

The Lord's Coming Into The World - Part 2. No Other Saviour

At the end of my previous talk I mentioned that Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of the Lord consistently speak of the One who was to come into the world as God Himself, Jehovah. Whilst this is something that is only ever reluctantly acknowledged, yet it is undeniably so. God Himself would come and intervene. The Advent prophecy in Isaiah Chapter 25 is very much a case in point. We read there: "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 Jehovah; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation." And much as is the title "Prince of Peace" readily ascribed to the Lord, so ought also the titles "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father", for it is said in the same prophecy that He was to be these as well. One thing is certain here, and it is this. The Old Testament knows of only one God and only ever speaks of that one God, who is Jehovah. It was indeed the worship of the one and only God, Jehovah, which distinguished the Jews of old from all other peoples. Jehovah was everything. He was God, He was Saviour, He was Redeemer.

"You are my witnesses, says the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that you may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and besides me there is no savior." (Isaiah Ch. 43:10-11).

And in the following chapter, chapter 44: "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God." I repeat the point: no other God, no other Redeemer, no other Saviour. And what is important, as I said at the beginning, is that this one God, Jehovah, would according to the prophecies, Himself come into the world.

Emphatic as the Old Testament may be - and can be shown to be - on this point, yet when we come to the New Testament and, in particular, to what is written in the Gospels, it seems very much so that Jesus was someone separate from God. After all, He prays to the Father and cried out in anguish to Him at the time of the crucifixion. At the very least there is a difficulty here; and, because it is important, we should try to understand what was involved. The Old Testament, as we have seen, speaks only of one God, and of that one God, Jehovah, coming into the world. So far as the New Testament is concerned, the impression we get from at least some of the passages there, is that God and Jesus were two. And orthodox teaching on the subject is very much along these lines.

In order to overcome the power of evil from hell which was then threatening to overwhelm and destroy mankind, God Himself willed to become incarnate. He assumed or took on human nature by birth of the virgin, Mary, coming down to the level at which we live our lives in this world, and bringing Himself into a situation where He could, through victories in temptation conflicts, put down the hells and re-open the possibilities of salvation.

It was in fact only by birth into the world that God could come face to face with evil. Here He would, as He did, become conscious of its power and attractiveness. He could, as He did, feel its pressure and influence, and was very conscious of its subtlety and persuasiveness. It confronted Him with, and urged upon Him, the same opportunities to hurt and to hit out, to curse and to take revenge. It is evident from the Lord's temptations in the wilderness which are recorded in the Gospels that He was subject to what must have been very appealing inducements to sacrifice long-term objectives for short-term gain - just as we are. But He rejected and overcame all of those things. Tempted in all points as we are, yet He remained without sin.

That He might, come face to face with evil, and overcome its power, God took on human nature. He came on earth as the Lord Jesus Christ, His divinity necessarily covered over and obscured, hidden away, in a sense, deep within. He had taken on not only a natural, physical, body, but a natural mind as well; a mind which could be attacked by evil thoughts, ideas, and suggestions and which would know times of desolation and despair. There is no doubt but that during the time of the Incarnation there was a real sense of separateness between Jesus and God. This is why, as we saw earlier, He prayed and cried out. And sense of separateness there had to be. But in time that separateness disappeared. As Jesus put away from Himself His limited, human, consciousness of things, so Divine consciousness and awareness was able to enter in and take its place. Infirm and frail as that human nature from Mary had been during those thirty three years on earth, God glorified it and made it divine. There are not two gods, or three gods, but one God. He it was who came on earth for our redemption. He who created us also redeemed us. He did not send another.

"In the beginning" it is said, "was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.... He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not." (John 1: 1-4, 10-11).

"Christian churches to-day believe that God the Creator of the universe fathered a Son from eternity, who came down and took upon Himself human form to redeem and save mankind. But this is an error . . . it is shown from the Word that it was Jehovah God Himself who came down and became man and also was the Redeemer." (*True Christian Religion* 82).

And isn't this as the prophecies always declared would be the case? "Behold, the days come" we read in Jeremiah "that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgement and justice in the earth.... and this is the name whereby He shall be called, JEHOVAH our righteousness." (Ch. 23: 5,6).

Earlier in my talk I spoke of the purpose of God's Coming on earth 'to overcome the power of evil from hell which was then threatening to overwhelm and destroy mankind.' There is no question but that He rescued the human race from a most dangerous situation which had arisen. Influenced as we on earth are, and from earliest times always have been, by impulses from the heavens on the one hand and by impulses from the hells on the other, what had happened was that evil and hellish influences were beginning to pre-dominate over good and heavenly influences reaching people. Conscious as we are of alternatives to choose from, whether it is with regard to thoughts and attitudes, or whether it is with regard to our actions, the alternative was no longer reaching people or affecting them. The danger was that people would be unwittingly drawn into a life of evil, and, in the end, mankind would have destroyed itself.

That He might prevent this happening God intervened. By opening up the way for good and heavenly influences to reach people again He restored spiritual freedom. It cannot be said that in the way the word is usually understood, the Lord, by His work on earth, has "saved" us. What He did was to re-open the possibilities of salvation. The responsibility is, as ever, still very much with us. It is up to us to make use of the freedom He restored at that time; to actively think about and to choose between the conflicting influences and thoughts that come to us.

It was promised of the Messiah who was to come into the world that he would, and I quote, "bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." (Isaiah 61,1). And the Lord announced the fulfilment of that prophecy right at the outset of His ministry.

Who were the captives, we ask, and who were the prisoners, other than those who were spiritually so - people captive and bound and as in a prison because of the influence of evil acting in their lives; captives and prisoners of thoughts and ways of going about things which by themselves they could not break away from. These the Lord came to set free.

In the same way that at a given point in time the Lord set free the human race from the uninvited dominion of evil influences from hell, so He stands always ready to do the same thing with each of us individually. Redemption is very much an on-going process. Each of us needs to be redeemed; each of us needs the Lord to make His Advent into our lives - as He will do if we invite Him - to overcome the power that evil has with us. We too, are prisoners and captives, needing to be set free. And there is this we can be sure of. The Lord having defeated the power of evil in its worst and ugliest forms, as He did, He can defeat it over and over again in our lives. Beset as we may seem to ourselves to be, by the worst evils imaginable, yet in the Lord's strength they can be - and will be - overcome.

It is extremely important to us that we should know and understand the God whom we look to and worship. It is altogether too easy to be content with vague thought and belief in concepts that are not properly thought out. We shall soon be involved in celebrations centred on the most wondrous event of all time, and in this series of talks we are trying to come to terms with just something of what was involved.

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