

The Eternal Present

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There is a common complaint that unbelievers have against believers in the religion of Christ, and that is that they live too much in the future, and not in the present; that religion concerns itself only with promises that are to be fulfilled at some indefinite future time, and leaves the things of the present entirely alone. Now so far as this complaint is directed against many professed Christians, it is all too applicable, but it is altogether wrong as regards Christianity itself.

He from whom Christianity springs “went about doing good.” His thought was of the poor and the suffering, and they received the most of His attention. To relieve present necessity, occupied His whole time and care. His appearance in this world was made known by the proclamation. “On earth peace, good will toward men.” The “glory to God in the highest,” and this was revealed in “grace and truth” bringing salvation to mankind. This salvation is indeed “eternal salvation,” including therefore the most distant future, but it is also, because it is eternal, a present salvation. “Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” 1 Timothy 4.8

Many people always conclude their prayers with a request to be “saved at *last*.” The future seems to be their only anxiety, and often they stumble because of their continual looking to the distant scene. But this is not according to the teaching of the Gospel. “Now,” “today,” are the words, which it most employs. It is quite true that it promises much for the future, but the only assurance of future salvation is present salvation. He who is saved today, has no fear for tomorrow.

The Gospel does not consist in theories or dogmas, but in actual life. It does not present to men and women abstruse problems to puzzle their brains over, or questions for speculative discussion, but present help for daily need. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Psalm 46.1. Real Gospel teaching consists in giving the people such instruction as will help them to live the right kind of life from day to day. It is to the laboring and the oppressed classes that the Gospel appeals. All that labor and are heavy laden are offered rest. When the Lord says, “Come,” He means come now, and whoever comes finds rest at once. He does not disappoint anybody.

This is just what the fourth chapter of Hebrews presents, in the statement, “There remains therefore a rest to the people of God.” This verse has been strangely misread, and made to refer only to the future, when it means *now*. That which *remains* is not that which is yet to come, but that which has already been, and is still in existence. The remnant of a piece of goods is the portion that has not yet been disposed of. So the rest that remains is the rest that God prepared from the foundation of the earth, and which is still open for weary souls to accept.

The Christian life is a life of rest, even in toil. “These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” John 16.33. This rest is found in Christ, —in His life. But His is eternal life, which He gives to as many as receive Him. “These things have I written unto you, that ye may know that ye have eternal life, even unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God.” 1 John 5.13, R.V. So it is that the Gospel has to do with eternal things, but eternal things in the present time. The trouble with people is that they regard eternity as only future, whereas eternity is past, present, and future. It has been, is, and is to be. Especially is it *now*, for God “inhabits eternity” (Isaiah 57.15), and His name is “I AM”. Eternity with Him is always present. Likewise He desires us to live the life eternal, but always in the present. He, who truly believes in Christ, passes from death unto life, from the temporal to the eternal, from the unreal to the real.

And thus it is in a sense true that the Gospel has to do with the next world, rather than with this. Christ “gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from *this present evil world*, according to the will of God and our Father.” Galatians 1.4. But He delivers us from this present world only by saving us from the evil of it *now*. He gives us rest in His righteousness.

This rest in His righteousness—the rest that remains—is the rest that was ready for man from the foundation of the world. Hebrews 4.3-5. As we learned in the second chapter of Hebrews, God has put “the world to come” in subjection to man, not to angels. Do not forget that “the world to come” *has been put* in subjection to man, not ‘is’ to be put in subjection to him. That world to come is the new earth, the same that God created and gave to man in the beginning. Its rest and peace and power are to be enjoyed in this present time, thus bringing heaven upon earth, and giving men a heaven in which to live, while going to heaven. While the redeemed are to sing a new song on Mount Zion, they are to “come with singing unto Zion.” Isaiah 51.11

“God did rest the seventh day from all His work.” Hebrews 4.4. “The works were finished from the foundation of the world.” Verse 3. That rest God gave to man, and that rest still remains, for on the cross, Christ, in whom all things are created, said, “It is finished.” The same rest which is now given, is to be enjoyed in the ages to come, for “He that sat on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto Me, Write; for these things are true and faithful. And He said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.” Revelation 21.5, 6. The finished works of creation in the beginning, and the finished work of the new creation, are found in the cross of Christ. Oh, come to Christ, believe His word, and find rest *now*.