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"BEHOLD, I AM ALIVE FOREVER MORE."

- REV. 1:18.

- JOHN 20:11-18. - APRIL 14. -

NOT only was it necessary that Christ should rise from the dead and become alive forevermore in order to accomplish the great work planned of God and foretold in the prophets, and secured by his own sacrifice, but it was necessary also that indubitable proofs of his resurrection should be given to his disciples, for themselves and for us through them. The necessity for this lay in the fact that in the divine plan this Gospel age was marked out to be a Faith age – for the selection of a special little flock, able, like father Abraham, to walk by faith and not by sight. But faith, in order to be faith, and not merely credulity, must needs have some reasonable foundation upon which to build its superstructure; and it was to provide this foundation for faith that our Lord remained with his followers for forty days after his resurrection, before ascending to the Father, – as the Evangelist declares, "He showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." – Acts 1:3.

The disciples realized that great events were transpiring, tho how great and momentous was their character, they but slightly comprehended. They knew that their hopes as respects an earthly Kingdom, and their Master as an earthly Lord, had failed. They had vague, indefinite hope that all that he had said to them would in some manner have a fulfilment, but how or when or where, was beyond their conception. They knew not that a change of dispensation was occurring; – that the rejection of Israel after the flesh, and the calling of a new Israel after the spirit, was commenced; and that they themselves were amongst the first thus

privileged to pass from the relationship of *servants* of God to that of *sons*. – John 1:12.

As yet they knew nothing about spiritual things, not having been begotten of the holy spirit to sonship and the knowledge of things to come, Jesus not yet having been glorified, and it being impossible for the holy *spirit of adoption* to come upon them until after his sacrifice for sins had been presented in the [R2797 : page 126] Most Holy, and accepted of the Father. They knew not that the new Kingdom was to be a spiritual one, and that Christ, its Head, must pass from fleshly conditions to spiritual conditions in this resurrection, even as he had foretold, saying, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." They had much to learn, but they had a great Teacher, and, as we shall see, his arrangements for their instruction were specially adapted to their conditions as natural men, to give them such foundation of knowledge and experience as would subsequently be helpful to them when they should be begotten of the holy spirit at Pentecost.

The Apostle informs us that Christ was "put to death *in flesh* and quickened (made alive) *in spirit*" (we give a literal translation). The Apostle's words being true, those who declare that our Lord arose from the dead a fleshly being at the time of his ascension are grossly in error. Indeed, it is evident that they have misconceived the entire subject of the atonement, for if our Lord, as the *man* Christ Jesus, gave himself a ransom, he could not be restored to *manhood* in a resurrection, without annulling the ransom – taking back the price he had paid for our sins. The Scriptural thought is that as man had sinned, and been sentenced to death, it was necessary that the Redeemer should become a man and should give his manhood as the ransom-price for Adam and his race; and the Scriptural declaration is not that this ransom price was taken back, but that God raised him from the dead a *new* creature of a new nature, – not in flesh, not in human nature, but in spirit, a spirit being. – 1 Pet. 3:18.

The Apostle Paul agrees with Peter's testimony, that Jesus was quickened in spirit, saying that Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God *with power*, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4); and again, the same Apostle, describing the first resurrection, in 1 Cor. 15:42-45, says: "Thus also is *the* resurrection of *the* dead: it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural [animal] body, it is raised a spiritual body." The Apostle elsewhere declares that the Church's highest ambition is to be a partaker in this first resurrection, which he denominates "his resurrection," the Christ-resurrection, the resurrection to spirit conditions, which came first to our Lord Jesus, and in which all of his body, his Bride, is to have a share. – Phil. 3:10; Rev. 20:6.

There can be no question that the Apostle, in this description of the first resurrection, means us to understand his words just as they read – whoever interpolates and adds to the Word of God, and declares that it was sown a natural (animal) body and raised a natural (animal) body, and subsequently changed to a spiritual body, wrests the Scriptures to his own injury, to the darkening of his own understanding of the divine plan. In the same connection the Apostle declares that that body which thou sowest is not quickened, but in the resurrection God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, to every seed his own body – *in* the resurrection, not after it. (1 Cor. 15:35-38.) If the Church belongs to the spiritual seed, to which is to be given the spiritual body in the resurrection, then unquestionably the Lord Jesus, the Head of the Church, belongs to the same spiritual seed, and accordingly God gave him a spiritual body in his resurrection. Likewise, in a succeeding verse, the Apostle declares that our Lord at his resurrection became the second Adam, and then contrasting this second Adam with the first, he says, "The first man Adam was made a living

soul [an animal or earthly being]; the last Adam was made a quickening [life-giving] *spirit* [being]." – 1 Cor. 15:38-45.

The lessons to be learned by the Lord's immediate followers would necessarily be much more difficult to them than to us; because we have been begotten of the holy spirit, and are thereby enabled to appreciate spiritual things. To meet the exigency it was necessary that our Lord, the spirit being, should be present with them for forty days, – invisible, as spirit beings are always invisible to men, unless through the operation of a miracle. It was necessary for them to know of his resurrection in order that they should have faith in his message, and act accordingly, as he desired; yet, had he appeared to them in the glory of his spirit being, opening their eyes to see the supernatural splendor as he showed himself in vision to John on the isle of Patmos, his face as lightning, his arms and his feet shining like molten brass in the furnace – the effect would have been to terrorize them, and their natural minds would have been unable to link such manifestations with their Lord, recently crucified; neither would he have had opportunity, under such conditions, to have given them instructions, for they could not have received them by reason of terror.

It was necessary therefore, that our Lord, a spirit being, should manifest himself, as he had in the long past manifested himself to Abraham and Sarah, and as angels, under divine commission, had done on sundry occasions – *as a man*. (Gen. 18:1.) He must lead their minds step by step, and their thoughts link by link, from the cross and the tomb to an appreciation of his present exaltation as a spirit being, respecting which he himself explained to them, contrasting it with his previous condition, "All power in heaven and in earth is given unto me." And this leading of their minds must be such as would gradually force upon them the conviction that he was "*changed*," that he was no longer a man, and no longer subject to human conditions, as before his

death. Having this thought in mind, we will have no difficulty whatever in seeing how our Lord inculcated these instructions during the forty days in his various interviews with his followers.

Mary Magdalene was honored in being the first to whom our Lord revealed himself. Scholars are generally coming to the opinion that it is a mistake to suppose that Mary Magdalene had ever been an [R2797 : page 127] unchaste woman – a mistake to identify her with the woman in Galilee in the house of the Pharisee, who washed our Lord's feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, and of whom the account says, "She was a sinner." The name Magdalene is now supposed to signify that this Mary was of or from Magdala, a town on the sea of Galilee. However, according to the Scriptural account, Mary Magdalene was a miracle of grace, for it is distinctly stated (Luke 8:2) that she had been obsessed of evil spirits, seven of them, whom the Lord cast out. Many think that she was a woman of wealth, and the evidences are that she greatly appreciated her benefactor, and esteemed it a privilege to follow him whithersoever he went. Not only had she come from Galilee to Judea, but she was near the cross at the time of his death, and the first at the tomb on the morning of the resurrection – "while it was yet dark." Such love and devotion commend themselves to every sincere heart, and are surely worthy of emulation on the part of those who receive at the Lord's hands spiritual favors, forgiveness, reconciliation, the spirit of a sound mind, new hopes and aspirations, etc.

To harmonize the various accounts we must suppose that the women charged with the work of embalming our Lord's body lived in various parts of the city, and did not all arrive at the same hour. Mary Magdalene arrived first, and finding the tomb empty hastened and first found Peter and afterward John, both of whom at once ran to the sepulchre, Mary probably returning more slowly to the same place, arriving there after they and the other women had gone. It was at this second visit that the Lord revealed

himself to her. She had been weeping and then stooped down in order to see through the low doorway, as tho to reassure herself that it was empty, and then saw for the first time two angels in white, who inquired respecting her sorrow. The angels had doubtless been there when she was there before, but she had not seen them, because not of their choosing to "appear:" indeed, the Scriptures assure us, saying, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation"? And again, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."

Doubtless holy angels had in charge not only our Lord's body, but also the interests of his bereaved followers; and now, and on other occasions, some of these *appeared* – appeared, because they could not be seen without appearing, without a miracle – appeared as "young men," tho they were not men, but angels; not flesh, but spirit beings – assuming fleshly bodies for a time, that they might render the service necessary. In Luke 24:4 these same angels appearing as men are said to have been clothed in shining garments – so that they might not be understood to be men, but might at once be recognized as heavenly messengers. On the contrary, when our risen Lord as a "quickening spirit" similarly "*appeared*" in the flesh, in order to come closer to his followers, he did not appear in shining garments, but in ordinary apparel, assumed for the purpose, and in order that he might have the better opportunity for giving the instructions which his followers needed. **[R2798 : page 127]**

The words of the angels to Mary would be calculated to assuage her grief, for they manifested no grief, and by their question implied that she had no ground for it. At this juncture something drew Mary's attention, and turning around she discovered another person near her, evidently in ordinary garments, whom she presumed to be a servant of Joseph of Arimathaea, the owner of the garden – his gardener. She

considered herself a trespasser to some extent, and assuming that our Lord's body was not wanted longer in the rich man's tomb she inquired where he had been taken, that she might take the proper steps to care for his reinterment. Then Jesus (for it was he who had "appeared" in the form of a gardener) spoke her name: "Mary!" At once she recognized the voice, and crying, "Master, Teacher!" she fell at his feet, grasping them as tho fearful that somehow, if she let go, she might never get the opportunity of touching his blessed person again. Our Lord's words to her, "Touch me not, but go, tell my brethren," would more properly be translated, Cling not to me, etc. – for I have not yet ascended to my Father; I will be here a while yet, before I ascend, but your great opportunity for clinging to me and trusting in me will be after I have presented to the Father, and he has accepted, the great atonement for sins which I have just accomplished at Calvary. Mary's *touch* could do our Lord no harm, for others touched him subsequently, as the record shows; but our Lord would lead Mary's mind away from a mere clinging in the flesh, – to the higher relationship and intimacy of heart and of spirit, which would now be possible, not only for her, but for all his followers, not only then but ever since. In a spiritual way the Lord's people may be exhorted not only to "look unto Jesus," the Author and Finisher of our faith, but also to "cling to Jesus," and by faith to place our hands in his that he may lead us all through our pilgrim journey, in the narrow way until he shall bring us to himself, when we, like him, shall be changed, in a moment, in a twinkling of an eye, and be like him, spirit beings, and see him *as he is*; – not as he was, before his resurrection, nor as he "appeared" during the forty days after it. – 1 John 3:2.

Our Lord gave Mary a message, a service to perform, and so it is with all who love the Lord and seek him and find him: they are not to merely enjoy him selfishly, but are given a commission in his service for the brethren. This seems as true today as ever. And by the way, this is the second instance in which our Lord

ever addressed his disciples as "brethren," with all that that word implies of fellowship and of all being children of the one Father. (Matt. 12:48.) Now he emphasized this relationship by referring to the Father as his Father, and their Father, his God and their God. How close this brings our Lord to us in fellowship and relationship, not by pulling him down, but by realizing him as highly exalted, far above angels, principalities and powers, and every name that is named; it lifts us up, and by faith enables us to consider ourselves, as the Lord considers us, "brethren," prospective joint-heirs with him, who by and by shall be like him, our elder brother, sharing, through his grace and assistance, in his resurrection, and participating as joint-heirs in his "Kingdom" – **[R2798 : page 128]** if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." – Rom. 8:17.

Mary departed with her glad message and was undoubtedly much happier in the delivery of it than if she had been permitted to remain clinging to the Lord; enjoying her knowledge somewhat selfishly. To find her Lord alive when she had supposed him dead meant to Mary a joy such as the Apostle Peter expressed when he said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." We may well suppose from our own experience in such matters, that every time Mary told the good tidings to others and made their hearts rejoice also, it brought her a fresh increase of joy. The Master similarly sends all who recognize him as "he that liveth and was dead, and is alive forevermore," to go forth and tell others of the glorious fact that we have a living Savior, whose love and interest extends to every interest and affair of our lives, and who not only is full of sympathy and compassion, but is able also to succor those who are tempted, who are in trial, who are in distress of any kind; – one who is able to bring us off conquerors, to give us strength to

endure hardness, and who by and by will receive to himself all the faithful.
