

## AS SEEING HIM WHO IS INVISIBLE.

– JOHN 20:19-29. – APRIL 28. –

**"Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed."**

AS THE news of our Lord's resurrection spread amongst his disciples it naturally drew them together seeking for fresh evidence respecting it. Then arose the fear that the spite of the priests, etc., which had seemingly been satisfied in the crucifixion of Jesus, would now extend to his disciples; and no doubt this thought was emphasized by the recollection that the Lord, speaking of his own sufferings and experiences, warned the disciples that they would be cast into prison and suffer persecution for his sake. No wonder, then, that when they met in the upper room that first Sunday night, the doors were shut for fear of the Jews, and we may safely conclude that this means that they were barred, bolted, locked in some manner.

Scarcely had the two from Emmaus finished their account of how Jesus had appeared to them on the way and at Emmaus, when suddenly they were all terrified at seeing a stranger standing in their midst. It was Jesus, and this was his third manifestation on this day of his resurrection (counting that of Matt. 28:9 and John 20:14 as the same; and that of Luke 24:15 and 34 as the same). He came into their midst, not by opening the doors, as some have suggested, but strictly as the narrative reads, "***the doors being shut.***" The security which was felt from having the doors fastened, caused the disciples to feel the more terror, when they beheld a stranger with them, but Jesus quickly assuaged their fears, saying, "Peace be unto you!" and then showed them his hands and his side, that they might note the marks of his crucifixion and the spear-wound, that thus they might identify him with the crucified one. This evidence, added to what they had already heard, was convincing to all who were

present, and they were glad. No doubt our Lord's previous manifestations were intended to lead up to this general presentation. He had stimulated and cultivated the faith, not only of the ones to whom he had appeared, but also of the entire company, through them, by the method adopted.

Women seem to be able to exercise faith more readily than men; hence our Lord appeared first to Mary, and through her prepared the hearts of the others, as we have seen. It requires the masculine mind rather longer as a rule to reach the position of implicit faith; he calls for more evidences, more proofs, and our Lord was not unwilling to give these. However, had this appearance in the upper room in the evening been the first manifestation and information respecting our Lord's resurrection, we can readily suppose that it would not have produced the faith and joy it did produce. Wonder, astonishment and "reasonings" required the entire day for their exercise, and by the time our Lord showed his hands and his side this culmination of evidence was convincing.

After the disciples believed, Jesus again used the words, "Peace be unto you," but now as believers the words had to them a new meaning; they began indeed to find a peace for their troubled hearts which they had not known for some time. Since they realized their Master to be again alive they could afford to have peace, for they had learned to have confidence in him and in his love, and intuitively realized that all things would work together for good to them, under his care, tho as yet they knew not how. And so it is still. It is only those who realize in Jesus their Redeemer and Lord, who died and who rose on their behalf, and who have given themselves to him to be his disciples – only such can really receive of his peace – "the peace of God which passeth all understanding" ruling in their hearts. So today, as well as then, and even more abundantly under the holy spirit's guidance, they can realize that they are not their own, and that

all things are under divine supervision, working for their highest welfare.

"My peace I give unto you," were our Lord's [R2803 : page 139] words on the night of his betrayal, at the supper, and "Peace be unto you," were his words when first he met the disciples together after his resurrection. He is indeed the Prince of Peace, and the grace of peace which he gives to his faithful disciples is a blessing beyond all measure, such as the world can neither give nor take away; but this peace is based upon certain conditions of the heart: first, faith, trust in God; secondly, obedience, on our part, endeavoring to do those things which are pleasing in God's sight. To such and such only comes the heavenly peace, and in proportion as either the faith is lost or the obedience lacking, the *peace* flies away. Whoever, therefore, believes himself to be a child of God, trusting in Jesus and consecrated to the Lord's service, and seeking to walk in his footsteps, should expect the Lord's peace to rule in his heart, giving him rest, no matter what his circumstances or conditions in life; and if any of this class are without the peace let them look to it and repair the difficulty, for they are lacking either in faith or in obedience, and with the revival of these the dove of peace will surely return. Another lesson here is, that however much strife and contention his message, the Truth, stirs up among men, our Lord himself was always peaceably disposed and a peacemaker as respects others; and so all of his disciples are to be. "Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called children of God." Whatever of strife may come in contact with the Lord's people it is not to be of their production or cultivation; and even when they speak the truth, which will necessarily cause strife, they are directed to "speak the truth in love," in meekness, in gentleness, and with long-suffering and patience, and not in strife.

Then, saying to his disciples, "As the Father commissioned me so I commission you," our Lord breathed upon them, adding,

"Receive ye the holy spirit." The Father's commission to the Christ, the Royal Priesthood, was all addressed to the Head, the Chief Priest, we having no standing with the Father except through him, and no other commission than his for our service. Our Lord's words imply that we as his disciples are to be engaged in the same work that he is engaged in. He did not finish the work completely, but merely finished one part of it – the part which he was to perform in the flesh, the redemption. Another great part of the work is to be accomplished at his second advent in power and great glory; viz., the blessing of all the families of the earth with a knowledge of divine grace and an opportunity for returning into full fellowship with the Father and to eternal life. His commission covered this entire work, as represented in the promise of God to Abraham, "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed," and our Lord explained to the two brethren on the way to Emmaus that it behooved him to suffer for the sins of the world before he should enter into his glory, and ultimately begin the work of their blessing, because he could not have the power or the authority to bless until first he redeemed from the sentence of death.

And this is the commission which our Lord and Head has in turn committed to his followers. We are sent on the same mission, and hence it is declared that we are to suffer with him in the present life – to "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ" – and then to share with him in his glory in the blessing of all the families of the earth. How grand a commission! What a great privilege to be invited to walk in his steps – of trial and suffering now, and of glory, honor and immortality by and by! Whoever appreciates this privilege will show his appreciation, not only in words, but in deeds, in truth, by laying aside every weight, and the easily-besetting sin, and running with patience the race set before us in the Gospel.

The breathing upon them was evidently symbolical; an illustration of his words, "Receive ye the holy spirit," by which, when, fifty days later, they would receive the Pentecostal blessing and adoption of sons, they might know that while the holy spirit is *of* the Father it is nevertheless *by* the Son. And so the apostles understood it, as Peter subsequently explained. – Acts 2:33.

**"WHOSESOEVER SINS YE REMIT THEY ARE  
REMITTED."**

We are not to understand that either the Father or the Son gave over to the apostles or to others the *power* of remitting sins. We see, indeed, that sins could not be remitted by power, but only by the satisfaction of Justice, and that hence it was necessary for Jesus to die for our sins, and to rise for our justification, before those sins could in any sense of the word be remitted. The most that could possibly be understood from our Lord's words is that he would so supervise the words and writings of the apostles that in every instance they would lay down such directions respecting sins and their forgiveness as would be in full accord with the divine arrangement – that thus they might act as mouthpieces of God explaining to men the nature of sin and the terms of its forgiveness. This view we know is fully borne out by the facts in the case. The apostles did define sin and the terms of forgiveness, justification, reconciliation, etc., in a manner entirely satisfactory, in a manner in which our Lord himself never explained these things; because he left this work for his apostles to accomplish in his name and under the guidance of the holy spirit.

This commission is grossly misunderstood and misapplied by Catholics, who claim for the pope, the bishops and the lower clergy of their institution the right, the power, the authority, to forgive sins, – to determine **[R2803 : page 140]** what penalties

shall be inflicted, and to offer release from such penalties on certain conditions of their own making. It is in support of this claim, and as an adjunct to it, that Papacy has established "the sacrifice of the mass," by which it claims that all of its priesthood can so consecrate flour and wine and water as to make of these the actual flesh and blood of Christ, which then being broken they claim is Christ sacrificed afresh, as the basis or authority for *their* forgiveness of sins.

We claim, on the contrary, that all of the Royal Priesthood (under Christ, the Chief Priest, and under the directions given them through the chosen apostles), are fully empowered to declare to the world *the terms* upon which sins will be covered, cancelled, remitted, – and consequently the terms without which there is no remission. The right to do this comes, not through any power or authority enjoyed by the under-priesthood now, but as a result of the information which they receive of the holy spirit, through the inspired utterances of the apostles. By these means "we have the mind of Christ," and know clearly the terms upon which he is willing to receive sinners; viz., upon repentance, and faith in him, and consecration to his service. Any and all of the Royal Priesthood are privileged to tell this good message to whoever may have an ear to hear it; – but we are instructed of the Lord not to expect that many will have the hearing ear now, but to know that the present is rather the time when only the few specially blessed of the Lord will be able to understand and appreciate this grace of God by faith.

### **"BE NOT FAITHLESS, BUT BELIEVING."**

One of "the eleven," Thomas, was not with them on the evening mentioned. This would imply that he had disbelieved the stories told by the sisters respecting the message of the angels and the Lord's manifestation to Mary. He evidently thought them laboring under some delusion and excitement, which he ought to

discountenance, and he therefore did not meet with the others to confer respecting their newly begotten hopes; they might enjoy such ephemeral hopes if they chose, but as for him, he could not do it. Having seen the crucifixion and the wound in the side, he could believe nothing else than that the Lord was still dead. And even when the apostles met him the next day, and told him how Jesus was in their midst and showed them his hands and his side, Thomas still disbelieved, and told them that he would not even trust to the sight of his eyes, which might be deceived. On his part he would want also an opportunity to feel the print of the nails and to thrust his hand into the spear-hole in the Lord's side. If he could have such evidence he could believe, but not otherwise.

Our Lord's followers today, as then, differ constitutionally to a considerable extent. Some find it easier to exercise faith than do others. It was right that Thomas should take care not to be deceived in the matter, but it was wrong that he should be so deficient in faith as to stand out stoutly in disbelieving when he had his evidence from so many of the brethren whose honesty he could not doubt. However, the Lord is very patient and long-suffering toward us all, and so he was with Thomas to the extent of granting him the very evidence which he had said would be satisfactory.

A whole week passed without any manifestation of the Lord to any of the disciples; however, the next first-day of the week (Sunday, "the eighth day," the Jewish method of counting including both days) found the Lord's followers gathered in hope of some further reports, evidences, etc., connected with his resurrection, when Jesus again "appeared," and we may well suppose them full of interest and suppressed excitement not unmixed with disappointment, and fear that they might see him no more. But all this was a part of the lesson they needed; – for meantime they must have reasoned out that a great "change" had

come to our Lord, that he was no longer a man as before, but a spirit being, who exercised the powers of angels in respect to his appearing and disappearing, – coming and going invisibly "like the wind." Thomas meantime, altho still sceptical, had become sufficiently interested to want to be present, to want to receive any proofs or evidences that could be adduced by which he would know that his dear Lord was now alive again. As before, Jesus came into their midst, the doors being shut, and again gave the word, "Peace." How beautiful and how blessed it would be if the Lord's people whenever they come together, to meet each other and to meet Jesus in spirit, would greet each other with [R2804 : page 140] this salutation from the heart, – "Peace be unto you!" Uttered in the right spirit it should imply that their hearts were in a peaceable condition, seeking each other's peace and welfare and to avoid strife. This meek and quiet spirit would have a quieting and pacifying effect to a considerable degree upon any others present in such a meeting who had less of this holy spirit. The spirit of peace is contagious amongst the Lord's people, even as the spirit of anger is contagious in the flesh. "My peace I give unto you," said our Lord; and hence whoever has not this spirit ruling in his heart lacks an important evidence of discipleship. The Apostle classes the contentious with those who are disobedient to the truth (Rom. 2:8); yet allowance is to be made for weakness of the flesh in this as in other respects; and to "contend earnestly" for the truth (in a spirit of love) is commended. (Jude 3.) Whatever our natural dispositions may be, the indwelling of the Lord's [R2804 : page 141] spirit is sure to be manifest in "the *peaceable* fruits of righteousness." – Heb. 12:11.

Immediately our Lord addressed Thomas, thus indicating his thorough knowledge of his doubts and fears; he invited him to come forward and have the very evidences which he had declared would be necessary. We presume that Thomas did as he said, altho the account does not mention it; it is implied in his



prompt confession of his faith in the words, "My Lord and my God!" We are not to suppose that by this expression Thomas meant that he recognized the risen Jesus as being the Heavenly Father, as some would suggest: on the contrary, we are to remember that amongst the Jews the word "god" signified mighty one, and was sometimes applied to angels, and sometimes to great, influential men, as well as to the All-mighty One, Jehovah. God, mighty one, was an appropriate title to apply to our Lord Jesus; but in no event should Thomas' words be understood either to be wiser or truer in any sense than our Lord's own expression of a few days previous, when he said, "I have not yet ascended to...my Father and your Father; my God and your God." As the angels were *elohim*, mighty ones or gods, to mankind, so Jesus, God's beloved Son, was properly recognized by his disciples as being far more than man, as being a mighty one, a god; and Jesus, in turn, recognized the Father as his God as well as ours. With this view all is reasonable, consistent and harmonious. With any other view of the subject there is confusion.

Our Lord did not reprove Thomas for his hard-headed determination to have indubitable proofs before he would believe; but he did tell him of a more excellent way, – that while it is good to believe upon the basis of physical sight and physical touch, there is a still higher attainment of faith than that, which is able to see things that cannot be seen with the natural eye, and to feel things which cannot be felt with the natural touch. He would have Thomas and us all realize this well; so that we might the more cultivate this spiritual sensibility: not that he would have us credulous and ready to believe without evidence or testimony, but so filled with true faith and confidence in the Father's mighty power, and in Christ's own promises, that we would be ready to believe certain things upon the evidence of others, yea, to expect those things.

And this has been the condition of acceptance with the Lord throughout this Gospel age. We have not seen Jesus except with the eyes of our understanding; we have not heard his voice except as we have heard with the ears of our hearts; yet this is the more blessed faith; – the kind more appreciated by the Lord himself than the kind which would be satisfied with nothing but a tangible demonstration. A time is coming in which God will give to the whole world of mankind tangible evidences respecting all the features of the divine plan. Faith will then be swallowed up in sight, but when that time shall have come the rewards of faith which are now held out will no longer be open. Other rewards will be given, rewards of obedience; but they will not be so great as the rewards of faith.

Now, while it is dark, before the Sun of Righteousness has arisen with healing in his beams, to scatter all the doubts and fears and hindrances, the Lord puts a premium upon faith, and only those who can and do exercise it may and do have certain rewards, privileges, opportunities and blessings. Of the Gospel-age-little-flock it is written, "We walk by faith and not by sight." We endure, "as seeing him who is invisible;" we run for a crown and a throne which we may see only with the eye of faith; we obey the voice of him who speaketh from heaven, but whose voice now is the still small voice, which only the few who exercise faith can hear, appreciate and understand. By and by the time will come when this voice shall shake the earth and cause the knowledge of the Lord to fill the whole earth. Obedience then will be proper and bring a blessing; but obedience now, even unto sacrifice of earthly interests in following the footsteps of him who set us an example, brings the greater blessings – the blessings which pertain not only to the life which now is, but also to that which is to come, – the blessings of glory, honor and immortality.

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