

CHRIST'S ASCENSION.

– JAN. 3. – ACTS 1:1-14. –

"While he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." – Luke 24:51.

THE writer, Luke the evangelist, here introduces the Book of Acts and associates it with the Gospel of Luke.

(2,3) These two verses cover briefly the forty days of our Lord's presence with the disciples after his resurrection, prior to his ascension. An important part of our Lord's mission during those forty days was to give the disciples instruction respecting the spiritual character of the kingdom to be established, and the necessity for his sufferings as a prelude to the glory to follow. His words of explanation, as for instance to the disciples on the way to Emmaus, constituted only a part of this instruction; another and, we may judge, a still more important instruction was conveyed to them through observation of his conduct. He would prove to them two things: (1) that he whom they had seen crucified and buried had come to life, had arisen from the dead; (2) that, although alive and the same person, with the same individuality, yet now his *conditions* were entirely altered; – that he was no longer "the *man* Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom," but that, having finished that work for the performance of which he took the form and nature of a servant, he was made alive again on the higher, the spiritual plane, which he left more than thirty-three years previously in order to redeem mankind.

Since the apostles were still natural men, not having as yet received the gift of the holy spirit, they were still unable to appreciate spiritual things (John 3:12); and hence it was necessary to give the proofs of a spiritual matter (namely, that Christ had risen from the dead a spirit being) along lines which the unilluminated could appreciate. It would not have availed the accomplishment of his purpose, it would

not have given the disciples satisfactory evidence of his resurrection, had he appeared to them as he did subsequently to Saul of Tarsus in the glory of a spirit being "above the brightness of the sun at noonday." That was a valuable lesson to the Apostle Paul and to all the apostles; but it needed the connecting links associating the risen and glorified Jesus with the *man* Jesus, and these links of association were provided during the forty days before the ascension. It was to this end that our Lord appeared to the disciples in bodies of flesh, and on two occasions in bodies resembling the one which they had seen crucified, bearing also the nail and spear marks. He thus associated in their minds the crucified man-Jesus and the risen spirit-Jesus.

The second step in the lesson was in the fact that these appearances were infrequent: in all the forty days the records would not indicate that he appeared to them at the very outside more than ten times, and his interviews with them would appear to have been very brief, so that we are certainly safe in concluding that out of the forty days he was not visibly manifest to the disciples more than four hours – quite probably not more than one-half hour at each of the five to ten interviews recorded. Where was he the remainder of the time? would naturally come to them as a question. Why not with them continually as before his crucifixion? they probably asked. And this was part of the lesson – to induce reasoning and reflection on their part, and to cause them to understand that a great "change" had taken place in the interim between his crucifixion and his first appearance to them on the morning of his resurrection. We can fancy their study of the subject during those forty days, and discussions pro and con, their wonders when the next appearance would take place, and what would be the outcome of the whole matter.

The third feature of their lesson in observation was in respect to the manner and variety of his appearances; once as the gardener to Mary, who saw no nail prints in his hands or feet, although she embraced his feet; again as a sojourner and guest at Emmaus in another form, so that the disciples did not know him and did not

remark anything peculiar about his hands or his feet, although he was with them at the table. It was in his asking of a blessing upon the food that they recognized him. Again at the seashore where he evidently appeared in still another form to Peter, James and John who recognized him by the miracle, and concerning whom the evangelist says, None of them durst ask him who he was, knowing that it was the Lord – not by the marks of the crown of thorns, not by the nail prints, but by his manner and the miraculous draught of great fishes following their unprofitable night of toil. And on two occasions he appeared in a body of flesh like to that crucified, with nail prints and spear marks; once when doubting Thomas was absent, and once when he was present. These various appearances under various conditions in various places, wholly unlike his previous conduct with them, were calculated to teach them the lesson that he was "changed" – that he was no longer a flesh being, "the man Christ Jesus," "made flesh" and limited to fleshly conditions in locomotion and visibility, etc.; but that now he was alive, though so changed that he could appear or disappear, assume one kind of body or another kind, assume one kind of clothing or another kind at pleasure.

The fourth lesson along the lines of observation was taught by the fact that he appeared and disappeared miraculously, suddenly, unaccountably. Coming from they knew not whither, the Lord had joined the two going to Emmaus; and then, after he had given them as much of a lesson as they could digest, he "vanished out of their sight." The same evening in another city he suddenly appeared to the ten, the doors being shut for fear of the Jews, and, we may suppose, securely barred: he needed not to undo the bolts nor to open the door as the "man Christ Jesus" would have needed to do; the spirit-born Jesus could do and did do just what he had previously explained to Nicodemus in the hearing of the disciples as recorded by the Apostle [R2082 : page 310] John (3:5). He came and went like the wind; they could not tell whence he came; and when he went he vanished out of their sight again, and they could not tell whither he went: *So* is every one that is *born of the spirit*. No wonder the disciples

were astonished and affrighted at the first, and needed that our Lord [R2082 : page 311] should convince them that they were not looking at a spirit but at plain, ordinary flesh and bones, of which they need have no fear. Of this he assured them saying, you do not see a spirit, "a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." Similarly he appeared in a body of flesh and bones to Father Abraham and ate and drank with him (Gen. 18:1,2); and similarly angels in the past upon certain missions have appeared to men. We are to draw a great distinction between the power of a spirit being to appear *in* a body of flesh and the great humiliation which our Lord accomplished on our behalf, when he entirely left his glory and exchanged his nature as a spirit being for human nature and was "made flesh." In the one case the spirit nature was maintained with unrestricted power and merely used a human form as a means of communication, creating the human body as well as the human clothing in an instant, and as quickly dissolving both. This was evidently what our Lord did, when he appeared in the room, the doors being shut, and when he vanished, the doors still being shut. The power thus manifested is so far beyond human power as to be incomprehensible to us, as the turning of water into wine or as the resurrection itself. It can only be received by faith based upon the evidences of reliable witnesses and supported on every hand by our knowledge of the divine power.

That the apostles got this thought is evident from the peculiar manner in which they refer to the Lord's manifestations after his resurrection. They say, "he appeared," "he showed himself." These are not ordinary expressions nor do they mark ordinary circumstances. Ordinarily, people are *seen* if present without any necessity of *showing* themselves or *appearing*. The disciples learned and noted also the fact that these showings and appearings were only to the believers and never to the world; which agrees with our Lord's testimony before his death, – "Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more." Nor will the world ever see the man Christ Jesus. While he still bears the title of Son of Man as a mark of his great obedience to the Father, and the purchase of the human race, and his title to the

glories of the divine nature which he now possesses as a reward of his obedience even unto death, even the death of the cross, God has now highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess.

Many confuse themselves greatly by failing to clearly distinguish between spirit-beings and human-beings and their distinct powers. Very many suppose that a spirit body must be *made out of* a human body, and must still contain certain human elements. They overlook the fact that the resurrection body is *not* the body buried, as the Apostle so forcibly proves (1 Cor. 15:37,38); nor will those have "flesh and blood" bodies who shall inherit the Kingdom. (1 Cor. 15:50; John 3:3,5,8.) Some, in an effort to harmonize a false theory with the Scriptures, claim that a spirit-body is one in which the blood gives place to spirit. (Do they mean wind?) They fail to see that this would not harmonize with the conditions noted foregoing. A body of flesh and bones with wind in the veins instead of blood could no more come into a room when the doors were shut than could a body of flesh and bones and blood: nor could it vanish from sight – nor could its clothing come in and then vanish out of a closed room. The only solution is that which recognizes the truth of our Lord's words, – "A spirit hath not flesh and bones;" although spirit beings in harmony with God have in the past been permitted to assume flesh and bones and clothing for approved purposes.

(4,5) Here our attention is called again to the fact that the gift of the holy spirit to the gospel Church is something unique – wholly different from any previous gift of the holy spirit except upon our Lord Jesus himself. They were to wait for it, and did wait ten days from the time of our Lord's ascension, until the spirit power came upon them. They waited while he as the great High Priest went into heaven itself and there appeared in the presence of God and presented to God on our behalf the merits of his sacrifice at Calvary.

(6-8) They were perplexed with the new order of things since Christ's resurrection. Their previous ideas, common to the Jews, had been of an earthly kingdom, and Christ and themselves, the apostles, associated in a human or fleshly glory and kingdom power. Now however they perceived their Master wonderfully changed, and he spoke to them again of going away and said nothing about the kingdom for which they in common with all recognized as the twelve tribes of Israel waited. (Acts 26:7.) So they asked him concerning the time for its establishment. In his answer he does not deny that there will be a kingdom, but the reverse, merely telling them that it is not for them to know the time. When they asked him a similar question before his crucifixion he answered that he did not know. (Mark 13:32.) But he does not so answer on this occasion. We must suppose, on the contrary, that he did know, because he was now born of the spirit, and he himself testified "All power in heaven and in earth is given unto me." This must therefore have included the power of knowledge; but he withheld the knowledge from the disciples in their interest and instead told them of the coming power of the spirit, and of the intermediate mission appointed for them and all his Church, of witnessing to the world before the establishment of his Kingdom.

(9-11) The account of the ascension is very simply given and yet, strange to say, many stumble over the statement of the angels "this same Jesus" "shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go." Many think of this as though it read *that* same Jesus, "the *man* Christ Jesus," shall come again. But it was *this* Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, the Jesus whom none of the world saw; the Jesus who was seen by the disciples only a few times during that forty days; the Jesus who was seen by them only when "he appeared" or "showed himself;" the Jesus who could come into their midst, the doors being shut, and who could and did "vanish out of their sight;" "*this* same Jesus" is the one who will "come again."

Again, many get a wrong impression from the word "manner." They think of manner as meaning *flesh*; but manner means *manner*.

He ascended in a quiet manner, without display or commotion or noise, in a secret manner, so far as the world was concerned, in a manner known only to the disciples. Hence, when he comes again in like *manner*, it will be likewise unknown and invisibly to the world, without noise or demonstration, and recognized only by believers.
