

14.09.2019 LIVING THE ADVENT HOPE

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” 1 Corinthians 15:58

“He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” 1 Peter 1:3

The Advent movement rejoices in *“the blessed hope”*. Titus calls this blessed hope *“the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ...” (Titus 2:13)*. It refers to the coming of kingdom of God in glory at the Second Coming (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17) and its establishment on the earth after the Millennium (Revelation 21). Christ will reign in glory, and we, His glorified people will reign with Him, and *“God will be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28)*.

All of the above refers to the FUTURE; the future setting up of God’s Kingdom at the culmination of the great controversy between Christ and Satan.

It is important however, to recognise that the Kingdom of God is present today; it is a PRESENT reality. When Jesus came to earth, He declared that the Kingdom of God had been inaugurated.

Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” Mark 1:14, 15

“The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, ‘See here!’ or ‘See there!’ Indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.” Luke 17:20, 21

The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached...Luke 16:16

Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.” Luke 12:31, 32

By His death and resurrection, Christ has defeated Satan and has set up His Kingdom on earth.

Paul describes what that victory means to us today:

*The Father has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and **conveyed (translated) us into the kingdom of the Son** of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:12-14*

*For whom God foreknew, **He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.** Romans 8:29, 30*

*For **our citizenship is in heaven**, from which we also eagerly wait for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:20*

So we see in the Bible that the Kingdom of God is both present and future; it is ‘already’ here and ‘not yet’ here.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life (PRESENT), and shall not come into judgment (FUTURE), but has passed from death into life (PAST HISTORIC).” John 5:24

“What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him? You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honour and put everything under their feet.” In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them (NOT YET).

But we do see Jesus, who was made lower than the angels for a little while, now crowned with glory and honour (ALREADY) because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

God, for whom and through whom everything was made, chose to bring many children into glory. Hebrews 2:6-10

By that will we have been sanctified (ALREADY) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Hebrews 10:10... For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. Hebrews 10:14

Beloved, now we are (ALREADY) children of God; and it has not yet (NOT YET) been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 1 John 3:2

In the light of the above, how shall we live the Advent Hope?

God calls His people to live lives of REJOICING and OBEDIENCE.

1. With Joy

"Rejoicing (PRESENT) in hope (THE FUTURE)" (Romans 12:12)

Today we are to live rejoicing in the hope of the future.

a. The sure and certain hope of our sanctification.

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1:6

I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. 2 Timothy 1:12

b. That we will be vindicated in the Judgment. God the righteous Judge is for us, not against us.

Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us Romans 8:33-34

c. The sure and certain hope of our resurrection to eternal life.

"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" John 11:25, 26

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. 1 Corinthians 15:20-22

d. The sure and certain hope of the absence of sin and its consequences.

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Revelation 21:3-5

e. The joy of living with Christ eternally.

And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. Revelation 22:3-5

2. In Submission to God's Will (Obedience)

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:10, 11

We can only do God's will by the 'obedience of faith' - trusting the Spirit to keep us obedient to the will of God (Romans 1:5; 16:26).

God's Kingdom will come as His people hallow His Name and do His will on earth. Planet earth is the only place in the universe where God's will is not done. Christ redeemed the earth and its people by His blood. We, who call ourselves by His name, must no longer live by the principles of the world, but only by the will of God.

This is what Jesus did when He came to earth to usher in the Kingdom of heaven:

Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then I said, 'Behold, I have come (In the volume of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God.'" Hebrews 10:7-9

Our responsibility is to:

- a. Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Matthew 6:33

What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God? 2 Peter 3:12

- b. Live in relationship to the Holy Spirit continually. He is the Provider of God's righteousness. He will keep us prepared for His Coming. (Matthew 25:1-13). This is the true Sabbath rest – to depend on God for everything.

The Kingdom of God is... Righteousness and Peace and Joy in the Holy Spirit. Romans 14:17

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. Ephesians 5:8-10

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...Galatians 5:22, 23

*"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; **for without Me you can do nothing**... By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. John 15:5, 8*

- c. Use the resources the Spirit gives us – talents and gifts (Matthew 25:14-30). Never be afraid to invest in them. They proceed from the Spirit and (to use another metaphor of Jesus) will flow out in blessing to the world when we allow ourselves to be channels of God's love to the world.

"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." John 7:38

As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. 1 Peter 4:10

- d. Endure the opposition of the world to a Christ-like life and Christ-centred preaching.

"If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you" John 15:18-20

"We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." Acts 14:22

But he who endures to the end shall be saved. Matthew 24:13

e. Refuse to do anything that is worldly (of this world).

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him... And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. 1 John 2:15, 17

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols." Amen. 1 John 5:21

f. Fight the fight of faith (spiritual warfare)

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 1 Timothy 6:12

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Ephesians 6:10, 11

g. Restore the true gospel – in our lives, in the church, in our preaching.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:14

'And finally the encouragement: the kingdom really has arrived. The King has come. The King has dealt with sin once for all in the sacrifice of Himself. The King sits at the Father's right hand and reigns now until all His enemies are under His feet. The King's righteousness is now already ours by faith. The King's Spirit is now already dwelling in us. The King's holiness is now already being produced in us. The King's joy and peace have now already been given to us. The King's victory over Satan is now already ours as we use the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. The King's power to witness is now already available to us. And the King's gifts—the gifts of His Spirit—are now already available for ministry.

And now with a sober awareness of the mystery of the kingdom—present yet future; fulfilled but not consummated—let us go on as a church to seek the kingdom first—to discover all we yet should be for the salvation of lost sinners and the glory of King Jesus!' *John Piper.*

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. Titus 2:11-13

Additional Note:

How do we rejoice in a suffering world?

This world is full of pain and tragedy and sin and death. Everywhere men and women live lives that are desperately poor and tragic and fearful. Even we, who live relatively comfortable lives, cannot escape sickness and pain and death. And if we stop to really think about it, many times our comfort is gained at other human beings' expense.

This world's only hope is to look at life from the perspective of eternity, as did many of God's saints – Job, David, Daniel and his three friends, the martyrs of the church. When faced with despair and the threat of death, they chose to trust in God, knowing that there is a blessed hope, the hope of the gospel. Jesus Christ has come, and has destroyed the works of the Devil (1 John 3:8) and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10).

From the perspective of eternity therefore, 70 years (or even a 100 years) of tragedy is 'less than an evening past' in the sweep of eternity. In God's perspective a thousand ages is as an evening gone (Psalm 90).

We look back at thousands of years of life on earth and measure suffering over that time. But every individual life is really short. And most people do not suffer every moment of their lives (I do recognise that some are born with inherited conditions that are associated with great pain; mercifully these are often short-lived lives). If we lived taking into account the perspective of eternity, then one recognizes that 70-100 years of suffering is very little when compared to an eternity of life that will be lived as we were first intended to live it – loving every human being, serving every human being and always living in the joy that such a life produces.

Everything is tragic on planet earth. We take the flowers falling and the leaves dying and sickness for granted because it so much a part of the world we were born into and live in. But every plant and animal that dies, every human being who falls ill, who suffers because of the evil men do, is a tragedy to the heart of God. Life of earth was intended to be perfect as the rest of the universe is perfect. We are suffering the consequences of Adam's rebellion. And every one of us suffers; we often look at great and tragic suffering, but every human being born on planet earth suffers to a greater or lesser degree.

God suffers more than we do. We live and observe a lifetime of suffering; He is the One who has endured thousands of years of suffering. He sent His Son to guarantee that suffering will end. He does not only suffer in sympathy, He Himself suffered while here on earth. By His life, death and resurrection He has destroyed the works of the Devil.

And God has promised that He will finally put an end to sin and suffering and death when He comes the second time to earth. If He kept His promise and came the first time, we can be sure and certain He will keep His promise to come again (John 14:1-3).

Why is He taking so long to return, some ask? Why can't He stamp out evil now?

Who can really know the mind of God? We do know that He will not interfere with man's will. But the most reasonable answer from the Bible is that God is looking at the big picture. He is making sure that sin (the state of living independently from God) will not arise a second time. Man must be so appalled by the effects and consequences of evil that he will never decide to live apart from God again. Therefore God has to let evil run its course.

Until it ends, God uses human beings who respond to the Light that lightens everyone, to relieve suffering in practical and humanitarian ways. CS Lewis puts it well – we who hate evil and suffering, as God does, are the ones who are most earnest in relieving suffering, in taking care and being good stewards of nature and the environment.

God also uses those who understand His ways to tell the world the good news of the gospel - that while all mankind was destroyed because of the rebellion of one man, Adam; all mankind is redeemed because of the life and death of one Man, Christ Jesus. The removal of the curse of sin from nature and man is guaranteed by the death and resurrection of Jesus (Revelation 12:3-5).

So we come full circle – it is as we understand the heart of God and the good news of the gospel that we can understand the true solution to the problem of sin and suffering. And we can obey Paul's command to 'Rejoice always', for we know Whom we have believed and our hope is in Christ Jesus who has "*abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*" 2 Timothy 1:10.
