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"HE ASCENDED UP ON HIGH."

– ACTS 1:1-11. – MAY 19. –

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

LUKE, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, in its introduction refers to his Gospel narrative of the life of Jesus – respecting "all that Jesus began both to do and to teach until the day in which he was taken up." It was no doubt of divine intention that he should express this matter in this particular form, and refer to the personal work of Jesus as merely the beginning of his work. Only those who grasp this thought; viz., that the body of the Church, "the body of Christ," in the flesh, is a continuation of the work of Jesus, the Head of that body, in the flesh – only such can grasp with clearness the divine plan. We are to consider the name, Jesus, as the personal name of our Lord and Head, and the name Christ, or Anointed, as the official name, applicable to him as the head, and to the whole Church as his body. From this statement the two advents of Christ are brought close together, for the work of the first advent, the sacrifice of Christ in the flesh, will be little more than completed, until the work of the second advent begins, the blessing of all the families of the earth with restitution privileges and mercies, at the hands of the glorified Christ, Head and body. Indeed the preparation for the new age and its work laps upon this Gospel age and its work.

It was in harmony with this thought (that the work which he had begun his apostles, and all his footstep-followers, were to carry on) that the Master so particularly instructed them during the forty days after his resurrection. We have already noticed that he appeared to them in all some six or eight times, and now in the present lesson we have an account of his seventh

(or ninth) appearance, at the end of the forty days. It was probably at least a week after he had seen seven brethren in Galilee that he appeared to them again at Jerusalem, where he evidently had appointed the apostles to assemble. Here he met with them and gave them his final parting instructions, which were perfectly in harmony with his previous teachings, that their mission was to continue to be a spiritual one, to feed his sheep and to feed his lambs – to continue the work which he had begun, and to follow in his footsteps. But he impresses upon their minds the fact that they are incompetent for this work until first they shall have received of the Father through him a special power from on high, for which he bade them wait at Jerusalem. He reminded them that this blessing for which they were to wait was the same that he already had mentioned before his crucifixion, – telling them that the Father would send the holy spirit in his name, that it would bring to their remembrance all things that he had spoken unto them, and guide them into all truth, etc. – John 14:16,26; 15:26.

He would impress his disciples with the importance of the blessing for which they were to wait, and with the fact that it meant to them a new era, a new dispensation: as they knew of the reformation movement instituted by John the Baptizer, and that the repentant sinners were immersed in water, he would have them know that now he was instituting a Church on a much higher plane, and that all who would be received into it would be immersed in holy spirit,* holy power – come under an influence of power from on high. His declaration that this would be not many days hence, was indefinite purposely; first, that they should expect it soon, and not be disheartened or discouraged, and yet he left the exact number of days **[R2818 : page 172]** unstated, so that they might be continually watching for it. This left the apostles in a waiting attitude, and, as Luke informs us, in an attitude of prayer and expectancy, very profitable to them at this juncture.

*"Ghost" is old English for "spirit" – the word is really obsolete, and had the American Revision Committee had its way it would never have appeared in the Revised Version, we are told. It is not used in the American Committee's Version; it is misleading.

Slowly, during the forty days, the disciples were learning to expect very different things from what they had in mind at the beginning and throughout the Lord's ministry: they were learning that the Kingdom glories and honors were not to be distributed immediately; but that a new dispensation, and a new kind of work in harmony with it, was set before them to be done; and gradually their minds reverted to the prophecies in which the blessings of the Lord upon the nation of Israel are set forth, and the intimation given that the blessings upon the whole world are to flow through the children of Abraham in some national capacity. They had confidence in these prophecies, and now they would ask the Lord respecting them. How could these prophecies be fulfilled under the new arrangement, which seemed to ignore the nation and to merely use themselves, the Lord's followers, a mere fragment of the nation. Hence their inquiry of the Master whether now or soon or when the prophecies would be fulfilled, which promised the restoration of Israel to divine favor as God's Kingdom, thus implying its release from the power of Rome and all other dominions.

Our Lord's answer was not to the effect that they had misunderstood these prophecies, and that they would all have some kind of spiritual fulfilment; on the contrary, by his answer he implied that their conception of the prophecies was quite proper, but that the time for their fulfilment had not yet come, and that they must not press the question as to the times and seasons; they must trust to God, who has these in his own

keeping, and who will abundantly fulfil every promise he had ever made in its due time.

Our Lord, then, drew the minds of his disciples back to their own work, to which he had called them – to the work which they were to accomplish as members of his body in the flesh. He informs them that they shall be specially empowered through the holy spirit, which the Father would send in his name; and that using this power, this influence, they would be privileged to be his witnesses – his representatives – representatives of his character, his teachings and his work, not only in Jerusalem and throughout Judea and Samaria, but also eventually to the utmost parts of the earth. He would have them see that a great work was being committed to their care. God would attend to all of his promises in due time; now they, to be his co-laborers and witnesses, must be attentive to the work to which they had consecrated themselves, and for which they now were to be thoroughly empowered and quickened through the holy spirit. With this parting lesson, while he was walking with them and talking to them on the Mount of Olives, going in the direction of Bethany, he began gradually to ascend from them, a cloud receiving him out of their sight.

One error leads to another; and the failure to note that our Lord's change of nature from human to spiritual took place in his resurrection, and that his presence during the forty days was that of a spirit being, unseen except when he for a few times very briefly appeared to his disciples for the purpose of instructing them, and these different appearances in different forms, in different kind of clothing, etc. – has led some to very peculiar ideas respecting our Lord's ascension. Thus we find one Doctor of Divinity saying on the subject: "The ascension was a noble and fitting close of the earthly career of Jesus; far better than to die again, as Lazarus died, or to remain always on earth in his body – the only alternatives!" Poor man! How

tightly error has blindfolded the eyes of his understanding, that he should think thus.

From the Scriptural standpoint, that our Lord was raised "a quickening *spirit*," invisible to mankind, and that he merely "*appeared*" in forms of flesh, the matter has an entirely different aspect. From this standpoint we see that this last appearance of our Lord to the disciples, like the other appearances, was intended for their instruction, and to help natural men, not yet begotten of the holy spirit, to understand deep things, which otherwise they could not so well have comprehended. Our Lord's ascension was simply another way of *disappearing*. When he appeared to them in the upper room, the door being shut, and talked to them and convinced them, having finished his lesson he "*vanished*" as suddenly as he had "*appeared*." The body of flesh and its clothing, which, by miraculous power, he had organized within the room, he could and did disorganize again by a power beyond our comprehension – the same power which turned the water at Cana into wine; by the same power by which angels had frequently appeared as men for a purpose, – disappearing when the purpose had been accomplished. Indeed, in one of these instances narrated in the Scriptures, an angel accomplished his disappearance in very much the same manner in which our Lord disappeared on this last occasion of his ascension. – Judges 13:19-21.

The propriety of *thus* terminating his intercourse with the disciples is evident: they would have no further expectation of his appearing to them again as a man, in different forms, after such a farewell: they would understand that he was gone from them now as [R2819 : page 173] a spirit being, as he had previously said: "It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come." The confusion of the D.D. from whom we quote foregoing, is the more manifest

from the fact that in further writing upon this subject he recognized the "two men" of vs. 10 as being angels who, for the time being, had assumed human form for the purpose of communicating with the disciples, and impressing upon them a certain valuable lesson. Why could not the gentleman see that our Lord, having finished the work which the Father had given him to do (*viz.*, the laying down of his life as the man Christ Jesus) was no longer a little lower than the angels, a fleshly being, but was now "changed," and as he was, previous to coming into the world, a spirit being of the highest order, so now, as the Apostle declares in his resurrection, he was a life-giving spirit? (1 Cor. 15:45.) And if the angels had power to appear as men, and did so appear, why should not their chief and Lord have power so to appear to his disciples in various forms, for the purpose of convincing them that he was no longer dead, but risen, – no longer a man, but "changed"?

Our Lord's words, "It is expedient for you that I go away," lead us to inquire, Why was his ascension expedient? Let us consider the matter. Had he remained with the disciples, present but invisible, and appearing to them and to all of his followers occasionally throughout this Gospel age, of what special advantage would it have been? What could he do for us in this manner that could not as well be done for us from his high station in the heavens with the Father? And again, had he remained with the Church it would have seemed all the more inexplicable that he should have permitted his representatives to be misused, slandered, abused in various ways, and that he should seem to take no part in the management of the affairs of the world, while claiming the legal right through purchase, by his own blood, to be its prince and Savior from the power of sin and Satan. For all these reasons it was appropriate that he should not be with us, but that we should know that he was with the Father, and should wait for him until the time appointed of the Father – until all of his faithful disciples had been called

and proven acceptable, and the foreordained number of the elect fulfilled; – and that he should then come to receive them to himself, and to establish them as his joint-heirs in the Kingdom; and to assume the rulership of the world, to bind the Adversary, to overthrow his dominion, and to establish truth and righteousness on a permanent basis by the divine authority and power which he possesses.

But there was another and all-important reason why he should ascend to the Father, and it is that which our Lord mentions, "Except I go away the Comforter will not come." (John 16:7.) Why not? We answer, that the whole world being under divine condemnation, none could be recognized by the Father and adopted into his family, begotten of the holy spirit as his sons, so long as they were sinners. And the death of our Lord Jesus, while it was the ransom-*price*, had not as yet affected any of those for whom it was intended. Before it could benefit them he must ascend to the Father and must present that sacrifice or *price* as on behalf of those to whom it would be applicable: that they, being justified by faith and sanctification or setting apart to holiness and divine service, even unto death, might receive the spirit of adoption into the family of God's spiritual sons.

This was the reason, and it is in full harmony with the Apostle John's statement: "The holy spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified." (John 7:30.) He had received his glorious body in the resurrection, as the Apostle shows us in 1 Cor. 15:43,44; but it remained for him to be glorified (honored) after he would appear in the presence of the Father and present before him his complete work, and officially receive divine approval; then he was honored, glorified, with a name that is above every name, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess, to the glory of God the Father." – Phil. 2:10.

We can imagine the eleven apostles (all Galileans) standing looking after the disappearing Master, and endeavoring to peer into the cloud that had received him from their sight, and endeavoring to comprehend the meaning of the various lessons of experience through which they had recently passed; and their perplexed thoughts respecting the promised coming of Christ again, and the interim of loneliness which he had promised should be compensated for by the promised holy spirit which should comfort them. Then appropriately, at the needed moment, under the divine providence, two beings stood by them, "men" in appearance, but in garments which indicated that they had only assumed the form of men for the occasion, and which told the apostles that these were really angels. These in cheerful tone and impressive manner assured them that they need not continue to look into the sky, but to remember that he would so come again in like manner as they had seen him go.

How strange that so many of the Lord's people, even amongst those who fully believe in, and with deep interest long for his second coming, should overlook the particular features of this angelic testimony! First, that it was the *same* Jesus that should come again – not the former Jesus, whom they knew in the flesh, but the same Jesus, who was taken up from them, and whom they recognized as so thoroughly "changed" from the time of his resurrection – the spirit Jesus, "a quickening spirit." This is the one promised to come again, not in weakness, as "in the days of his *flesh*," but a spirit being, clothed with full plenitude of divine power to establish them as his Kingdom, and through them to bless all the families of the earth.

How strange, too, that the other important fact [R2819 : page 174] which the angel noted, *viz.*, the "*manner*," is so often overlooked by the same class! What was the manner of our Lord's going? Was it with great ostentation, with the sound of a literal trumpet calling the attention of the whole world?

Was it in a manner known to the whole world? Or was the *manner* of his going an extremely quiet one, known only to his most faithful followers? His second coming is to be "*in like manner!*" Those who give to the words of the angels their true weight and force, laying the emphasis upon the right words, will receive a blessing in so doing, and be the better prepared to understand the character of our Lord's *parousia*. They will be less surprised to know that it fulfils all these conditions; that he is now seen only with the eye of faith, and only by the most consecrated of his people. It will be after his second coming, that he (unknown to the world) will reckon with his own servants, his saints, exalting the worthy, faithful over a few things, to be rulers over many things. (Matt. 25:14-30.) It will be still later on that he will restore the Kingdom again to Israel – to the worthy ones of that people, through whom, as the earthly agents of the spiritual Kingdom, the blessing of divine grace and truth shall flow to all the families of the earth. And in connection with the giving of the Kingdom to the elect the great time of trouble will reveal the new ruler to all the families of the earth in the fiery judgments upon all iniquity, until every eye (of understanding) shall see him – revealed as King of kings and Lord of lords.
