

::R3570 : page 170::

THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

—REVELATION 22:1-11—JUNE 18—

Golden Text:—”To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne.”—Rev. 3:21

THOSE who claim that God’s Kingdom was set up in power at Pentecost, and that it since has been conquering the world, and that it will proceed until God’s will is done on earth as in heaven, and that then Christ’s second advent will take place and he will say, Well done, I could not have done better myself, and that then he will proceed to take all the faithful to heaven and to burn up the world;—these dear friends have a specially hard task before them when they touch upon the book of Revelation, as the present International Sunday lesson does. They must admit that the first three chapters, containing the messages to the churches, imply nothing of the kind. Referring to seven different epochs in the Church’s history, they suggest nothing to the effect that the Church is now reigning, but, quite to the contrary, that it will be a suffering Church down to the very last. It promises a coming reign to those who faithfully endure the trials of the present time preceding the reign. Each one of the messages closes with an exhortation, To him that overcometh, I will grant, etc.

All the intervening chapters between the third and the twentieth deal with conflicts between good and evil, and evidently cover the entire period of this Gospel age; yet in all of these presentations the evil is shown to be triumphant, and the people of the saints of the Most High God are worn out and cry from under the altar, etc. Not much a reign of righteousness that, surely! and how thinking people close their minds to all this is passing strange.

It is at the conclusion of this book of symbols, from the eighteenth to the twenty-second chapters, that the close of this Gospel age and the inauguration of the Millennial age is pictured, and the triumph of the Lord and of his saints is shown. The introduction of that reign of righteousness, Christ’s Millennial Kingdom, is shown, marked by wonderful events connected with our Lord’s second advent, the glorification of his Church, the binding of Satan, the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, the blessing of the world, the scattering of its darkness, ignorance, etc. One would think that, even with no knowledge of the symbols of Revelation, no thinking Christian should have any difficulty in realizing that the book portrays trouble for the Church throughout this Gospel age

and the triumphant Millennial reign at its close.

Our lesson pertains to the New Jerusalem, which in the preceding context is described as “coming down

::R3570 : page 171::

from heaven as a Bride prepared for her Husband”—beautiful, pure, gorgeous, resplendent. The City represents the Church in glory, this being indicated by the declaration that it was like unto a bride prepared for her husband, and the further demonstration is in the fact that the angel who called to John, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the Lamb’s wife,” showed him the New Jerusalem descending, etc.—Rev. 21:9,10.

The words of the Apostle comparing the earthly Jerusalem with the heavenly corroborate the angel’s testimony. The entire Gospel age has been the time for the preparation of this New Jerusalem. In one figure we are the city, in another we are the people of the city. The walls are living stones, such as the Apostle Peter describes; the foundation stones are the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The city as a whole comprises all the saints, from our Lord, the Head, down to and including the last member of the Church, which is his body. Not until all these have been chosen and found

::R3571 : page 171::

faithful and fitted and prepared for their places, will this city descend to earth in power and come into the possession or control of the earth. The coming of that city to the earth is the symbolical representation of the establishment of God’s Kingdom in the earth, for a city is a symbol representing government, control. Thus Washington City represents the United States government, St. Petersburg the Russian government, Paris the French government, Rome the Italian, Berlin the German, London the British, etc.

“THE RIVER OF THE WATER OF LIFE”

The throne of God and of the Lamb is represented as being in this city. That is to say, the Kingdom, the government that will then be established in the world, will have as its center of authority the divine law and the divine power—every feature of the government will be in accord with the divine will. From the throne of God will proceed the river of the water of life, of crystalline purity, not muddy traditions with false doctrines. No impurity of any kind will be in it: it will be the pure message of the Lord, going forth from the Millennial Kingdom for the blessing, refreshment, rejuvenation and eternal life of the whole world of mankind or so many of them as will accept the

blessed provisions. Not only will the message of peace and the offer of life thus go forth from the throne to the whole world, but, additionally, there will be trees of life on both sides of the river, bearing twelve manner of fruits and yielding their fruits every month, and the leaves of these shall be for the healing of the nations.

The symbolic picture suggests nourishment and healing for the sin-sick, starving world, which then may partake freely of all the blessings and privileges thus symbolized. No longer will it be necessary to say to men, "The weaknesses of your fallen flesh will be with you until death, for although the Lord has graciously covered your sins because of faith in the Redeemer and the desire to walk in his way, nevertheless there is no escape from the consequences of sin, there is nothing that will absolutely heal." When the new dispensation, represented by this symbolical city and its river of the water of life and the trees of life with their leaves of healing, is made available to men, it will be the beginning of the times of restitution spoken by the Lord through the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:19-21.) The restitution will affect all the willing and obedient, not only physically but mentally and morally: the uplift will be individual and world-wide. This is the very object of providing the river of life, the trees of life, their fruits and their leaves.

"WHOSOEVER WILL MAY COME"

The call of this Gospel age is a limited one, "He that hath an ear, let him hear," and let him come, and, coming, be one of the elect. But the majority of our race cannot hear the message in the present time, hence cannot come, hence cannot be of the elect. The Scriptures clearly indicate a reserve in the matter of the Lord's grace at the present time, our Lord's word on the subject being, "No man can come unto me except the Father which sent me draw him." Again, "If I be lifted up I will draw all men unto me." This Gospel age is the period in which the Father is drawing the Church to be the Bride of Christ, but as soon as the marriage of the Lamb shall have taken place, as soon as the New Jerusalem, the Church in glory, shall have been established in the earth, the drawing of all the families of the earth will ensue. They will not be drawn, however, to the same things to which we have been drawn; they will not be drawn to the heavenly things, to the joint-heirship with Christ in his Kingdom; they will not be invited to become members of his Bride, for that Bride class, that Kingdom class, will then be completely beyond the possibility of any further additions.

This river of the water of life represents the blessed influence that will proceed to humanity from the glorified Christ, Head and body—from the Kingdom of God's dear Son. When the blessed opportunities of that time are thoroughly open to the world, when the Sun of Righteousness shall have scattered all the darkness of ignorance and sin, when Satan shall have been bound, when the

river of the water of life shall flow freely, then the invitation that will go forth will no longer be a call of the elect, but an invitation to every creature, every member of the human race, to partake of the blessings and privileges which God has provided in Christ, that they may have the everlasting life and everlasting joy which is to be the portion of those who love righteousness and hate iniquity, and who avail themselves of the gracious provision in Christ.

The statement respecting that glorious time and message is, “And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst, Come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.”—Verse 17.

There will be a Bride then, but there is no Bride now. The Church is espoused, but the marriage of the Lamb is still deferred, not yet accomplished. The last members of his Church must complete their course, must pass their examination and enter into glory with him before the marriage be consummated. But after the marriage there will be not only the holy city, representing

::R3571 : page 172::

the Church in her official or governing capacity under Christ her Head, but there will be also the blessed work of the Church, the calling of the world’s attention to the river of the water of life, to the leaves of healing, to the fruits of the Spirit; and the Spirit, the power of God, will co-operate with the message that will then be promulgated, and the result undoubtedly will be that all the world shall hear, and that all who love righteousness and hate iniquity will return again to life eternal. It will require all the Millennial age for the delivery of this message to every creature and for them to avail themselves of the privileges.

It will be remembered that the Scriptures nowhere speak of the river of the water of life now. There is none, and can be none until the heavenly city descends, because the river must flow from the midst of it, from the throne. Describing the condition of the Lord’s saints at the present time very differently, the Lord declares that those who are his have in them a well of water springing up into life eternal. We know what this is, we know in what sense each individual of the Church has received of his Spirit, has in him a fountain of grace and truth for his refreshment; but there is no river of the water of life to which he could go or to which he could invite others to go.

“THE HEALING OF THE NATIONS”

It should not be overlooked that the healing and refreshment mentioned in this symbolization does not pertain to the “little flock,” the Church, but to the world, the nations. The little flock will have been glorified, perfected in the first resurrection, before this offer of healing and restitution of the world is made. Undoubtedly Israel will be the first of the nations to be blessed, but subsequently

all the families of the earth, as God's oath-bound covenant has promised.

The glorious blessings and favors of that Millennial period, set apart by the Lord and declared by the mouth of all the holy prophets to be times of restitution of all things spoken of, is summed up most completely in the declaration, "There shall be no more curse." In what more comprehensive language could the Lord declare the end of the reign of sin and death and the commencement of the reign of righteousness unto life eternal. There is a curse upon the world now, official, legal. It has been against us as a race for six thousand years. It is a curse or sentence of death. Although our dear Redeemer has died, the Just for the unjust, although he was made a curse for us, nevertheless up to the present time release from the curse has come to only a small proportion of the race. In the Father's plan the only ones released from the curse, the only ones who have yet escaped the condemnation which is still on the world, is the class which has accepted Christ and is trusting in him.

These are not justified outwardly, actually, but are justified in God's sight, justified by faith. The world realizes not their justification and can appreciate it only by the exercise of faith. By faith they may realize that their sins were laid on Jesus and that his righteousness is imputed to them. Those who can thus exercise the necessary faith have had the opportunity during this Gospel age of consecrating their justified lives, to have fellowship with Jesus in the sufferings of this present time, to have fellowship in his death, to be dead with him. The promise to these is that if faithful in this matter they shall live and be with their Lord, partakers of his glory and sharers in his future work on behalf of the world.

With the end of this age, when the last members of the body shall have finished their course and be glorified with him, he as the great High Priest and they as the under priests, his members, will be prepared to bless the world. Then will be presented to the Father on behalf of the world the merit which came from our dear Redeemer's death on behalf of all, shared by those who rejoiced to suffer with him and who are accepted. Then divine justice will declare the lifting of the curse from all the world of mankind, and then the work of graciously blessing and uplifting and helping them out of their sinful conditions into life everlasting will be possible and will begin. There shall be no more "curse" against humanity, but, on the contrary, they may have fellowship with the Lord, and the throne of his grace and the evidences of his favor will be theirs, and all who desire shall have the opportunity to serve him. All the night of darkness, ignorance, superstition and sin will be past; no longer will the world be dependent for light upon the imperfect shining of such little candles as the Lord's people now are.

::R3572 : page 172::

All who come into accord with the Lord shall see his face—that is, there will be no earth-born cloud

between, no hindrances to the Father's love and favor, and his name shall be in their foreheads. They will confess him, they will have his likeness, the various elements which go to make up his glorious name and character will be theirs and will be manifest in their faces. If, even now, under present imperfect conditions, the light of grace and truth in the heart transforms the outward features and makes them more and more bright and glorious, much more, we are sure, will this be true of those who at that time shall come under the influence of the light of divine favor and have their hearts filled with the Lord's spirit and truth.

“THEY SHALL REIGN”

The developments of that Millennial age will bring the willing and obedient of the human family back to the original perfection, the image and likeness of God, and once more they will have direct communication with the Lord and not merely his written messages through apostles and prophets as now. “And they shall reign forever and ever.” This does not refer to the Church, whose reign has been previously described. The reference is to the reign of those whom the Millennial age shall find worthy of life eternal—all the unworthy being then cut off in the second death. The account here is in full accord with that of Matthew 25:34—the sheep of that age will at its close be received into the fullest fellowship with the Lord, the goats of that period being destroyed.

The nature of the reign then to be delivered to the

::R3572 : page 173::

world we have already considered on other occasions, and shown that it will be the same reign or kingdom which at his creation was bestowed upon father Adam, as it is written in Psalm 8:6, “Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands. Thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen with the beasts of the field and fowl of the air and fish of the sea.” This dominion of earth was part of what father Adam lost by his disobedience, and was a part, therefore, of what our Lord Jesus purchased by his obedience even unto death, and is to be an element of the restitution to be accomplished during the Millennial reign of Christ.

At the close of that reign the Kingdom shall be delivered up to God, even the Father, by being delivered over to those for whom the Father originally intended it, and who by that time will have been fully prepared to receive it. The whole world of perfect men will be a world of kings, though doubtless one of their number will serve particularly as general or representative, just as in the Republic every individual is a sovereign and from their own number they choose a sovereign, a servant.

“SAYINGS FAITHFUL AND TRUE”

Having pictured the work of restitution down to its consummation in the delivery of the kingdom to man, in harmony with the Father's intention, the address of the revelation changes. We are assured that these wonderful promises are faithful and true, that the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly come to pass. Then the Master speaks to all of his Church who have ears to hear, saying, "Behold, I come quickly: Blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book." The intimation seems to be that the book being symbolical, none can understand it except as its seals are loosed, as its message opens before the Lord's people; and that when its sayings, its teachings come to be appreciated, it may be recognized by those who do understand it as an evidence that the Lord's second advent and the establishment of his Kingdom are close at hand.

This thought is further borne out by the statement of verse 8. As we have already seen, John the revelator represented those favored members of the Church who, living in this end of the Gospel age, are granted the privilege of seeing and appreciating more and more the things which he saw in symbol. The revelation being complete, John fell down before the angel who had given him the revelation to offer him worship. This may signify that in the end of this Gospel age as the whole Church, the John class, comes to see the unfolding of the divine plan, there might be a spirit or disposition amongst them to do too much honor to the one used of the Lord in communicating to them the divine light now due.

The proprieties of the case are set forth to us in the conduct of the symbolical angel who talked to John and who represented some in the end of this age commissioned to present God's truths to his people. He said, "See thou do it not"—do not worship me, for I am not the author of this plan. I am thy fellow servant, a brother to all the prophets and all those who keep the message of this revelation. God alone should be worshiped: he is the Author of the great plan and will be the finisher of it. It is brought to our attention now by him because it is now "due time" for his people to come to an appreciation of his plans.

"RIGHTEOUS OR FILTHY STILL"

The same thought continues: At the time that the features of this symbolical revelation shall come to be understood and appreciated by the Lord's people, they may know that the time of the completion is near at hand. They are not to feel it necessary to hide the matter. "Seal not the sayings of this book, for the time is at hand." Furthermore, we are not to expect that the telling of this message, the explaining of the divine plan, will have the effect of converting the world. It was not intended to do this and will not do it. Notwithstanding the unfolding of the divine plan, this knowledge will only be for a special class for whom it was intended, namely, the Lord's people—"None of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand." So far as the

revelations of the divine plan are concerned they are not intended to turn the filthy to make them righteous, nor will they be inclined contrarywise to turn the righteous to sin. So far as these revelations are concerned they who are righteous may be righteous still, they who are filthy may be filthy still, they who are holy may be holy still.

How true it is that Present Truth, although in many respects full of comfort and encouragement to the Church in respect to their dear friends who are out of Christ, has no effect whatever upon those who love sin, who are filthy, who are unrighteous. It appeals only to those who are already righteously inclined. This does not mean that it appeals only to those who are saints, who are holy. There are some who are not saints because they have never properly grasped the conditions of the divine call of the present time, but who are, nevertheless, righteous persons, persons who desire to live uprightly, honorably, honestly, who are sincere and truthful in their own hearts and in their dealings with others so far as their knowledge permits. To these lovers of righteousness, of truth, as well as to the holy, the revelations of the divine plan now unfolding commend themselves, and intensify their love for righteousness and appreciation of full consecration to the Lord.

On the other hand the unrighteous and the filthy simply ignore this message and are not moved specially by it. During the Millennial Kingdom time, however, we may expect that the vigorous processes of the kingdom will correct many of these filthy and unrighteous, and ultimately develop many of them into lovers of the Light and the Truth and the Way, bringing many of them into full fellowship with the Lord, which will secure to them life everlasting.

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— June 1, 1905 —



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