

"I AM ALIVE FOREVERMORE."

– JOHN 20:11-23. – JUNE 4. –

Golden Text: – "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept." – 1 Cor. 15:20.

WHILE the death of Christ was the greatest event in history, his resurrection from death readily holds second place. The death of Christ without his resurrection would have left our race just as helpless and hopeless as before. The word death signifies the absence of life just as truly when applied to our Redeemer as when applied to others. The Scriptural statement that "The dead know not anything" applied to him while dead as truly as to others, as also the declaration, "There is neither wisdom nor knowledge nor device in the grave" – sheol, hades. No religion in the world other than that taught in the Bible teaches the resurrection of the dead. Heathen philosophies assume, contrary to the Scriptures, contrary to reason, contrary to facts, contrary to all the evidences of the senses, that the dead are not dead, but, on the contrary, more alive than ever before.

It is because so many Christian people have imbibed much of heathen philosophy on this subject of death that to many of them the resurrection of the dead is a superfluous matter, to say the least. Indeed they reason soundly when they say that if Abraham lived 175 years in this world and at death passed into the spirit world more alive than ever, where he has been enjoying himself in spirit surroundings for the past 3,800 years, they can see no reason why he might not continue to enjoy himself just as well for all eternity in that condition. Indeed they argue forcefully, logically, that if, according to their expectations, his resurrection by and by will mean a return to earthly conditions after so long an experience in spirit conditions, he doubtless would, if given his choice, prefer that there should be no resurrection.

THE INSPIRED RECORD REASONABLE

The difficulty is that the Scriptural teachings on the subject are wholly overlooked in such reasoning. According to the Scriptures Abraham has known nothing since he died, and the moment of his resurrection will mean the revival of all his previous experiences and hopes at a time and under conditions which will permit of the fulfilment to him of all of God's gracious promises. Without resurrection he would be, as the infidel claims, "dead as a door nail." From this Scriptural point of view it will be readily seen that the resurrection of the dead is all important, that on it depends all hopes of eternal life. That this is the Scriptural teaching we shall see.

The Golden Text of our Lesson is from the chapter which explains the subject of resurrection more particularly than does any other chapter in the Bible. It assures us that Christ was dead and that he is arisen from the dead. In this it agrees with our Lord's own words (Rev. 1:18), "I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold, I am alive forevermore." How plain, how forceful are these words when given their proper weight, their true signification! Life and death are here referred to as opposites – he is not dead now, but is alive; when he was dead he was not alive. It seems strange that it should be necessary to examine so simple a statement. It surely would not be necessary to discuss the matter at all with thinking people were it not that the error of thinking of the dead as alive is so prevalent, so deeply entrenched in all our minds, in all our thoughts.

Further, our Golden Text declares that our Lord in his resurrection became the "first-fruits of them that slept." What does this mean? It means what the Apostle states in other language, saying that he "should be the first that should rise from the dead;" and again, he was the "first-born from the dead." (Acts 26:23; Col. 1:18.) None before him was ever resurrected, though a few were temporarily awakened, as, for instance, Lazarus, the daughter of Jairus, and the widow of Nain's son. Jesus was the first to be raised

completely out of death's power – to perfection of life, of being, on any plane of existence. And the word "first-fruits" carries with it the thought that there are to be others who similarly will pass completely out of death conditions into perfect life conditions.

"IF THERE BE NO RESURRECTION"

In the context (1 Cor. 15:12-18) the Apostle seeks to impress upon his hearers the importance of the doctrine of the resurrection as connected with the Christian religion. He wrote at a time when the Greek philosophies were invading all parts of the then civilized world, and when many, imbued with the Platonic theory that the dead are alive, had become interested in Christ and were more or less associating the Platonic view that there is no death with the Christian view that death is the penalty for sin, but that Christ paid that penalty, and that as a result the resurrection from the dead is made possible for every member of Adam's race. Because of the prevalence of the error the Apostle was constrained to state the truth in the most positive form. He says:

"If Christ hath been preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised: and if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, and **[R3563 : page 157]** your faith is also vain. Yea, we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not then is not Christ raised; and if Christ be not raised your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."

There is no reasonable ground for misunderstanding these plain statements. Only deep-seated errors have hindered us from attaching to these inspired words their true meaning. They mean what they say: that if Jesus remained dead, if he was not raised up from death to life, he did not complete the work he undertook, he did not

become the Savior, the Deliverer. True, indeed, his death was necessary as the redemption price, but it was also a part of the divine plan that if he accomplished the sacrifice in a manner satisfactory to the Father, he would be raised from death to a higher plane of existence, to a higher than human nature, to the divine nature, and that thus raised he should have the opportunity of presenting the merit of his sacrifice on behalf of the Church first and subsequently for the sins of the whole world.

If he remained in death, was not resurrected, it would be a proof that he had failed to come up to the divine requirements. If he remained in death, was not resurrected, then he could never present his sacrifice on our behalf, could never appear as our advocate and mediator, could never secure our release from the sentence of death, and could never be our helper to bring us back into accord with the Father. Hence, as the Apostle says, "If Christ be not risen the teachings of the apostles are all false," for they are all built upon this central fact that "Jesus rose on the third day." Hence again, as he states it, if Christ be not risen it proves that our hope of forgiveness of sins through the merit of his sacrifice is a vain one – then he did not appear on our behalf, he did not offer the merit of his sacrifice in mediation of our sins, we are not reconciled to the Father, we are yet in our sins, yet under condemnation, without hope. [R3564 : page 157]

"MANY INFALLIBLE PROOFS"

Then comes in our Golden Text, in which the Apostle reassures us that it is no fable, that Christ arose from the dead, that it was not only necessary to our salvation, but that it is a fact well attested. He proceeds in his argument to show that thus by the resurrection of Christ is ultimately to come the resurrection of the Church to full harmony with God, ultimately to be completely delivered from the power of sin and death – "As all in Adam die, so all in Christ shall be made alive" – a full release from death, which is the great enemy.

He proceeds to say that ultimately, at his second advent, "Christ must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

With this view of the importance of the resurrection of Jesus, we cannot wonder that the Scriptures lay great stress upon that fact, and deduce various proofs and demonstrations intended to establish our faith in it. All four of the evangelists give the details respecting our Lord's resurrection and manifestation to his apostles with great particularity. In the book of the Acts (1:3), the writer begins with this assurance, that Jesus "showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of his disciples [occasionally] during the space of forty days, speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God."

When the Apostle would outline the great plan of God he shows the importance of the resurrection, not only for Jesus but also for all who ever shall be blessed through him as the Savior. He begins his dissertation on the subject by saying, "I delivered to you first of all that which I also received [first of all]: how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve, and after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep. After that he was seen of James, then of all the apostles, and last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time."

A VERY PREVALENT ERROR

Those who think of the dead as being alive and who still desire to apply in some manner the Scriptural teaching respecting the resurrection, have forced themselves to the thought that it is a resurrection of the body that is promised, which is a mistake. It is the being or soul that has the promise of a resurrection, and some beings or souls are to be resurrected to one plane of existence and

others to another plane. For instance, the promise to the Church of Christ is a resurrection in a spirit body. The Apostle describes "the" resurrection of "the" dead as the resurrection of the Church, born again to a new nature, a spiritual, a heavenly nature. He says of the being or soul of such, "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 an animal body it is raised a spiritual body."

Although not discussing particularly the resurrection for the remainder of the world, the Apostle intimates that not all will be raised celestial bodies, heavenly bodies, and he explains that there is a glory for the celestial and a glory also for the terrestrial. He proceeds to contrast the first Adam, of the earth earthy, with the second Adam, the heavenly Lord, saying, "The first was made a living soul [an animal being], the last was made a life-giving spirit." But it was not until our Lord's resurrection that he became a life-giving spirit, for as the Apostle Peter declares elsewhere, "He was put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit." These two Adams are samples or patterns of what mankind may attain to in the resurrection: the Church is to attain to the likeness of the second Adam, the world the likeness of the first Adam – "as is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly."

Only the Church of this Gospel age has been granted the opportunity of becoming spiritual children of God, joint-heirs with Christ their Lord. Theirs is the great blessing, the privilege of the first resurrection, concerning which the Scriptures declare, "Blessed and holy are they who have part in the first resurrection; on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." It is this wonderful hope that God has set before us in the Gospel, the hope of participation with our Redeemer in the sufferings of this present time and also in the glories that shall follow, and our hope is

attainable [R3564 : page 158] in and through and by the first resurrection, of which the Lord was the first fruits.

Subsequently will come the world's opportunity for a resurrection. This is elsewhere described as restitution, a return to all that was lost in Adam – a return to the likeness of God in the flesh which Adam had before he transgressed, and which all of his children are yet to attain to if they will – through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus and during the period of his Millennial Kingdom. The world's hope in Christ is a resurrection hope and a glorious one, but the hope of the Church excels in glory, honor and immortality.

MARY THE FIRST WITNESS

The honor of being the first witness to whom our Lord manifested himself after his resurrection came to Mary Magdalene, who at one time was possessed by evil spirits, but who, being freed from their domination became a faithful and loyal follower of Jesus. This was not the Mary, sister of Lazarus and Martha, neither was it Mary the "sinner," who washed our Lord's feet with her tears in the Pharisee's house. She is called Mary Magdalene, probably because her home town was Magdala.

Early on the next morning after the Sabbath – corresponding to our Sunday, the first day of the week – Mary had an appointment with others of the Lord's friends to go to the tomb with spices, etc., to embalm his body, a proceeding which had been impossible because of the lateness of the hour of his crucifixion, and because on the Sabbath intervening no such work was permissible under the Law. Their thought was to take advantage of the very earliest opportunity for the embalming before decomposition could set in. Arising earlier than her companions Mary went alone to the sepulcher, and, looking in, saw that the body of Jesus was gone. She wondered why he had been removed and where, and wept; then stooping down again, because the door of the sepulcher was low,

she beheld two persons in white raiment, whom she recognized as angels, sitting at the head and foot of the place where Jesus' body had lain, as though they were keeping guard. They asked why she wept; she answered because they had taken away her Lord and she knew not where they had laid him.

Turning, Mary saw a man near her, whom she took to be the caretaker of the garden in which was Joseph's tomb. He also asked why she wept, and she appealed to him that if he had removed the body, being dissatisfied that it should remain in that tomb, if he would give it to her care she would take charge of it. Nothing about this person indicated who he was. He looked like a gardener, probably had on gardener's clothing – (his own clothing we know had been appropriated by the soldiers who crucified him, and the linen clothes were still lying in the tomb). It was not until Jesus called her by name, probably in the old familiar voice, that she recognized that the one before her was her Lord – in a different body, in another form, but still he.

Falling at his feet and clasping them she simply uttered the word, "Rabboni!" Master; but Jesus did not encourage her to thus continue, but intimated rather that, having knowledge of his resurrection, she should become the newsbearer or gospeller to the disciples, informing them that he was risen and that by and by he would ascend, "To your Father and to my Father, to your God and to my God."

ART THOU A STRANGER?

Our risen Lord evidently revealed himself to Mary only by his voice. The clothing was not such as he had previously worn nor was the appearance the same; she knew him not until he spoke. Later in the day two of his disciples were going to Emmaus and the Lord overtook them and saluted them kindly, inquiring why they were of such sad countenances and evidently in deep sorrow. They knew him not, they saw not the print of the nails in his hands nor in his

feet, they saw not the features they had long known nor the clothing. They said to him, "Art thou a stranger in these parts and hast not heard about Jesus?" etc. He took occasion to open unto them the Scriptures, to point out to them from the prophecies how it was necessary that Messiah should thus suffer in order to enter into his glory, in order that his Kingdom might come, in order that mankind might be blessed, in order that an elect Church might be gathered to be associated with him in the blessing of the world.

Finally, after being with them probably for several hours, and doubtless being esteemed a very wonderful man indeed, who could thus open up the Scriptures so as to cause their hearts to burn within them with love and devotion and with faith, he revealed himself to them in the breaking of bread and immediately vanished. Something about his words or about his manner of giving thanks told them at once that this was their Lord, and accounted for all the peculiar phenomena they had noted.

The same evening he met with his assembled disciples, who, in fear of the Jews, behind fast-closed doors, were discussing their own safety and also the reports **[R3565 : page 158]** of Mary and the other women at the sepulcher when Jesus appeared suddenly in their midst. They were astounded and fearful. How could any being get into their midst while the doors were fast? Surely the being before them must be a spirit. They were in fear and trepidation, but the Master's words, "Peace," stilled their fears. He showed them his hands and his side, and he ate before them and said, "Handle me and see that it is I: a spirit [*pneuma*] hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." Then were they glad as they realized the truth, and so are all glad who realize this great fact of our Lord's resurrection from the dead and who have any conception whatever of its weighty importance as connected with the divine plan for our salvation.

WHY THE DIFFERENT FORMS?

We may be sure that there was some good and wise purpose served by the Lord's course – by his appearing in various forms and later on vanishing from sight. Nothing, we may be sure, was done in vain; everything had a purpose, especially at such a time. It is for us to reverently examine the matter and note the purpose, the object, of such manifestations. We accept them as follows: **(1)** Our Lord would convince them that he was not any longer the fleshly Jesus whom they had known for several years; he would convince them that although put to death in the flesh he was quickened in the spirit, that henceforth he was a spirit being. They knew about angels – Mary herself [R3565 : page 159] had seen two in the sepulcher; they knew that angels could appear and disappear; they knew that angels could assume human form and flesh; they knew from the record that angels had appeared to Abraham and had eaten dinner with him, and that Abraham knew not that they were angels until subsequently.

Our Lord would show his disciples that not only was he not dead, but that now he could go and come like the angels, he could appear and disappear, he could manifest himself in the flesh or be present without flesh, he could create clothing as easily as the flesh for these appearances and did so, yet none of the clothing and none of the flesh were the same that they had previously been in contact with. The clothing was with the soldiers still – the flesh, we know not where it is; we simply know that Jesus was not raised in the flesh, and we know also that the elements of the fleshly body are not at all necessary to God for the creation of a spirit body.

Our Lord illustrated in his own person the very lesson he had given them on the occasion of the visit of Nicodemus. He then said that those born of the spirit could go and come like the wind, and that none would know whence they came nor whither they went. How appropriate that he should illustrate this and thus give them their first lessons in spiritual things, which, however, they would not

be fully able to appreciate until after Pentecost, when the holy Spirit would be poured out.

"A SPIRIT HATH NOT FLESH"

But some, perhaps, may say, Did not Jesus contradict the thought that he was a spirit when he used the words, A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have? The two thoughts are quite in harmony: they were not seeing the spirit Jesus, they were merely seeing the flesh and bones which the spirit Jesus assumed for the purpose of conversing with them, just as the angels assumed flesh-and-bone bodies when they made certain communications as recorded in the Old Testament Scriptures. He did not say, "A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see I am," but "as ye see me have."

The spirit Jesus manifested himself through the flesh and bones and clothing. He saw that, if they could but realize that they were looking at flesh and bones their fear would depart, and as they would be thus calmed, Jesus would be the better able to explain to them the fact of his resurrection and to give them the initiatory lessons connected with their future work as his representatives in the world when he should be gone. This was the object of his various manifestations during those forty days, about eleven in all, and very brief in every case. The appearing in the flesh would remove their fear and enable them to hear the better what he had to say to them. Their seeing him on two occasions in a body of flesh resembling the one he had been crucified in, and perhaps in clothing resembling that the soldiers had divided among themselves, assisted them also to grasp the thought of the resurrection, that he was no longer dead; and his appearing in different forms proved to them conclusively that none of these forms was his own proper one, but that they were merely so many appearances through which he communicated with them.

Doubtless it was for this same reason that he remained forty days, manifesting himself occasionally, yet invisible to them all the

remainder of that period. He would have them learn gradually not to expect him again in the flesh, but to realize, nevertheless, his presence with them and care over them, so that they might the better understand, when he should leave them, how he could still maintain his presence with them and his guardianship of all their interests. He was sending them forth as his special representatives in the world as his words indicated, "Peace be unto you. As the Father hath sent me even so send I you." Jesus Christ was the Father's representative; we are the special representatives of our Lord and Head, though of course through him and in him representatives also of the Father.

"RECEIVE YE THE HOLY SPIRIT"

The disciples had not yet received the holy Spirit. Only Jesus had ever received it in the sense of a begetting, although the prophets had received it in a mechanical sense to work in them and through them. This is in harmony with the statement elsewhere made, that "the holy Spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified." In other words, God could not communicate his spirit to any until after the merit of Christ's sacrifice had been appropriated to them. This was done after the Lord had ascended up on high, there to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Forthwith the holy Spirit, in Pentecostal power and blessing, was shed forth.

The Lord would have the disciples anticipate the blessing that was to come to them; he would have them understand that the holy Spirit he would send would not be a person, but the Father's spirit and his own spirit – the breath or spirit of God, the breath or spirit of Jesus, the spirit of truth, the spirit of holiness, the spirit of a sound mind.

"WHOSSOEVER SINS YE REMIT"

Our Lord's declaration that his disciples might or might not remit sins is not to be understood after the manner in vogue amongst Roman Catholics, Greek Catholics, etc. – that a priest, by virtue of

the sacrifice of the mass or otherwise, is able to remit sins. The thought rather is that these twelve apostles in particular, and less particularly all the Lord's true members while in the world, would be under the influence and guidance and instruction of his holy Spirit to such an extent that they would know the terms and conditions on which it would be possible to forgive sins, and that they might thus know so certainly as to be able to tell their hearers whether or not their sins were forgiven by the Lord.

We have this privilege still, and every true child of God should know how to exercise it, so that if brought into contact with penitent sinners he could render them the necessary assistance and indicate to them upon what particular terms they might know that their sins were forgiven of the Lord. For instance, we may assure any one who gives evidence of contrition, of heart repentance, restitution to the extent of ability, faith in Christ and obedient desire to walk according to his ways – we may assure any such person that his sins are forgiven; not that we have the power to forgive them, but we, being intimate with the Master and knowing his mind on the subject, can speak for him as his mouthpiece, to declare the terms of reconciliation. Whoever can know about his own sins, should know also how to direct and assist others in knowing of the cancelation of their sins.

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