

THE HOUR IS COMING

Charles Dickens described the historical setting of his novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, this way:

It was the year of Our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five. Spiritual revelations were conceded to England at that favoured period, as at this. Mrs. Southcott had recently attained her five-and-twentieth blessed birthday, of whom a prophetic private in the Life Guards had heralded the sublime appearance by announcing that arrangements were made for the swallowing up of London and Westminster.

At that time, many of the people of England had a keen interest in all things spiritual, and they believed that prophets lived among them. Dickens mentions Mrs. Southcott. This is Joanna Southcott, a controversial religious figure. She claimed to be a prophetess, and the Woman of the Apocalypse. When she was sixty-four years of age, she announced that, by some miracle, she was pregnant with Shiloh, the Messiah mentioned in the Book of Genesis. She was not pregnant, however, but rather physically ill. When she understood that she would soon die, she asked that her body be preserved for four days in case she might rise from the dead. Of course, she did not rise from the dead, and her followers buried her body only after its putrefaction. Dickens's novel is about spiritual resurrection, both individual and societal, and, from the start, he set it in contrast to false resurrection. All men come into the world dead spiritually, and so bound to die physically. Jesus is the Great Prophet, prophesied by Moses, who rose from the dead, and raises from the dead those that believe in Him.

After the Exodus, at Mount Sinai, God made a covenant with Israel in which He would be their God if they would obey His law. The people agreed to the terms of the covenant. Within forty days of the ratification of the covenant, the people rebelled against God. They went after other gods, making graven images and worshiping them, and God punished them accordingly. They did not end their rebellion, however, but continued. They rebelled against God more than they submitted to Him. The people had, at Mount Sinai, promised to obey God's law, but they were powerless to do so. They were spiritually dead, and they needed spiritual life.

In the days of the divided monarchy of Israel and Judah, Isaiah the prophet prophesied to the people:

Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the LORD, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness. For they call themselves of the holy city, and stay themselves upon the God of Israel; The LORD of hosts is his name. (Isaiah 48:1, 2)

The Israelites did not keep covenant with God. They claimed to be God's people, but they did not obey Him. They called the city of Jerusalem 'the holy city, but they were unholy. They were hypocrites. They were hypocrites who took the name of the Lord their God in vain. Through the prophet, God said to them:

I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass. Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass; I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, Mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them. (Isaiah 48:3-5)

In times past, God had, through His prophets, spoken of things to come, and those things did come as God said they would. God knew that His covenant people were obstinate, and stiff-necked, and served other gods. So, He revealed to them the future, so that they would know that He is the one true God who knows all things, and can do all things, and their idols were false gods. He would prove that He worked His will in the world, so that the people would not credit their idols. Yet, for all this, the people would repent of their sins, and turn to God. So, God in His severity, would send the army of Babylon to conquer them, and carry them away into exile. God is severe, but He is also merciful, and He would show mercy to His people by sending Cyrus the Great, king of Persia, to conquer the Babylonians, and finally liberate the Israelites. (Isaiah 48:12–22) God would punish the Israelites, but He would later restore them.

Isaiah prophesied:

Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them. And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim. (Isaiah 49:8–12)

God had made Israel His people so that they would worship and serve Him, and be a light, a guide to the nations. Some Israelites were more faithful than others, but none of them was perfect. There would come one Israelite, however, God's Holy One, who would serve God, and serve Him perfectly. He would make with the people of God a New Covenant in which He would raise people from spiritual death to spiritual life. He would make new the desolate places of the earth. He would do this, not for Israel only, but for all nations, and so He would establish righteousness in the earth. When God created the heavens and the earth, He said, "Let there be light," and there was light. So God would create a new heavens and a new earth, and He would say, "Let there be light," there would be light, spiritual light. As the nations would worship and serve Him, so He would bless and prosper them. People from every part of the world would come to God, and they would be His people, and He would be their God.

Isaiah next said:

Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted. But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. (Isaiah 49:13–15)

The Lord would comfort His people in their distress, and have mercy on them in their affliction. He would save the world, and this salvation would be cause for great joy, and would call for songs of praise to God whose kingdom would be done on earth as it is in heaven. While the exiles were in captivity in Babylon, they would lose heart. They would think that the Lord had forsaken them, had forgotten them, but they would be mistaken. A woman conceives a child, and carries him in her womb for nine months, and gives birth to him, and nurses

him. She, if she is righteous, could never abandon her child, or forget him. In this way, God is like a mother to His covenant people. He, as it were, conceived them, gave birth to them, and nursed them. He could never abandon them. Even if some women might, against nature, abandon their children, God could never abandon His people. He would deliver them from their sins, and make them new.

From the beginning of the earthly ministry of Jesus, the Son of God, Jews persecuted Him, and desired to kill Him. When He, on one Sabbath Day, healed an invalid man at the pool at Bethesda, the Jews desired to kill Jesus because He had healed on the Sabbath. Jesus said to them, “My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.” (John 5:17) Saint John commented, “Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God.” (John 5:18) It was one thing for Jesus to break the Sabbath; it was quite another for Him to call Himself the Son of God, and that He and His Father worked together.

Jesus said to them:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. (John 5:19–23)

Jesus is the Son of God incarnate. When He became incarnate, He laid aside His privileges and the Son of God, and humbly lived as a man. He can do nothing independently of His Father in heaven; He can only do what His Father does, because they have one and the same nature. God the Father loves His Son, and shows the Son everything He does. Jesus performed many miracles, like healing the invalid man at the pool of Bethesda, but His apostles would perform works greater than those. God gives life to the dead. After He made the body of Adam, He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. (Genesis 2:7) He raised the dead through the prophets Elijah and Elisha. As the Father raised the dead, so would the Son. God the Father is the judge of all mankind; yet, He gave to His Son this prerogative. He did this so that, as all men should honor the Father, so they should honor His Son, whom He loves. If any man does not honor the Son of God, then He does not honor the Father who sent Him.

Jesus further said:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. (John 5:24)

If any man listens to what Jesus says, and believes Him, then He also believes in the Father who sent Him. God gives that man eternal life, and the Son of God will not condemn him at the Final Judgment. That man has, as it were, risen from the dead.

Jesus then said:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he

given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation. (John 5:25–29)

Jesus said that the time was coming, and in fact, had come, in which the Son of God would call people out of their spiritual graves to walk in new life, a life of obedience. God the Father has life in Himself; He is eternal, and He is the Creator of all things. He has given to His Son to have life in Himself, and the Son gives spiritual life to whomever He pleases. Jesus gives to some men spiritual life, but He, when He returns, will give to all men physical life. He will call all men from their graves, and He will sit in judgment of the things they did in life. Those that did good will have done so only because of the spiritual life Jesus gave them, and they will be raised to a blessed life forever with God Those that evil did not have the spiritual life that Jesus gives, and he will raise them to a cursed life forever without God.

Let us understand that God desires to save the world. Let us believe that Jesus is the One whom God sent to save it. Let us thank God that Jesus has given us spiritual life, and let us with that life do good.

Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us; unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end.

Amen.