

The Last Day.

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THIS phrase, as descriptive of the end of the world, occurs but six times in the New Testament, and only in the Gospel of St. John. Our Lord uses it four times in His address at Capernaum (6³⁹. 40. 44. 54), where He reiterates the words, 'I will raise him up at the last day,' and once in the twelfth chapter (12⁴⁸), where He says that the words He speaks will judge those that hear them 'at the last day'; and Martha uses it when she says, 'I know he shall rise again at the last day' (11²⁴).

But if the phrase itself is not of frequent occurrence, many others are used to convey the same ideas—*e.g.* the day; that day; the day of judgment; the day of wrath; the day of redemption; the day of Christ; the day of the Lord; the day of God; the great day.

This variety of expression indicates the large eschatological element to be found in the New Testament. Just as the Old Testament predicted a 'day of Jahweh,' which by the coming of the Messiah would establish a kingdom of infinite glory on earth, so the New Testament points to 'a last day,' which by the return of Christ will bring all things to their consummation and usher in the perfected kingdom of God.

That this world ultimately will reach a consummation wherein good at last will be victorious, is a demand of conscience. To hold that the opposing principles of right and wrong shall exist side by side in creation in eternal antagonism is a belief contrary to our deepest intuitions. Indeed, we may say that belief in goodness is only possible on the assumption that it will finally subdue wickedness. But when to this assumption of conscience we add the known facts of our Lord's life and work, and the progress since Pentecost of the truth He revealed, we reach a certainty of conviction. Knowing what Christianity *has* done, we judge what it *can* do; and faith compels us to believe that Christ will not leave the work of regeneration He has already accomplished, half-finished, but that He will triumphantly bring it to its perfection. And thus the distinctive feature of Christian eschatology is to be seen in its linking the consummation of this age to the Person of our Lord. The Last Day is not merely the time when the

principles which He taught shall predominantly rule, but is also the hour of His personal return. And just as the foundation of the kingdom of God required His advent in humiliation, so its culmination is reached by His advent in glory.

The distinct prediction by our Lord of a last day shows us that He had, at least from the commencement of His ministry, a definite *plan* in His redemptive work. In His case there was no starting of a movement with uncertainty as to its issue. Circumstances as they arose did not lead Him further than He at first intended; but seeing the end from the beginning He steadfastly wrought out His ministry, undergoing the necessary humiliations and declaring the necessary truths upon which the perfecting of the world was to be based. He placed the leaven in the meal with full knowledge that the whole would be leavened and that the last day would arrive.

The question arises whether we are to expect the consummation of all things to be reached through a gradual development of the principles of Christianity, or through an ultimate crisis.

Philosophy would seem to suggest to us an endless succession of development, as it presents to us an ideal which is always being realized and more and more approximated to, but never finally reached. Philosophic thought, however, from its very nature can neither affirm nor deny a catastrophic ending to this age; for it deals with principles not with epochs, with succession not with events. It is therefore to *History* and *Revelation* that we must turn if we would judge of the probability of any cataclysmal action terminating life as we know it.

Now as regards *History*, whether it be of the material universe or of mankind, there is no doubt that the state of present advancement has been reached not merely by constant steady development, but by progress punctuated by epochs. Throughout periods of apparent rest, forces silently gathered to a head, and then in a few moments of violent strenuous life the world of matter or of humanity was shaken to its foundations, and an old era ended, and a new era began. If, then, the history of the future be as

the history of the past, a stately, continuous advance towards a final restitution is not to be anticipated, but rather a progress through epochs, reaching its culmination in some such catastrophic ending as Scripture predicts.

Neither as regards the New Testament is there any doubt as to its general teaching. According to the words of Christ, and of His earliest followers, we are to expect a crisis at His return, which will suddenly and completely bring to an end the present system and establish His eternal kingdom (Mt 24²⁷, Lk 17²⁴, Jn 5²⁸, 1 Th 4¹⁶, 1 Co 15⁵², 2 P 3¹⁰, He 12²⁶, Jude¹⁴, Rev 20^{7ff.}).

The only possible exception is to be found in the Fourth Gospel, where some scholars find teaching on this point which they regard as different from the rest of the New Testament. They think that St. John teaches, not that Christ will visibly return at the end of the age, but rather that He is perpetually coming, spiritually throughout time, to His Church, and that judgment even now is executed (Jn 14^{18, 23}, 11²⁴⁻²⁶, 3¹⁸, 5²⁵). There is no doubt that this Gospel emphasizes Christ's continuous *dynamical* comings, rather than His Parousia, and that the centre of its eschatological thought is found not so much in His judicial coming at the end of the age as in His personal comings to His disciples either at His resurrection, at their deaths, or by the Holy Spirit (Jn 16^{16, 23}, 14^{3, 18, 23}). But it clearly also teaches, though less prominently, His final return at the end of the age. Such teaching is implied in the phrase 'last day,' which, as we have seen, it records as used by Christ five times, and even more clearly so in the words, 'The hour cometh in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth' (5^{28, 29}).

Wendt (*Leben Jesu*, i. pp. 248 ff. 267, 279) holds that this verse and the phrase 'last day,' wherever it occurs, are interpolations inserted by an editor, who was unfamiliar with and not able to understand St. John's teaching on 'eternal life,' as he himself held the current and less mystic view found in the Synoptists. But as this reasoning is entirely based on subjective theorizing and has no external evidence in its support, it is surely more simple to believe that the Fourth Gospel originally contained these statements, especially as their import is in no way essentially in opposition to those that emphasize the spiritual comings. In the Synoptic Gospels, where we have the chief emphasis laid

upon Christ's final return, we also have words that teach His continuous advents throughout time to His Church, as, for example, where He says, 'Where two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst of them' (Mt 18²⁰). The fact is that there is no collision of thought between these two truths which run side by side throughout the New Testament. If, on the one hand, the Parables of the Mustard Seed and Leaven (Mt 13) show the steady progress externally and internally of the principles of the gospel, and imply the constant supervision and frequent visitation of the Church by our Lord, so, on the other hand, the Parables of the Tares and the Sheep and Goats (Mt 13 and 25) predict the crisis of a last day and of a judgment occurring at His return.

The teaching, then, of experience and of the New Testament alike is, that progress is the constant law of the kingdom of God; that that progress is marked by critical periods, dynamical visitations of our Lord, epochs which are the birth-throes of better things to come; but that when that progress becomes ripe,—ripe by the development of God's children, ripe by the filling up of the iniquity of the sinful (Mt 23³²),—*then* it will be crowned by the visible return of the Son of God. The last day is the acme of a long development.

The Signs.

Special signs are foretold as heralding the last day. Our Lord in His prophetic discourse (Mk 13, Mt 24, Lk 21) replied to the question of the Apostles, 'When shall these things (*i.e.* the temple's destruction) be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the age?' by warning them against being deceived by false Christs, and by telling them that before the end there must be wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, pestilences, and signs from heaven: further, that before His return the gospel must be preached in the whole world for a testimony, that the abomination of desolations would stand in the Holy Place (St. Luke interprets this by saying, Jerusalem would be compassed with armies, 21²⁰), that after these days of extraordinary affliction the sun would be darkened and the stars fall from heaven, and that then 'the sign of the Son of man' (Mt) would appear, and the Son of Man Himself be seen coming in the clouds of heaven. He closed by saying that that generation would not pass till all these things were accom-

plished, but that of that day and hour knew no man, no, not even Himself.

The difficulties of the passage are great, but the solution is probably to be found in seeing that He spoke not merely of His final Parousia, but also of His *historic comings*. Before that generation passed He came in judgment upon the Holy City, and that coming, as all His 'historic comings' since, was a picture on a small scale of His great final return.

The premonitory signs, then, of the last day, are:

1. *Signs in the heavens*. These are the ordinary theophanic signs of Old Testament prophecy, (Jl 3¹⁵, Is 13⁶ 34⁴). It is possible to interpret them spiritually and to regard them as but the drapery of description, especially as Peter sees the fulfilment of similar portents foretold by Joel (2⁸¹) in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Ac 2¹⁶⁻²⁰). But, on the other hand, it is stated in other passages of Scripture (e.g. 2 P 3¹⁰) that the last day will be accompanied by physical dissolution. And if nature shrouded with darkness the dying Redeemer (Mt. 27⁴⁵), it is not unlikely that it will also signalize His return. It is impossible to decide with any certainty as to the meaning of the *sign of Son of Man* mentioned by Mt. It has been interpreted as meaning the acknowledgment of Christ's kingdom on earth, or as the appearance of a Cross in the heavens, or as not to be distinguished from the actual coming of Christ.

2. Before Christ's return, *the gospel must be preached to all nations as a testimony*. This statement found in the first two Gospels (Mt 24¹⁴, Mk 13¹⁰) is paralleled by St. Luke in the words, 'Jerusalem shall be trodden down until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled' (21²⁴). This prediction does not in itself necessarily imply the conversion of the heathen world before His return, but that the Gospel will be offered to them. At the same time, the teaching of our Lord's Parables of the Leaven and Mustard Seed seem to imply at least the adoption of Christian principles by mankind before the end.

3. The treading down of Jerusalem until the fulness of the Gentiles implies *the ultimate restoration of Israel* before their Messiah returns in glory. The same teaching is probably contained in our Lord's words in His lament over Jerusalem, 'Ye shall not see me, until ye shall say, Blessed is

he that cometh in the name of the Lord' (Lk 13³⁵). Such interpretation agrees with the clear prediction of Paul, who states that the hardening of Israel is only until the fulness of the Gentiles has been won for Christ, and that ultimately 'all Israel' will be saved (Ro 11^{25, 26}). Thus, according to the Gospels and the Apostle, the history of the world does not culminate until the admission of mankind, Jew and Gentile, into the Messianic kingdom. It is sometimes assumed that the conversion of the heathen will only be accomplished when the conversion of the Jew has taken place, that the impulse to Christianity gained by the winning of God's ancient people will result in a mighty increase of evangelistic endeavour. Paul, however, places the conversion of the Jews *after* the fulness of the Gentiles.

4. Immediately before the last day there will be *a time of great tribulation*. It is probably correct to identify this with the *Apostasy* foretold by St. Paul (2 Th 2). He predicts that at the time of the Parousia wickedness will have come to a head in the person of *The Man of Sin*, who will lead the Godless that have never known Christ, and the apostates who have fallen away from Christ into open conflict with God and His righteousness.

It is to be remarked that such a doctrine shows the intensity of Christianity's faith in itself. It would be more in accordance with human feeling to foretell a gradual subjugation of mankind to the truth; but she, convinced of the indestructibility of her creed, fears not to announce a falling away of her own children at the very close of her militant career. Her faith enables her to look beyond such a trial of affliction, for at the critical moment of conflict her Lord will return.

5. *A millennial period* is predicted in the Revelation (20¹⁻¹⁰) as preceding the Parousia. A discussion of this difficult passage is outside our present scope. We can only deal with it in relation to the last day, and in this connexion remark: (a) This period of 1000 years (which need not be taken literally as a period of this exact length of time; cf. 2 P 3⁸) must *precede* the Apostasy. The Apostasy occurs at the very close of the Christian dispensation, the *Man of Sin* being annihilated by the manifestation of the Son of God. (b) The loosing of Satan after the 1000 years, the 'little time' of his activity, corresponds exactly with the Apostasy, both being immediately followed by the last day (2 Th 2⁸, Rev 20^{9, 10}).

(c) The 1000 years can therefore hardly be a period of earthly reigning of Christ, for it is inconceivable to think of Him as visible Sovereign among men, and yet of evil at the same time reaching its height. (d) We may best follow Martensen (*Christian Dogmatics*, p. 470 f.), and others in regarding the millennial period as the *blossoming time of the Church*, which is still before us. The influence of Christianity will increasingly spread, men will gradually learn to hate war and cruelty, and to love mercy and justice. Then the Millennium will commence; Christ ruling indeed, but *spiritually* through the universal adoption of His principles. Then national, municipal, and social life will be purified, and universal peace will reign. Then the divisions of Christendom will cease, and there will be the one flock and one Shepherd. But even during this period, sin will not have been eradicated. The wrongness of much now endured will be recognized, and life will be humanized and civilized by Christ's teaching: but deep down in many outwardly civilized hearts will be the old unconverted nature,—many will be but nominally Christians, as lacking that vital union which alone constitutes eternal life. This millennium, this blossoming time of Christianity, will therefore have its autumn season. Sin under the specious leadership of some incarnation of evil will rally itself for a final struggle. Its combined forces will concentrate round the camp of the saints (Rev 20⁹). The Church will be hemmed in and outnumbered by the armies of evil. These will be the days of tribulation which for the elect's sake will be shortened (Mk 13²⁰). But Christ's loving care will be watching over the Church, and so in the moment of her deepest distress the clouds of heaven will open and will reveal Him in the brightness of His glory taking vengeance on His enemies and *finally* overcoming evil.

The Parousia.

The actual event of the Parousia is described in the New Testament as follows: Christ's return will be as sudden and as unmistakably visible as lightning (Lk 17²⁴, Mt 24²⁸; cp. 1 Th 5²); He will be accompanied by the angelic host (2 Th 1⁷, Mk 13²⁷, Mt 13⁴¹); a shout, as a cry of command (κέλευσμα), will be uttered (1 Th 4¹⁶; cp. Jn 5²⁸); the archangel's voice will be heard (1 Th 4¹⁶); the last trumpet will be sounded to summon mankind, and to assemble

the elect (1 Co 15⁵², 1 Th 4¹⁶, Mt 24³¹; cp. Ex 19¹⁶, Nu 10²); the dead will be raised (1 Th 4¹⁶, 1 Co 15^{23, 52}); the living will be transfigured instantaneously (1 Co 15^{51, 52}); those that are Christ's from among those thus risen and transfigured will be caught up to meet Him (1 Th 4¹⁷); sudden destruction will overtake the wicked (1 Th 5³, 2 Th 1⁹, Rev 20⁹); this destruction will be wrought by fire as the most searching natural force (1 Co 3¹³, 2 Th 1⁸, Rev 20⁹; cp. Mk 9⁴⁹, He 12²⁹); the material world will be dissolved in fervent heat (2 P 3^{7, 10}), and in this dissolution Creation will find its purification and renovation (Ro 8¹⁹⁻²³). It is impossible to decide with our present knowledge how much of these revealed circumstances of the Parousia are to be interpreted literally, and how much symbolically; but certain distinct immediate *results* of the coming stand out prominently.

1. *The Resurrection.* Our Lord in the sixth chapter of John reiterated four times the words, 'I will raise him up at the last day.' Thus the day of His return is revealed as the day of the consummation of the individual believer. Martha echoed this teaching, when in her disappointment as to her brother's death she declared that she knew she would meet him at the last day (11²⁴). Her certainty of faith seems to have risen above that usual among her contemporaries, and we feel that she thus incidentally shows us how greatly she had been enriched by the influence of her Master; and our Lord's reply to her, that He was Himself 'the Resurrection and the Life,' interprets for us the great claim previously made by Him, that He would raise the dead ('I will raise him up').

Certain sayings of our Lord are taken to imply that only the righteous will be raised at His appearing, the ungodly being judged in a disembodied state. There is no doubt that He promised *especially* to raise those that believe on Him, who thus possess eternal life as a personal possession (Jn 6⁴⁰; cp. 11²⁶).

He also spoke of those who are *worthy* of attaining the resurrection from the dead (Lk 20^{35, 36}), and of the resurrection of the *just* (Lk 14¹⁴); statements which, if they stood alone, would lead us to think that only those who shared His life would share His gift of resurrection.

But, on the other hand, there are many passages where He spoke in the most general

language of the rising again of mankind. For example, in His reply to the Sadducees He did not confine His references to the resurrection of the righteous, but asserted quite universally 'as touching the dead, that they rise' (Mk 12²⁶, Mt 22³¹, Lk 20³⁷); while His Parable of the Sheep and the Goats pictures *all nations* as assembled before Him (Mt 25). It is argued that as disembodied angels and demons will be judged, we can conceive of the wicked as being judged in a disembodied state, and therefore without their resurrection bodies (Charles, *Eschatology*); but the cases are not parallel. Demons will be judged for transgressions done in a disembodied state, but man for sins committed in the days of his flesh. The human body is not a garment to be laid aside, but rather is it part of the essence of true manhood, and as such necessarily should partake of the bliss or punishment awaiting human personality in the coming age.

What seems to have led to such expressions as 'the resurrection of the just' is the truth that the *characters* of the resurrections of the righteous and of the ungodly are wholly different—rising at the same time, at the last day, they rise to essentially different existences. To the one it is a resurrection unto life, to the other a resurrection unto judgment (Jn 5²⁹, Mt 25⁴⁶). So that while there is but one resurrection, and that at the day of Christ's return, yet there is an awful and agelong distinction between those that hear the voice of Christ calling them to Himself, and those that hear His voice driving them from His presence. And it is this supreme tragedy of the resurrection, whereby the righteous will be chosen out from among the whole of risen humanity, that accounts for the use of the phrase *ἀνάστασις ἐκ νεκρῶν* (Lk 20³⁵, Ac 4², 1 P 1³), which occurs only in connexion with the resurrection to life, instead of *ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν*, which describes the general resurrection both of bad and good, and enables us to interpret the meaning of St. Paul's desire that he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead—where he uses not only the *ἐκ νεκρῶν*, but strengthens the thought by changing the usual *ἀνάστασις* to the unusual *ἐξανάστασις* (Ph 3¹¹; see Lightfoot, but also Vincent, *loc. cit.*). Thus the last day is the day of Resurrection.

2. It is also the *day of Judgment*. St. John in accordance with the general spirit of his teaching, regards judgment as in a sense taking place now

(3¹⁸ 5²⁴). Revealing Christ as *The Life*, he emphasizes the result of the relation of the individual to Him. Thus to be *in* Christ is to be possessed of eternal life, and so to be delivered there and then from judgment; while to be a disbeliever in Christ is to cut oneself off from life, and so to incur judgment at once by abiding in a state of death. He also emphasizes the fact that Christ, as the realized righteousness of God, must of necessity, though man's Saviour, be also man's judge; for as the ideal Man He is the one standard who by the mere fact of existing must ever discriminate between the worthless and the worthy; and thus as He is received or rejected, judgment ever goes on, self-fulfilling itself automatically by His presence (9³⁹ 3¹⁹). Further, in addition to this teaching which is peculiar to the Fourth Gospel, we find, as we have seen, in the Synoptic Gospels teaching of catastrophic judgments incurred during the Christian era, and so before the last day (Mk 13, etc.).

But notwithstanding these *present judgments* of St. John, and these *periodic judgments* of the Synoptists, the New Testament, both in the four Gospels and throughout, distinctly foretells one great assize at which sentence will be delivered upon mankind both bad and good; a time when these *present judgments*, which by their nature are mostly hidden, and these *periodic judgments* which arrested the thought of the world for the time being, will receive their final vindication and manifestation. Nor must this final discrimination be conceived of as merely being the course of a natural process throughout which individual good and evil will be rewarded or punished,—an interpretation which falls far short of the precise teaching of Scripture,—but rather are we to conceive of it as taking place at a definite hour of judgment, an hour prefigured indeed throughout time, but nevertheless itself arriving, an hour that will be the consummation of all previous judgments in that it, unlike them, is not relative or partial, but banishes for ever injustice and sin from creation. This final judgment takes place at the last day or Parousia (Mt 7²² 24³⁶⁻⁵⁰ 25, Mk 8³⁸, Lk 17²⁹⁻³¹ 21³⁴⁻³⁶, Jn 12⁴⁸, He 10³⁶ 37, 2 P 3¹⁰⁻¹², Rev 22¹²), and therefore St. Paul yearns for the sanctification of his spiritual children, in order that he may present them 'without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Th 5²³ 3¹³ 2¹⁹).

Further, as all men partake in the resurrection

at the last day, so also are *all* men to be judged at the last day. 'The quick and the dead' (an expression as wide as humanity) are the objects of His judgment (2 Ti 4¹, Ac 10⁴²; cp. Mt 25³²); the Almighty, acting through Christ, is 'the judge of all' (He 12²³). The wide sweep of the judgment is also seen in the various classes that are mentioned by our Lord as incurring it. Not only those who heard His words (Jn 12⁴⁸), but Israel as a nation (Mt 19²⁸), the Nineveh of old (Mt 12⁴¹), the Queen of the South (12⁴²), with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Mt 10¹⁵), will all alike be called to account at the great day. While, finally, the consequences of that judgment are revealed as eternal or agelong (Mt 25⁴⁶). The bliss of those that, possessing Christ, possess life is immediate. They enter the joy of their Lord (Mt 25²¹); they are rewarded for past, and granted extended, opportunities for future service (Lk 19¹⁷, 2 Jn 8); they partake of the marriage supper of the Lamb (Mt 22 25¹⁰, Rev 19⁹); they see Christ's face (Rev 22⁴, He 12¹⁴); and beholding His glory (Jn 17²⁴, 1 Co 13¹², He 2¹⁰) are transformed by that vision into His likeness (1 Jn 3²). On the other hand, those apart from Christ and so lifeless enter upon their doom, which is a destruction (He 10³⁹) that is far worse than bodily death (Lk 12^{4.5}); they are cast into Gehenna (Mt 5²⁰ 10²⁸, Mk 9^{43f.}), into that outer darkness (Mt 8¹² 12¹³ 25³⁰) which is exclusion from the vision of God (a vision they dare not behold (Rev 6¹⁶)), and are victims of a remorse which consumes them as a worm that dieth not, and as a fire that is not quenched.

... I heard a voice upon the slope
Cry to the summit, 'Is there any hope?'
To which an answer peal'd from that high land,
But in a tongue no man could understand;
And on the glimmering limit far withdrawn,
God made Himself an awful rose of dawn.

3. But while the last day is for the individual the time of resurrection and judgment, it is also for *physical creation the time of transformation.*

To suppose that the earth should actually exist in its present state for ever, is to suppose a hopeless eternal dualism; and thus the prophets of Israel felt the spiritual necessity of a renovation of nature, while we feel that in the Person of Christ this their dream becomes an actuality. In Him matter and spirit at once find their perfection of union, as in Him the dust of earth is raised through His resurrection and ascension to the very throne of Deity. In our Lord's teaching we do not find Him predicting the physical renovation of this world, unless, indeed, it may be seen in His promise that the meek should inherit the earth (Mt 5⁵), or in the expressions 'regeneration' (Mt 19²⁸) and 'heaven and earth shall pass away' (Mt 5¹⁸ 24³⁵). But the Epistles teach it distinctly; for in them we read not only that the earth was once shaken, but that the heaven and earth together will yet be made to tremble (He 12^{26f.}), and that they as a mantle will be rolled up (1¹²); that the fashion (*σχημα*) of the world will pass away (1 Co 7³¹, 1 Jn 2¹⁷); and that fire will be the element of their purification (He 12²⁹, Co 3¹³ 7³¹, 2 Th 2⁹; cp. Ps 97³, Is 34⁴ 66¹⁵, Dn 7^{9.10}, Mic 1⁴, Mal 3² 4¹). It is suitable that this transformation of Nature should take place on the day of resurrection, for the resurrection of the human body is the redemption of matter as worn by spirit, and it is fitting that at this moment of the consummation of the individual should come the deliverance of all creation from the subjection in which it has been held (Ro 8^{21f.}), the redeemed being awakened then not to mere spiritual existence, but to a life lived in a glorified creation in a glorified body. Nature in its present imperfect state awaits a transformation, and God's scheme would be faulty were it omitted. Thus at the last day there will be 'a restoration of all things' (Ac 3²¹), the old imperfect earth and heaven fleeing away from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne (Rev 20¹¹), and a new heaven and a new earth appearing (Rev 20¹, 2 P 3¹³; cf. Irenæus, i. 7. 1, and v. 36. 1).