or unknown writer, who spoke through the written word to a responsive heart.

What could and should each one of us be doing to cheer and encourage others in the narrow way? Paul speaks of the brethren in Corinth as being "our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men" (2 Cor. 3:2) and it is the consistency of profession and daily living that is so essential for effective witness, not only to the world, but also to our own brethren, for all those around us are, as it were, "reading" our lives. Peter exhorts the elders to be examples to the flock, but this role is also for every Christian, for we are all members of the one body. All of us have times of special need for encouragement and we read of the apostle Paul in his travels as a prisoner to Rome — "when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us... whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage." (Acts 28:15) What a privilege it is to be in the right place at the right time to bless others!

Perhaps we have had the joy of leading another to the Saviour, as Andrew did, or to an appreciation of the gospel message in all its fulness. God alone can give the increase to the sown and watered seed, but how vital that seed be first sown and that the testimony of our lives, every day, every moment, be such as to encourage others to progress and development. Have there been

opportunities for a word of helpfulness, of commendation or of comfort?—"to speak a word in season to him that is weary"—"a word in season, how good is it!"

No doubt the apostle had this in mind when he wrote—"let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (for He is faithful who promised) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works, not forgetting the assembly of ourselves together... but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as we see the day approaching." (Heb. 10: 23-25.) Here is the right order of service—first, the maintaining of our own faithfulness, the most powerful witness of all, then the stimulating of others to press on in the same course of faith and then the regular and mutual exhorting of each other to faithfulness.

His closing words in Verse 25 come down to us with added force — "so much the more, as we see the day approaching". The testimonies of all those of every age who have gone before us, faithful unto death, are for us truly "a cloud of witnesses". These all challenge us to personal faithfulness in that high and holy calling to which we have been invited. He who has given such rich promises to those so called is able to complete His work of grace in us, for He Himself is faithful. For our part, may our own witness also be a faithful one that will be a blessing, a challenge and an encouragement to fellow-travellers along the way that leads to life everlasting.

*"A cloud of witnesses around
Hold thee in full survey;
Forget the steps already trod,
And onward urge thy way."*

Entering Into Rest

"We which have believed do enter into rest... there remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God." (Heb. 4:3 & 9)

Most Christian people—except perhaps the young and the naturally energetic—are conscious at times of a desire for rest. Rest from the eternal conflict; a cessation of the tiring struggle against unrighteousness and injustice and every form of evil. It would be unnatural if it were not so, for the Christian life was always intended to be a conflict and a struggle, and where these things are, there must be at times a desire for rest. The traditional heaven of mediaeval days was always depicted primarily as a place of rest. The oft expressed hope of the early Christians was for rest from the wickedness of the world; in those days they had much more justification than we for weariness on that score. The secret

of the intense longing felt by many believers of more devotional turn of mind for their Lord's return to take them to be with Him, is largely their desire to be associated with Him in what they picture as an eternal rest.

But the writer to the Hebrews is not speaking of any kind of possible future rest to follow the toils of this life. He is speaking in the present tense and the rest into which we are invited to enter is one that is ours NOW, if we will. Here is a very real sense in which we can cease to strive and struggle, and enter a condition of complete rest, yet without forsaking in any degree that life of service and activity which is ours and should always continue to be ours while we have any talents or opportunities whatever to expend for Christ. This rest we are strongly exhorted to attain. "Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest" is the word. (V.11). A paradoxical statement—"labour" to "rest" but a profound truth lies behind the exhortation.

The world today knows no rest. "Peace, peace, but there is no peace" has become a truism. It is a condition of mind not to be envied. There is upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity, men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking to the things coming upon the earth. Jesus said it would be so in the last days and today the word is true as never before. However, Christians are to be a contrast to all this. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength" is the divine injunction and unless we can reach up to that level we are missing much of the real essence of Christian living. Faith has to play an important part in this; we have to develop a faith based upon a sure knowledge of God and His ways, a sure conviction that He is steadily working in the world to bring mankind to Himself. It is when we come to that realisation that we can endure with greater confidence the many circumstances of life which would seem to give the lie to any assertion that the world will yet be saved from itself. On this faith, and in the quietude of this rest, Christian character is developed and God's will done in our minds and hearts.

What Then Is This Rest?

Before trying to answer this question, let us look back to the words of Hebrews 4. The writer is talking about natural Israel at the time of the exodus. They were plodding through the wilderness on the way to a Promised Land, but they were suffering all kinds of hardships and misfortunes meanwhile. They had a "rest" offered to them, an entry into a land "flowing with milk and honey", a land that would gratify their fondest desires. After the rigour and perils of the

wilderness their life in that Promised Land was to be indeed a "rest". But they never attained it. A later generation inherited the land; the generation that left Egypt with such high hopes and sojourned in the wilderness for forty years never entered in. Why? Hebrews 4:6 gives the answer—"They entered not in because of unbelief."

What an amazing sequel to their pilgrimage; they had enjoyed every possible evidence of the divine power and protection extended on their behalf — far more in a physical sense than we have today. The pillar of fire protected them by night and the cloud lead them by day. The manna and the quails and the water from the rock all came at the times of their greatest need. With a high hand the Lord delivered them from the Egyptians and brought them to Himself. What more could they want or expect? The Promised Land was in front of them, waiting to be entered. True, there was fighting to be done, but there was the definite promise of victory.

Why then the failure?—Because of unbelief. They sent the spies to search out the land, Joshua and Caleb returning with the heartening assurance—"Let us go up, for we are well able to possess it", but they disbelieved, and murmured and rebelled. They refused to go up and possess the land. So came the sentence "Tomorrow turn you, and get you into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea." That is the penalty of unbelief, the wilderness. There are two kinds of wilderness; the wilderness WITH God and the wilderness FROM God. It is good for us if we are in the wilderness WITH God, there we can learn of Him and grow strong in His ways. It is hard for us if we find ourselves in the wilderness APART from God, but this is the penalty of unbelief.

The Rest Of Faith

So the rest of our text is one into which we enter because of complete faith in and dependence upon God, and in this rest we find spiritual strength. It does not imply idleness or sloth; the vigorous activity of a full Christian life can be assiduously pursued in complete possession of this rest. The Bible itself gives us enough examples of that in its accounts of great things in early days; those historical narratives illustrate the various aspects from which we view this rest.

Consider the story of creation. Out of the chaos and clashing elements came the calm and peace of Eden. The Lord God created man and woman and put them in the Garden. Then God entered into His rest, that seventh day on which He rested from all His works which He had made; a cessation of creative activity in relation to His plan for mankind. Creation must still have continued, for God is ever a Creator, but at Eden

He left His plan for this earth to run its course, being confident and restful as to its outcome. That was the rest of KNOWLEDGE. He knew that His will would be accomplished and what He had purposed would come to pass. We too need the rest of knowledge. We KNOW and therefore we are content.

Adam and Eve in the Garden entered into a rest. They had the divine commission to till the ground and reap its fruits, and that implied diligence and activity. They knew themselves bound to render worship and adoration to their Creator and to observe the laws which had been revealed to them and that implied loyalty and obedience. But in that life they enjoyed a rest, the rest of DEPENDENCE, dependence on God. We too need the rest of dependence. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

Noah in the days of the antediluvian world was told an unheard-of thing, a thing that the wisdom of that world did not know of and could not credit. A flood that was to come would destroy the whole order of things but by the building of an ark Noah could save himself and all who with him believed in God. In the turmoil and confusion of that doomed world, Noah achieved complete rest, the rest of CONFIDENCE. In the power of that confidence he triumphed and was saved. So it may be with us. "In quietness and confidence shall be your strength." "Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." We must have the rest of confidence.

Abraham was called the Friend of God, but his life was, nevertheless, a stormy one and he was called upon to pass through many strange experiences. His faith was tested to the uttermost; yet the story of his life reveals a calmness and serenity which declares in no uncertain tones that his life was lived in a condition of rest with God. His was the rest of OBEDIENCE. He was obedient because he believed and that belief earned for him the honour of justification by faith. If we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and are obedient, we also are justified by faith and enter into the rest which comes from obedience.

The first disciples of Jesus, between His death and the day of Pentecost, were disturbed and

perplexed, not knowing what to do; but when they gathered "with one accord into one place" and the Holy Spirit descended upon them, they one and all entered into rest. All the best of the lessons of past lives was built into their experience; their rest was one of knowledge, of dependence, of confidence, of obedience. In the power of that rest, they were able to go forth in all boldness to preach the Word and become known eventually as they who had turned the world upside down. They believed, therefore they entered into rest and nothing could destroy that rest.

Our Rest

That same rest is for us if we also believe. It is complete and unassailable, based upon our relationship with the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Accepting Christ's finished work, at His hands, we enter into rest. This rest is our rightful inheritance; none can deprive us of it but we ourselves can throw it away. The Promised Land is before us; Jordan is held back; there is nothing in the way. There are enemies in the land, seeking to destroy our rest, but "greater is He that is for us than all that can be against us" and we have nothing to fear—except unbelief, for except we believe, we shall in no wise enter in.

"Let us therefore fear lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." Heb. 4:1. (B.S.M.)

The Angels' Song

Softly the night is sleeping
On Bethlehem's peaceful hill;
Silent the shepherds watching,
The gentle flocks are still.
But hark! the wondrous music
Falls from the opening sky;
Valley and cliff re-echo
Glory to God on high!

Glory to God! it rings again,
Peace on the earth! goodwill to men.

Come with the gladsome shepherds
Quick hastening from the fold;
Come with the wise men bringing
Incense, and myrrh, and gold;
Come to Him, poor and lowly,
Around the cradle throng;
Come with your hearts of sunshine,
And sing the angels' song.

May the Christmas season once more remind us especially of the sweet story of our dear Saviour's coming into the world and of our Father's so great love. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift."

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