

DISCUSSING A RENOVATED EARTH

REV. J. A. SEISS, D.D., LUTHERAN (DECEASED) WROTE:--

THESE words occur in connection with the Apostle's endeavor to impress his Jewish brethren with a sense of the greatness and glory of the Lord Jesus and of the salvation which is preached in His name. He begins the epistle by announcing the Savior to them as the Son of God--the appointed Heir of all things--the Maker and Upholder of the worlds --the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of his person, who has been exalted to the right hand of the Majesty on high. These were sublime [R3968 : page 102] statements, and needing to be well substantiated to be made acceptable. He therefore instituted various lines of argument, adapted to the Jewish mind and founded upon the Scriptures, which all held to be divinely inspired. And as the Jews regarded angels as the highest created orders, and as standing next in the scale to the eternal Father himself, Paul's first effort was to prove from prophecy that

CHRIST IS SUPERIOR TO THE ANGELS

He introduces three points in which the super-angelic dignity is shown. The first is that Christ is assigned a higher name than the angels. The second is that he is clothed with a sublimer honor than the angels, and the third is that Christ is invested with a sublimer office than the angels, they being only ministering spirits, while he is spoken of as a divine King, whose throne is forever and ever, and the sceptre of whose Kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness. The princely investiture and reign of the Messiah is thus distinctly deduced from the Old Testament, and used by the Apostle as the sublimest demonstration of the Savior's personal dignity. And this Messianic dominion he applies particularly to what is hereafter to grow out of the gospel economy. He tells us that it is peculiarly "the world to come" over which the Messiah's reign is to be exercised. "For unto the angels hath he not put into subjection the world to come, whereof we speak," thus proceeding upon the implied assumption that it has been by promise put into

SUBJECTION TO CHRIST,

and that all those allusions to the Savior as a King have their chief application and ultimate fulfilment in that "world to come." The Messiah's reign and this world to come accordingly belong together and coexist in the same period and locality. By determining, then, what is meant by this "world to come," we may form an idea of what is included in the Messianic Kingdom; or, if we already know what the consummated Messianic reign is, and where it is to be, we have it already decided what we are to understand by this "world to come."

If any stress is, therefore, to be laid upon the conclusion evolved in the preceding discourses, there is no alternative left but to understand this "world to come" as the Millennial World, or the world as it shall be when Christ shall have restored the throne of David and entered upon his glorious dominion as the Sovereign of the nations and Lord of the whole earth. And to this agrees exactly the original word, *oikoumene*, which means the habitable earth--the domiciliated globe on which we dwell--and not some remote supernal region, as we sometimes imagine. The world to come, then, is nothing more nor less than this self-same world of ours in its final or Millennial condition. The earth is not to be annihilated.

GOD NEVER OBLITERATES

His own creations. The dissolving fires of which Peter speaks are for "the perdition of ungodly men," and not for the utter depopulation and destruction of the whole world. They may consume cities, destroy armies and effect some important meteorological and geological changes; but men and nations will survive them and still continue to live in the flesh. The earth is to be renovated and restored from its present depression and

dilapidation, and thus become "the new earth" of which the Bible speaks. It is to pass through a "regeneration" analogous to that through which a man must pass to see the Kingdom of God; but there will be a continuity of its elements and existence, just as a regenerated man is constitutionally the same being that he was before his renewal. It will not be another earth, but the same earth under another condition of things. It is now laboring under the curse; but then the curse will have been lifted off and all its wounds healed. At present, it is hardly habitable--no one being able to live in it longer than a few brief years; but then men shall dwell in it forever without knowing what death is. It is now the home of rebellion, injustice and guilt; it will then be

THE HOME OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

It is now under the domination of Satan; it will then come under the blessed rule of the Prince of Peace. Such, at any rate, is the hope set before us in the Word of God, and this I hold to be "the world to come," of which the text speaks. It cannot be anything else. It cannot be what is commonly called heaven, for the word oikoumene cannot apply to heaven. It is everywhere else used exclusively with reference to our world. Neither can it be the present gospel dispensation, as some have thought, for that began long before this epistle was written and could not, therefore, have been spoken of by Paul as yet "to come." We are consequently compelled to understand it to mean our own habitable world in its Millennial glory. And as the prophecies concerning the Messiah's eternal kingship are here referred to as having their fulfilment in the subjection of the Millennial world to his dominion, we are furnished with another powerful argument of Scripture in favor of the doctrine of Christ's personal reign as a great Prince in this world. Indeed, the Bible is so full of this subject, and its inspired writers are so constantly and enthusiastically alluding to it that I am amazed to find so many pious and Bible-loving people entirely losing sight of it. Ever and anon the Scriptures return to it as

THE GREAT AND ANIMATING HOPE

of the Church in all her adversities and depressions, and it does seem to me that we are depriving ourselves of much true Christian comfort by the manner in which we have been neglecting and thrusting aside that glorious doctrine. My present object is to show, from the Scriptures, and by just inferences from them, what sort of a world this "world to come" is, and to describe, as far as I can, what we are to look for when once this earth has been fully subjected to that divine King whose throne is forever and ever, and the sceptre of whose Kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness.

That "the world to come" is a highly blessed world, [R3969 : page 103] and a vast improvement upon the present scene of things, will be inferred on all hands without argument. It could not be a subject of hope if it were not. The Savior himself exhibited a model of it when in the Mount of Transfiguration,--from which, perhaps, we may obtain as deep an insight of its glories as from any other portion of Scripture. That he designed

THAT SCENE AS A MINIATURE MODEL

of what his future coming and Kingdom is to be, is obvious. A week before it occurred he told his disciples that "the Son of man shall come in the glory of the Father, with his angels or messengers with him"; and that there were some standing there when he made the declaration who should not taste of death till they saw the Son of man coming in his Kingdom." This coming in his Kingdom, which some of the disciples were to live to see, is not the final advent, for the disciples are all dead, and the final advent is still future. Neither is it the destruction of Jerusalem, for but one of the apostles lived to see that catastrophe, and the Son of man did not then come in his Kingdom. And yet some of the apostles were to have ocular demonstration of the Son of man's coming in his Kingdom before tasting of death. Search through apostolic history as we will we shall find nothing but the transfiguration to which the Savior's words will apply. That, then, was in some sense the coming of the Son of man in his Kingdom. It was

NOT, INDEED, THE COMING ITSELF

but it was an earnest and picture of it. It was the coming of the Son of man in his Kingdom, as the bread and wine in the eucharist are Christ's body and blood. Peter says: "The power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" are not "cunningly devised fables." He declares that he was certified of their reality by the testimony of his own senses. We were "eye-witnesses," says he, "when we were with him in the holy mount." We thus have clear, inspired testimony that the scene of the transfiguration was a demonstrative exhibition of the coming of Jesus in his Kingdom. Hence, whatever we find in the descriptions of that scene, we may confidently expect to be realized in that "world to come whereof we speak." As Christ appeared in that glorious scene, so he will appear when he returns to this world. As he was then personally present as the Son of man, so he will be personally present in the Millennial Kingdom. And as he was there attended by different classes of persons, so will his glorious Kingdom consist of similar classes.

Let us, then, endeavor to draw out before us some of the more striking features of "the world to come," and, by the contemplation of its attractiveness, endeavor to school our hearts into more ardent thirst to participate in its blissful scenes.

I do not wish to depreciate in the least those gracious arrangements of heaven under which we now live. It is a blessed thing to have the Bible and to attend properly on the means of grace and to enjoy the renewing and comforting influences of the holy Spirit. In giving to us these things God has endowed us with mercies for which we never can be sufficiently thankful. But he authorizes us to look for greater things than these. The present economy is only preparatory to something higher and more blessed.

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