

## SECOND PRESENCE

(Discourse given at Lebanon Convention, June 22, 1974 by Norman Rice.)

“But ye brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.” (1 Thess. 5:4, 5) This is a fitting text indeed for the theme text of this convention, especially when we consider that this year of 1974 marks the 100th year anniversary of our Lord’s return. To all who appreciate this great truth it is a cause for rejoicing.

We see the signs of His presence on every hand and appreciate their true significance. The world sees the same signs that we see but are unable to recognize their meaning. Thus while this knowledge of our Lord’s second presence causes great joy and rejoicing in the hearts of his faithful, His presence produces an entirely different effect upon the world—distress, perplexity, destruction, spasms of trouble as travail upon a woman with child.

In our text, the Apostle indicates we enjoy a favored position for he says, “Ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief.” We are not in darkness because we are children of light, children of the day. Our minds have been illuminated by God’s holy spirit to an appreciation of the effects of the dawn of the new day, “as the morning spread upon the mountains.” We have been made aware of the times and seasons of God’s plan. It has been His purpose to make these things known unto us so that that day has not overtaken us as a thief.

All of God’s faithful children have been spared from the traditional error of expecting Jesus to come again in the flesh. Instead, the eyes of our understanding have been opened to appreciate that Jesus will never again be seen by the eye of flesh for only by mental perception will the world ever see him again. At the present time he has come as a thief in the night, seen only by the faithful watchers. And we have learned that at his second presence he will come in the clouds of trouble. The prophet Joel describes this time (Joel 2:2), as “a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains.” We see the effects of this dawning of the new day, upon the nations. It has caused a time of trouble such as the world has never before known.

The power and activity of the new order being established by our Lord “in the top of the mountains” is accompanied by the forces of destruction which shall make an utter end of the old order. Thus simultaneously while the kingdom is now being set up, the old order is being broken down. It is this appreciation and understanding of the prophetic word and our ability to recognize its fulfillment in our day that marks us as children of light. What

a great privilege it is to see and appreciate these evidences of our Lord's second presence. God has favored us with His grace. We are miracles of God's grace as the Apostle reminds us, saying (Eph. 5:8), "Ye were at one time darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk as children of light."

Continuing in the same vein, in 2 Cor. 4:6, he says, "For God [that is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Truth] hath shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." Our heavenly Father has given His assurance that those living in full harmony with Him will not be left in ignorance, they will not need to grope their way in darkness with the world. These footstep followers of the Master will have the lamp, the sure word of prophecy, as a light in a dark place. Our heavenly Father and His beloved Son have been true to their word—this day of our Lord's second presence has not come upon us unaware.

The importance of prophecy is brought to our attention by the prophet Amos (3:7) where we read, "The Lord will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." We understand this to mean that God has foretold every feature of his plan through his servants the prophets. But these secret things of God's purposes, His prophetic utterances through the prophets, were not given for their edification. This is confirmed by the Apostle Peter who says (1 Pet. 1:10, 12), "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven."

In Acts 15:18 the Apostle James says, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." Thus it was possible for our Father to arrange the time features of his plan with unerring accuracy, the full appreciation of which stimulates our faith in His Bible chronology. And knowing the end from the beginning, our all-wise Heavenly Father was able to weave into the web of experiences of peoples and nations of the past, the thread of His divine plan, with all His purposes foretold and prefigured in obscure statements and lessons, in types and shadows and in allegories. Now today the light of the harvest message has illuminated this golden thread of truth so that the knowledge and appreciation of God's plan today is greater than in any other period of the church.

Sometimes we have heard statements to the effect that we don't need to understand this doctrine or that doctrine, or various features of prophecy. We know of no minimum standards that the Lord has established for the "more than overcomers." Neither do we believe we should look upon the understanding of God's word as merely a duty. Rather we should look upon acquiring a thorough knowledge of God's plan as a great privilege reserved solely for His faithful followers. Our Father is pleased to have us diligently apply ourselves in a study of His word, and He will bless our efforts in this endeavor.

Of these secret treasures of knowledge hidden in the prophetic word, the Apostle Paul says, “God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God.” This would include matters of prophecy too, would it not? The Pastor said, “If prophecy was never designed to be understood, there could have been no reasonable object in giving it.” (Vol. 2, page 19.)

But can we place much confidence in prophecy, is it reliable? In this connection, we are reminded of the words of the Apostle Peter when he referred to the transfiguration scene on the Mount in which, by a vision, he was an eyewitness of the power and majesty of our Lord at his second advent. This indeed was a faith-stimulating experience for Peter. At the time that Peter refers to, this experience in his second epistle, he is nearing the end of his course. He wants to leave a final message to the church that will continue to encourage and strengthen them long after he is gone. He writes (2 Pet. 1:15, 16), “I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” While this was a great faith-stimulating experience for Peter, and for all who believe his testimony, yet he says (V. 19), “We have also [in addition to the vision he has related] a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day star arise in your hearts.” The Greek word translated “more” in this text is translated “steadfast” in Heb. 3:14, which reads, “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.” So then, it would be proper to say we have “a more steadfast word of prophecy.” It has been this steadfast word of prophecy that has enlightened and encouraged all true followers of the master down through the dark night of the Gospel age. Thus while they were in toil, privation and tribulation, their hope of the coming kingdom and glory remained sure and steadfast. But while we are to rank the sure, steadfast word of prophecy above visions, we cannot help but feel that Peter’s vision caused him to have greater conviction concerning the coming kingdom than would have been possible without that experience, for Peter had both the prophecies and the vision.

The church today is even more blessed than was Peter, for it is true as was prophesied by the Prophet Daniel, “Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days.” (Dan. 12:12) We are living in the dawn of the new day, in the time of our Lord’s second presence, living at the focal point of time for the fulfillment of the prophecies that have gladdened the hearts of the saints down through the Gospel age. We stand witnessing the birth pangs of the new order, seeing before our very eyes the fulfillment of prophecies like Isa. 2:2, “It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, [kingdoms] and shall be exalted above the hills” (lesser kingdoms).

We see the evidence on every hand of the activity of our present Lord together with the risen saints establishing the kingdom, exercising kingdom power and authority in the overthrow of present institutions that the kingdom of Messiah might be fully established. Thus living in this grand and awful time, we share with Peter the faith-stimulating experience of seeing the vision of the kingdom and are eyewitnesses of the power of our Lord and Master. And so we can say with Peter, “we have not followed cunningly devised fables.”

Yes, dear brethren, the day star, the light bearer has arisen in our hearts and in the hearts of all true followers of the Master. But while the light of the new day is perceived in the hearts of God’s people, it is not recognized by the world. And so it was at the first advent as we read in John 1:5, “the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” This is just what we should expect for the prophecy was, “the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.” We have seen this fulfilled. Our Lord has returned stealthily, unobserved by the world during the dark night of sin.

Following the return of our Lord “as a thief in the night,” will be what the Apostle describes (1 Thess. 5:3) as sudden destruction. But we are not to understand the Apostle to mean sudden destruction from the standpoint of one sudden act of destruction, for he describes it as “sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child.” Therefore we believe we should interpret this sudden destruction to mean a sudden change in the status quo from which the world (the old order) will never recover. And we find this was true as a result of the first major spasm of trouble in 1914. Statesmen recognize that 1914 marked the end of an era. Conditions have been worsening ever since.

“As travail upon a woman with child” to us describes what we have been witnessing for many years—spasms of trouble coming increasingly at more frequent intervals with each spasm of trouble growing more severe. We recognize these to be the birth pangs of the new order. Relief will only come with the birth, the full establishment of the new order of things—the new heavens which we understand to represent spiritual control under Christ, and the new earth, picturing the new order of things under righteous rule.

Let us read some scriptures we believe describe the conditions we now see in the world and which explain the reason for the trouble. Dan. 12:1: “And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time.” Micah 1:3, 4: “Behold the Lord cometh forth out of his place, and will come down and tread upon the high places of the earth [the mountains or kingdoms]. And the mountains [kingdoms] shall be molten under him.” (This means that Christ returns.) Hab. 3:6: “He stood and measured the earth: [in other words he took stock of the situation] he beheld, and drove asunder the nations.” Rev. 11:17, 18: “We give thee thanks, O Lord God,

which art, and wast; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And [meaning because He has reigned] the nations were angry.” (Then follows a description of all that is to be accomplished during His reign.) The Prophet Joel described the inauguration of the kingdom as “a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains.” (Joel 2:2) To us these scriptures are very clear and to the point. They indicate that the trouble, the distress of nations so apparent on every hand, is the result of our Lord’s second presence and His exercise of His kingly authority and power, bringing about disintegration of the present order; described by the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 15:24 as putting “down all rule and all authority and power.”

We rejoice that our Lord has given us the understanding and appreciation of the prophetic word that we might see these signs as evidence that he is indeed present and establishing his righteous kingdom. Many sincere people see the same signs that we do but fail to recognize their true meaning. To them these signs indicate the Lord will come soon. This belief is quite prevalent among various sects of Christendom. They fail to recognize that it was prophesied that our Lord would come as a thief in the night and are unaware that these signs in fact indicate the Lord has come. They are not “the children of light” and children of the day. They are not of the watchers but are of the night and of darkness. The day has overtaken them as a thief as the Apostle foretold would be the case for all except those who are the “children of light.”

Turning again to 1 Thess. 5:5, 6, we read, “We are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.” Thus the Apostle admonishes us to be sober, to be vigilant, to hear the knock of the prophecies, and not to be overcharged with the cares of the world and not to be intoxicated with its spirit. Instead, he admonishes (V. 8), “But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.”

The secrecy the Lord has invoked concerning the time and manner of his second advent has proven to be a strong test. And of the Lord’s consecrated who are overcharged with the cares of life—business, pleasure, or family will be slow to hear the knock, and having heard may find themselves losing their appreciation of the fact of his presence. It brings great sorrow to our hearts when we see this happen—when we see brethren who once recognized these signs as evidence of our Lord’s presence now take their position with others in the various sects of Christendom and declare these signs to indicate our Lord will soon come. On the other hand there are those who don’t go so far as to openly deny the Lord’s presence. Some, failing to continue to recognize the present activity of our Lord and the risen saints, may deny that the work due to begin at his second advent has begun and declare it to be yet future. Let us watch and be sober, dear brethren, as the Apostle admonishes lest the light that is in us become darkness. Our text draws quite a

contrast between the children of light and of the day, and those who are of the night and of darkness.

Our Lord's second presence causes great joy and rejoicing to the hearts of the Lord's faithful. But to the world, the bright shining of the Lord's presence has a totally different effect. We have seen that it has caused a general opening of the eyes of the world along the lines of justice and injustice, of righteousness and sin, of the rights of mankind and the wrongs of mankind. It has caused a general awakening of the world to a realization of its rights and wrongs. It has brought a realization that the earth belongs to all mankind and not exclusively to the few who have seized it for their own selfish purposes.

Today we have the environmentalists on one side and big business on the other. We see discontent and strife in the midst of luxury and plenty such as the world has never before known. We have seen the light of His presence expose corruption, falsity and greed in present institutions, whether they be religious, political, financial or social. We are seeing Luke 8:17 fulfilled: "Nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither anything hid that shall not be known and come abroad." That this is due to the light of His presence is indicated by the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 4:5 where he says that when the Lord comes He "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts." A good example of the fulfillment of these prophecies by our Lord and the Apostle is found in the Watergate affair which has been in the news for many months. As children of light we recognize all these things as indications that our Lord is present.

In Matt. 24:3, reading from the Diaglott, we have the account where the disciples came to our Lord toward the close of His ministry: "saying, Tell us, when these things will be?" and "what will be the sign of thy presence, and of the consummation of the age?" Let us remember that the entire prophecy that follows was given in answer to these questions. The first question, "Tell us, when these things will be?" is not answered directly by our Lord. Instead he gives a general outline of the experiences that lay ahead for the church from his day until now. Thus he implies that a great deal of time must pass before the consummation of the age.

Concerning the question, "What will be the sign of thy presence?" our Lord said nothing concerning the character of the sign but merely said (Verse 30) "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven." Thus he tells us where the sign will appear and then he continues by telling us what the results of that sign will be saying, "and then shall all the tribes of earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."

Our Lord knew the sign would be sufficient for the faithful watchful people of God. As Daniel said, "The wise shall understand." All others would misunderstand this to mean

that our Lord would again be visible to the eye of flesh. But the lesson the Master wishes to impress upon his faithful followers is the fact that his presence will be accompanied by trouble and distress. And not only so, but that the first phase of the trouble will be felt in the heavens, symbolic of the religious institutions. In V. 29 he says, “the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.” This will cause the false stars to fall from every pretense of preaching the gospel truth for the sun, the light of truth, will become darkened by the theory of evolution and heathen philosophies endorsed by Christendom. One has only to review the account of the “World Parliament of Religions” in 1893 as given in Vol. 4 to see how fully this prophecy was fulfilled just a few years after our Lord’s presence.

In this text the word translated “coming” is the Greek word “*erchomai*” which means revealment. Let us remember that while the world will see the sign, recognize the trouble, they will not realize its cause to be due to our Lord’s presence. Only the children of light have been able to recognize this fact.

We have seen the results of the Lord’s judgment upon Babylon. Yes, the cry has gone forth, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen.” And the call has long since gone out to the wheat class in her—“Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.” This has been a major thrust of the harvest message which was due to be proclaimed during our Lord’s second presence and which has been a major factor in the shaking of the symbolic heavens.

We should realize too, that all these prophecies are in fact promises of what was to come to pass. And this is especially true of our Lord’s prophecy recorded in Luke 12:37 which we believe is one of the greatest indications of the Lord’s presence that his faithful followers have today. “Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching; verily I say unto you that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve him.” All faithful watchers, footstep followers of the Master rejoice in the bountiful fulfillment of this promise. As the Pastor writes in Reprint page 5487: “The mysteries of God are now opened up to his faithful children, the watchers; and we are granted a clear understanding of the ‘deep things of God,’ some features of which were never revealed until the present time, even to the most faithful of the Lord’s saints.” We have received the special blessings that were to come at the culmination of the 1335 days. We have heard the knock of the prophecies and therefore have received special blessings of truth.

Our returned Lord has come in and supped with us; he has girded himself and spread before us a great feast of truth, things both new and old from his storehouse. And so every feature of the divine plan has been made clear as never before. Things that were “old”—justification, sanctification and redemption have taken on a new beauty in understanding. The doctrine of redemption, the philosophy of the ransom—how the death of Christ is justification for our sins; how that his merit is imputed to us to make

our sacrifice acceptable. And how that in due time when the better sacrifices are completed, his merit will be applied on behalf of the world of mankind. The meaning of the term—Body of Christ. What sanctification of the church really means; the begetting of the Holy Spirit. The explanation of the term “new creature” and how it differs from the old creature. The understanding of the Church’s share in the sin-offering. The call, development and glorification of the new creation. How that the first resurrection is to bring the new creation glorious privileges and divine blessing—glory, honor and immortality. The philosophy of God’s dealings—how the Logos was made flesh and dwelt among us for the suffering of death. How that he was born of an earthly mother yet was holy, harmless and separate from sinners. All these truths have become clearer to us. These are a cause for rejoicing; and these are an indication that our Lord is indeed present and has girded himself and is serving us from his precious storehouse of truth—through that wise and faithful servant, the writer with the inkhorn.

This year, 1974, marks the 100th year anniversary of our Lord’s second presence. Few, if any, ever expected that a remnant of the Lord’s saints would be on this side of the veil 100 years into the kingdom. That this has been a matter of concern and has constituted a test among the brethren cannot be denied. Suggestions that our Lord is not reigning, that the chronology is wrong, that two years in the garden before sin is incorrect, the smiting of the image of Daniel is future, and so on. All these suggestions reflect some measure of a loss of confidence in the message of truth the Lord has given us through that wise and faithful servant.

Rather than be discouraged and dismayed by the seeming delay, we can take heart that we have here yet another confirmation of the orderly outworking of God’s plan. Speaking of the vision of the kingdom, our Lord through the prophet Habakkuk (2:3) tells us, “though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” It will only seem to tarry, dear brethren, and the fact that the full establishment of the kingdom has seemed to tarry, is in itself another fulfillment of prophecy.

We remember that Elijah was sorely discouraged even to the point of wanting to die. And then he was shown the vision of how the Lord would ultimately be revealed through the winds, the earthquake, the fire and the still small voice. And so it is with us, the Lord has shown us through the prophecies how Messiah’s kingdom will be inaugurated.

As we grow in our understanding and appreciation of these prophecies, there is no room for doubt or discouragement. Let us remember, the Apostle says, “Ye are children of light, and the children of the day.” Thus we belong to the new dispensation and our citizenship is in heaven. By faith we are counted as dead to the world and alive toward God. We are children of light even in the midst of the present darkness. We have had the eyes of our understanding opened to the gracious promises of the divine word. Let us therefore continue to walk in the light and live up to our responsibilities to the truth.

We can say with confidence with Peter, “We have not followed cunningly devised fables”; and we have a “sure [a steadfast] word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.” “Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.” (Heb. 10:35) “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.” Heb. 3:14.