

The Witness

OF THE

Apocalypse to Christ

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WHATEVER date may be assigned to the Apocalypse (and concerning this there has been much disputing), its only rightful place is at the end of the Book of God. Some one has happily described Genesis as "the book of origins," and the Revelation as "the book of issues." This is true. The beginnings of all God's ways with men are shown in Genesis, and the results for time and for eternity are seen in the Revelation.

But our present object is not to deal particularly with the prophetic aspect of the book, but to draw attention to the completeness of its witness to Christ. In the wisdom of God all the great cardinal truths of our faith concerning the person and work of the Lord Jesus are here gathered up and re-affirmed by the Divine Spirit before the canon of Scripture was closed for ever. As we survey the Apocalypse we find His Deity, His humanity, His atoning death, and much more besides.

I.—**HIS DEITY**

This is the foundation of everything. Disprove it, and all that may be said about His true and perfect humanity will profit me nothing. Prove to me that the Person who died on Calvary's tree is not God, and all the value has gone out of His work. Salvation becomes impossible for the guilty sons of men.

"No victim of inferior worth
Could ward the stroke that Justice aimed ;
For none but He in Heaven or earth
Could offer that which Justice claimed."

While the Apocalypse opens with the Lord's humanity (for it introduces Him to us as the Servant-Son who gets a revelation from God to pass on to His servants), it quickly reminds us of His Deity. Thus in verses 4, 5, John sends the seven assemblies a threefold greeting from the Eternal God, from His sevenfold Spirit, and from Jesus Christ. Who but a Divine Person could be set in such associations? In Galatians 1. 1 another Apostle not only links Him with God the Father, but even names Him first! Every question as to who He is is thus hushed to rest, and we fall at His feet like Thomas of old, exclaiming, "My Lord and my God."

In verse 8 there is

A Remarkable Blending of God and Christ,

which all careful readers will have observed to be characteristic of the writings of John. But the Alpha and the Omega is undoubtedly Christ. Chapter 22. 13 puts this beyond dispute. Alpha and Omega being the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet, we thus learn that He is the beginning and the end, *i.e.*, the sum, of all that the Holy Spirit has ever written. He is the theme of Scripture from first to last. What a thought!

Now note His appearance to John on the Lord's Day. Head and hairs white like wool remind us of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7. 9, to whom the Son of Man comes with the clouds of Heaven, and is invested with all the rights and dignities of the Kingdom. But verse 22 of the same chapter lets us know that the Son of Man is Himself the Ancient of Days! In verse 7 the Son of Man comes, and in verse 22 it is the Ancient of Days who comes! Thus the Son of Man and the Ancient of Days are one!

Moreover, the Son of Man affirms three times in the Apocalypse that He is the First and the Last (chaps. 1. 17; 2. 8; 22. 13). In Isaiah's prophecy, Jehovah in His controversy with Israel about their idolatry, declares that He is the First

and the Last, and that beside Him there is no God. This He affirms three times (Isa. 41. 4 ; 48. 12 ; 44. 6). Who then is the Man who spoke to John in Patmos, and takes to Himself that which pertains to God alone ? " What manner of Man is this ? " (Matt. 8. 27).

Turn now to the

Great Vision of the Opened Heaven

in chapter 19. 11-16. There we see the Sovereign of Divine appointment, coming forth in righteousness to judge and make war. On His vesture and on His thigh He has a name written, " King of kings, and Lord of lords." In 1 Timothy 6. 15, 16, this is the title of Him who dwells in light unapproachable, and of whom the incarnate Son is the manifestation to men. Thus, what the Spirit through Paul says of the Eternal God, the Spirit through John says also of Jesus (see also Rev. 17. 14).

When John first saw Him, he fell at His feet, and as we realise that in Him all glories dwell, we feel that our true place is at His feet also, and that in adoration.

Throughout the Apocalypse both God and the Lamb are worshipped ; God and the Lamb are the Temple of the Holy City Jerusalem (chap. 21. 22) ; and God and the Lamb occupy the one final throne of blessing (chap. 22. 1). In contrast with this, when John on two occasions was so overwhelmed with the marvels that were being shown to him, that he was disposed to fall at the feet of the angel, he was rebuked, and told to " worship God " (chaps. 19. 10 ; 22. 8, 9).

" It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve " (Matt. 4. 10). " But the God-head of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one : the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost " (Athanasian Creed).

II.—**HIS HUMANITY**

Although it was specially given to John to emphasize the Deity of the Lord Jesus when writing his Gospel, His unique humanity is not lost sight of there. Indeed in chapters 4. 6 ; 11. 33-35 ; 19. 25-27, we have some of the most exquisitely human touches to be found anywhere in the pages of the Evangelists. In like manner, while John beheld in Patmos One who could declare Himself the First and the Last, it was a very real Man who thus spake to him.

John was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (*not* " the Day of the Lord "), and heard a trumpet-like voice speaking to him. Turning himself, he saw seven golden lampstands, and

One Standing in the Midst

like the Son of Man. It was the same Person whom John had seen sitting by the well of Sychar conversing with a sinful woman, and in whose bosom he himself reclined at supper, but the circumstances how changed !

Not as the Revealer of the Father's love did He now appear, but as the Executor of the righteous judgment of God . " His eyes were as a flame of fire, His feet were like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace ; and His voice as the sound of many waters." The same lips that once said so tenderly, " Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," now resounded in majesty like the roar of mighty cataracts. Righteousness, not grace, characterises the Apocalypse. Everything there passes under the searching eyes of the Judge—the Assemblies, the Beast, the False Prophet, Satan, and the dead, great and small. But

It was a Man whom John Saw,

and presently He laid His right hand upon His prostrate servant, saying, " Fear not ; I am the First and the Last ; and the living One, and I became dead ; and behold, I am alive

for evermore ; and have the keys of Death and Hades " (compare R.V.).

The hand was very real, it was no mere vision. It was the same hand that was once laid so compassionately upon the poor Jewish leper (Matt. 8. 3) ; that touched the bier whereon the only son of the widow of Nain was being carried to his burial (Luke 7. 14) ; and that was pierced for our many iniquities (Psa. 22. 16).

In what He said to John He not only proclaimed His Deity as the First and the Last, and as the Living One (in contrast with idols), but He spoke of the completeness of the victory which by His death He has gained. Death has no more dominion over Him ; He has annulled him who had the power of death ; and He has authority (symbolised by the keys—Isa. 22. 22) over both Death and Hades, and will summon both at the appointed hour to deliver up their solemn charge.

Revelation 12 gives us another remarkable picture of God's Man, but viewed as the object of the Devil's murderous hatred. John sees

Two Great Signs in Heaven ;

first, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars upon her head, travailing in birth ; and then, a great red Dragon standing before her, ready to devour her child as soon as it should be born. The woman thus seen invested with all the symbols of authority is neither the Church nor Mary, but Israel, viewed from the standpoint of Divine counsels ; for the proper calling of the nation is to govern and lead the peoples of the earth.

From Israel the Christ has come forth, who will yet rule with a rod of iron. In Romans 9. 1-5, where the Apostle enumerates Israel's privileges and favours from God, he says last of all, " And of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen." Could Israel but

see it, no greater honour has ever been hers than the wonderful fact that God's Anointed has come forth from her midst.

Chapters 12 and 13 of the Apocalypse should be considered together. In chapter 13 we have the

Two Principal Enemies of God

and His people in the world's last crisis—the Beast that arises out of the sea, the head of the revived Latin Empire, and the Beast that arises out of the earth, the Antichrist; the seat of the one being Rome, and of the other Jerusalem. These move and act upon the open stage of human affairs. Chapter 12 shows us the spirit force that operates from behind the scenes. The Dragon (for the serpent has developed into this—deceit into violence) is fiercely opposed to all that is of God, and is determined, if possible, to remove every suggestion of Him from the earth; and seeing that a pious remnant in Israel will bear witness for God, and will endeavour to hold aloft the lamp of truth in the midst of the world's gross darkness, his malignity will be chiefly concentrated there.

Chapter 12, viewed as a whole, shows the awful consistency of

The Devil's Operations throughout the Centuries.

In this respect this chapter reminds us somewhat of Acts 7. He sought to destroy Israel's King when He was born, that God's purposes concerning the earth might be frustrated. Foiled in this, he will seek to destroy the witnessing remnant (and the whole nation, if possible) in the last days.

The two comings of our Lord are thus suggested in this remarkable chapter. Two parentheses may be noted. In the middle of verse 5, thirty-three years are passed over between the bringing forth and the catching up of the Man Child; between verses 5 and 6 nearly two thousand years intervene, for the woman has not fled into the wilderness yet. It will be her place of refuge during the period of the great tribulation.

The Devil hates the Man Christ Jesus. For Him is destined universal rule, and the enemy knows it. In his insensate pride and enormous self-sufficiency, he seeks this for himself. Witness his words to our Lord in the wilderness : " All this power will I give Thee, and the glory of them : for that is delivered unto me ; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If Thou, therefore, wilt worship me, all shall be Thine " (Luke 4. 6, 7). These blasphemous pretensions God will yet judge. Meanwhile the Object of the Devil's spite is on high, " caught up unto God, and to His throne." From that seat of exaltation and glory He will presently come forth to claim His rights, and put down every opposing force of every kind throughout the universe of God.

III.—HIS ATONING DEATH

Although the Apocalypse is the book of His glory and triumph, the death of Christ underlies all its unfoldings. Several times He is referred to as the slain Lamb, and in chapter 1. 18, we hear Himself saying to John, " I became dead." But what is the character of that death ? What is its value and significance ?

Some years ago, it was my lot to lodge under the same roof for several days with a West of England gentleman whose natural charm and amiability is unforgettable. He was a devout Churchman beyond many, and found pleasure in discussing Biblical themes. But every mention of the blood of Christ aroused his ire, and his indignant language concerning it I will not transcribe. I pointed out to him on several occasions that a person of his views, whatever his natural kindness, could have no place in Heaven, for the theme of its song is " Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood " (Rev. 5. 9), and in such a song he could not join. Alas ! the attitude of that gentleman is sadly characteristic

of the majority in the Christendom of to-day. They have no use for the atoning blood; their benighted minds see no necessity for it.

But let us see what the Apocalypse has to say about this. In the very opening verses of the book we have John's remarkable outburst, "Unto Him that loveth us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us a kingdom of priests unto His God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever, Amen" (Rev. 1. 5, 6). This is the response of his heart to the threefold presentation to him of Christ as the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.

John Speaks Representatively.

His praise is ours. He knew, and so likewise do we, why the precious blood was shed. The wicked hands of men were indeed active at Calvary's tree, but His self-sacrificing love to sinners shines out in all its Divine brightness. For our sins that blood was outpoured, and in virtue of it, the whole sanctified company stands "perfected for ever" (Heb. 10. 14). The cleansing is once for all, and its efficacy remains eternally, but the love is present and continuous, "changeless as the eternal laws."

We have referred to the glorified throng in Heaven. John sees them in chapters 4 and 5, represented by twenty-four enthroned elders. The sight of the once-slain Lamb standing in the midst of the throne brings them down upon their faces in adoration and song. Be it noted that there will be only one wounded Man in Heaven. Whatever may have been the sufferings of saints throughout the dispensations, and however mangled their poor bodies may have been, no trace of it will be seen in Heaven. It will be a brilliant throng of perfected humanity that will surround the throne of God. But the One to whom all are indebted for their salvation and blessing

will carry the marks of earth's indignity and suffering for ever. This tender appeal to our affections will never pass away.

The Lamb takes the seven-sealed book out of the right hand of Him who sits upon the throne, and forthwith the new song begins. Other versions than the Authorised may well be consulted concerning

The Language of the Song.

It appears to be abstract in character, not "redeemed *us*" or "made *us*," but simply "redeemed" and "made." The fact is that the happy singers celebrate the marvel of the act, rather than state specifically who are the beneficiaries of it. They are not occupied with themselves as richly blessed at tremendous cost (although that is true); they think rather of the personal worthiness of the Lamb, and of the value of His redeeming Blood.

The scarlet thread runs through the Apocalypse from the first chapter to the last. In chapter 7. 14, the white-robed throng who come out of the Great Tribulation are said to have "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." What robes are these? Scarcely "the best robe" of Luke 15. 22, for that is the righteousness which is not my own, but "that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phil. 3. 9). Assuredly such a robe needs no cleansing; it is as perfect as He who in grace confers it. The "white robes" (three times thus described in Rev. 7) are "the righteousnesses of the saints" (chap. 19. 8).

These, albeit they are produced by the Holy Spirit working within, are so sadly mixed with that which proceeds from ourselves that only the cleansing blood could make them acceptable to our God. The same figure is found in chapter 22. 14, rightly rendered, "Blessed are

They that Wash their Robes

(not, 'do His commandments') that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Nothing that even saints can show could give a right of entry there; but the precious Blood of Christ furnishes a title that is without flaw, and that never can be challenged.

The sufferers of chapter 12. 10, accused by the Devil before God, "overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony." The Blood maintains them in a good conscience before God. Being right with Him, they dread no other. The enemy may kill their bodies, but morally the victory is with those who are killed, and their testimony continues amongst men. Once more we read of

The "Slain Lamb"

in chapter 13. 8. All the dwellers upon earth will worship the Beast but those whose names were written from the world's foundation in the Book of Life. He will deceive many, but not "the very elect" (Matt. 24. 24). Thus in earth's darkest hour, when the greatest lie of the ages is being eagerly believed, God will preserve to Himself a testimony here. There will not be wanting those who will fearlessly maintain the rights of Christ in the presence of men's pretensions and who will confess, at all cost to themselves, that the sole ground of their confidence and hope is the precious atoning Blood.

IV.—HIS RESURRECTION

Is Christ risen? Has the Man whom transgressors slew come back from the grave? Everything depends upon the answer that we are able to give to this question. If there be any doubt here, if the resurrection of Christ may reasonably be challenged, then Christianity is at an end. Salvation is impossible, and all our hopes are myths. Blessed be God, nothing is more certain than the rising again of the Son of His

love. The evidences are so many, and so complete, that he who would refuse them after careful examination can scarcely be expected to believe anything. The Apostle of the Gentiles deals elaborately with the great truth of Christ's resurrection in his famous fifteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians.

But we turn to the Apocalypse, and in its opening chapter we hear the Lord Himself saying : " I am the living One, and I became dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore." There is

A Clear Ring of Triumph Here.

The once crucified One is risen. " Death hath no more dominion over Him " (Rom. 6. 9). It is on the Lord's Day He speaks, the day of His mighty victory over all the powers of darkness, the day when John and his brethren saw Him come into their midst, drawing their attention to His hands and His side, and saying, " Peace be unto you " (John 20. 19, 20). The day, too, when the saints after His ascension made it their practise to come together to break bread (Acts 20. 7) ; the day that has been sacred to His own throughout the Christian era.

In Revelation 2. '8, we hear His voice again—this time to the suffering Assembly in Smyrna : " These things saith the First and the Last, which was dead and is alive." What suited consolation to those who stood

In Jeopardy every Hour !

They might indeed be called to tread His own painful path, and lose their lives for His Name's sake, but resurrection would be as sure for them as for Himself. Slain they might be by those who hated them, but in His eyes they would nevertheless be overcomers, and they should not be hurt of the second death. His own mighty victory has secured life eternal for all who believe. Paul, who also lived in daily peril, was

similarly cheered by the thought of His triumph. "Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present *us with you*" (2 Cor. 4. 14).

V.—**HIS EXALTATION IN HEAVEN**

To the astonished Jews on the Day of Pentecost, Peter announced that God had completely reversed their judgment against Jesus. They had slain Him, but God had raised Him up, loosing the pains of death. He is now by the right hand of God exalted, Psalm 110 being quoted by the Apostle to show that this had been in the mind of God for ages. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2. 24, 33-36). The Lord Himself forewarned the Sanhedrin that it would be so. "Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God" (Luke 22. 69).

The Apocalypse confirms this. Let us again turn to chapter 12. The Dragon's determination to devour the Manchild is shown, but God's intervention is shown also. "Her child was caught up to God, and to His throne." There for the moment He remains. He is destined in the Divine purpose to rule all nations with a rod of iron, but the day for this is not yet. The longsuffering of God with an evil world still runs on. When that is exhausted, God will bring again His First-begotten into the world; then, let Satan and the kings of the earth do what they may, He will establish Him upon His holy Hill of Zion, King of kings and Lord of lords (Psalm 2).

His Present Exaltation

is variously presented in the New Testament Scriptures. Paul, the depositary of God's counsels concerning the Church and its Heavenly relationships and blessings, sees Him in Ephesians 1. 20, 21, seated at God's right hand in the Heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and

dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in that which is to come. Peter, with a less comprehensive vision, tells us that He "is gone into Heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him" (1 Peter 3. 22). The Epistle to the Hebrews introduces Him to us in its opening verses as the triumphant sin-purger sitting down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Each vessel of inspiration speaks of the exaltation of Christ in terms consistent with the subject-matter in hand. The writer of the Apocalypse does the same. His mode of presentation is different from that of all others. Thus, we see the Lamb

In the Midst of the Throne

and of the glorified throng in chapter 5. 6; we see Him as the cloud-clothed Angel in chapter 10 coming out from Heaven, little book in hand, to claim His rights, and in chapter 19. 11 as the Rider upon the white horse, Head and Leader of the armies of Heaven in the final conflict with wrong. The viewpoint of the Apocalypse is God's vindication of Him who as the meek and suffering Lamb endured the rejection and scorn of men the while He was laying the only possible foundation of blessing for men, and of glory for God.

VI.—HIS COMING

Upon this not much need be said. The Apocalypse is full of it. The Rapture is not expressly mentioned there (although in a veiled form it may be found in chapter 4. 1); the book concentrates rather upon His glorious manifestation. All the main lines of prophecy, whether Old Testament or New, converge upon that great Day. It is the epoch of Divine intervention in the course of earth's little history, for the putting down of all that is offensive to God, and for the establishment of another order of things consistent with His

own nature. The Man who now sits at His right hand in Heaven is alone competent to carry all this out for God.

We shall do little more than quote the Spirit's words. First, in chapter 1. 7 : " Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him : and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so. Amen." This is

The Subject of our Testimony

rather than our hope. All classes are comprehended in this solemn passage. Those who are in the mind of God, and who realise in any measure the awfulness of the evils which call aloud for judgment, can but add their grave, " Even so. Amen."

The messages to the last four of the Seven Assemblies all contain references to the Lord's Coming. To the overcomer in Thyatira He not only promises a share in His rule, He adds also " I will give him the Morning Star," and withal gives the needed exhortation, " that which ye have already, hold fast till I come " (chap. 2. 24-28). To Sardis, religious indeed, but to be treated as the world, He says, " If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief " (chap. 3. 3). To Philadelphia, after the gracious promise to keep His own from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world, He adds, " Behold, I come quickly : hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown " (chap. 3. 10, 11). And to the overcomer in Laodicea, He says, " To him will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne " (chap. 3. 21). All these words from His own blessed lips are meant to be a holy stimulus to our souls as the dispensation runs out, and as His return draws ever nearer.

When the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, great voices in Heaven proclaim, " The Kingdom of the world of our Lord

and His Christ is come " (chap. 11. 15, J.N.D.). But—" the nations were angry." God's King is still unwelcome. In all His majesty the King of kings and Lord of lords is seen coming forth from the opened Heavens in chapter 19. 11, " in righteousness to judge and make war." An awful moment for a rebellious world.

The Apocalypse concludes with His thrice repeated,

" I Come Quickly."

In verse 7 (chap. 22) it is in connection with keeping " the sayings of the prophecy of this book ; " in verse 12 it is linked with reward, " to give every man according as his work shall be ; " but in verse 20 it is just Himself that is before us. Let us not forget that *these are the very last words that have reached us from the lips of the Lord Jesus*. Since that day in Patmos, Heaven has been silent, and we need expect to hear nothing further from thence until we hear the great shout of 1 Thessalonians 4. 16. No saint will miss that welcome sound, whether asleep in the tomb or occupied with the activities of service, all will hear it and recognise it, and in one vast company the whole blood-washed host will be caught up to be " for ever with the Lord."

Three Voices.

may be discerned in the two closing verses of Holy Scripture. First the voice of the Lord, " I come quickly," then, the voice of the Church in her glad response, " Amen. Come, Lord Jesus," and finally, the voice of the Holy Spirit in the benediction, " The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all." A sweeter close to the Book of God could scarcely be conceived. " The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ " is what the Church has had to live upon while toiling, suffering, and witnessing here, and the storehouse has never failed. Until His return to call us home, whenever that may be, the grace of the risen One on high may be counted upon to sustain our souls in their every need.

16 THE WITNESS OF THE APOCALYPSE TO CHRIST

The thought of His coming creates

Two Distinct Longings

within us : first, for the consummation of our hope, that we may see His face, and enter with Him into all the joys of the Father's House, and second, that others may be blessed before the door of salvation is closed for ever. Another has expressed it thus : " The Bride in Revelation 21 descends in the most lovely way from the highest occupation with Christ Himself step after step, until she becomes Evangelical to the utmost extent. ' The Spirit and the Bride say COME.' That is occupation with Christ, and must be first. Then 'let him that heareth say, COME,' then 'let him that is athirst COME,' and last of all, Evangelical to the largest degree—'whosoever will, let him take of the Water of Life freely.' "

Thus may it be with us all until we meet Him in the air, and see Him as He is.