

The Continued Presence of the Church in the World

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One of our Lord's gracious parting gifts to the church is the record in John chapter 17 of what is often called His "High Priestly Prayer." Some think this remarkable prayer was offered up by Jesus in the midst of His struggle in the garden of Gethsemane. But in the first verse of the next chapter we're told that He left for the garden after He prayed this prayer. Clearly Christ meant for it to be heard by the disciples on that night in the upper room.

Christ's disciples were profoundly distressed by the announcement that He would be leaving them shortly and so Jesus took opportunity on that night to reassure them that they would not be left orphans. He promised that upon His departure He and the Father would send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who would abide with them forever.¹ But Jesus would also warn them of the difficulties, trials and afflictions they would experience in order to prepare them for what lay ahead.

He further offered consolation and comfort to these distressed men by providing a kind of preview of what would be His on-going High Priestly work of intercession on their behalf, as well as for those who would follow in succeeding generations of the church. "I pray for them," He said, "I do not pray for the world but for those You have given Me, for they are yours." He went on to say, "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me..." His gracious intercession would clearly be directed towards those for whom He came to lay down His life, "those who believe in Me," but in the succeeding phrase, "through their word," He

¹ John 14.16; 16.7

made clear the means by which they would believe. This phrase in Christ's petition helps us understand more fully His request that the disciples not be taken out of the world. "Those who believe in Me" would be ones gathered into the church through the ministration of the Word by the disciples. And so, He therefore stated, "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world."² Christ would be physically leaving and He essentially appointed these men to continue the work He began in His earthly ministry. We see a preview of Christ's intent in His petition when He previously sent out the twelve and then the seventy. It's interesting that the first mission of twelve were sent to the Jews only³, and then the seventy were sent without that same restriction. This order in which the gospel was presented is expressed by Paul who wrote, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."⁴ But what is also clear is that this work was not confined to the twelve. William Hendriksen wrote, "Does not the mention of these seventy... stress the fact that kingdom work is not limited to a few... first there was Jesus; then also the Twelve, now also the seventy; and these in turn, are told to pray that the Lord may send forth (still more) laborers into His harvest."⁵ The disciples would initially be the instrument through which the word would be proclaimed, resulting in the gathering into the church those who would exercise faith in Jesus Christ. And then laborers would be sent who would follow them in this task. Those succeeding laborers would be the church. This truth is set forth in the Savoy where we read, "Christ always has had, and ever shall have a visible

² John 17.9,15,20

³ Matthew 10.5

⁴ Romans 1.16

⁵ *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke*, W Hendricksen, Baker Book House, p.572

kingdom in this world, to the end thereof, of such as believe in Him, and make profession of His name."⁶ It is this profession of His name which chiefly constitutes the Great Commission and it is the church who is to proclaim it.

The Foundation for the Realization of Christ's Petition

On the occasion of Peter's confession, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God," Jesus took occasion to proclaim, "I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."⁷ This marvelous promise is rooted in God's covenantal interaction with His people. In fact, we are encouraged to go all the way back to the garden at the time of Adam's fall when God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."⁸ This record of God's first public declaration of His purpose in human history would be further revealed in His covenantal promise to Abram, "I will make you a great nation... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed... all the land which you see I give to you and your seed forever."⁹ The apostle Paul ties together the promise of the Seed of the woman with the seed in God's promise to Abraham in his letter to the Galatian churches. He wrote, "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ."¹⁰ If we put these promises of God together, we can understand that there would be two lines of Adam's descendants. Both lines could trace their physical lineage to Adam, but there would be a distinct difference between them. One line would be

⁶ The Savoy Declaration of Faith, XXVI. Of the Church, III

⁷ Matthew 16.16,18

⁸ Genesis 3.15

⁹ Genesis 12.2,3: 13.15

¹⁰ Galatians 3.16

children of the serpent, or Satan, and the other would be children of the woman whose offspring would culminate in the Seed, Jesus Christ. It is this latter line which concerns us presently. Paul helps us here as well by writing further to the Galatians, "If you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise."¹¹

In all of this we see clearly that it was God's intention to have a people, Abraham's seed, for Himself. These would be the ones Jesus spoke of when He said, "All that the Father gives Me will come to me."¹² This saying of Jesus is a clear reference to a commission given to Him by the Father and as such was an essential element of a covenant between the Father and the Son. This covenant is plainly set forth by the Psalmist who wrote, "I have made a covenant with My chosen, I have sworn to My servant David: Your seed will I establish forever, and build up your throne to all generations."¹³ This is a reference to God's covenant with David where He said, "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish His kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever. I will be His Father, and He shall be My son."¹⁴ That this One referred to is the incarnate Son of God is confirmed by the writer to the Hebrews who referred to the prophecy as having been fulfilled by Jesus Christ.¹⁵

We now ask how will they come, and what will be the nature of the relationship they have with Christ? We read in the Savoy, "The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one,

¹¹ vs. 29

¹² John 6.37

¹³ Psalm 89.3-4

¹⁴ 2 Samuel 7.12-14

¹⁵ Hebrews 1.5

under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all.”¹⁶ Paul confirmed this description of the church when he wrote, “He (*Christ*) is the head of the body, the church,” and “He (*God the Father*) put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”¹⁷ These elect, chosen, predestined ones are called in the course of time, irresistibly drawn by the Father to Himself through the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ This life-giving work was characterized by Paul as, “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,”¹⁹ and is in complete harmony with the electing will of the Father and the finished redemptive work of Jesus Christ in His life, death, and resurrection from the dead. The resultant church form the spiritual body of Jesus Christ and are therefore in union with Him as He is the Head. The expression “in Him” in reference to Jesus Christ is used by Paul no less than nine times in Ephesians chapter one to describe this remarkable and gracious relationship of individual members of the church with Jesus Christ.

The 19th century German preacher F. W. Krummacher gave joyful expression to the gracious experience of each member of the church in their union with Christ, and therefore in their union with one another. He wrote, “The communion of saints is a great and blessed mystery. When anyone is sincerely converted to the Lord, his soul is not only received into a world of new contemplations, ideas, feelings and prospects; but he enters upon eternal relations that he never before dreamt of; and alliances are formed that shed upon his

¹⁶ Savoy Declaration, XXVI, I

¹⁷ Colossians 1.18; Ephesians 1.22-23, (*parenthetical inserts mine*)

¹⁸ Romans 8.30; John 6.44

¹⁹ Titus 3.5

existence, on this side of eternity, the glorious light of Paradise. He discovers a new country in the midst of this world of death. 'O thou land of peace,' he joyfully exclaims, as he strikes his tempest-beaten sails, 'thou sweet, delightful land, on whose shores I am now at length landed!' An extensive circle of new friends, brethren, and sisters, bid him welcome; people whom he had till then passed with indifference, if not with contempt, from whom he had never dreamt that the breath of that pure, disinterested love could proceed, and of whose existence under heaven he had long despaired; and he now finds himself blessed in its possession. He everywhere meets with the purest sympathy. He has gained friends, on whose eternal fidelity he can count. Could he forget himself, he will never be forgotten before the Lord; for his life has lost its individuality, and it is united by love in the community of many. Community, in the most enlarged sense of the word, is the essence of his new being. What others possess, is also his; whatever blooms for them, sheds its fragrance likewise upon him. In their experience, there is opened to him an ever-flowing fountain of unexpected refreshment; in their victories he likewise triumphs; the light that is vouchsafed to them, shines also upon his path; and his days pass in the sweetest exchange of the richest and most precious gifts of heaven. Verily, no thought can grasp the fullness of that joy and bliss, which proceed from the heavenly union of believing souls. Nor can anyone conceive the sweetness of this delightful union, but he who has himself experienced it."²⁰

Now, given this glorious union of believers with Christ and with one another, the words, "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world," take on a deeper meaning with important implications as regards the Great Commission given to the church. As

²⁰ *Twelve Sermons on Elisha*, F.W. Krummacher, Pietan Press, 2002, pp. 123-24

described above, the church is intimately and vitally connected to Christ, and is therefore equipped through her union with Christ to fulfill her charge to be the on-going proclaimer of the gospel. This can be seen and understood more fully by examining the equipping of Jesus for His public ministry at the time of His baptism by John the Baptist.

Christ's Baptism

The record of the baptism of Christ may be found in all four gospels. It is a profoundly significant and beautiful Trinitarian event which inaugurated the public ministry of Jesus Christ. Matthew records that John was taken aback when Jesus came to be baptized. He protested saying, "I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?" to which Jesus replied, "Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness."²¹ John's message was a call to repentance, and baptism was a symbolic representation of the necessity for cleansing from the filth of sin. The waters of baptism also pictured the waters of God's judgment on sin which is death, eternal death. Jesus Himself had this understanding of baptism by the way He described His death on the cross. On one occasion He said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with,"²² which was a clear reference to His upcoming death on the cross. His outward symbolic baptism was emblematic of what was to be the realization of what the waters of baptism pointed to.

But Jesus was sinless. He did not need to repent of sin or to be forgiven of any sin. And so, we see in His baptism Christ identifying with the sinners He came to save. He, the sinless One would pour out His soul unto death, be numbered with the transgressors, and bear the sin

²¹ 3.14-15

²² Luke 12.50

of many.²³ This is what Paul meant when he wrote, “He (*God the Father*) made Him (*Jesus Christ*) who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”²⁴ This expresses the very heart of the gospel, which is the substitutionary redemptive work of Christ in His fulfilling of all the demands of God’s law for the believing sinner, both in obedience, and in the bearing of the punishment of eternal death for disobedience. Thus, Jesus recognized the significance of His baptism when He overruled John’s objection to it by stating, “Permit it to be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.”

And so, as regards the church, the Apostle Paul helps us in understanding the necessity and significance of this baptism in his letter to the Corinthians. He wrote, “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.”²⁵ In commenting on these verses, Hugh Martin wrote, “The members are many, but the body one. And it is baptism—not symbolical, of course, but real, and of the Spirit—it is baptism that makes many members one.”²⁶ In the Savoy we read, “Baptism is... to be unto the party baptized a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his engrafting into Christ.”²⁷ A similar statement can be found in the Westminster from which Martin asked, “What can the sacrament of baptism be in Christ’s *own case* but a sign and seal of *His engrafting* of the church unto Himself, and communicating to her the benefits of the new covenant, and His engagement to be hers—her

²³ Isaiah 53.12

²⁴ 2 Corinthians 5.21, (*parenthetical inserts mine*)

²⁵ chapter 12.12-13

²⁶ Hugh Martin, *The Abiding Presence*, Christian Focus Publications, 2009, p.65

²⁷ XXIX, I (*italics added*)

Lord and covenant head?"²⁸ Further, in commenting on God the Father's public proclamation, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, " Martin wrote, "He is one with us, not only by His birth, not only in respect of a common nature, but by baptism, or engrafting into one body with us also... the Christ now, after His baptism, must be regarded as including more than the Christ at the incarnation. He must be understood and acknowledged now—and especially if acknowledged in immediate connection with, and obvious reference to, His baptism—as not merely the individual Jesus in His own single person as the head, but as the whole body mystical."²⁹ And so we affirm again that the disciples and subsequently the church are not disparate entities, but are intimately joined to Him in covenant union, He being the head and they being the very body of Christ. This extraordinary relationship the church has with Jesus Christ, signed and sealed in Christ's Baptism, is the basis for what would occur to the church at the time of Pentecost.

However, we first need to examine an additional implication of Christ's baptism. In his commentary on the gospel of Mark, William Hendriksen anticipated the question in regard to Christ's baptism, "Was He (*the Son*) not divine, and therefore not in need of the anointing of the Holy Spirit to qualify Him for the carrying out of His task?"³⁰ He answered with, "The divine Son at His incarnation adopted a human nature, which is in need of, and capable of, being strengthened."³¹ In Hebrews we read, "Inasmuch then, as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same."³² And Hendricksen continued the above

²⁸ *The Abiding Presence*, Hugh Martin, Christian Focus Publications, 2009, p.66

²⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 72,73

³⁰ *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, William Hendricksen, Baker Books, 1996, p.43

³¹ *Ibid*

³² Hebrews 2.14, or as J.B. Phillips paraphrased it, "It was imperative that He should be made like His brothers in every respect"

with , "Thus qualified, He, as divine and human Mediator, was enabled to function in His threefold office as Prophet, Priest, and King, for the salvation of God's people, to the glory of God Triune."³³ In order for the Son of God to be truly qualified as a substitute for those He came to save, He not only took into union with Himself "the likeness of sinful flesh,"³⁴ but in His human nature, He too, like His people, was in need of the enabling and empowering of the indwelling Holy Spirit. John confirmed this by proclaiming, "He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure."³⁵ Further, Luke tells us that, "Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit"³⁶ as He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted. It was the Holy Spirit who sustained Him through that trial and through the whole course of not only His public ministry, but His whole life. This brings us to the experience of the church at Pentecost.

Pentecost

Even after Christ's resurrection, the disciples still did not fully comprehend the significance of what had happened during that momentous week of Passover. Just prior to His ascension, Jesus instructed them to not depart from Jerusalem, "to wait for the Promise of the Father, 'which,' He said, 'you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.'"³⁷ Upon hearing that they asked, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" They didn't yet see all the things that had happened in light of the bigger picture of redemptive history. The kingdom of

³³ *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark*, William Hendricksen, Baker Books, 1996, p.43

³⁴ Romans 8.3

³⁵ John 3.34

³⁶ Luke 4.1

³⁷ Acts 1.4-5

Israel they knew was a preview of, and a kind of pointer to a greater kingdom which would come with a greater king than a David or a Solomon. They were looking backwards, not understanding the progressive revealing and fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes in history. All that had gone before, the tabernacle, temple, priests, sacrifices, kingdom, et al, were all fulfilled through the course of human history in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Jesus redirected their thinking by stating, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."³⁸

And it happened just as Jesus promised. We read, "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."³⁹ In the light of what has been written above regarding Christ's baptism, this outpouring of the Holy Spirit was essentially an extension, or second stage of that baptism upon the spiritual body of Jesus Christ, the church. It was for the same purpose as Christ's baptism, the encouragement and empowering of His body, the church, to continue the work that Christ had begun in His earthly ministry. George Smeaton wrote, "As to the object designed to be served by the descent of the Holy Spirit, it showed that Jesus of Nazareth

³⁸ Acts 1. 7-8

³⁹ Acts 2.1-4

was the Messiah promised to the Fathers, and that He was filled with the Spirit, who, on the one hand, would fit Him for the execution of His high office; and, on the other hand, *enable Him, when His work was accomplished, to dispense the Spirit to His people* without let or hindrance; for the Spirit is the efficient cause of all His divine operations outward to the church and to the world. The operations of the Son of God upon His human nature were effected by the Holy Spirit, as the immediate efficient cause of its existence, and the source of its fitness for the accomplishment of the great work for which the Son of God had assumed human nature."⁴⁰

The pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the church would not be the same measure of the Holy Spirit given to Christ, nor would that passed-on work include the once-for-all-time atonement, but at Pentecost it would chiefly be for the fulfilling of Christ's promise that He would build His church. How so?

God, who making His will known through Christ, has ordained the completion of this building and has also ordained the means for the accomplishment of His will. The gathering and building of the church would be through the instrumentation of the church. Paul wrote regarding the appropriation of salvation by the elect, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."⁴¹ He wrote that this "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."⁴² But this proclamation of the Word would only be made effectual through the mysterious and powerful working of the Holy Spirit accompanying the preaching and teaching of the Word. Paul made this clear when he wrote the Corinthians, "I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom

⁴⁰ George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Banner of Truth Trust, 2016, p. 126, *italics mine*

⁴¹ Ephesians 2.8

⁴² Romans 10.17

declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."⁴³ The third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, has always been active in God's people through the course of redemptive history, but upon the completion of Christ's redemptive work in His obedience, death on the cross and resurrection, He, the Holy Spirit, would come upon the church at Pentecost in a greater measure than before.

As such, Peter came to understand that this unique one-time event of Pentecost was a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, and he quoted it in his sermon; "And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy... and it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."⁴⁴

It's helpful at this point to be reminded of the days of Ezra when the temple was being rebuilt in Jerusalem after the captivity of the Jews in Babylon had ended. There were "many of the priests and Levites and heads of the fathers' houses, old men who had seen the first temple, (*who*) wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this temple was laid before their eyes."⁴⁵ The temple they saw being built paled in comparison to the glorious temple structure

⁴³ 1 Corinthians 2.1-5

⁴⁴ Acts 2.17-18,21

⁴⁵ Ezra 3.12, (*parenthetical insert mine*)

built in the days of Solomon. The word of the Lord came to Zechariah saying, "Who has despised the day of small things?"⁴⁶ In this way, Zechariah was used by God to encourage God's people in their efforts to rebuild the temple. They were discouraged by the intensity of the opposition, but they were told that the temple would be finished because God Himself would insure its rebuilding and be the enabling power behind their efforts. We read, "This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' says the Lord of hosts."⁴⁷ This was God's promise to them that He, "by My Spirit" would insure the rebuilding of the temple.

The fact that this rebuilt structure was not as glorious as the previous temple should have been to them a kind of indicator that there was coming a future and far more glorious temple than could ever be realized and represented by a physical structure. Until that future time, this rebuilt temple would provide the bare necessities for what was required in order to fulfill the worship stipulations encompassed in the old Mosaic covenant. Certainly, Herod's non-divinely instructed renovation of the temple at the time of Christ's earthly ministry should have been a further indication that the physical temple would soon no longer be needed. What a stunning sight it must have been for those in the temple when "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom"⁴⁸ at the time Jesus died on the cross, having made satisfaction by His blood, and thereby providing for the believer "access by one Spirit to the Father."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Zechariah 4.10

⁴⁷ Zechariah 4.6

⁴⁸ Matthew 27.51

⁴⁹ Ephesians 2.18

A greater and lasting temple would be built. In commenting on Zechariah's prophecy, Calvin wrote, "God intended... to show that his Church is built up and preserved, not by human and common means, but by means extraordinary and beyond all our hopes and all our thoughts... Now as Zerubbabel was only a type of Christ, we must understand that this word is addressed to Christ and to all his members. God raises up his Church, and preserves it in its proper state; but this he does by his Spirit, that is, by his own intrinsic and wonderful power, which he does not blend with human aids; and his object is to draw us away from the world, and to hold us wholly dependent on himself." ⁵⁰

The impact of this outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disciples was dramatic and powerful. Concerning this change that came upon the disciples, Lloyd-Jones observed, "The Holy Spirit came down on the Day of Pentecost, and these men who had fumbled and stumbled suddenly had understanding and spoke authoritatively and with great power, and tremendous things happened. The book of Acts is a thrilling account of that." ⁵¹

Under the Mosaic covenant, the Israelites were to celebrate yearly the three great feasts of Passover, the Feast of Firstfruits and the Feast of Booths. ⁵² All three were types and shadows, finding their ultimate fulfillment in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Christ, the true Passover Lamb, having crushed the head of the serpent at the cross, is now risen, exalted, and seated at the right hand of God. And the true "firstfruits" of His glorious victory occurred on that Day of Pentecost when "about three thousand souls were added to them." ⁵³ This was

⁵⁰ Ages Digital Library, *The John Calvin Collection*, pp. 94,95,96

⁵¹ Martin Lloyd-Jones, *Living Water*, Studies in John 4, Crossway Books, 2009, p.254

⁵² Leviticus 23.4-14;33-44

⁵³ Acts 2.41

through the preaching of the Word which was made effectual by the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of those hearers whom God had "chosen in Him (*Christ*) before the foundation of the world... according to the good pleasure of His will."⁵⁴

Prior to Pentecost, Jesus had instructed His disciples "not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father," the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵ Obediently they returned to Jerusalem, "and continued with one accord in prayer and supplication."⁵⁶ Smeaton wrote, "The union of the disciples in prayer and supplication, and in waiting for the promise of the Father, is... never to be interrupted. The instruments by whom the Spirit works are also prepared for service in a similar way, only without the miraculous accompaniments... The first disciples were called to wait in the attitude of humble supplicants for the power with which they were to be endowed by the Holy Spirit coming upon them; and we have an example of what is ever to be reproduced."⁵⁷

To that end, the church has been given the privilege of being given the deposit of "faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."⁵⁸ The Apostle Paul described the church as "the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth."⁵⁹ As such, the church is to preserve, protect and proclaim the gospel in its pristine purity.

⁵⁴ Ephesians 1.4,5 (*italicized parenthetical insert mine*)

⁵⁵ Acts 1.4

⁵⁶ 1.14

⁵⁷ Smeaton, p.255

⁵⁸ Jude 3

⁵⁹ 2 Timothy 3.15

Expectations

From the discussion above, it's clear that one of the primary reasons for the continued presence of the church in this world is to be an instrument of Christ in the fulfilling of His promise to build His church. Paul wrote, "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us." And he then characterized his fulfillment of that charge by writing to the Corinthians, "We implore you on Christ's Behalf, be reconciled to God..."⁶⁰

At the risk of oversimplifying and of also imposing our present eschatological categories on the eschatological views of the Puritans, it would appear that the writers of the Savoy held to what we in our day might call a "Post-Millennial" view regarding future things. We read, "As the Lord in his care and love towards his Church, hath in his infinite wise providence exercised it with great variety in all ages, for the good of them that love him, and his own glory; so according to his promise, we expect that in the latter days, antichrist being destroyed, the Jews called, and the adversaries of the kingdom of his dear Son broken, the churches of Christ being enlarged, and edified through a free and plentiful communication of light and grace, shall enjoy in this world a more quiet, peaceable and glorious condition than they have enjoyed."⁶¹ Joel Beeke and Mark Jones write that the Puritans developed an "eschatological optimism, which proposed a future day of glory in which the Protestant gospel would triumph. This approach to interpreting unfulfilled prophecy was a unifying factor among the Puritans," even though "disagreement arose over specific fulfillments and dates."⁶² It was this expectation of a glorious

⁶⁰ 2 Corinthians 5.20

⁶¹ XXVI, V

⁶² Joel Beeke & Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology, "The City on a Hill": The American's Puritans' Optimistic View of the End Times*, Reformation Heritage Books, 2012, ch.48, p.774

millennial golden age of the gospel which inspired future Massachusetts Bay Colony governor John Winthrop to call the settlement a “city upon a hill” before a watching world. Beeke and Jones added, “The settlers of New England believed that through their emigration and settlement they, with the Holy Spirit’s Blessing, would bring their eschatological hopes to reality. When New England was established as a “city on a hill,” the rest of the world, including Old England, would repent of its ways and follow the example of New England by instituting necessary reforms.”⁶³

Today, those who hold a post-millennial view refer to just about every other millennial view as having a pessimistic expectation for the future in these last days. Post-millennialist Kenneth Gentry writes, “all non-postmillennial views deny widespread and enduring gospel success in transforming men, nations, and cultures in this age.”⁶⁴ However, Beeke and Jones write, “Not surprisingly, New England did not live up to this vision and eschatological optimism. Within years, this “city on a hill” was only a name.”⁶⁵ What would the early Puritan settlers of the New England “city on a hill” think of its present condition? In our day, nominalism, secularism and paganism characterize much of New England.

What then should the expectations of the church be as she seeks to fulfill Christ’s command to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature... making disciples of all the nations?”⁶⁶ Many Christians measure the “success” of the proclaiming of the gospel by the number of conversions. If that is what success is then apparently Jesus had for the most

⁶³ Ibid, p.781

⁶⁴ Kenneth Gentry Jr., *The Greatness of the Great Commission*, Institute for Christian Economics, 1990, p.151

⁶⁵ Beeke & Jones, p.781

⁶⁶ Mark 16.15; Matthew 28.19

part an unsuccessful ministry. After His feeding of the 5000, many were offended by His teaching and “went back and walked with Him no more.”⁶⁷ To the twelve Jesus asked, “Do you also want to go away?”⁶⁸ On another occasion, having instructed His disciples not to worry, Jesus said, “Do not fear little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”⁶⁹ Jesus would rebuke the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum for their failure to repent after seeing His “mighty works.” But He then prayed, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.”⁷⁰ That was not a prayer expressing pessimism, discouragement or failure. It was quite the opposite. God is glorified in not only the reception of the gospel, but also in its rejection. As regards those who remain unrepentant, Paul asked, “What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory, even us whom He called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?”⁷¹ In the midst of their suffering from persecution, Paul encouraged the Thessalonians by writing them that, “It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting

⁶⁷ John 6.66

⁶⁸ Ibid, v.67

⁶⁹ Luke 12.32

⁷⁰ Matthew 11.20,25

⁷¹ Romans 9.22-24

destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed."⁷² Further, Krummacher wrote, "To fear God, is to confess, on our knees, that His Name appears equally glorious in the flaming characters of infernal punishment, as in the bloody ones of the work of redemption, and the rosy ones of grace. A psalm, which glorifies Him, is the hallelujah of the redeemed in heaven; and the despairing moans of the lost in the eternal wastes, also bespeak His glory."⁷³

Jesus made it clear that His followers would be hated and persecuted by the world. In the beginning verses of Matthew 24, Jesus described what the last days would be like till the end of the age. He added, "All these are the beginning of sorrows... lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come."⁷⁴ Jesus likened His kingdom in this present age to a field in which the good seed of wheat had been planted. But an enemy secretly planted tares among the good seed. When a servant reported this work of the enemy and offered to rip up the tares, the owner responded, "Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into the barn.'"⁷⁵

⁷² 2 Thessalonians 1.6-10

⁷³ F.W. Krummacher, *The Last Days of Elisha*, Pietan Publications, 2003, p.98

⁷⁴ Matthew 24.8,12-14

⁷⁵ Ibid, 13.30

Cornelius Venema posed the questions, "Does the Bible anywhere clearly teach that Christ is not presently king in the way in which He will in the future become king during the millennial age? And, if it is conceded that Christ's present kingship is of a piece with His future kingship (because the millennium is now), then what becomes of the expectation for a distinct and unprecedented period in the future?"⁷⁶ He added, "Whereas the New Testament depicts the church in this present age as continually participating in the sufferings of Christ and eagerly awaiting the return of Christ at the end of the age, the postmillennialist view encourages an outlook for the future that focuses on an anticipated period of largely undisturbed blessedness. The expectation and hope of the believer for the future focuses upon the millennium rather than the return of Christ"⁷⁷

What we as the church should fundamentally expect is the fulfillment of what Jesus clearly taught. He promised that He would build His church, the gates of hell would not prevail against it, and that all the Father had given Him would come to Him. Therefore, we don't have to coerce or manipulate people in our presentation of the gospel. At times it will seem like the enemy is winning, and in those times God's people will feel like a mere remnant which will soon be extinguished. But concerning this, Krummacher wrote, "Let the king of the evil one reach its utmost maturity; the Mighty One of Israel, by quiet conquests, accomplishes His object, despite all opposition; and His banners will indubitably be the last, which planted on the ruins of Satan's kingdom, shall float over the whole earth."⁷⁸ The glorious accomplishment of Christ's promise to build His church is made all that more glorious against the backdrop of the seeming strength

⁷⁶ Cornelius Venema, *The Promise of the Future*, Banner of Truth Trust, 2000, p.348

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.355

⁷⁸ F.W. Krummacher, *The Last Days of Elisha*, Pietan Publications, 2003, p.11

of the enemies opposition. Krummacher wrote further, God's "omnipotence demands opposition as a striking contrast; His faithfulness, danger; His wisdom, intricacy; His favor, obvious unworthiness of him to whom it is shown; His mercy, oppression, distress and misery."⁷⁹

We are to lovingly plead with sinners to flee to Christ, to seek God while He may be found. Our proclamation of the truth should not only be by word, but our lives should be such that we are display cases of God's grace in the way we love God and our neighbor, confident that the increase belongs to God. We have the Word, we have the enabling of the Holy Spirit, and even the enemy has been bound during this millennial period of the last days such that, "he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years are finished."⁸⁰ Yes, the enemy will be released for a short time at the very end, but "The Lord will consume (*the lawless one*) with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming."⁸¹ In the meantime, we are called to be faithful!

But "who is sufficient for these things?" Thankfully we can by God's grace confidently say, "Our sufficiency is from God."⁸² And to God be the glory!

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.121

⁸⁰ Revelation 20.3

⁸¹ 2 Thessalonians 2.8, (*parenthetical insert mine*)

⁸² 2 Corinthians 2.16; 3.5