

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION MAKES FAITH EASY.

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While the universal reign of law is a comparatively modern discovery, it was learned long ago that the human mind acted in accordance with great principles which must be respected by whoever would appeal to it. To convince the intellect the laws of reasoning must be observed. To arouse to action the principles governing the emotions must be carefully regarded. It is true that often what convinces one man does not convince another, and that what moves one to action leaves another unmoved. But this does not alter the conviction that law prevails in the operations of the human mind.

Some things are essentially believable, others are essentially unbelievable. That which does no violence to the laws of mind may be generally accepted by men everywhere; but that which in any wise does violence to these laws can never hope for general acceptance among men.

Christianity appeals for general acceptance among men. "God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." But if there is the least hope that the appeal will be at all effective the Christian system must be essentially in harmony with the laws of the human mind. It would be a delightful task to show that it indeed is so to a remarkable degree, but we shall limit ourselves here to the contribution of the resurrection of our Lord to this striking harmony.

It is difficult to present briefly the work of Christ in redeeming the world. Nothing entering into it was unimportant, and to omit anything is liable to create misapprehension. Without attempting, therefore, a summary of the work, let us note three important factors entering into it. (1) The Divine became linked with the

human. The Son of God became the Son of Man. In Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter's son, was found not only "very man of very man", but also "very God of very God". He that looked upon Jesus beheld the Father. He and the Father were one. (2) The Son of God bore the sins of men. He took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He shed his blood for many for the remission of sins. (3) He triumphed over sin and continues His work at God's right hand. On the third day He rose again. It was not possible that He should be holden of death. In triumph He ascended on high and sat down with the Father in His throne. Today He continues there not only as supreme ruler of all things, but as our advocate pleading our cause for us.

No such claims have ever been made for any other man. "Neither Confucius nor Buddha claimed to be divine, or the organs of divine revelation, though both were moral teachers and reformers. Zoroaster and Pythagoras apparently believed themselves charged with a divine mission, though their earliest biographers wrote centuries after their death. Socrates claimed nothing for himself which was beyond the powers of others. Mohammed believed his extraordinary states of body and soul to be due to the action of celestial beings; he gave forth the Koran as 'a warning to all creatures', and sent a summons to the King of Persia and the Emperor of Constantinople, as well as to other potentates, to accept the religion of Islam; yet he mourned when he died that he could not have opportunity to correct the mistakes of the Koran and of his own life."¹ The remarkable uniqueness of Christ's claims challenges attention to the utmost degree. Such claims accompanied by the ordinary human life would be simply unbelievable. The human mind could not give them credence. As the same writer con-

¹ Strong, "Systematic Theology", Vol. 1, p. 190.

tinues: "For Confucius or Buddha, Zoroaster or Pythagoras, Socrates or Mohammed to claim all power in Heaven and earth, would show insanity or moral perversion".² But in conjunction with the life of our Lord this and all other claims made by him have proved easily believable. But would they have been so without the resurrection?

1. THE RESURRECTION AND FAITH IN CHRIST AS REDEEMER.

We believe that Christ redeemed us from sin and death by His death on the cross. And more than for any other reason, we believe this because He rose from the dead on the third day.

The first death on Golgotha on that dark crucifixion day was no ordinary dying. It was such a death as this world shall see but once. In it one life was given as a ransom for many.³ He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us.⁴ By the cross He offered Himself as the propitiation not only for the sins of the elect, but also for the sins of the whole world.⁵ He tasted death for every man.⁶ And this "death" certainly includes more than mere physical dying. It is all that death that was entailed upon man by sin. Not, of course, quantitatively, but qualitatively. In whatever sense the human soul can die, in that sense Christ died for us. Dr. Alexander MacLaren concisely puts it thus: "We are not to set the physical sufferings of Christ in separation from, or in contrast with, the spiritual agonies, but let us not suppose that the physical death was the atonement, apart from the spiritual death and separation from the Father, which is witnessed by that cry of despair mingled with trust, that broke the darkness."⁷

² *Id.*

³ Matt. 20:28; Mk. 10:45.

⁴ 2 Cor. 5:21.

⁵ 1 Jno. 2:2.

⁶ Heb. 2:9.

⁷ Quoted by Mabie, "The Meaning and Message of the Cross", p. 67.

Moreover, this death which qualitatively included everything that can come to any man, had respect unto all men. It was of such character as to constitute a propitiation for their sins. It was of such value that God could remain just and yet justify whosoever believeth in Jesus.⁸ It justified the dealings of God with men until that hour, and made possible all the manifestations of His love and power since that day.⁹ Nor has there yet been seen the full fruition of that death. As it reached backward to the very beginning of human sin, so it will reach forward with ever-increasing fruitage until time shall be no more. In it, "all the forces of sin and evil have been adequately grappled with and potentially overcome for man's benefit".¹⁰

Now suppose, the Christ having entered into such a death as this, He had failed of the resurrection. Could we have believed that He actually triumphed over sin and death and the great adversary in such fashion as to free us from their power, and that He rendered to God such satisfaction for the sins of the world as to justify Him in offering pardon to all? To die for the sins of the world; to die to overcome death and the devil; to die to justify God in freely pardoning myriads of men steeped in the most heinous sin; thus to die was the supremest test. To turn water into the best of wine; to feed the hungry thousands with five loaves and two fishes; to give sight to him born blind; to bring the decaying body and the departed soul of Lazarus together again, what were any or all of these as tests of power beside that death? And what assurance could the performance of these miracles, wonderful as they are, have given us that He triumphed in that death if Joseph's tomb had held Him fast in its cold embrace?

The higher our conception of the holiness of God and

⁸ Rom. 3:26.

⁹ Id. 3:25.

¹⁰ Mable, as above, p. 121.

the keener and deeper our realization of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the more ready will we be to declare the impossibility of believing that He triumphed apart from His resurrection. God is infinite in virile holiness. Sin is heinous in His sight; sin is awful; sin is superlatively wicked. And when we realize it, and are told that one bore our sin in His own body on the tree, together with the sin of the whole world—bore it in the sense of taking it away, that we might go free—we must have some evidence of the triumphal completion of the task or we shall find it very difficult to believe it.

Some may tell us that the resurrection of our Lord is not necessary to faith, but we cannot resist the conviction that such have not yet adequately recognized man's sinfulness in the sight of a most holy God. For ourselves, we frankly confess that to take away the resurrection is to take away the light of the world, and we believe that it is so with the vast majority of men. In human thought, as well as in divine, a death like that of Christ upon the cross demands the resurrection as its complement.

2. THE RESURRECTION AND FAITH IN CHRIST'S DEITY.

Again, we believe in the deity of Christ. It is only as we believe Him to be Himself God that we can accept Him as our Savior. We are also assured that this belief in His deity has a firm basis in fact. Not only did Christ claim to be one with the Father, but His whole life as recorded in the gospels is in harmony with that claim. The unique exaltation of His teachings, His spotless sinlessness and His wonderful works form an entirely adequate basis for such a claim and our acceptance of it.

Of these three bases for accepting Christ as divine, however, there can be no question that the last named has always been much more widely efficient than either

of the others.¹¹ The miracle at Cana led His disciples to believe on Him. In Jerusalem at the Passover "many believed on His name, beholding His signs which He did". Nicodemus was convinced that no man could do the miracles of Christ "except God be with him". The feeding of the five thousand led the people to say, "This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world". The blind man presented the generally accepted view when he said to the pharisees, "If this man were not from God, he could do nothing". The raising of Lazarus not only led many of those who saw it to believe on Christ, but led His enemies to assert, "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him".

The service rendered by our Lord's miracles in establishing His claims to deity during His ministry they have continued to render in the popular consciousness throughout the ages. Possibly there have always been those to whom Christ's manifest sinlessness and the unique exaltation of His teachings have appealed more strongly than His miracles. Certain it is that there are many such today. But even in this day of outcry against the miraculous, these are but a small group among the vast multitude. The uniform testimony of both the Scriptures and Christian experience makes it entirely unreasonable to doubt that always to the great mass of Christians the miracles have been the most satisfying proof that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

But all the miracles do not contribute alike to this truth. Some are more convincing than others. A study of apostolic preaching and Christian consciousness in general makes it very evident that one above all others has been effective in certifying this fundamental truth. This supremely dynamic miracle is, of course, the resur-

¹¹ As Canon Gore says: "It is not that the miracles prove the doctrine, or that the doctrine makes credible the miracle. It is rather that as parts of one whole they cohere as soul and body."—"The Incarnation of the Son of God", p. 54.

rection. On the day of Pentecost, Peter insisted most strenuously that God had made that same Jesus whom the Jews had crucified "both Lord and Christ". And the fact he advanced to establish the proposition was that He had been raised from the dead. Paul presented the resurrection as the crowning feature of his message to the Athenians. The substance of his message in this home of Greek culture was the substance of his message everywhere. And as he spoke he also wrote. His letter to the Romans insists that Christ was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead".¹² In writing to the Corinthians he makes the resurrection the very basis of the Christian faith.¹³ And the spread of that faith in the first century is indubitable evidence of the power of the resurrection as a proof of Christ's deity.

The power thus exerted by the resurrection in the first Christian century, it has continued to exert more or less largely until now. Even in this age of antagonism to the miraculous, the average Christian will in most cases be amazed to find how difficult, if not outright impossible, it would be for him to continue to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was divine if his belief in the resurrection were shattered. Suppose the Christ had not risen. Suppose, like the ordinary man, His body had mouldered into dust in that new-made tomb. Would His sinless character and exalted teachings and all His former miracles combined have enabled us to accept Him as indeed the Son of God? It seems all that had gone before was not sufficient to give the disciples a firm and lasting conviction that He was the Messiah. The awful scenes of the crucifixion shook to the very foundation, if they did not entirely wreck, their faith, and it was only as they beheld Him risen that they were begotten again to a living

¹² 1:4.

¹³ 1 Cor. 15.

hope.¹⁴ And it is extremely doubtful if it would be at all possible for men generally to believe in the deity of Christ if He had not come forth from the grave. Certain it is that if such belief were possible to the human mind generally, it would not be so easily attained and held as now.¹⁵

But if the death of Christ were of the nature set forth above; if its reach was so vast and its efficacy so great; if it in some way—however mysterious to us the method may remain—made it possible for the all-holy God to grant eternal salvation to all men; and if on the third day He rose in triumph from that struggle with the great destroyer; then we have in this rising from the dead not only a most gracious assurance that He succeeded in the task of bearing our sins, but also a most satisfying proof of His identity with the Father. For to the limit of the human mind to understand, the task was infinite in its demands, and could be performed only by one clothed with the power and nature of God Himself.

3. THE RESURRECTION AND THE CHRISTIAN SYSTEM.

In assuring us of a great divine sin-bearer, the resurrection did also another thing for us. It completed that element of perfect harmony among the fundamental facts of Christianity which has always made them easily accepted by the human mind. Mr. Leckey thus accounts for the rapid progress of Christianity in the Roman empire: "The chief cause of its success was the congruity

¹⁴ 1 Pet. 1:3.

¹⁵ "Had Jesus not risen again, all the hopes His friends had cherished regarding Him would have been buried in His tomb. Had He not risen, His words would have been falsified and doubt thrown upon all His teaching. Had He not risen, His claims would have been unintelligible and His whole appearance and life a mystery suggesting a greatness not borne out—different from other men, yet subject to the same defeat. Had He not risen, the very significance of His life would have been obscured; and if for a time a few friends cherished His memory in private, His name would have fallen back to an obscure, possibly a dishonored, place."—Dods, "Expositor's Bible", The Gospel of St. John, Chapter xxi.

of its teaching with the spiritual nature of mankind. It was because it was true to the moral sentiments of the age, because it represented faithfully the supreme to which men were then tending; because it corresponds to the religious wants, aims, and emotions, because the whole spiritual being could expand and expatiate under its influence, that it planted its roots so deeply in the hearts of men."¹⁶ But the progress of Christianity in the Roman empire was far less remarkable than are the conquests of Christ in heathen lands today. Hardly a nation remains today that has not been touched by the gospel of Christ, and wherever the gospel has been presented it has been more or less widely accepted. Race characteristics have proven no barrier to its progress. Environments the most antagonistic have been successfully invaded by it. So extensive have been the operations of the missionary enterprise of the last one hundred years that it is safe to affirm that it has now been demonstrated that the gospel is easily accepted by all men, whatever may be their condition in life. Moreover, it has also been conclusively shown that wherever the gospel is accepted it exerts a truly marvelous uplifting and transforming power. And how could these things possibly be except that, as a recent writer says, "Christianity is in harmony with the whole nature of man as he now is and as he is to be".¹⁷ Unless it be true that there is remarkable harmony between the nature of man and the Christian system, nineteen hundred years of Christian history, and especially the last one hundred years of missionary achievement, become an insoluble enigma.

But this harmony would be sadly wanting without the resurrection. At the very beginning of our Lord's life we are confronted with a stupendous Divine act, the Incarnation. We can hardly realize how we would be

¹⁶ "European Morals", Vol. 1, p. 413.

¹⁷ Moore, "Preacher Problems", p. 168.

startled by it, if we might come to it now for the first time. With this beginning the extraordinary life which preceded the crucifixion is in perfect accord, just what we would expect it to be. The crucifixion itself, as interpreted by the Spirit, appears equally harmonious. The resurrection and subsequent appearances and the present glorified state and rulership of Him who died complete a picture, a series of events, of most exquisite harmony. But drop out of this picture, this series of events, the resurrection and the things which cluster about it. Who can put into words the violence that would be done to our sense of the congruous? A union of God with man, a life of sublimest teaching and most marvelous working, a dying for the sins of the world and the justification of an all-holy God who justifies sinners, and an exaltation of this divine-human Being to the dominion and glory of God Himself without the resurrection! In all earnestness it must be asked, is it thinkable? Does not the lack of congruity become an intolerable burden to the human mind? That gulf between Joseph's new-made tomb and the throne of God is wide and deep and dark. It is scarce distinguishable from that between heaven and hell. He who dares attempt to vault it must certainly have hardihood to the verge of madness. The grave of Christ, with all its impenetrable gloom and deadening chill, must mark the end of faith's journey for most of us, as it did for the disciples, except that chasm had been bridged. And how else than by that mightiest of all miracles, the resurrection, could the gulf between that earthly tomb and that heavenly throne have been bridged for us? Earth either remains silent, or sends forth a babel of confused sound that is worse than silence, and heaven has not yet ventured a reply.

Peter, doubtless with the despair from which the resurrection delivered him fresh in mind, no sooner closed the salutation of his first epistle than he broke forth with

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” And what a volume of glad praise ought to ascend to God from the Church of today that the way of faith has been made not only possible, but even easy, by that mighty work of God which left to Joseph and the world an empty tomb.

Glory to God in full anthems of joy;
The being He gave us death cannot destroy:
Sad were the life we may part with tomorrow,
If tears were our birthright and death were our end:
But Jesus hath cheered the dark valley of sorrow,
And bade us, immortal, to heaven ascend;
Lift then your voices in triumph on high,
For Jesus has risen, and man shall not die.

—*Ware.*