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## THE CHRIST, THE SON OF GOD.

– JOHN 20:31. – JUNE 25. –

**Golden Text: – "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."**

OUR Golden Text is a very appropriate one for a review lesson, preparatory to a new course of studies in the Old Testament. We have been considering the testimonies of the Evangelists respecting the words and mighty works of him who spake as never man spake, and who, as the finger of God, as a small manifestation of divine power, cast out devils, healed the sick, awakened the dead. John sums up the object, the purpose, of these records, saying that they were written to the intent that we might believe on Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God.

Some in our day, totally misunderstanding the divine plan with reference to human salvation, would be inclined to say – What difference whether we believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, or believe merely that he was an ordinary man, a wise and good man, the son of Joseph? Would not his conduct and teachings be just the same in either event? And is it not the teachings of Jesus and their moral influence that we seek as a power over men rather than any faith in him? What is the value of faith anyway? is it not works that we wish? If a man have good works without faith would he not be just as acceptable to God as if he had [R3580 : page 186] faith? In what way would faith profit or benefit any?

We answer that this is human reasoning merely, and that it ignores the divine plan and record, which is to the effect that "without faith it is impossible to please God." It seems strange to some – impossible to believe this Scriptural declaration – to accept the fact that an imperfect man with faith is acceptable to God, while the best man in the world without faith would be unacceptable. Nevertheless,

this is the divine arrangement respecting the work of God which he is accomplishing during this Gospel age.

### **KNOWLEDGE AND WORKS BY AND BY.**

The Scriptures indicate to us that by and by the knowledge of the Lord shall be so complete, so fill [R3580 : page 187] the earth, that at that time the word faith will have practically lost its present meaning, knowledge taking the place of what is now termed faith. In that time knowledge and works will be what the Lord will require of mankind. All the avenues of knowledge will be open to the human family, the knowledge of the glory of God will fill the whole earth as the waters cover the great deep, and with that knowledge obedience will be required – obedience to the extent of ability, and increasing ability will be the reward of every effort until, at the close of the Millennial age, all who will may actually have attained full perfection of human nature that was lost in Eden. That will be the age of works, as we read in Revelation 20:12. The whole world will stand on trial for life eternal, and their judgment will be in harmony with the principles already enunciated in the Word of God, and the decision will be "according to their works" – not according to their faith, as it is with us in this Gospel age.

During this Gospel age the Lord is seeking a certain class able to exercise faith, a class whose conduct will be largely influenced by their faith. It is this class that is addressed throughout the Scriptures, and their faith is continually appealed to as in our text – "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." The Apostle declares that God's method of dealing seems foolish to the world – "It has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." The world thinks it strange that believers should be saved on account of their belief rather than from the standpoint of works. But whoever wants to avail himself of the present privileges of this Gospel dispensation must accept the Lord's terms or none. It is he and not the Evangelist who has decided that

faith is an essential. First, before we can come to God, we must believe that he is and that he will reward those who seek him, those who desire to come into heart-relationship with him. Whoever cannot thus believe in advance is barred from coming to God at all in this present time. If he exercises faith to this extent he may go on to still greater and deeper and broader faith.

To him who seeks to thus approach God in fellowship, the Lord is pleased to point out that sinners can have no relationship to him except they come through the appointed Mediator who redeemed us with his precious blood and made possible our reconciliation with the Father. If the believer accepts this as the divine provision he may rejoice in the thought that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he rose again on the third day for our justification. If he cannot believe this he must stop just where he is – he finds no access into divine favor and fellowship. He may find access into errors and false doctrines, but he can find no fellowship, no assistance from God, no correct information respecting the divine plan. If he takes this step, accepts Christ through faith, then he may have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Still, faith will be necessary if he would go on. To the justified believers during this Gospel age God has been pleased to make known further riches of his grace, namely, the call of the Church to joint-heirship with the Lord in his Kingdom, "If so be that we suffer with him that we may also be glorified together." – Rom. 8:17.

But this inspired hope can only be ours to the extent that we exercise still further faith in God, in his love, and in the messages which he has sent us through his Son and through the apostles and prophets. Even if these be accepted, and we have thus "access into the grace of God wherein we stand, hoping for the glory of God," it will be necessary for us to still exercise faith in order to make progress in the narrow way thus entered and to ultimately attain the glory, honor and immortality promised. Thus it is written, "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life," and again, "This is the

victory that overcometh the world, even thy faith." So we see that faith marks every step of progress for those who are the called according to the divine purpose during this Gospel age.

### **PARTICULAR FAITH NECESSARY.**

Another mistake frequently made is to suppose that the faith which God requires is a vague and indefinite one – anything. On the contrary, the Scriptures delineate very particularly the kind of faith acceptable to God. We have already shown as a first prerequisite a faith in the personality of God and in his willingness to be approached by his creatures; second, a faith in him, that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life, by whom alone we can approach the Father. Our text emphasizes this thought of a particular faith, declaring that the faith must be that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. What is implied in this thought, the Christ the Son of God? It means more, far more than a mere belief that Jesus lived and Jesus died, a man of Nazareth. The word Christ signifies Messiah and Messiah signifies God's anointed king. For four thousand years the Lord has been making gradually known to mankind through the prophets and apostles that he will ultimately establish a Kingdom of righteousness in the earth, "under the whole heavens." That through this Kingdom for which we pray, "Thy Kingdom come," all mankind are ultimately to be blessed and righteousness established in the earth upon a sure footing, and all sin and iniquity be overthrown, and this Kingdom is to be under the control of Messiah, the great King, the divinely appointed Ruler. The thought of our text, then, is that Jesus must be recognized as more than a man who died; he must be recognized as the long-promised King of the world and as the Son of the Highest.

### **MESSIANIC HOPES INSPIRING.**

To be without any hope of a future would make the present existence terrible; to think of death as ending all would be to rob life of its chief blessing and hope. Fortunately but few of mankind are in this absolutely hopeless condition; but to attract attention away from

the divine plan, and its reasonable and efficient hopes and promises respecting the Millennial Kingdom, and the blessing under that Kingdom of every nation, people, kindred and tongue, seems to have been the **[R3580 : page 188]** object of the Adversary. He has introduced false hopes which can never appear to mankind to be thoroughly reasonable because they are most unreasonable – the hope on the one hand that they do not die and on the other hand that they go to heaven when they die, the hope that death does not mean death. These fallacious hopes are delusions which may satisfy the mind temporarily, but which in the end, with all who will reason, must prove unsatisfactory.

The only faith that will stand the test and bring us off conquerors over the spirit of the world, the flesh and the Adversary, is the hope set before us in the Gospel, of which Jesus as the Messiah is the center. That is the hope of the world – the hope that Christ having redeemed the world with his precious blood will grant, in due time, a blessing of opportunity to every creature, that whosoever will may come through knowledge and obedience to life eternal and that the disobedient shall be destroyed in the second death. A further part of this hope of which Jesus, the Messiah, is the center, is that those who are now called, the obedient through faith, shall be joint-heirs with the Master in the great Kingdom which shall bless the world. No wonder the Apostle said of this Messianic hope, this Kingdom hope, "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself even as he is pure."

### **LIFE THROUGH BELIEVING.**

The Apostle in the latter part of the text pursues this thought of the necessity of faith, saying that the believing ones may have life through the name, through the power, through the authority of this Messiah – by virtue of the work which he has accomplished for them and the door of opportunity which he has opened to them. The unbelieving have no such door of opportunity now. Thank God there will be a glorious opportunity of another kind for them in a coming

age, but they are barred by their unbelief from participation in God's favor now, because the present salvation is based wholly upon this as a condition – faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

Believing is not only the precedent to the life to come, to be attained at the resurrection, but it is also precedent to a proper life in the present time. Indeed it is a very easily discerned principle that whoever would be accounted worthy of a part in the first resurrection must begin the new life in the present time and have his trial here. In other words, unless we are begotten of the Spirit now to newness of life, unless we be risen with Christ to walk with him in newness of life, unless we develop as new creatures, we will never be fit for eternal life, which is offered to us as a reward – life with our Lord, glory, honor and immortality. How essential then it is that we have faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God; how necessary that this faith work in us to will and to do God's pleasure, that our **[R3581 : page 188]** faith be so living, so real, that it will influence the entire course of life, transforming us by the renewing of our minds and sanctifying us to the Lord and to his service, changing us from glory to glory, in the likeness of the Lord, and generally making us meet, fit, for the Kingdom which God hath promised to them that love him.

The Apostle in the beginning of the Gospel age referred to the Jews, and remarked that as a nation they had from the Lord much advantage every way over other nations and peoples, chiefly in that to them were committed the oracles of God, a knowledge of the divine plan, even though that knowledge were more or less veiled in symbols and scattered in mysterious statements. But accepting that as a fact, what can we say of Spiritual Israel? Certainly we can say that she enjoys much advantage every way, not only advantages over and above those possessed by the heathen, but advantages over those possessed by the Jews. To us the oracles of God are no longer veiled and hidden, but open by the grace of God through the holy Spirit. We can see a depth of meaning and beauty in the words of the Law and the prophets that the Jews never discerned, for we are guided into

these by the inspired explanations of the Lord and the apostles and by the illumination of our minds through the holy Spirit.

And if this be true in respect to the Gospel age in general, what shall we say of the special advantages and privileges and unfoldings of the divine Word accorded to us who are now living in the end of this age – to us who now have the convenience of the Word of the Lord in printed form, with marginal references, concordances and various Bible study helps? What advantage have we? Much every way, we reply, even over the believers of the early Church.

If of these early Christians it was required that their faith should bring a corresponding life, as of those risen from the dead, seeking the things above, much more should this be true of us who now with still greater knowledge of the divine plan should have a still larger and fuller appreciation of the grace of God in Christ, and a still fuller desire to live the new life and to ultimately be accounted worthy of the new body in the resurrection, and that the new life should be made everlasting. By the grace of God, dear brethren and sisters, let us attain to this which has been placed within our grasp. As the Apostle says, let us lay aside every weight and every easily besetting sin and let us run with patience the race set before us in the Gospel: Looking unto Jesus the author of our faith who will also be its finisher. We have been studying the various experiences of our dear Master, and now we are to remember that we are called to walk in his steps, to suffer with him that we may also reign with him. Every feature of his experiences should be profitable to us and any victory of his should give us more courage, realizing that greater is he that is for us than all they that be against us.

