

SOMETHING TO CHEW ON

History and the Word of God have combined to inform us of the lot of the prophets, of the saints, of them that fear His name, be they small or great, as they have walked their way through this world. Filled with the joy and love of the Lord, overcoming temptation, and by His grace obeying His will, they have nonetheless been hated and maligned by the world. Some had "cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." Hebrews 11:36-38.

Many of these men were great indeed - men of commanding intellectual stature as well as greatness of soul. We think of Wycliffe, Luther, Wesley, Calvin. All of them were recognized in their own day as being the leading intellects. The work they did for God was very great, too. And there have been many like them, for God has not done His work in a corner. Men of distinction have graced His cause with their talents. We could name others like John Milton, poet and statesman; Isaac Watts, poet and scientist; Isaac Newton, mathematician and prophetic expositor; David Livingstone, doctor of medicine, explorer, naturalist, and surveyor, as well as missionary. Many of God's good men have been great men.

But the day of rewards will come not alone to God's great men. It will come to them that fear His name "small and great." That should encourage every faithful child of God. The great majority of us recognize that in stature, such men as we have named, tower above us. We are like the throngs of the unnamed and unsung through the ages who have lived for the Lord in this world. We know but few of the names of the millions of martyrs who perished rather than betray their Lord. Though the names of this multitude have not been recorded in the annals of history, God does not pass over them. In that climactic event that is to close this era, Christ will overlook none of his. They all will receive their joyous reward - "small and great!"

In this, Christ would not only gird us with encouragement, but he would also enlighten us with his truth. He tells us here that all his saints, prophets and people are to receive their reward at the same moment of time - that is, when Jesus Christ comes the second time. Paul also believed this. "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Hebrews 11:39,40. Even the believers who were growing old in Paul's own day were told they would join the righteous of all ages to be with the Lord - at his coming. Thus all believers receive their reward at the same time.

"Now we don't want you, my brothers, to be in any doubt about those who 'fall asleep' in death, or to grieve over them like men who have no hope. After all, if we believe that Jesus died and rose again from death, then we can believe that God will just as surely bring with Jesus all who are 'asleep' in him. Here we have a definite message from the Lord. It is that those who are still living when he comes will not in any way go before those who have previously fallen asleep. One word of command, one shout from the archangel, one blast from the trumpet of God and the Lord will come down from heaven! Those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise, and then we who are still living on

the earth will be swept up with them into the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And after that we shall be with him for ever." 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.

How harmonious with the Word of truth is the belief that all saints are rewarded as Jesus said - at his coming. Paul concurs with the revelator. "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." 2 Timothy 4:8.

Revelation also portrays Christ's coming as the time of the harvest. "And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe." Revelation 14:14,15. As elsewhere in the Scriptures, the concept of harvest is associated with our Lord's return. "The harvest," Jesus declared in one of his parables, "is the end of the world." Matthew 13:39. And then he immediately describes the events of his coming.

The idea of harvest is this: it involves the reaping of what has been sown and now is come to fruition. By the time Jesus comes again, everything involved in the great struggle between Christ and sin will have born its full fruitage. Those who have embraced the Saviour's grace and mercy shall be endowed with that power from on high which will attend the final outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and in them all God's purposes and holy ambitions of sanctified living shall be brought to full fruition. But similarly and conversely will it be with those who embrace the principles of sin. Men now are removing from themselves all those restraints that godliness has imposed on the pursuit of evil, and more and more we are finding governments, courts, and people of influence condoning and sanctioning practices that are corrupt, sensual, and wicked. Even from among the circles of the church, it is urged that laws be "reformed." And when we examine what is meant, the speakers are actually urging that licence be granted to lust, that good be called evil, and evil, good. "To reform" has come to mean "to indulge," "to remove all reproof from sin."

One day soon, God, who has so graciously imposed restraints on evil that have mysteriously quelled the carnal, corrupt heart of man, will remove those restraints. The voice of conscience, and the love and respect of righteousness - those influences that have served to discipline wickedness - are of the Lord. But have you ever dared to wonder what man would be capable of when God shall remove even these restraints? On occasions, events of this century have given us a preview of what it will be like when the carnal heart of man is devoted solely and without reproof to the pursuit of its own purposes. Then will this world witness a harvest - the terrible harvest of evil! Sin in its full fruitage!

The wise Husbandman said: "Let both (the good seed and the bad) grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn." "The harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." Matthew 13:30, 39-43.

We should never read such scriptures as these without asking, "What will the harvest be in my life?" The answer is: "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." Galatians 6:8. "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."

God has declared that when the principle of evil has come to its fruition, Christ will bring it to its end and destroy it. When the harvest of grace has brought forth its full fruitage, Christ will gather the precious sheaves into his kingdom. "And now, little children, abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming." 1 John 2:28.

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