

[R5236 : page 147]

A CONVINCING PROOF OF THE RESURRECTION

"Be not faithless, but believing." – John 20:27.

PREVIOUS to the occasion of the words of our text, St. Thomas, the Apostle, had not been present at any of the manifestations of Jesus after His resurrection. He seems to have been of a rather skeptical turn of mind. He heard the other Apostles telling about what they had seen, about the manifestations that had taken place, and he felt that on such evidence he could not believe in the resurrection of Jesus. He thought that his brethren had been too easily deceived.

St. Thomas did not accredit his fellow disciples with an attempt at deceiving him; but as he declared, he would not believe on any such testimony as he had received. He said, "Unless I see the spear mark, unless I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe." You cannot convince me that He is not dead. You cannot convince me that a person put to death after that manner is again alive. I cannot say where the deception came from, but you brethren are too easily deceived.

A week later, Jesus appeared in the "upper room" a second time. After saluting the company, He said to St. [R5237 : page 147] Thomas, "Reach hither thy finger and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into My side; and be not faithless, but believing." Again, He said, "A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have." The disciples did not see, evidently, the spirit being. They saw merely a materialization – actual flesh and bones. St. Thomas did as the Lord had requested. Then he said, "My Lord and my God!" He acknowledged that Jesus was the Lord. It was not an apparition. The brethren had not been deceived. He was the one who had come very near being deceived by his own lack of faith.

We cannot doubt that in this incident the Lord has given to all of His followers a very helpful lesson. Had none of the Apostles even seemed to doubt the Lord's resurrection, they might have failed to bring out convincing proof of the fact. They might afterward have thought to themselves, "Why did we not make further investigation?" But here we have evidence of the investigation.

There are some people who are naturally very cautious. St. Thomas seems to have been one of these. We cannot think that the Lord is displeased with such characters. From our standpoint, indeed, the person who is inclined to be somewhat critical is rather to be approved. We would naturally incline to disapprove those who are too easily credulous, too easily persuaded. We are even to think highly of those who are of the mental attitude of St. Thomas. We are glad that there was one such hard thinker as this Apostle.

The Lord said in this connection, "Because thou hast seen, thou hast believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." There might be a question as to what the Lord meant by these words. He may have meant, Do not congratulate yourself that you were not easy to convince; or He may have meant, There is a special blessing for those who have faith – who believe without seeing.

There were above five hundred brethren amongst the disciples at the time of our Lord's crucifixion. The Apostle says that He was seen of these at one time. (I Corinthians 15:6.) But afterwards the brethren were obliged to believe without seeing, merely on the testimony of others. We are in this category ourselves. All the Christian Church throughout the Gospel Age have believed without seeing the outward demonstration. Whether on this account the Lord would be specially pleased with us, we know not. But we think not. Whether we believe on slight evidence or on greater evidence is dependent upon the structure of the brain. God seems to have made provision that all those called of Him may have a sufficiency of

evidence. And He gives us the additional evidence from the days of the Apostles to help to sustain our faith. We have the benefit of the doubts of St. Thomas and of our Lord's demonstration of His change of nature.

FAITH THE CENTER OF CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

The question might be asked, Why did Jesus lay stress upon the importance of faith? Why did He imply that St. Thomas could not be His disciple at all without believing? There are many who tell us that they cannot see that faith has any province, that they see no reason why God should bless *faith*, that in their opinion God should reward us for the *doing*. They say, "We are doing all the good works that we can." The Bible always sustains the thought that any one who does not do to the best of his ability shall receive stripes. But the Bible also holds out the other thought – that God purposes to reward His people according to their faith; that whoever cannot exercise perfect faith cannot be His disciple; that if one has not faith, it is impossible for him to get into the Kingdom.

In God's arrangement, faith has been made the very center of Christian progress – faith in the things He *has done*, faith in the things He has *promised* to do. Faith is the thing which, by God's grace, enables us to avail ourselves **[R5237 : page 148]** of the wonderful opportunities of this present time. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." But this does not mean that conditions will always be as now, or that God will forever reject those who, on account of their mental make-up, cannot now exercise faith, but it means that at the present time He will save no others than the faithful.

The Scriptures very clearly indicate, however, that after the selection of the Church, and the reward of their faith, the Lord will then deal with the world through the class which exercise faith now – through Christ and the Church – for the blessing of all mankind. In the next Age less faith will be required than now. Messiah's

Kingdom established, will be openly manifested. Then mankind will not be obliged to walk by faith. They will walk by sight, whereas now we must walk by faith and not by sight.

From the natural standpoint it looks as though God were not ruling the world at all, but that the world were being ruled by chance or by Satan himself – so different are conditions from what we would expect if God were recognized as the great King. Consequently we must exercise faith, if we are to receive the blessing at this time. By and by, during the Messianic rule, when everything contrary to righteousness will be punished, and everything in harmony with righteousness will be rewarded, then all opposers of righteousness will be cast down, and all lovers of righteousness will be prosperous. That will be the time of walking by sight.

In the present time we must walk by faith because ours is a special salvation. The "high calling" is a peculiar privilege, for a special class. In the next Age, however, mankind's unbalance of mind through the fall will be compensated for. Those who need much demonstration will have much; those who need less will have less. The matter will be made so clear that there will be no excuse for any one not to attain to full obedience of works, and these works will gradually lead them up to full human perfection. God has made nothing unreasonable in His laws and requirements, His every demand is reasonable and essential.

OUR LORD'S CHANGE OF NATURE

Putting ourselves into the position of the disciples during the forty days after Jesus had arisen from the dead, we can readily imagine that they were considerably confused. One and another of them had been witnesses of strange things – they could not explain what, but they had seen what purported to be Jesus – on one occasion the appearance was as the gardener, on another occasion as a stranger, etc. They saw no mark of identity, and did not really know

whether they had seen Him at all. On another occasion, looking very much like His former self, He appeared in their midst, the doors being shut. They could not imagine how a human being could have come in while the doors were shut. Therefore there was considerable perplexity.

The Scriptures give us to understand that the reason why our Lord thus manifested Himself in various forms was that God raised Jesus from the dead to a different plane of existence – as a spirit being. The Scriptures declare, "Now the Lord is that Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:17.) The Second Adam is the Heavenly Lord. He is not the earthly man Jesus. This explanation we can appreciate because we are living since Pentecost. We can see and understand that Jesus had become a spirit being, and that like the angels he could, where it was necessary, appear like a human being. We would not question at all that if Jesus had any reason for showing the identical body that had been crucified He could have appeared in it, could have opened the door and the Apostles could have been blinded, so that they could not see the door opening and shutting, as He entered. But the account contradicts such supposition and is very explicit in the statement that "the doors were *shut*," not that the Apostles did not *see* them open, but that they *did not open* at all. In the second statement – when St. Thomas was present – our Lord appeared in the same manner, "The doors being *shut*." – John 20:19,26.

While Jesus could have brought the body, and could have maintained Himself inside of it as a spirit being, He did not do so. If He had done this they would have been deceived, supposing that He had arisen in His body of flesh in which He had been crucified. Therefore He appeared in *different* bodies of flesh, but under conditions that left no doubt as to His identity. He knew that after the disciples had received the Holy Spirit all would be plain to them. So He made no attempt to explain to them at that time, but merely kept them in touch with Himself until after the Pentecostal blessings

had come, when they were able to understand from the true viewpoint.

Our thought, therefore, would be that the body in which our Lord appeared was materialized. This was not a deception. It was intended, on the contrary, to keep the disciples from being deceived. Being natural men, they could not appreciate a change from human nature to spirit nature. Therefore this appearance was to help them over a difficulty – to keep them from saying "He is not risen."

RESURRECTION MUCH MISUNDERSTOOD

The disciples could see that our Lord had a different power altogether from what He had before He died. Thus He appeared time and again during the forty days – a few minutes at a time. This very evidently was to accomplish the purpose of demonstrating to them that He was a spirit being, that He had power to come and go like the wind, that He could appear in the flesh when necessary, and then vanish at will, and that He could come in one form and another form. This was the great lesson by which He purposed to keep them from being in any way deceived.

We cannot imagine how Jesus could have substantiated His resurrection and confirmed the faith of His disciples in any better way. If He had remained with them as a man, they would have felt bound to believe that the same [R5238 : page 148] personality, the same flesh, was His still, and they would have been unable to understand His words, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the Age." But now they could understand that as He had appeared and vanished from sight, although really present with them throughout the forty days, He could also in a different sense, be with them all through the Gospel Age, and return in person when necessary, in the end of the Age.

We see no deception in this, but an avoidance of deception. We are to remember that it took several of these manifestations to attest

the fact that He was a changed being. If the disciples had thought of Him as a Man in Heaven, it would have led them into serious difficulty, just as we see is now the case with our friends in the nominal Churches, who think Jesus arose in the same flesh, and that He retains that flesh in Heaven. As the hymn says,

"Five bleeding wounds He bears,
Received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers,
They strongly plead for me."

Our friends believe this. We ask them if they think that as Jesus bears the marks, the scars, of His wounded flesh, that all of His followers will likewise bear theirs. [R5238 : page 149] They answer, Yes. Then we remind them that some of them were most horribly maltreated, often mutilated, before they died. Think of those who were beheaded; and those who met with accidents and wounds! If they are to bear those marks and bruises in Heaven, or be headless, they will be a disfigured set.

We show them that those who hold this view do not believe at all in the Redemption – the Redemption of which the Bible treats. We quote to our friends, "He poured out His soul unto death;" He made "His soul an offering for sin." Yes, they answer, we believe that His fleshly body was sacrificed. We reply, His fleshly body will only redeem the fleshly body of Adam. But Adam had more than the fleshly body. It was the *soul* of Adam that sinned – and Jesus must have given a *soul* in order to redeem Adam. – Isaiah 53:10,12.

If the body never was a *part of Jesus*, then it was not *Jesus* that died, but His *body*; it was not *He* that was humiliated, but His *body*; it was not He who left His glory that was sacrificed, but His *body*. Now, if the body never was Jesus, then He deceived mankind into thinking that He was a man; and He deceived the Apostle into saying that "He who was rich, for our sakes became poor." (2 Corinthians 8:9.) Then to speak of His being tempted, as

the Apostle Paul spoke of Him, was wrong, for He could not be tempted like us, if He were altogether of a different nature. So we see that the Truth, as the Bible teaches it, is harmonious.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE WORLD

The First Resurrection, Christ's Resurrection, began with the glorious change of our Lord, more than eighteen centuries ago, and as *His* Resurrection, it will be completed when the last member of His Body shall have experienced the change from earthly to Heavenly, Divine nature. The world's resurrection cannot take place before that of the Church, but must follow it. The Ancient Worthies will be the first of the earthly class to be resurrected to human nature. But their resurrection will not be at the same time as that of the Church, but *later* – as the Apostle says, "They, without us, shall not be made perfect." – Hebrews 11:39,40.

The awakening of the world will probably not begin for fifty or a hundred years after the Kingdom has been established. During that time, however, the resurrection process – the raising up gradually – will be in operation amongst the nations then living. As gradually nations, peoples, kindreds and tongues are awakened, they must be brought to a knowledge of the Truth, and must give the assent of their wills, before any resurrection processes begin to operate in them. This work will continue all down through the thousand years of Messiah's Reign.

The world's resurrection will not be fully completed until the end of the thousand years, while the Church's resurrection will be completed at the beginning of the thousand years. For this reason it would be improper to say that the resurrections of the just and of the unjust take place at the same time. Indeed, the world will not be raised up fully until, at the close of the thousand years, they shall be turned over to God, even the Father; for one result of the fall was the loss of the Heavenly Father's favor and fellowship. Mankind will

not be delivered out of that feature of the fall until the Mediator shall have accomplished His work in them.

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