

## Friendly Bible Talks

thing that God asked of you, just to leave one tree alone, you would have been saying to yourself: 'Such a little thing can't really matter; God never would be so strict as all that.' Perhaps Adam and Eve talked to each other in that style; but if they did, God very soon gave them to understand that He meant what He said, big or little. It cannot mean that God will overlook disobedience in little things, when it says He does, not mark offences, or else He would have overlooked Adam's first offence. It must mean that there is forgiveness to be had through His grace for every sin, great and small."

"Maybe you are right," replied Mr. Rogers. "Still it seems to me that as long as a man is sincere in what he does, he will be accepted by God."

"Yes, I think you are right there, because if he is sincere he won't neglect any duty that God reveals to him. God won't ask any more of us, I am sure, than that we serve Him sincerely," replied Mr. Barker.

"What I meant to say was that it doesn't matter whether a man goes one way or another, so long as he is sincere. For instance, Mr. Summers thinks certain things are right; and I may not agree with him; but if we are both sincere, it will make no difference. We shall both be all right in the end."

"Isn't that another question altogether, Fred?" said Mr. Barker, with a smile. "You must have forgotten the inquest on old Mr. Johnston last winter. When his wife give him the medicine out of the wrong bottle she did it in all sincerity, but he died just the same. I remember going out of my way once a good many miles because I was so sure that I was on the right road that I didn't dream of asking anyone I met to direct me. My sincerity didn't save me from going wrong; and if I hadn't got uneasy and begun to inquire, I never should have got to the place I was bound for. No; sincerity is very good, but it doesn't take the place of correct information; and the more I think about it, the more I think I shall go and hear what Mr. Summers has to say. If he has got any new light from the Bible, I would like to have some of it for myself. Light never hurt anybody yet, and if we study in the right spirit, God will save us from falling into error, for the Savior promised that the Holy Spirit should lead us into all truth."

"Well, I'll come along with you. There are one or two questions I should rather like to ask Mr. Summers. But, I must say I can't see how it is going to make any difference to us, as Christians, whether we believe that Jesus is coming again soon or not."

"I don't see myself," were Mr. Barker's parting words, as he lifted the latch of his garden gate; "but whatever truth you and I have learned in the past we have always found to be a blessing and a power in our lives, and if the Lord has more light for us, we may be quite sure that it will bring some blessing with it."

## The Hope of the Fathers

"You want to know what difference it makes?" said Mr. Summers.

"Yes," replied Mr. Rogers; "Mr. Barker and I have been talking over things a little since you invited us to come and have a Bible study together. We can see some reasons why, perhaps, people ought to be giving more thought than they do to such matters, but we thought we would like you to tell us, before we go into the question more deeply, why you think it matters whether we believe that the Lord is soon coming again or not."

The three men were seated in Mr. Summers' home. Each had a Bible before him, and a concordance, with one or two other books, lay on the table. Mr. Summers was a young man, about the same age as Fred Rogers. He had always been fond of study, and these tastes had been considerably strengthened by the new interest he had taken in the teachings of the Bible during the past year. He thought a moment before he answered the question put by Mr. Rogers, and then spoke:

"Matters to whom? To you, or to the Lord Jesus?"

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“Why, of course, we were thinking of ourselves,” replied Mr. Rogers. “How can anyone know what it matters to the Savior?”

“It matters everything to Him,” was the reply. “The very last message that has come to us from His own lips is: ‘Surely I come quickly.’ You will find it in the close of the Revelation, at the end of the Bible, like a parting word to keep us from ever forgetting that Jesus is coming again as quickly as possible. You know how we all treasure the last word spoken by a departed friend. Well, it seems to me that the Savior wanted us to have some word that would always stay in our hearts, and keep alive in them the sweet remembrance of the past, and the blessed hope of the future, and He couldn’t find a better message than this: ‘Surely I come quickly.’ And what makes me sure that this was His real thought in giving us that last loving message is the fact that when He parted with His disciples before the crucifixion, and when He left them to ascend to the right hand of the Father, it was the same word of consolation that He spoke to them then.”

“Where do you find that He spoke to His disciples just before the crucifixion about His coming back?” asked Mr. Barker.

“In Matthew’s gospel,” was the answer, “the twenty-sixth chapter. When the Savior instituted His memorial supper, He told the disciples that His body was to be broken and His blood was to be shed for them; but He did not leave them to think only of the cross. He pointed them forward to the time when He would come again to receive them into His kingdom. Read these words: ‘But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.’ Did you ever think of that when you were partaking of the Holy Communion? When we go to the Lord’s Table, we are not only to look back; we are to look forward, also, to the coming great celebration of the Lord’s Supper, when He will drink wine with us in the kingdom. Our visits to the Lord’s Table ought to be like links in a chain that connect us, at one end, with the Supper at which the suffering Savior was present, and, at the other, with the great feast in the kingdom, when He will once more pass to us the bread and the wine. Paul saw this in the Supper, for he writes to the Corinthian believers: ‘As often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do show the Lord’s death till He come.’ So you see the Holy Communion is robbed of its wonderful meaning if it does not lead us to cherish the thought of the Savior’s return.”

“I must confess,” said Mr. Barker, “that I hadn’t seen the Lord’s Supper in this light. It certainly gives it new meaning.”

“Yes, and that is not all,” replied Mr. Summers. “Notice what the Savior says: ‘I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you.’ He seems to say, When you meet to celebrate this Supper, think of Me, not as enjoying the plenty of heaven, but as filled with a great longing to sit down with you all. So the Lord’s Supper, every time we partake of it, ought to remind us that the Savior’s heart is yearning for the time when all the saved will sit at His table. How it must gladden His heart to see the longed-for moment drawing nearer! When I think of Christ, and His earnest desire for the reunion with His own, I can’t help feeling that we ought to be thinking more of the difference it makes to Him than about the difference it makes to us, whether His longing is soon to be gratified or not.”

“That’s true,” said Mr. Rogers; “I am afraid I haven’t been taking the feelings of the Savior into account when I have thought about His second coming. But you were going to tell us about the Savior’s last message, when He ascended.”

“You will find it in the first chapter of the Acts of the Apostles,” answered Mr. Summers. “Jesus had taken the disciples out to Olivet, and had there ascended before them, until a cloud received Him from their sight. Then, while they stood with upturned faces, looking and looking, as though they never could take their eyes off the cloud that hid His beloved form, lo, two angels stood by them with a word of comfort for their bereaved hearts: ‘This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven.’”

“So you see, when Jesus goes forth to be crucified, He points His sorrowing disciples to the time when they should sit down with Him in His kingdom; when He ascends into heaven, He comforts those who lose His

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personal presence with the assurance that He, the same Jesus, will one day descend; and the last word that comes to us from His own lips repeats the same glad tidings; 'Surely I come quickly.' Clearly, it ought to make to us who love Him all the difference in the world whether the glad tidings is soon to be fulfilled. More than that, the promise of the return of Jesus is so prominent in the Scriptures, and is connected with so many other great truths, that if we do not give the 'blessed hope,' as Paul calls it, its proper place, we are certain to go astray in our understanding of other teachings of the Bible."

"It certainly does seem," said Mr. Rogers, "that the subject is very important, and I, for one, am getting anxious to know more about it."

"It is a remarkable fact," said Mr. Summers, "that while in our day the second coming of the Savior has no interest for large numbers of Christians, thousands of years ago it was a highly-prized hope. Naturally, one would think that the nearer we come to the end, the more the church would be looking for the Second Advent, but it almost seems as if the patriarchs and prophets made more of it than the church does today."

"You, say 'thousands of years;' how far back do you find the coming of the Lord spoken of?" asked Mr. Barker.

"Well, it certainly was referred to in the garden of Eden," was Mr. Summers' reply. "The promise that the head of the serpent should be crushed by the Seed of the woman pointed forward to the time when sin and death should be vanquished and brought to an end. But the record of the years before the Flood is so exceedingly brief that we know next to nothing of the knowledge enjoyed by the servants of God in that time. If it were not for a brief allusion by a New Testament writer, we should not know that the hope of the coming of the Lord encouraged the hearts of the antediluvian saints when they saw themselves surrounded by the tides of evil."

"Where in the New Testament do you find any such reference as that?" inquired Mr. Rogers.

"In the epistle of Jude," was the reply. "He tells us that 'Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.' Enoch was a good man who walked with God, and God showed him the end of human rebellion. Enoch passed on the knowledge to his generation, and taught them about the time when the Lord should appear to execute judgment. And his message has come down even to our day to show how it has always been a star of hope to the people of God."

"Do you suppose, Mr. Summers, that Abraham knew anything of the Second Advent?" questioned Mr. Barker.

"There is no definite statement that he did," was the reply. "But we know that he saw the day of Christ, and was glad, for the Savior Himself tells us so. And the eleventh chapter of Hebrews informs us that Abraham believed in the resurrection from the dead, and looked for his inheritance in the renewed earth, and in the city whose Builder and Maker is God. He and his seed 'died in faith,' so they must have looked forward to the coming of the Lord to bring them forth from the dust. The prophecy of Enoch shows that Abraham did not live too early to know anything of the Second Advent. Then Job, who probably lived not long after Abraham's time, spoke very definitely about it. Will you read us Job 19:25-27, Mr. Rogers?"

Mr. Rogers found the place, and read: "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."

"Do you notice," asked Mr. Summers, "how clearly Job states his hope? It is a Redeemer whom he expects to see, who at the latter day shall stand upon the earth. That Redeemer is divine, even the Son of God; and Job in that day will be clothed with renewed flesh, notwithstanding his body has been dissolved in decay."

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How closely does job's hope correspond with that expressed by the apostle Paul! On another occasion the patriarch speaks of his own resurrection, and again his statements are in close harmony with Christ's own teaching. You will read them in Job 14:14, 15: 'If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call and I will answer Thee: Thou wilt have a desire to the work of Thy hands.' The Psalmist David also speaks of the same time. Will you read to us from Psalm fifty, verses three to five, Mr. Barker?"

Mr. Barker read with a solemnity that deepened as he proceeded: "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people. Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice." "It sounds very terrible," he remarked.

"It is," answered Mr. Summers. "Far more so than any of us can conceive. It will be an awful thing to be numbered among the wicked in that day. No wonder they pray that the rocks may fall on them and hide them from the face of the Lamb, because the great day of His wrath is come. But there is another side to the story. You remember the comfort that came into job's heart when he looked forward to that day. When the Lord should come in power and glory, He would not be to His own as 'a stranger,' which is the marginal reading of Job 19:27. The devouring fire and the tumult of the tempest are not for the people of God. For them there is the loving summons: 'Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.' Christ and His people have become one, joined in one spirit of self-denying service. He is no stranger to them; and His love casts out all fear from their hearts. The coming of the Lord is for them the overflowing fullness of joy unspeakable and full of glory.

"Then again, if you will turn to the prophecy of Isaiah," continued Mr. Summers, "yea will see that he also speaks of the coming of the Lord in glory as though it would be an event earnestly desired and expected by His people. The twenty-fifth chapter, verse nine, reads: 'And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.' So you see that His own will be looking and waiting for Him."

"But does not that prophecy refer to the first advent of the Lord?" asked Mr. Rogers. "It speaks about bringing salvation. Did not Jesus do that at His first coming?"

"Yes," was the reply, "but His second coming will bring to perfection the salvation then begun. The epistle to the Hebrews tells us that to them that look for Him Jesus will appear the second time without sin unto salvation. And Peter tells that we 'are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.' When man sinned he lost character and life and home. The work of restoration began at Calvary; it will be completed when Jesus returns to take His people home, to dwell with Him for ever. Isaiah, in the very passage we have just read from, shows the scope of the salvation which the Savior brings at His second coming: 'He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears away from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth.' Even the redeemed still have to weep over the ravages of sin and death, but they will weep no more after the coming of the Lord.

"But now let us consider further what the Second Advent will bring. Mr. Barker, will you turn to the thirtieth chapter of Isaiah, and read what it says as to the effect of the Lord's coming upon His enemies? Verse twenty-seven."

Mr. Barker read: "Behold, the name of the Lord cometh from far, burning with His anger, and the burden thereof is heavy: His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue as a devouring fire."

"Now verse thirty, please."

"And the Lord shall cause His glorious voice to be heard, and shall show the lighting down of His arm, with the indignation of His anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones."

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“Now will you read the twenty-ninth verse, which describes the attitude of God’s children at that very time? Here, as everywhere else, you will notice that it is an occasion of rejoicing.”

“You shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one who goes with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the Mighty One of Israel.”

“Thank you,” said Mr. Summers. “We might read a great many scriptures, for the Bible has much to say on this subject. The prophets recur to it again and again. It is the blessed hope that cheers them in days of gloom and disappointment. They do not always refer to the particular event of the descent of Christ from heaven, but they speak very frequently of the restoration that will, at that time, be brought about. Then the Good Shepherd will gather His sheep and, in Ezekiel’s words, ‘will feed them in a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: there shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel.’

“Joel describes the arming of the nations and the great strife that will attend the Second Advent; Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah speak of various aspects of the day of the Lord; and Malachi tells us how it will burn as an oven, and devour the wicked, root and branch. One of the most glowing pictures of all is drawn by Habakkuk. In the third chapter of his prophecy we read of the unendurable brightness of the Savior’s appearing: ‘His glory covered the heavens.’ It will be as though, instead of one sun in the sky, the firmament were filled with blazing suns. Did ever men yet see such a sight as that?”

“No,” said Mr. Rogers.

“Nor ever will,” continued Mr. Summers, “until the Lord Jesus rides forth in the glory of His Father and of the holy angels, and every eye shall see Him. The prophet goes on: ‘His brightness was as the light; He had horns coming out of His hand [bright beams out of His side, margin]: and there was the hiding of His power. Before Him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at His feet. He stood, and measured the earth: He beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hill did bow: His ways are everlasting.’”

“I do not wonder,” remarked Mr. Barker, “that the Jews were mistaken in their expectations of a Messiah. These texts we have been reading do not say very much about the suffering side of the Savior’s work, and it would be very excusable in a Jew to look for a glorious Conqueror after reading such prophecies as these.”

“They certainly did form wrong conceptions,” answered Mr. Summers; “but they might have gathered the truth from God’s Word if they had studied it in a spirit of faith and humility. Peter tells us in his first epistle, first chapter, that the prophets themselves searched diligently to find out what the Spirit was revealing through them, and what time the revelation pointed to when it bore witness of the sufferings of Christ and of the glory that should follow. And through the prophet Daniel, God gave a key to this mystery several centuries before the first advent of the Messiah. In his ninth chapter, Daniel tells of a certain prophetic period that was cut off upon his own people, which period was to begin with the commandment to restore and build Jerusalem, and to terminate shortly after the cutting off of the Messiah. When the Savior was speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem, He showed that He understood this prophecy, and that others might do so. ‘Whoso reads, let him understand,’ were His words, which you will find in the twenty-fourth of Matthew. So every student of the Old Testament prophecies had a good opportunity to know that the Messiah, when He appeared at the expiration of that prophetic period, proclaiming in His own words that ‘The time is fulfilled,’ had come to suffer and die, to ‘make an end of sins,’ and ‘bring in everlasting righteousness,’ according to Daniel’s prophecy. The glory was to come later.

“The Lord has never left men to walk in darkness,” continued Mr. Summers. “He tells us that the sure word of prophecy is a light in a dark place, to which we do well to take heed. If Israel had paid due attention to that light, they would have been prepared to receive the Messiah when He appeared; and if we pay heed to its instruction today, we shall understand our own time and its demands upon us. Then when the Messiah comes the second time we shall be ready for Him. We need not be in darkness that that day should overtake us as a thief.”

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“Well,” remarked Mr. Rogers, “I never thought that I was in any danger of making the same mistake as the Jews; but I can see that if I don’t study my Bible more earnestly than I have done in the past, the danger is a very real one. Tell us some more about this second advent, Mr. Summers, please.”

“When we turn to the New Testament,” went on Mr. Summers, “we find it full of the subject of the second coming of the Savior Christ Himself often referred to His advent in glory. In the twenty fourth chapter of Matthew we read of signs that He said would be given in the sun and moon and stars, by which the church might know that He was even at the door. Many of His parables pointed the minds of the disciples forward to that day. As we have already seen, the Holy Communion was designed to keep the church in remembrance of the Savior’s next appearing; and when He ascended, the angels told His disciples that He would come again in the same manner as He went up. One of the clearest statements on the subject is made by Christ Himself, as recorded in John’s gospel, chapter fourteen. Will you read it for us, Mr. Barker?”

“Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

“Do you see,” asked Mr. Summers, “how full of promise these words of Christ were to the disciples whom He was about to leave? Naturally enough their hearts were heavy at the thought of losing Him. What is the comfort He offers them? It is His second coming. He tells them: ‘Do not think of heaven as a place in which you have no part. There are many mansions there, and I am going away in order that I may prepare a place for you. Some day I will come back and fetch you, so that we may live together for all eternity.’ How the disciples would think over those words in days of darkness! When the world was casting out their names as evil, and some were even thinking it would be an acceptable service to God to kill them, they could always turn in their hearts to the home that Christ was preparing for them, and to the day when He would come to fetch them. Then the exile would be over, and the glorious, everlasting reward would be theirs.

“Paul cherished the same hope, although he had not known Christ after the flesh. One thought gave him courage to go on bearing his testimony, whether men would listen or not, and that thought was that one day he would meet the Savior face to face, and give account of his life-work. So he wrote to his young comrade Timothy: ‘I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; preach the Word.’”

“Such a hope certainly would be an incentive to faithfulness in carrying out the Lord’s commands,” said Mr. Barker.

“Yes,” rejoined Mr. Summers, “and it was even more than that. The positive assurance of a personal reunion made Christ a living reality to His disciples, and in that way it made His saving work for men and women more real. At the beginning of our study you asked what difference it made to the Christian whether he looked for the coming of the Lord or not. What do you suppose the apostle John would say in answer to such a question?”

“I suppose;” remarked Mr. Rogers, “he would be surprised at anyone asking the question. Can you tell us just what he would say?”

“Yes, you will find it in his first epistle, third chapter,” answered Mr. Summers. “Mr. Rogers, will you read the second and third verses?”

Mr. Rogers turned to the place, and read: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is. And every man that has this hope in Him purifies himself, even as He is pure.”

“The cherishing of this hope, then,” said Mr. Summers, “has an effect upon the character. The Christian who looks for his Lord to return will be a better man than he could be without such a hope. And this agrees with what Paul writes to Titus. He declares that the saving grace of God teaches us ‘that, denying

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ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.”

“But this must end our study for tonight. Next time we meet, it will be interesting to consider one reason, at least, why the church has not cherished the blessed hope more warmly, but has allowed it largely to be forgotten.”

Both Mr. Barker and Mr. Rogers thanked Mr. Summers warmly for his kindness in giving them such an interesting and profitable evening, and as the two walked together on their way home they agreed that they had certainly done well in accepting the invitation given them by Mr. Summers to spend a little time in ascertaining what the Bible had to say for itself on the subject of the Second Advent.

### The Gate Of Life

“I WOULD like to ask one question before we begin the study tonight,” said Mr. Barker, as he and Mr. Rogers drew up to the table in Mr. Summers’ sitting-room, after the latter had offered a brief prayer that God would guide and bless them all in the search for truth.

“Certainly,” was the response.

“It is this,” said Mr. Barker: “I can feel the force of what you read to us and told us last week, and am convinced that we ought to be familiar with the truth concerning the Savior’s second coming, and give it a large place in our hearts, but I can’t yet see how that doctrine is going to do Christians any more good than the old idea did, that they ought always to be prepared for death. What is the difference between being ready for the Lord’s coming, and being ready for the hour of death?”

“That is a question that you will have to find the answer to in your own experience,” replied Mr. Summers.

“Hitherto you have, I doubt not, found help in remembering the shortness and uncertainty of human life, and in cultivating a state of preparedness for death; but you have given no thought to the coming of the Lord, so you cannot tell how much more helpful it would have been if you had cherished the apostolic hope in waiting for the Lord to come from heaven. With your present experience, it may well be that you can see no difference in the degree of helpfulness connected with the two expectations. But if you cherish what Paul calls ‘the blessed hope,’ you will find a great deal more blessing in it than you ever found in being prepared for death. Indeed, the hope of the Lord’s coming is so inwrought into His own teaching and that of the apostles, that one must perforce get wrong conceptions of truth, and occupy a wrong point of view, if one fails to give it its rightful place.”

“Well,” said Mr. Barker, “I suppose the matter will grow plainer, as you say. I know we must not expect to get all the blessing there is in any truth by the mere exercise of our intellectual gifts. The Holy Spirit must make the truth a living reality to us.”

“All the same,” put in Mr. Rogers, “I wish Mr. Summers would try to answer the question more directly, for I have the same difficulty. I have been speaking to two or three people since we met last week, asking them if they ever thought of the Lord’s coming. About all I could get was: ‘Don’t bother your head about such questions as that. Do your duty day by day, and be ready when the Lord calls you, and you’ll be all right!’ Now, what can I say to such people? Isn’t it just the same to a man whether he goes to be with the Lord at death or whether the Lord comes and fetches him at the Second Advent?”

“That question,” said Mr. Summers, “raises the very point I was intending to ask you to study tonight. If you remember, I said last week that we would consider at our next meeting one reason why the church has in a large measure lost sight of the blessed hope of the Lord’s return. Mr. Rogers has just stated that reason. It is that the church today has somehow transferred to the hour of death what the apostolic church connected with the second coming. Christians look now to the time of their dying as the time when they go