

A D V E N T

By D.B. Knox

"The Protestant Faith"

ADVENT

Next Sunday is Advent Sunday, when we particularly think about the future, and the appearing and rule of our Lord Jesus, God's representative on the day the rulers of the nations will be superseded by the rule of God, our Creator and Lord.

At the end of his life the apostle Paul wrote to his younger friend Timothy: "The time of my death is come, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth is laid up for me the crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day, and not only to me but all them that have set their heart on his appearing" (2 Timothy 4: 7,8).

It is interesting to see the way Paul thought. His view of life is not bounded by this world; he pictures himself beyond death receiving Christ's reward on the day of the completion of God's purposes, on the day of judgment and the establishment of Christ's rule. His view of world history has its culminating point, not in today's events or tomorrow's promised utopia, but in the establishment of God's righteous rule under the Lord Jesus.

Such a view is, of course, the only true way of seeing our own lives and the historical process in which we are living. Most people, even professors of history, can see no purpose, no target for life or for history. But the Bible is clear that God, who created us and our environment, is sovereign God controlling everything in our own lives, everything in history, and that he is bringing everything to its completion, in the fulfilment of His purposes, to the day of judgment and to the reward of eternal inheritance to those who are His. God's purposes can already be discerned, not only in creation, which was the start of it all, but in redemption, when our estrangement from God was dealt with in Christ Jesus, and made plain by His resurrection from death. In Christ's coming reign God will complete His purposes. St. Paul identifies with these purposes; he lived his life in the light of

the future, and as the end of his life on earth drew near, his hope remained clear for eternal relationship with his Lord; he looked for the crown of righteousness which the Lord will give him on the day of Christ's kingdom, and not to him only, he says, "but to all those who have set their hearts on Christ's coming".

This is an interesting phrase to describe Christians, namely, "Those who have set their hearts on the coming of their Lord"; that is, those who identify with Christ, and with God's purposes in Christ. There are different ways in the New Testament of describing Christians. For example, in 1 Corinthians 1:2 Christians are called "those who call upon (i.e., pray to) the Lord Jesus Christ", that is, those who recognise Jesus as their Lord and God. Here we have an equally interesting description of Christians: "Those who have set their hearts on His appearing". Does this description fit you who are listening?

God has created the world; created us and everything around us, and he has created it purposefully; he redeemed us from the consequences of our own rebellion against Him, and given to us the great gift of forgiveness and restoration to fellowship and the promise of eternal inheritance. All this He has done through Himself taking our nature and bearing the consequences of our self-centred rebellion and sinfulness. He grants to all who call upon His name a share in His final purposes when His Kingdom will be established, without contradiction or rebellion.

Are we those who have set our heart on this, as St. Paul was able to describe fellow Christians? An interesting definition. How true is it a definition of us and of our congregation? If it doesn't fit it means that we are not the sort of Christians that St. Paul knew in his time. Advent is a reminder to re-align our thinking to the realities which stretch beyond this life. Jesus is Lord.

In the next verse St. Paul has a very sharp contrast. He speaks of Demas, one of his companions who has left him because "he set

his heart on this present world". Demas had been sharing with St. Paul in the ministry; but has now given up his Christian work because he has set his heart on this present world (2 Timothy 4:9). We have in these two verses a sharp contrast in life attitudes. To set your heart on Christ's appearing or to set your heart on this present world. There are many objects which the present world provides on which we may be tempted to set our heart. If we are young it may be on having a good time; if we are young marrieds it may be on our house or car; if we are older on our salary, or on our future security, on our retirement benefits. But the present world passes away and everything in it. We Christians are to set our hearts on Christ and His appearing and to live by that. We cannot do both. "If we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us", says St. John; "you cannot serve God and mammon", said Christ our Saviour. Most of us Christians believe we can, but in so far as we set our hearts on the things of this world we are not in fact serving God, though we may think we are. To serve God is to trust Him for the present and to set our hearts on His coming Kingdom. It is only by God's word that we hear of Christ's Kingdom and of God's judgment and of salvation through Christ our Lord. Therefore, if Christian ministers do not preach the word it is impossible for Christians to set their hearts on Christ's appearing. Yet, in one way or another, we are all ministers of the word with a responsibility for preaching the word, whether as a parent at home or as a friend at work or as a minister in the congregation; and we are to press this word home, to show its implications. What use to Demas now is this present world on which he set his heart. He has left it for thousands of years and yet he lives to God. Only the things which are of eternal value are of any account.

God, our creator, is the righteous Judge and living Saviour; we

should seek His salvation and set our hearts on His purpose and His plans and His Inheritance and His reign, and not turn aside for self-centred, short-lived power or money. Our Lord comes.

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