

"IF I GO AWAY I WILL COME AGAIN"

– LUKE 24:36-53. – DECEMBER 23. –

Golden Text: – "While he blessed them, he was parted from them, and was received up into heaven."

THIS lesson connects with our previous one, and is Luke's brief summary of our Lord's manifestations during the forty days of his presence up to the time when he left his disciples by ascending to heaven. It presents what in our last lesson we designated the fifth and eleventh manifestations of the risen Messiah to his faithful apostles, who were to be his witnesses to the Jews and indirectly to the whole world. The forepart, from verses 36-43 inclusive, show how carefully, how wisely, our Lord presented the Truth, so that none of his followers would have occasion for stumbling, although he well knew that he was to be for a stone of stumbling, a rock of offence, to both the houses of Israel, the Jewish and the Gospel nominal churches.

The account graphically sets forth how on the evening of his resurrection, while his apostles were gathered discussing the incidents of the day, the reported meeting, interview, etc., Jesus himself stood in their midst, the doors being shut. No wonder they were affrighted, for they were in a nervous condition throughout the day, not only fearing apprehension by the rulers but perplexed respecting the meaning of the day's incidents. What could they think now but that a spirit being stood in their midst? how could any other come in while the doors were shut? As a matter of fact, we have seen that although the Lord was put to death in the flesh, he was quickened, made alive in the Spirit, and that he was no longer a human being but born of the Spirit, and that it was by reason of his power as a spirit being that he was able to come into their presence, the doors being shut.

We have seen that he could have manifested himself as a spirit being as he did to Saul of Tarsus later, but that instead of so doing he assumed a body of flesh so that they might be without distraction. The wisdom of his course is shown by the alarm of the disciples and his ability to assure them that what they saw was not a spirit but flesh and bones. His words were, "A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have." But spirit beings had assumed flesh and bones as Jesus did, and had thus appeared to men to deliver divine messages. We have already noticed such an appearance of our Lord and two angels to Abraham, and how they ate and talked with Abraham. Similarly in this case our Lord, to prove that his body was of flesh and bones, called for food and ate before them some broiled fish and honeycomb.

Their fears thus allayed, they were the better prepared to receive the appropriate instructions of the hour – prepared as they could not have been under any other conditions of which we can think. Evidently our Lord chose the very best way of proving the two facts: first that he was risen, that it was his very self; and, secondly, that he was changed, not the same as previously, because now, as the angels, he had power to come and go, to appear and disappear, to assume one form and clothing or another as suited convenience and the objects he wished to serve.

OPENED UNTO THEM THE SCRIPTURES

Their fears allayed, they were prepared for further instruction – an explanation of the wonderful experiences through which they had recently been passing. We could hardly think of our dear Redeemer speaking to his loved ones upon any other topic at such a time. He explained that what they were experiencing was the fulfilment of his words while he was yet with them – intimating that he was no longer with them in the

same sense as formerly. He proceeded to explain to them the necessity for their trying experience and his, that the Father had so arranged from the beginning, and had so outlined the matter in the prophecies of Moses and all the prophets, including the Psalms wherever they referred to him. Thus he opened their understanding, their minds, that they could appreciate the Scriptures. His words served as a Bible Key, bringing order out of their previous confusion.

The fact that the Scriptures are so written that they cannot be understood without certain divine assistance is incomprehensible to the world. Not seeing the divine plan worldly minds think it unreasonable that God should hide his purposes from the wise and prudent and reveal them unto babes (Matt. 11:25); they think it strange that he so arranged his revelations through the prophets that they could not be understood except as he would furnish the necessary elucidation, keys or instructions. However, to us who do see **[R3910 : page 395]** the divine plan with a measure of clearness, it was evidently not only the wisest way but the best in every sense of the word for God to arrange his plan so that only those in heart harmony with him would be able to appreciate it in advance of its fulfilment, as the Lord declared, To you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom, but to all outsiders these things are spoken in parables and dark sayings, that they might not understand; and again he said even to his faithful ones, "I have many things to tell you, but ye cannot bear them now." – John 16:12.

The things which our Lord revealed to his disciples on this occasion as a key to their understanding of the Scriptures could not properly have been given them previously; those truths would not have been meat in due season to the household of faith earlier. They would do them more good now than at any other time – now that their minds were quickened and they were

awakened, energized by the stirring events and perplexities; they now were ready to see the course of divine wisdom in the arrangement of the plan. And is it so now – today? As one by one the Lord's people come to that condition of mind and heart development where they are ready for it the Lord is pleased to give them more light of "present truth"; and when once their eyes of understanding are opened they wonder why they have been so blind that they did not see these things before. The secret is that they were not previously prepared: other lessons must first be learned before the deeper truths could be appreciated; and the great Teacher, reading the heart, was able to give them the opening of the understanding at the appropriate time for the highest welfare of his followers.

We are not to suppose that our Lord worked some miracle upon the minds of his followers to open their understanding: rather we are to suppose that he operated then as he still operates in giving instruction; that he used natural means, that he reasoned with them, explaining to them the necessity for the one feature and the other of the divine plan, until they got before their minds the logical order and sequence of affairs and were able to some extent to grasp the divine purpose. We are sure, however, that they did not comprehend the Scriptures perfectly, because this was not to be their experience, according to our Lord's own words, until after he had ascended on high and sent forth the holy Spirit, which would guide them into all Truth, yea, into the deep things of God.

What our Lord did do was to give all the details that the natural man in a consecrated condition of mind could appreciate and act upon. He doubtless showed them briefly that the sacrifices of the Law typified his own sacrifice, that the atonement for sin was necessary on a higher scale by better sacrifices before the real reconciliation could be effected and the whole world of mankind be permitted to come back into

relationship with God and to have an opportunity for life eternal. He doubtless showed them that natural Israel was not worthy to constitute the Kingdom class, that therefore only those accepting him had been chosen – "The election hath received it and the rest were blinded." – Rom. 11:7.

He showed them, further, the work expected of them – to declare not only his righteousness but that he was the sin-offering, and that although he died he arose again to give the blessing as the antitypical High Priest. He showed them that repentance would be granted through the merit of his death and the remission of sins, and that this would be open and applicable to all mankind – all nations. Evidently, however, he did not explain to them that the Gentiles were to be fellow-heirs with themselves in the great honor of being the [R3911 : page 395] antitypical Israel, Spiritual Israel, joint-heirs with Messiah in the Kingdom; because we find that Peter and the other apostles were quite ignorant of this feature of the divine plan until the time of Cornelius and the special manifestations connected therewith. Their witness was to begin at Jerusalem, but not to end there.

"BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM."

The call to membership in the Bride of Christ must be thoroughly promulgated amongst the natural seed of Abraham that it might select as many as were Israelites indeed before it would be extended to the Gentiles. They were to tarry in Jerusalem also to await enduement from on high – the holy Spirit's anointing and begetting. He referred to the Pentecostal blessing, saying, "Behold, I send the promise of the Father upon you, but tarry ye in Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high." The Apostle tells us that the sending of the holy Spirit at Pentecost became a witness or sign of God's acceptance of our Lord Jesus' sacrifice, and thus a sign of his acceptance of

the Church and household of faith, whose sins alone were covered by that sacrifice. His words are, "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the holy Spirit of promise, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear." This was the seal of the Father's approval of the sacrifice of Jesus, and of the forgiveness of sins of those for whom his precious blood was applied; as the Apostle Paul declares, "He ascended up on high there to appear in the presence of God on our behalf – as the Advocate of believers, but not as the world's Advocate." – Acts 2:33.

The record is that the apostles did tarry at Jerusalem until they received the Pentecostal blessing, and the lesson to all the Lord's disciples from that day to the present time is that none except those thus endued with power from on high – none except those who come under the blessing of the Spirit of the Lord, the holy mind of Christ – none others are qualified to be the ambassadors for God and his representatives before men. When our Lord sent forth his apostles during his ministry he put his Spirit or power upon them, which enabled them to preach and cast out devils, in harmony with his wishes and instructions; but as soon as he was gone they might do no more work until they received the actual blessing in their own hearts.

We fear that a general trouble amongst those teaching in the name of the Lord today and in times past has been that they did not tarry until they were endued with the holy Spirit, but recklessly pressed into the ministry without this, the real credential of divine authorization. Let us not make the same mistake; let us realize that work not done under the guidance of the holy Spirit is sure to be defective and in some respects evil, and to result in evil fruitage, of which we **[R3911 : page 396]** can see so much everywhere about us in Babylon. Let us then not only see to it that we have come under the anointing which has been on the body since Pentecost, but see also that

we abide in this condition, that we grieve not the holy Spirit, and that thus we shall be qualified to be witnesses for the Truth, ambassadors for God, servants of the Most High, co-laborers in the vineyard. At no time was this more necessary than now in the harvest time. All of the Lord's people should be awake to a realization that the Truth, the light now due to the household of faith, is not to be expected through any but sanctified channels.

"WITNESSES OF THESE THINGS."

The apostles as witnesses were not merely to tell about the Redeemer's virgin birth, nor merely about his holy, devoted life, nor merely about his Calvary cross, nor merely of our Lord's resurrection, nor merely of his ascension, but in addition to all these facts they are to tell that he was a properly qualified Redeemer, that he met all the conditions of the Law, and that now he ever liveth to succor those who come unto the Father through him. How faithfully the apostles performed their mission! how truly, as the Apostle Paul declared, they shunned not to declare the whole counsel! Worldly wisdom might intimate that to own a Master and Teacher who had been executed as a felon would be to their discredit, and thoroughly hinder them from progress in gathering followers to their Leader. But these faithful witnesses consulted not with flesh and blood as to what they should preach – they told the story simply in all of its details, not neglecting even those features which showed their own weaknesses, as in the cases of Peter and Judas, and the disputing as to which should be greatest, etc. The Truth in the simplicity in which God intended it to be delivered has evidently come down to us in the Bible account.

Now we in our turn are the witnesses charged with the responsibility of carrying forward this same message – the message of our Lord's purity, that he was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners; the message of his loving

devotion to the Father's glorious plan unto death, even the death of the cross, his resurrection and his ascension, and his promise to come again to receive his faithful to himself and establish his Kingdom. Nothing less than the whole Gospel should be witnessed, and it is for each of us to say to what extent we are faithfully using our privileges. He who is ashamed of the Lord and his cause, or of anything pertaining to him – he who is ashamed of his agents and agencies of the past or of the present, is not a faithful witness and has the Master's word that "he that is ashamed of me or of my words, of him will I be ashamed when I come in my Kingdom." (Mark 8:38.) Let us, therefore, dearly beloved, not allow pride or any other evil condition of mind to hinder us from full heart-confession of what great thing the Lord has done for us, and of all the steps which he has been pleased to use in the doing of them.

"HE WAS PARTED FROM THEM"

Bethany was on the Mount of Olives, but a little distance from Jerusalem, and thither the Lord led his disciples at the end of the forty days, after having given them the various manifestations of his resurrection and change already mentioned. We read, "While he blessed them he was parted from them and carried up into heaven." Another account says, "A cloud received him out of their sight." We must remember that the apostles were still natural men, that the holy Spirit had not yet been shed forth upon them: hence we see the necessity for the Lord's giving them such evidence as natural men could understand.

He could have vanished out of their sight as he did after talking with them and eating of the broiled fish and honeycomb in the upper room. But had he so vanished and ascended to the Father how would they have known about the matter? Would they not have been in doubt as to whether or not he had ever

gone away to appear in the presence of God on our behalf? But when the changed Lord, the quickened spirit, was about to ascend to the Father, his last manifestation was in a body of flesh, and he was gradually parted from them and gradually ascended into the sky and was lost to their sight, so that they might have before their minds the thought that he was gone, that they were not to expect him to appear and disappear in the future as he had done during those forty days, that they were to think of him now as being with the Father in the heavenly glory. Now they could call to mind his promise, "If I go away I will come again and receive you unto myself." Henceforth their minds would center upon his second coming and the glorious things then to be accomplished for them and for the world. Doubtless this was part of what our Lord made plain to them in opening the Scriptures – that he accepted them and all spiritual Israelites indeed as his jewels, and was selecting these during this Gospel age, and at its close would come again and would receive them to himself as his Bride, and establish his Kingdom with power and great glory in the earth.

"THIS SAME JESUS SHALL SO COME"

Another account tells us that while they were looking upward to the point in heaven where last they had seen the Lord, two angels appeared and said to them, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye here gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus ye have seen go into heaven will so come in like manner as ye have seen him go." The lesson was a complete one and was well understood by the apostles; they fully believed that the Master had gone from them and that as truly he would come again.

They did not forget his statement either, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the age," but accepted this properly as signifying that he would be with them in the plenitude of his power to protect them, to oversee their interests through various

agencies at his command. But as to his actual presence, that was gone – "Ye shall see me no more until that day when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." (Matt. 21:9.) He went from them quietly, unostentatiously, unknown to the world. Hence his followers are to be on the watch for the signs that will indicate the presence of the Son of man in the end of the Gospel age, and are to remember that it will be in his day as it was in the days of Noah, men will be eating and drinking, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage, not discerning, knowing not that the Son of man [R3911 : page 397] is present, that the Gospel age is closing, that a new dispensation is about to dawn, to be inaugurated by the complete change of the members of the body of Christ, because flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom.

"THEY WORSHIPED HIM"

Although our Lord taught us to worship the Father in spirit and in truth, and again to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven," and although the Apostle said, "I bow my knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," (Eph. 3:14), nevertheless the general sentiment of Scripture seems to imply that there will be nothing wrong in our addressing a petition to our Lord Jesus direct if any so desire at any time. As the head of the body it is but the appropriate thing that, as every member of the natural body makes known its desires, its petitions, to its own head, so the Church, the body of Christ, should be permitted to address him, and thus we read in our lesson that the apostles worshiped the ascended Jesus – they recognized his greatness and dignity and honor as the Messiah, the Son of the living God, the Redeemer of the world, who in due time shall come and receive his faithful to himself and establish his Kingdom for the blessing of the world. The Lord's own words are appropriate here: he says, "That all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father." – John 5:23.

Matters had now taken a changed form in the minds of the disciples: their perplexities were gone, they understood [R3912 : page 397] why Jesus had died, the necessity for this, and that it was related to his second coming and the Kingdom then to be established – that it was the very basis of his future work. They knew not, indeed, how long it would be before he would come again – the Lord graciously kept this from them lest the length of the period might have discouraged them. Nor was it necessary either to them or their successors, because not one of them would live the entire period, and it was appropriate that each one should live his space of years in expectancy that the Kingdom might come in his day, and with the desire that he might be ready for it at any moment. We who live today have the happy lot to live "in the days of the Son of man" – in the days of his second presence – in the days of the establishment of his Kingdom – in the day of all days the best.

Instead of being discouraged the disciples now had great joy as they waited for the promised holy Spirit of the fiftieth day. Meantime they were continually in the Temple – not that they lived there, but as we say today of a regular attendant of Church, "He goes to Church all the time," meaning regularly. So with the apostles: they were from Galilee, and had no special business in Jerusalem during the remaining ten days till Pentecost, and they improved the opportunity of spending much of their time in the Temple, praising God, thanking him, desiring to cultivate in themselves more and more the Spirit of the Lord. Applying this feature to ourselves, is it not true of us also that we have had great joy from the time the Lord opened the eyes of our understanding, that we might see his Word in its true light, that we might be his witnesses? All of this class, truly members of his body, are represented as abiding in the Temple, the Tabernacle, the Holy, as the Apostle says: "We are seated together with Christ in the holies," our hearts have fellowship with him, prayer and praise and worship seem to rank amongst

the highest and most appreciated privileges. We have less to ask the Lord for than formerly, more to thank him for, as we begin to realize what great things the Lord hath done for us.
