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IMPORTANCE OF JESUS' RESURRECTION.

– MATT. 28:1-15. – JUNE 19. –

Golden Text: "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept." – I Cor. 15:20.

FEW seem to realize the importance of our Lord's resurrection – its bearing upon the entire Gospel message. The Apostle indicates how much depended upon it when he wrote, "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.... They also who are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." (I Cor. 15:14,18.) The numbers of the Lord's professed followers, clergy and laity, who fail to appreciate the resurrection – who really do not believe in it – is very large. The number who really do believe in it is very small. The majority, under the teachings which have come down to us from the dark ages, fail entirely to realize that death means a cessation of life, and, as the Scriptures declare, "In that very day their thoughts perish." On the contrary, the masses of Christendom have come to believe that there is no death, that the dead are more alive than they ever were before they died. Applying this thought to our Lord, as well as to others, they do not appreciate the Scriptural declaration that "Christ died for our sins and rose again on the third day." They think of him as being alive during that time, and that it was merely his fleshly body that was inanimate in the tomb, and that the resurrection which occurred on the third day was not his resurrection to life, but merely the reanimation of his dead body.

ERROR LEADS TO CONFUSION.

Confused thus by the errors of medieval times, which were adopted by the reformers and are engrafted upon the minds of the civilized world today, the majority of Christian people cannot appreciate the Scriptural declarations respecting the importance of the resurrection of our Lord. Instead of believing the Apostle we have just

quoted, to the effect that our faith is vain, our preaching vain, if Jesus did not rise from the dead, the majority of Christendom would be inclined to say just the reverse of this: "What difference would it make to our dead loved ones, what difference would it make to our preaching, what difference would it make to our faith, if Jesus' *body* had been left in the tomb?" Hence, only those who realize that the dead are dead – that they can have no conscious existence until awakened from the sleep of death – can really appreciate the importance of the resurrection.

If Jesus had not been raised up from the dead, we have no basis for the preaching of the Gospel – for the Gospel message is that, by the grace of God, Jesus' death [R3374 : page 168] was the ransom price for father Adam and his posterity, and that because Jesus has thus paid the penalty for the whole race and redeemed all from the sentence of death by his own death, therefore, in due time, in God's appointed time, Adam and all of his posterity are to be released from the death sentence, and Christ as the great King is to establish his Kingdom in the world, and through it lift from mankind the burden, the penalty of death, and that then all who are in their graves shall hear the voice of the Son of man and come forth to the glorious opportunities of the Millennial Kingdom – opportunities for reconciliation with God, and release from all the imperfections of the fall. To preach such a Gospel, with the fact before us that Jesus had died and without any proof of his resurrection, would be vain preaching, foolish preaching, deceiving the people. To believe such a Gospel, under such circumstances, would be to brand ourselves as foolish simpletons; and to have any hope that our dead friends could ever be benefited by a dead Christ would be absurd.

Seeing, then, the importance of the Lord's resurrection, and how every feature of the Gospel is dependent upon this great fact, we understand why it was that the apostles, preaching forgiveness of sins and a future blessing, based everything upon the fact that Jesus not only died for our sins as our ransom price, but that he rose again for

our justification, for our deliverance from the sentence, the guilt, the penalty, that is upon us as a human family – the death penalty. No wonder, then, that our heavenly Father arranged that we should have so explicit an account, so detailed a statement of everything pertaining to our Lord's resurrection; no wonder that the evangelists recorded matters with such minuteness, no wonder that in all the preaching of the apostles this great fundamental truth, which was the basis of their own faith toward God, was set before the Church as being all important. From this standpoint the present lesson must be of deep interest to all of the Lord's people for all time – until the outward manifestations of the Kingdom shall attest the things which the household of faith must now accept by faith built upon this testimony.

HE AROSE ON THE THIRD DAY.

We concur with the generally accepted – and, we believe, well-attested – view, that our Lord's crucifixion on the 14th of Nisan, Jewish time, corresponded to the sixth day of the week, which we now call Friday. According to the records, our Lord died at three o'clock in the afternoon. Calvary was but a short distance from the gate of Jerusalem, the Temple and Pilate's residence. Hence, Nicodemus and Joseph, members of the Sanhedrin, evidently friendly to Jesus, but not sufficiently convinced of the truthfulness of his claims, or else not sufficiently courageous to lay down their lives with him, had not far to go after noting his death to secure consent for his burial; and the tomb in which it is supposed he was buried is within a stone's throw of the supposed location of the cross. It has been presumed, therefore, that our Lord was buried about four o'clock on the afternoon of that day, corresponding to our Friday. The next day, which we call Saturday, and which the Jews called the seventh day or Sabbath, began – Jewish time – Friday evening at sundown and ended on what we call Saturday at sundown, and our **[R3375 : page 168]** Lord's resurrection took place early in the morning of the first day of the week, which we now designate Sunday.

Thus our Lord arose from the dead on the "third day." He was in death from three o'clock until six on Friday, all of the night following, all of the next day, Saturday, all of the next night, which, according to Jewish reckoning, was the forepart of the first day of the week. This would not make three days and three nights full, complete – seventy-two hours – but we believe it did constitute what the Lord meant when he declared that he would rise from the dead on the third day. Some, desirous of counting full three days and three nights, have been led to claim that our Lord was crucified on Thursday; but neither would this make three days and three nights – seventy-two hours. In order to have three full days and three full nights we would be obliged to suppose that the Lord was crucified on Wednesday. But all the testimony is against such a supposition and the weight of it decidedly in favor of Friday, and the counting of a part each of three days and nights as being what our Lord referred to. But if any one have a different view from ours on this subject, we will not contend with him: it is a trifling matter, of no importance whatever. Nothing was dependent upon the length of time our Lord would be dead. The important items were that he should actually die, that he should be dead long enough for it to be positively known that he was dead, and that he should rise from the dead.

DESTROYING THE TEMPLE AND RAISING IT UP.

When our Lord spoke in advance, saying, "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up" – "he spake of the Temple of his body." (John 2:21.) But of which body did he speak – of the flesh? – of the body which he took in order that he might be the sacrifice for sin, of the body which he consecrated to death? Was it that body that he meant would be raised on the third day? We answer that that body was not his temple, but merely his tabernacle. Our Lord's resurrection body was not the one which the Jews destroyed, but a spiritual body which they had never seen, but which was revealed to the Apostle Paul as "one born out of due time" when, on his way to Damascus,

Jesus appeared unto him "shining above the brightness of the sun at noonday."

It is much more reasonable to suppose that our Lord spoke of his body which is the Church and of which he was and is the Head. The Jews destroyed the Head, and all down through the Gospel age the various members of the body of Christ have been called upon "to suffer with him," "to be dead with him," "to lay down their lives for the brethren." The body has been in process of destruction [R3375 : page 169] from Jesus' day until now, and very soon, we believe, the last member will have proven himself "faithful unto death." Now, let us see how the Lord will raise up this Temple of which he was the great foundation stone, and of which the Apostle Peter declares, each of his faithful disciples is a living stone. (I Pet. 2:4) Considering the time from the Lord's standpoint – "A day with the Lord is as a thousand years" – our Lord died in the year of the world 4161 – after four days had passed and the fifth day had begun.

The destruction of the Temple of God, which is the Church, began there in the destruction of the chief corner stone and has progressed since – during the remainder of the fifth day, all of the sixth day, and we are now in the beginning of the seventh day – "very early in the morning." And the promise of the Lord is that the Lord's resurrection shall be completed about this time – "The Lord shall help her early in the morning." (Psa. 46:5.) Thus we view the matter, that the Lord was a part of the three days dead and rose on the *third* day, early in the morning, and that likewise the First Resurrection will be completed – the entire body of Christ will be raised on the third day, early in the morning.

Evidently the matter of the resurrection was beyond the mental grasp of the apostles themselves at the time it occurred. Jesus had foretold that he would rise again on the third day, but they had not comprehended the meaning of his words: None of them for a moment thought of his resurrection, but merely of what they could do in the

way of embalming his body, and showing to it, as his remains, the same sympathy and love which they would have shown to the remains of any dear friend or brother or sister. Thus it was that being hindered from coming to the sepulcher on the Sabbath day by the Jewish Law, which forbade labor of any kind on that day, the Lord's friends began to gather at the sepulcher, probably by previous appointment, about daybreak, after the Sabbath, – on the first day of the week. There were a number from Galilee, and probably they were lodged with other friends in different parts of the city, and possibly with some at Bethany; hence they went by different routes. The accounts vary, and are yet in perfect accord and all true. They are told from the different standpoints of each writer, and are all the more conclusive to us as evidences in that they show that there was no collusion between the writers of the Gospels – no endeavor to state the matters in exactly the same terms, as there surely would have been had the account been a manufactured one, a concocted story.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE TRUTH ARE WEAK.

Before the arrival of any of the disciples, while the Roman guard was still on duty at the tomb, an angel of the Lord appeared on the scene and a shock like that of an earthquake was experienced, and the guard, or "watch," became as dead men – almost swooned or fainted – but, recovering, hastened from the spot to make their report to the chief priests, at whose instance they had been appointed to this service. The chief priests induced them to circulate the report that the body had been stolen by his disciples while they slept, and this report was evidently current for quite a time subsequently, as we read, "the saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day" – up to the date of writing Matthew's Gospel, which is supposed to have been written some nine years after the event. Like all arguments against the truth, it was a weak one, but the best they could do. How foolish would be the testimony of men who would say what took place while they were asleep! A bribe was given to the guard as the price of this false statement, and they had the assurance of protection, security

against the ordinary penalty for a Roman soldier sleeping while on duty; but then they were not on duty for the Roman government; they were merely a complimentary guard furnished in the interests of the priests and at their solicitation.

Meantime, while the guard was on its way to the priests to report matters, the Lord's friends began to gather, with their love and spices, etc. The women of the company arrived first, and in so doing attested for all time the love and sympathy of their hearts, and honored, yea glorified, their sex in so doing. The three mentioned in our lesson have since had noble mention by the poets of all nations. One has written: —

"Three women crept at break of day,
Agrope along the shadowy way,
Where Joseph's tomb and garden lay.

"Each in her throbbing bosom bore
A burden of such fragrant store
As never there had lain before.

"Myrrh-bearers still, at home, abroad —
What paths have holy women trod,
Burdened with votive gifts to God!

"Rare gifts whose chiefest worth was priced
By this one thought, that all sufficed:
Their spices had been bruised for Christ."

During the forty days which began that morning, and which ended with our Lord's ascension, he appeared at most eleven times, sometimes to one and sometimes to another, and on one occasion to above five hundred brethren at once. It is quite probable that instead of eleven times there were only seven, and that the other four records

were merely differences of description of four of the seven manifestations.

"HE SHOWED HIMSELF BY INFALLIBLE PROOFS."

Our Lord's first appearance was to Mary Magdalene, she out of whom he had cast seven demons and who, from thenceforth, became one of our Lord's most earnest followers. She had much forgiven her; she loved much, and her love had brought her early to the sepulcher. Apparently, Mary Magdalene was the first of the women to arrive at the sepulcher, and immediately on finding that Jesus was not in the tomb, she hastened to announce the fact to John and Peter. Returning to the sepulcher, later [R3375 : page 170] she apparently reached it after the other women had been there and had gone their way, and it was while she was still near the tomb that Jesus appeared to her first of all, as described by John – 20:11-18.

Subsequently the Lord met the other women as they were en route to make known the news to the household of faith. He addressed them, "All hail!" which in the Greek was the usual salutation, practically signifying, Rejoice! They fell before him, worshipping him and grasping him by the feet, and appeared afraid that anything henceforth should separate them from him. Our Lord, however, reminded them of their duty toward the brethren – that they should spread the good tidings of his resurrection. The same lesson comes to us, that after we have found the Lord, have come to realize the Truth, we have a great privilege in being permitted to serve it, and a great duty toward the brethren who as yet know not what has caused our hearts to rejoice. We are not to assume that we are to merely hug the Truth to our own hearts, but are to remember that it is also for others, and to take pleasure in dispensing it to them. He who thus serves the Lord and the household of faith is sure to have the greater blessing in the end.

Our Lord's message was to tell the disciples that he would meet them again in Galilee. Thus it was that, after [R3376 : page 170] five

or six appearances in the vicinity of Jerusalem, our Lord abstained from further appearing to his followers, and they returned to their home country, Galilee, where he met them, as he had engaged to do. We must remember that the most of our Lord's ministry was spent in Galilee and that the majority of the believers were Galileans. It was to be expected that all of the household of faith should have some opportunity for witnessing to our Lord's resurrection, and so the Apostle Paul tells us that in one of these later manifestations in Galilee, "Our Lord was seen by above five hundred brethren at one time; of whom the greater part remain unto this present [the time the Apostle was writing], though some are fallen asleep." – I Cor. 15:6.

It is necessary that we should note carefully the two objects our Lord had in view in the various manifestations he gave his followers of the fact that he had risen from the dead. The first of these was a demonstration that he was no longer confined to earthly conditions, as they had known him to be during the previous years of acquaintance, but was now, like all spirit beings, able to go and come like the wind – invisibly, secretly. Like all spirit beings he was now glorious. The Apostle explains the resurrection of the overcomers of the Church in I Cor. 15:51,52, and the Scriptural assurance is that in our resurrection we shall be like the Lord, see him as he is and share his glory. The Scriptures also assure us that our resurrection is really a part of his resurrection, a part of the First Resurrection, – that Jesus the Head of the glorious Christ was raised from the power of death, was glorified on the third day after his death, and that early in the morning of the new dispensation the Church will come forth from death in his likeness, sharers in his resurrection. – Phil. 3:10.

OUR LORD'S RESURRECTION CHANGE.

This being true, we know that the time when our Lord received his spirit body was at his resurrection and not subsequently; as the Apostle declares, "He was put to death in the flesh, but quickened [made alive] in spirit." Speaking of our Lord's humiliation and his

subsequent exaltation at his resurrection, the Apostle assures us that our Lord left the glory which he had with the Father and humbled himself to become a man, and that in due time he humbled himself unto death, even the death of the cross – "wherefore God hath highly exalted him and given him a name that is above every name." The exaltation came to him in his resurrection change. It was true of him then, as it will be true of all the members of his body in due time, that he was sown in weakness, raised in power, sown a natural [animal, human] body, raised a spiritual body.

This spiritual body of our Lord was just as glorious in the moment of his resurrection as it was at any time afterward or is now. It had all the powers properly granted to spirit beings in harmony with the Lord. He was not, as previously, merely the man Christ Jesus, but was now the Lord of glory. As such he was able to associate himself with his disciples, either visibly or invisibly, or to appear as a flame of fire in the burning bush, or as a wayfaring man, as he appeared with others to Abraham, or in any manner he might see fit. He was the same glorious being who subsequently appeared to Saul of Tarsus, shining as the lightning, much as the angel appeared when the Roman guard was overcome and fled.

Some, then, may inquire, Why did he not appear to the women and apostles in the same glorious manner, with shining features? We answer that to have so done would have been to hinder the very object he had in view. How could his followers, who were not then begotten of the holy Spirit and consequently were unable to understand spiritual things (I Cor. 2:14) – how could they have understood that a being shining like an angel was the Lord Jesus they had seen crucified three days before? And even if they could have associated the two in some manner, what evidence would there have been for others since? The removal of the remains of our Lord Jesus from the tomb was an essential to the faith of the disciples of that day, and of all who would believe on him since through their word, and manifestations of his being alive from the dead were necessary also to all these. The

instructions which our Lord gave, and his expositions of the prophecies, and his application of these to himself, given at that particular time, were necessary as a firm foundation for faith. None of these objects could have been so well served in any other manner as the manner in which they were performed. Our Lord's first appearance to Mary was as a gardener. She recognized him not; neither his clothing nor his features were the same as those she had [R3376 : page 171] previously seen, as those she had previously recognized. His clothing was divided amongst the Roman soldiers, his grave clothes were still in the tomb, the body which she saw was a special body and the clothing which he wore was special clothing prepared and used for this special occasion. She knew not her Lord until he adopted a tone of voice which she recognized.

It was the same with the two on the way to Emmaus, later on the same day. Jesus walked with them, but they knew him not; his clothing was different, his features were different, they saw no prints of nails in his hands or in his feet. They asked him, "Art thou a stranger in these parts?" He improved the opportunity for discussing with them calmly, deliberately, carefully, the prophecies relating to himself, expounding these to them so forcefully, so clearly, that their hearts burned within them as they thought of the possibility that the story which they had heard from the women might have been really true – that Jesus was to rise from the dead. Our Lord did not reveal his identity until he was ready to vanish from their sight. When he vanished, his flesh and his clothing vanished, too. The same evening he appeared to the company in the upper room at Jerusalem, the doors being shut. They were doubtless talking about the events of the day and of the preceding day, when, suddenly, Jesus appeared in their midst. He materialized – that is to say, he, a spirit being, came into their midst and there assumed flesh, bone, a complete body clothed. Does some one ask, How could he do this? We cannot answer, but whoever can understand the miracle of the change of the water into wine can as easily understand our Lord's appearance in the upper room, the doors being shut; and how, after the interview, he just as

mysteriously vanished from their sight, flesh, bone, clothing, all – the doors still being shut and doubtless carefully barred for fear of the Jews, in anticipation that the hatred which had pursued the Lord to death would fasten itself upon his followers.

BE NOT FAITHLESS, BUT BELIEVING.

A later appearance was in the same upper room probably a week later – again on the first day of the week. Thomas was present: he had been absent on the previous occasion and he could not believe the testimony of the others. Thomas had expressed his doubts most forcefully and had insisted that the others were too easily convinced, but he was satisfied finally when Jesus, appearing to him with the others, requested him to put his finger in the prints of the nails. Did Thomas really see and put his finger into the nail prints of that body of our Lord which three days before had hung upon the cross. We answer No; that body of flesh and bones could not have come through the door while it was shut. The body which appeared in the upper room was a materialization – actual flesh and actual bones as our Lord said to them, "Handle me: a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." What they saw was not the spirit body, what they saw was the actual flesh and bones. He, the spirit being, was hidden from their sight; he assumed this body of flesh and bones in their midst – created it there and created the clothing also.

Whoever disputes the power of the Lord to create flesh and bones has an equal difficulty in accounting for the clothing; for who will say that it would be more difficult to create the body than to create the clothing inside that room, the doors being shut? Who will say that it would be easier to make clothing vanish into thin air than to make flesh and bones vanish into thin air? The power to do these things is not natural to us, nor can we fully comprehend the matter. Now we see through a glass obscurely, by and by we shall understand how our Lord can do the wonderful things that he is continually doing. For do we not see miracles all about us in nature, in the transpirings of every

day? The kernel of wheat – how is it possible that out of that little grain should come a stem, a sprout, a stock and a head full of grain? It is a miracle – something wholly beyond our power to accomplish and beyond our power to even understand. We could make a grain of wheat, we could combine the various elements necessary to it, and could shape them as a grain of wheat is shaped; but our grain, while analyzing the same as that which nature would put forth, would not send out shoots, would have no stock, would bear no grain.

"HIS FLESH SAW NOT CORRUPTION."

It is not for us to say what became of the natural body of Jesus – the one that was pierced. God has not revealed particulars respecting it, except that it did not corrupt. Where then is it? We know not; but he who hid the body of Moses so that none could find it, was likewise able to hide the body of Jesus. (Deut. 34:5,6.) Who can tell but that the uncorrupted body of Jesus is yet to be produced by the Lord as an evidence or testimony of the truth of this whole transaction for the world in all future time. We do remember that the manna with which Israel was fed was wont to corrupt on the second day, except on the Sabbath; but we remember also that a golden pot of this manna was preserved in the Ark incorruptible, as a witness or memorial of the great miracle of the desert. What shall we say, then, respecting this bread which came down from heaven, which is also likened to manna? Is not the Lord equally able to preserve the body of Jesus as a witness, and, although other bodies of flesh are wont to corrupt, may not this one be preserved incorruptible? There is a certain statement in the Scriptures which seems to imply that this same body, spear-marked and nail-marked, is somewhere kept for future exhibit – as it is written, "They shall look upon him whom they have pierced." – Zech. 12:10.

The first five of the Lord's appearances apparently took place during the first eight of the forty days' presence. Thus there was a long wait in which there was no manifestation, and the apostles had

abundance of time to think over and discuss the situation. As the majority of them were from Galilee, they probably did not remain in [R3377 : page 172] vicinity of Jerusalem more than two weeks after our Lord's last appearance on the eighth day, but betook themselves to their homes, wondering whether or not they would ever see the Master again, whether or not he might appear to them again on their homeward journey or in some other upper room when assembling in Galilee. Perhaps, too, they remembered the message sent to them by the women, that he would go before them into Galilee and meet them there.

A little longer waiting in the vicinity of the old haunts, visited frequently by our Lord and themselves, and the practical affairs of life began to press upon them. Simon Peter was the first to declare his intention of re-entering the fishing business, and others of the apostles, accustomed to the same craft formerly, joined him, and practically the old partnership arrangement was revived as it existed two years or so before, when Jesus called them to apostleship. This was the very condition of things which our Lord foresaw, and we believe that his tarrying forty days after his resurrection before he ascended was in great measure for the purpose of giving the very lessons which now were called forth. He knew just how discouraged they would feel; that all the hopes and prospects of the Kingdom, as they had previously viewed it, would seem vague and indistinct under the new conditions, and how his followers would not be prepared to go out in the work he intended without further instruction. He was present with them, but invisible, a spirit being, during all these weeks; he heard and noted their queries and explanations, suggestions and conclusions, and was ready to apply the proper lessons at the proper moment.

"LOVEST THOU ME MORE THAN THESE?"

The Lord permitted the partnership in the fishing business to progress and a fresh start to be made. They toiled all that night and

caught nothing, and doubtless were still further discouraged, concluding that failure was attending them in temporal matters as well as in spiritual. The opportune moment had come, and Jesus – standing on the shore in another form, in a body of flesh and with clothing, though not his own flesh and not his usual clothing, but specially prepared flesh and clothing – called to the apostles inquiring if they had fish; they shouted back that they had been toiling all night and had found nothing. He suggested the casting of the net on the other side of the boat, although it must have seemed to them foolish, because it would be but a few feet away from where it had already been, and indeed the boat itself was continually turning. Nevertheless something about the stranger on the shore impressed them and they did cast their net on the other side, and immediately the net was filled with great fish. So far as Peter was concerned the lesson was learned already. He remembered a very similar experience they had had at the time the Lord called them to apostleship, and quickly he perceived that the one on shore was the Lord – in another manifestation. Without waiting for the boats, the net or the fish, Peter sprang into the water and swam ashore in his anxiety to be soon with the Lord, and in his realization that this manifestation like the others might terminate suddenly. Besides, Peter was anxious to manifest his love and faithfulness, remembering how not a great while before he had denied his Lord.

It was in connection with this manifestation that Jesus specially directed his words to Peter: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" – these boats, nets, etc. The question addressed to Peter was applicable to all, but of special weight and force to Peter as the elder and leader of all, and the one who had particularly said but a short time previously, "Though all forsake thee, yet will not I." Peter declared his love for the Lord, and was told to feed the sheep and to feed the lambs. The lesson was a timely one and never needed to be repeated. Peter and the other apostles, so far as we know, never subsequently doubted the importance of their mission as apostles, but gave their entire time and energy to the feeding of the sheep and

lambs. The miracle witnessed convinced them of the Lord's power either to bless or hinder them in temporal matters, and that equally he will provide for their every interest as his apostles and representatives. The lesson was given at exactly the right moment. Had it been given earlier in their experience it doubtless would have had much less weight: it was the part of wisdom to permit them to become perplexed and to decide on the fishing business, and then on the very first day of their experience to give them this forceful lesson. It was a lesson respecting the resurrection of our Lord and also demonstrated the fact of his change, that he was no longer the man Christ Jesus, no longer subject to human conditions. Again he vanished out of their sight, but made an appointment for the meeting of all at a certain place.

This meeting by appointment was doubtless the one mentioned by the Apostle Paul – the one in which about five hundred brethren witnessed a materialization and manifestation of the Lord. We know not the full tenor of the various lessons taught, but incline to think that the lessons were more of the practical kind than in words – that these manifestations were for the purpose of convincing them of the Lord's resurrection and of his change from earthly to spiritual conditions.

HE THAT DESCENDED IS THE SAME THAT ASCENDED.

The next appearance probably was the one on the Mount of Olives at the time of our Lord's ascension. Apparently all of the apostles and perhaps others returned to Jerusalem and to the Mount of Olives, their instruction being to tarry at Jerusalem until they should be endued with power from on high. It was while they were present with him receiving final instructions that he was parted from them; the form that they beheld gradually receding into the clouds was received out of their sight. In this arrangement the Lord did the best thing possible to be done for those who had not yet been begotten of the [R3377 : page 173] Spirit and who, therefore, could not understand spiritual things. He represented in the flesh the things

which really transpired in the spirit. Then the apostles could understand after they had been begotten of the Spirit, and it is from the standpoint of the begetting and not from the standpoint of the natural man that their records come down to us.

The essence of this lesson is as expressed in our Golden Text, "Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept." Others have been awakened from the sleep of death temporarily merely to relapse into it again subsequently, but our Lord Jesus was the first "born from the dead," the "first-fruits of them that slept" – as the Apostle declares, "He was the first that should rise from the dead." His resurrection was the life resurrection – to perfection on the spirit plane. In that he was the first-fruits of them that slept, the implication is that the others slept similarly and are to come forth in the resurrection as spirit beings after the same manner. To be the first-fruits implies that the others will be of the same kind, for although our Lord was the first-fruits of all that slept in the sense that his resurrection preceded all other resurrections, in another sense he is the first-fruits of the Church, which is his body. It is in a still larger sense that the Christ, Head and body, is the first-fruits brought up to life of the whole world; as the Apostle James expresses the matter, "Of his own will begat he us with the Word of Truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." – Jas. 1:18.

Thus we see a first-fruits in two senses of the word: as, for instance, we see that strawberries are the first-fruits in the largest sense of the word in that they come before other fruits in the spring – so the expression that the Church is the first-fruits unto God of his creatures does not imply that all will have the same nature. Then again we may speak of the first ripe strawberries as the first-fruits of the strawberries. It was in this latter sense that our Lord Jesus was the first-fruits of the Church; and since the Church is the first-fruits of the whole creation, it follows that Christ keeps this place of primacy, not only in the Church, but in respect to all who will ever be raised up fully out of death into the fulness and perfection of life.

