

Esther 4:16 and 5:1; Matthew 27:63, 64.) "Three days and three nights" is just a fuller form for saying "after three days"; and both could mean in popular speech the same as "on the third day." Any expression means just what it is used to mean. The facts of the record show with what meaning the expression was used by Jesus. We must not put into it a meaning that will deny or disregard the facts; but the facts must control our interpretation.

SERMON NO. EIGHTEEN  
BEHOLDING THE CRUCIFIED ONE

Luke 23:33-35a

*Introduction*

I. SPECTACLE OF THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST. After the betrayal and arrest come the trials. He was shamed by His own (high priest). Herod plays with Him like a cat would a mouse. He mocks Him and allows Him to be smitten in the mouth. Then Jesus is returned to Pilate a second time. Pilate has Him scourged with a whip made of leather and bone until His back is a bleeding mass of raw flesh. Pilate wants to release Him. But the Jews cry "Crucify Him, his blood be upon us and upon our children . . ." Release unto us Barabbas the murderer. And, for political reasons, Pilate releases Him to be crucified.

And so the humiliated, tortured, betrayed, exhausted Son of God goes out bearing a 300 pound cross of wood. Through the streets of the city He goes, stumbling, dragging this cross along as the throngs cast stones and spit upon him. Up the long hill of Golgotha. There He is grabbed roughly by the soldiers and laid down upon the cross, BUT HE OFFERS NO RESISTANCE. The steel spikes are brutally driven into the quivering flesh of His hands and then His feet. The excruciating pain is relayed from the nerves to His brain. And what comes from his mouth? Agony and screams? NO! Hate and curses? NO! Wonder of wonders, His lips part to speak a blessing—"Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

II. "AND THE PEOPLE STOOD BEHOLDING . . ." What did they behold in the crucified One? What did those around the cross see? They saw much the same thing as men and women see in the Crucifixion today. THE CRUCIFIXION WAS NECESSARY. IT WAS IN GOD'S PLAN FOR JESUS CONTINUALLY TAUGHT "I MUST DIE . . ." IT WAS A SPECTACLE OF LOVE FOR MAN TO BEHOLD. IT WAS A PLANNED SPECTACLE FOR IT WAS PROPHECIED. Lk. 2.

*Discussion*

I. THE ROMANS. They beheld Him through eyes of *Indifference*.

Pilate made two tries to release Him and saw that politics demanded His death so he washed his hands of the whole matter. WHAT WAS ONE MORE DEAD JEW?? AFTER ALL PEOPLE DIE EVERY DAY. He had many responsibilities of more importance than the squabbles of the Jews. HE JUST HAD OTHER THINGS TO DO MORE IMPORTANT THAN LISTENING TO THIS NAZARENE'S CLAIMS OR BEING TOUCHED BY HIS INNOCENCE. Notice the calloused indifference of the soldiers who methodically nailed him to the cross and then sat down to gamble over his garments. There are multitudes today who look at the Crucified One through eyes of indifference. THEY COULDN'T CARE LESS THAT A MAN DIED SOME 2000 YEARS AGO. THEY ARE TOO BUSY WITH MORE IMPORTANT THINGS SUCH AS POLITICS, PTA, KEEPING UP WITH THE JONESES. THEY HAVE SO CALLOUSED THEIR HEARTS AND THEIR EMOTIONS THAT THEY ARE NO LONGER TOUCHED WITH THE LOVE SHOWN IN THE CROSS.

They thought they saw *Weakness*. Pilate said, "Don't you know I have the power of life and death over you . . . and still you say *nothing in your own defense?*" This Nazarene had even taught the doctrines of weaklings according to them. WHO EVER HEARD OF TURNING THE OTHER CHEEK? GOING THE SECOND MILE? RETURNING GOOD FOR EVIL? BUT A LOOK AT ALL THE CIRCUMSTANCES SHOWS THIS TO BE THE GREATEST ACT OF COURAGE HISTORY HAS EVER WITNESSED. MY LORD WAS NO WEAKLING NOR COWARD! HE WAS A MAN OF ALL MEN. THOSE WHO STOOD WATCHING HIM WERE THE WEAK, SPINELESS, GROVELING COWARDS. THESE WERE AFRAID TO FACE UP TO THE DEMANDS AND CONSEQUENCES OF HIS TEACHINGS. THE WEAKLINGS CANNOT TURN THE OTHER CHEEK, AND WILL NOT GO THE OTHER MILE.

They thought they saw *Foolishness*. He claimed to be a King, but where was His kingdom? They scoffed at Him as a religious crackpot. He had claimed to be a God . . . but none of their gods had ever acted like He did—HOW FOOLISH! WITH THEIR GODS IT WAS OPPOSITE—MEN DIED *FOR* THEIR GODS. He claimed to be dying in the place of men. This the wise heathen philosophers could not accept as sensible. The Greek philosophers at Athens scoffed at Paul's preaching the gospel of the cross and resurrection. (Acts 17).

HEAR WHAT MODERN UNBELIEVERS HAVE TO SAY . . . Dressed in the pious robes of ecclesiastical finery, giving the unsuspecting world the impression he is a follower of Christ, Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, former head of the World Council of Churches says, "We hear much of the substitutionary theory of the atonement. This theory to me is immoral. If Jesus paid it all or if He is the substitute for me, or if He is the sacrifice for all the sin of the world, then why discuss forgiveness? The books are closed. Another has paid the debt, borne the penalty, I owe nothing. I am absolved. I cannot see forgiveness as predicted upon the act of someone else. It is my sin. I must atone."

The theologians today do not see Jesus dying for our sins. They see him merely dying a tragic death for his misguided conviction that he had a special mission. **IT WAS NO ACCIDENT IT WAS PLANNED BY GOD—READ THE PROPHETS, AND SEE HOW GOD MOVES IN AND THOUGH ALL OF HIS-TORY!**

"If a prince or a king, passing by an execution, should take the condemned man's place and suffer in his place the deed would ring through all history, and be quoted as an amazing instance of heroic pity; and well deserved would be all the words of praise and admiration which would record and eulogize it. Yet, our Lord Jesus did this, and infinitely more for those who were not merely criminals, but enemies to His own throne and person. This is a wonder of wonders. But it meets with small praise. The most of men around us have heard of it, and treated it as of little import; as an idle tale; as a pious legend; as a venerable fable; as an unpractical myth. Even those who know, believe and admire are cold in their emotions with regard to the story of the atonement. Herein is love which ought to set our hearts on fire, and yet we scarcely maintain a smoldering spark of enthusiasm." So said Spurgeon.

"We preach Christ crucified, unto Jews a stumbling block and unto Gentiles foolishness . . ." "For the word of the cross is to them that perish foolishness . . ." **DO YOU STAND WITH THE GENTILES AS YOU BEHOLD THE CROSS ? ? ?**

- II. **WHAT DID THE JEWS SEE AS THEY BEHELD HIM?** To them His crucifixion was a *stumbling block*. What did they cry as they circled the cross? "If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross . . . He saved others, himself he cannot save . . ." **THEY STUMBLED AT THE IDEA OF A CRUCIFIED AND HUMILIATED JEWISH MESSIAH.** They had made up their

minds ages ago just what type of Saviour they would accept. THEY WANTED A SOCIAL REFORMER, A POLITICAL LIBERATOR WHO WOULD LEAVE THE RELIGIOUS STATUS QUO ALONE. NEEDLESS TO SAY THERE ARE MULTITUDES OF PEOPLE TODAY WHO STUMBLE AT THE SAME THING. THEY LOOK AT THE CHURCH AS A FAILURE! THEY HAVE TRIED TO USE AND ABUSE THE CHURCH AS A SOCIAL REFORM MOVEMENT, TO LIBERATE AND CONTROL POLITICS, BUT THEY WON'T HAVE IT TO HAVE ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE SOULS OF MEN!

They stumbled at His *claims to be divine*. I believe Jesus could have gotten by and perhaps even have been honored if He had claimed to be just another prophet. Many would allow Him this much today. But when He claimed to: forgive sins, come before Abraham, be the Messiah, and demanded rule over their hearts THEY CRIED BLASPHEMY . . . THEY COULD NOT ACCEPT ANY TEACHING THAT ASSOCIATED HIM WITH GOD.

MODERN THEOLOGIANs REBEL AT THE IDEA THAT GOD HAS ASSOCIATED HIMSELF WITH MAN OR HAS COME INTO THE REALM OF HISTORY. THEY SAY HE MUST BE WHOLLY TRANSCENDENT—"WHOLLY OTHER." THEY SAY WE LIMIT GOD'S POWER AND HOLINESS WHEN WE SAY THAT HE CAME IN THE FORM OF FLESH. TO THE CONTRARY, TO RELEGATE GOD ONLY TO THE REALM OF THE "WHOLLY OTHER" LIMITS HIS POWER AND HOLINESS. HOW COULD A GOD WHO HAD NO DESIRE TO BE TOUCHED WITH OUR INFIRMITIES, TO REVEAL HIMSELF TO US IN HISTORY, BE RIGHTEOUS AND HOLY AND LOVING ? ? ?

They felt *they were rid of One whose righteousness they could not stand*. As long as He was alive, they could not live with themselves, their consciences cried out against them, AND MEN AND WOMEN TODAY REJECT JESUS IN ORDER THAT THEY MAY BE ABLE TO DO AS THEY PLEASE, HAVING PUT BLINDERS UPON THEIR OWN CONSCIENCES. NO ONE WANTS TO MEASURE HIMSELF BY THE PERFECT STANDARD . . . JESUS CHRIST. WHEN HIS PERFECT RIGHTEOUSNESS SHOWS US OUR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, WE TRY TO HIDE OURSELVES IN SOME WAY OR AN-

OTHER. USUALLY BY "COMPARING OURSELVES WITH OURSELVES."

They saw in the *Crucified One their scapegoat*. Their High Priest had said, "It is expedient that one should die for the nation, lest the Romans come and take away our nation and our place." IS HE NOT BEING USED AS A SCAPEGOAT TODAY? SOME HAVE ACCEPTED CHRIST BUT, UPON FINDING THEY CAN'T HAVE HIM AND THE WORLD TOO, THEY FALL AWAY AND "CRUCIFY AFRESH THE SON OF GOD, BY COUNTING THE BLOOD OF THE COVENANT WHEREWITH THEY WERE SANCTIFIED AN UNHOLY THING." cf. also Heb. 6:1-6. AND THEN WHAT DO THEY DO? THEY USE HIS CHURCH AND HIS SAINTS AS THEIR EXCUSE FOR BACKSLIDING. THEY HARP ON THE HYPOCRITES . . . OR THEY HARP ON THE IDEA THAT CHRISTIANS ARE TOO UNCOMPROMISING, TOO INTOLERANT, FORGETTING JESUS HIMSELF SAID THERE ARE ONLY TWO WAYS—TWO CLASSES OF HUMANITY, SAVED AND LOST. WHERE DO YOU STAND TODAY AND BEHOLD THE CRUCIFIED ONE? ARE YOU WITH THE JEWS? IF YOU ARE A BACKSLIDER, YOU ARE WITH THEM.

III. WHAT DO BELIEVERS BEHOLD? One of the thieves beheld the Son of God and in faith and trust committed His soul to Him. We see *sin condemned in the flesh*. Jesus came in the flesh and lived a sinless life in the flesh, tempted in all points like as we are and WON THE VICTORY OVER SIN AND BECAME THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE FOR OUR SINS! He fulfilled the requirements of the law of God, even the sentence and penalty of the law which says, "The soul that sinneth it shall die . . ."

*We see there the propitiation for our sin*. WE BEHOLD JESUS AS HE SUFFERED THE AGONY OF THE SECOND DEATH FOR US. AND THEN WE READ AS HE HIMSELF REVEALS FROM HEAVEN TO JOHN IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION—THAT SUCH AS ARE BELIEVERS, OVER THEM THE SECOND DEATH HATH NO POWER.

We see God manifesting Himself as being *Just and the Justifier*. God decreed in His law that sin *must* be punished. If He went back on His word, He would be a powerless, unjust God. BUT HOW CAN HE HAVE LOVE AND SAVE MEN AND STILL PUNISH SIN? HE ACCOMPLISHED IT ALL IN THE CROSS OF

## CALVARY WHERE HE PUNISHED SIN AND SAVED MAN THROUGH JESUS CHRIST!

*We see sin as it was never shown before* in all of its evilness. As a sinner man is a slave who must be redeemed, an enemy who must be reconciled, a dead corpse which must be resurrected and given new life, a captive whose powerful oppressors must be overthrown and a criminal who must be justified. WE SEE THE HOLY AND PERFECT HATE WHICH GOD HAS FOR SIN IN THE GIVING OF THE LIFE OF HIS SON.

*We see the love and power of God manifested.* The word of the cross may be foolishness to some. "BUT TO THOSE WHO ARE BEING SAVED IT IS BOTH THE POWER AND THE WISDOM OF GOD . . ." GOD'S INFINITE WISDOM KNEW THAT THE CROSS WOULD BE THE ONLY WAY TO DRAW MEN UNTO HIM IN SINCERE FAITH. "And I, if I will be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friend." "For the love of God hath been shed abroad in our hearts . . . for while we were yet weak, in due season Christ died for the ungodly . . ." A man may decide many things in this life simply by human reason and knowledge. BUT WHEN IT COMES TO THE SALVATION OF HIS SOUL, HE MUST HAVE A POWER THAT IS BEYOND HUMAN REASON. THAT POWER IS PROVIDED IN THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. IT IS GOD'S DIVINE SEAL. GOD, DESIRING TO SWEAR WITH AN OATH, COULD SWEAR BY NONE GREATER THAN HIMSELF, SO HE SEALED HIS PROMISE BY SIGNING HIS OATH IN HIS OWN BLOOD . . . THE BLOOD OF HIS SON UPON THE CROSS . . .

### *Conclusion*

YOU SAY, I WANT SOME ASSURANCE . . . I WANT SOME AUTHORITY . . . I WANT SOME POWER BEHIND ANY PROMISES OF SALVATION. THERE IT IS IN THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST. His death was sufficient for your sins. His resurrection is power for your new life. The entire New Testament says it is so. YOU MAY BECOME A NEW CREATURE . . . YOU MAY HAVE YOUR SINS BLOTTED OUT. YOU MAY HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT COME AND LIVE WITH YOU.

HOW DO YOU CONTACT THIS DEATH? By faith? YES, BUT MORE! For contacting His death comprehends all of our obedience. By simply repenting? YES, BUT MORE! By prayer? YES,

BUT MORE! By making public confession of faith? YES, BUT MORE. IT IS FULL AND COMPLETE OBEDIENCE. Rom. 6 . . . "We are baptized *into his death*; planted together with Him . . ." Col. 2 . . . "We are buried with Him in baptism." IT IS HERE THAT THE FINAL ACT IN OUR CONTACTING THE DEATH TAKES PLACE.

HOW DO YOU LOOK UPON THE CRUCIFIED ONE THIS EVENING? I pray with all my soul that you look with faith trusting and seeking to obey Him in all things. "He has become the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." Remember what He told Nicodemus. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life." John 3:13

YOU KNOW THE ACCOUNT OF THE ISRAELITES AND THE SERPENT OF BRONZE ON THE STAFF . . . THOSE BITTEN OF THE FIERY SERPENTS WERE CURED WHEN THEY LOOKED, IN FAITH AND OBEDIENCE, UPON THE BRONZE SERPENT LIFTED UP THERE IN THE WILDERNESS. BUT IF THEY DELAYED . . . PROCRASTINATED IN UNBELIEF, THEY DIED!

There was an old man converted at the age of 68. One day he sat crying as the minister was preaching on the text, "No man liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." Later, with tears streaming down his cheeks, he approached the preacher. The preacher asked him what was the matter . . . "Oh, sir that text—it is true!" he replied.

"I did not know the Lord until I was 68. I stopped at my son's home this morning and said, "Come on son, and go with me to church this morning . . . and he laughed as he replied, "No, Dad, I've got plenty of time; I'll wait until I am 68 to get religion, like you did."

"I walked on down the street until I came upon my grandchildren playing and said, "Come on kids, let's go down to Bible School this morning." "No, they replied, we are busy, Grandpa; we will wait until we are old to start going to Sunday School and church like you did."

"Sir, he said to the preacher, I would give my right arm if I could live my life over."

Napoleon, the little general, paced the floor of his tent. Half of his troops had been destroyed and the battle yet raged. A messenger rushed in with the shout, "Tidings, sire, You have won the victory."

"Yes, replied Napoleon quietly, I have won the victory but another such victory would cost me my kingdom." YOU MAY HAVE WON THE VICTORY OVER THE SERMON: YOU MAY HAVE WON THE VICTORY OVER CONSCIENCE, OVER PRAYERS OF

MOTHER, OVER PLEADINGS OF YOUR WIFE, BUT ANOTHER SUCH "VICTORY" MAY COST YOU YOUR ETERNAL SOUL!

### CHAPTER TWENTY

"My Lord and my God!" This might well be the theme of this chapter. It records the climactic "sign" of a book filled with records of lesser "signs." And, as John adds in his postscript, Jesus did many other "signs" in the presence of His followers but John and the other gospel writers have witnessed and recorded enough supernatural signs to lead men to believe in His diety (cf. Jn. 20:30-31). The physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead, as He Himself foretold, was the apex of all His signs. This is the *one* event in the life of Jesus Christ which gives credence, meaning and relevance to all else He said or did! One is tempted to wax eloquent for page upon page concerning this event but we believe Dr. Merrill C. Tenney, Dean of the Graduate School, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois, has summarized it so well we prefer to quote from his book, "The Reality of the Resurrection" here:

"... the resurrection of Christ . . . marks the intersection of the temporal and eternal worlds, of material existence and spiritual life. Because the event is supernatural, it expresses the essence of God's revelation; because it is historical, it is a genuine part of human experience. The resurrection is a permanent witness to the love, power, holiness, and redemptive purpose of God and is also a fact which must be accepted as part of history. It cannot be dismissed as a speculative venture of the intellect which is possibly, but not necessarily, true.

For this reason the resurrection is perpetually relevant to the intellectual and spiritual problems of the world. The event provides a foundation for faith; its imagery contains the framework for a new life . . . By this one great fact all theology can be integrated. Revelation, incarnation, redemption, sanctification, and eschatology reach their fullest development in the demonstration of the divine triumph over death."

We feel compelled to repeat here some quotations by famous men showing their convictions concerning the resurrection of Jesus.

Warfield said, "The resurrection of Christ is a fact, an external occurrence within the cognizance of man, to be established by other testimonies and yet which is the cardinal doctrine of our system: on it all other doctrines hang."

Lyndhurst (famous British jurist) said, "I know pretty well what evidence is; and, I tell you, such evidence as that for the Resurrection has never broken down yet."



William Lyon Phelps (Yale) said, "Our faith in God, in Christ, in life itself, is based on the resurrection; for as Paul said, if Christ be not risen from the dead then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."

Theodosius Harnack said, "Where you stand with regard to the fact of the Resurrection is in my eyes no longer Christian theology. To me Christianity stands or falls with the Resurrection."

Tenney said, "The resurrection demands the attention of those who contemplate the basic problems of death and life, for it has thrust into them a new factor which must be included in evaluating the whole of human experience. Any attempt to explain the process of history will be incomplete without it. The resurrection is permanently relevant to any scheme of thought."

John omits some of the appearances of the resurrected Jesus. Even the Synoptics do not include them all. Acts and the epistles (esp. I Corinthians 15) include a few of the appearances omitted by the gospels. In fact, Acts 1:3 informs us that He "also showed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God:" by which we realize many of the appearances Jesus made to His disciples may not be recorded at all!

Generally speaking the Gospels record the *fact* of His resurrection; the Epistles show the *theological* and *experiential* implications of it; and Acts records the *results* or fruits of it.

We have included at the end of this chapter a topical sermon and a special study on the resurrection of Christ. We would like to offer here a short bibliography of material helpful in a study of the resurrection of Christ.

1. The Certainty and Importance of the Bodily Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead, by R. A. Torrey, mimeographed essay available from O.B.C. Bookstore
2. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ—Its Proof and Significance, by A. Dale Crain, mimeographed essay available from O.B.C. Bookstore
3. The Reality of The Resurrection, by Merrill C. Tenney, pub. Harper & Row
4. Therefore Stand, by Wilbur Smith (Chapter 8), pub. W. A. Wilde Co.
5. The Basis of Christian Faith, by Floyd E. Hamilton (Chapter 17), pub. Harper & Row.

We are now prepared to continue our presentation of the outline of the Spectacle of His Passion.

### III. The Word Manifested To The Disciples and Their Acceptance

of Him, 13:1—20:31

B. Public Spectacle of His Passion, 18:1—20:31

3. The Victorious Resurrection, 20:1-31

a. The Empty Tomb, 20:1-10

b. The Appearance to Mary, 20:11-18

c. The Appearance to Ten Disciples, 20:19-25

d. The Appearance to Thomas, 20:26-29

e. The Aim of the Gospel, 20:30-31

We have chosen to continue presenting a harmony of all the gospel accounts rather than a paraphrase. We have followed a harmony of the Appearances prepared by Russell B. Watts, a former student at Ozark Bible College, who referred to works by J. W. McGarvey, R.C. Foster, H. H. Halley, S. J. Andrews and A. C. Wieand.

### THE EMPTY TOMB

*Text:* 20:1-10

1 Now on the first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, while it was yet dark, unto the tomb, and seeth the stone taken away from the tomb.

2 She runneth therefore, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid him.

3 Peter therefore went forth, and the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb.

4 And they ran both together: and the other disciple outran Peter, and came first to the tomb;

5 and stooping and looking in, he seeth the linen cloths lying; yet entered he not in.

6 Simon Peter therefore also cometh, following him, and entered into the tomb; and he beholdeth the linen cloths lying,

7 and the napkin, that was upon his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself.

8 Then entered in therefore the other disciple also, who came first to the tomb, and he saw, and believed.

9 For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.

10 So the disciples went away again unto their own home.

### *Queries*

- a. Why did Mary think someone had taken the body of Jesus?
- b. What did the disciple "believe" (v. 8)?
- c. Why did the disciples go to their own home?

*Paraphrase (Harmony)*

Now late on the sabbath day, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, bought spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early while it was yet dark, on the first day of the week, they come to the tomb when the sun was risen, bringing the spices which they had prepared. And they were saying among themselves, who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the tomb?

And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was as lightning and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the watchers did quake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, who hath been crucified. He is not here; for he is risen, even as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And looking up, they see that the stone is rolled back: for it was exceeding great. And they entered in and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, while they were perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel: and as they were affrighted and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

And he saith, Be not amazed: ye seek Jesus, the Nazarene, who hath been crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold, the place where they laid him! He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying that the Son of man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you. And they went out, and fled from the tomb; for trembling and astonishment had come upon them: and they said nothing to anyone; for they were afraid.

Now when he was risen early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She runneth therefore and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid him. Peter therefore went forth, and the other disciple, and they went toward the tomb. And they ran both together: and the other disciple outran Peter, and came first to the tomb; and stooping and looking in, he seeth the linen clothes lying; yet entered he not in. Simon Peter therefore also cometh, following him, and entered into the tomb; and he beholdeth the linen cloths lying, and the napkin,

that was upon his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then entered in therefore the other disciple also, who came first to the tomb, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. So the disciples went away again unto their own home.

### *Summary*

Several of the devout women followers of Jesus come to anoint His body with spices. They witness the rolling away of the stone by the angel and enter the tomb to find the body of Jesus gone. They all flee in fear and trembling and only Mary Magdalene has the presence of mind to go and tell Peter and John who in turn run to the tomb and find the burial cloths but the body of Jesus gone. Although perplexed and unable to fathom the meaning of the empty tomb there seems to be a spark of faith ignited in the breast of John.

### *Comment*

On the sabbath day following the crucifixion of Jesus and after the burial of His body by Joseph and Nicodemus, the Pharisees and chief priests petition Pilate to make sure that nothing shall happen to cause the disappearance of the body of Jesus. They remembered His teaching that He would rise from the dead. Pilate commanded the official seal of the Roman government to be put across the stone door of the tomb and a guard of Roman soldiers to be placed before the tomb and to watch until after the third day at least, (cf. Matt. 27:62-66). In spite of all the miracles Jesus had performed, including raising the dead Lazarus from the tomb, of which these Pharisees and priests had knowledge still they thought they had at last defeated the Nazarene. If, as the text in Matthew seems to indicate, these rulers went to Pilate on Saturday morning they violated the sanctity of the Sabbath—one of the very charges they brought against Jesus!

The followers of Jesus would not desecrate the Sabbath and waited therefore until early in the morning of the third day to come to the tomb. The women began their journey to the tomb in the first hours of the morning of the first day of the week just when the midnight darkness of night is beginning to fade away and the dawn is beginning to break—even before the sun is visible (S. J. Andrews places the time at about 4:45-5:00 a.m.).

Whether the women were present when the angel rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb is not certain. They were concerned as they made their journey toward the tomb as to how they were going to gain entrance to anoint His body since the stone door was far too heavy for them to roll away.

The women then entered the tomb and seeing the body gone they were puzzled and distraught. The angel gave them the first "glad tidings;" "He is not here; for he is risen, even as he said . . . go tell his disciples and Peter, He goeth before you into Galilee."

Mary Magdalene either did not hear the angel's message or she did not even stay to enter the tomb with the other women but ran to tell Peter and John immediately upon seeing the stone rolled away. She was there with the other women for she uses the pronoun *we* when telling the news to Peter and John (20:2). Mary sobs out the dreadful picture as she has surmised it from just seeing the tomb's entrance violated—"They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid him." Peter and John do not wait for another word but bolt out of the house on a dead run for the garden and the tomb. Meanwhile, wild with joy and awesome fear the other women flee the tomb to tell the disciples the message of the angels. Why they do not meet Peter and John we are not told. McGarvey harmonizes: "They have scarcely left the spot, when the swift-footed John bounds up to the open door, stoops down and looks with eagerness into the vacant tomb. The impetuous Peter follows hard after, rushes past his companion into the sepulchre, and gazes around. They both for a moment look thoughtfully at the napkin lying here and the linen clothes lying yonder, then they solemnly walk away."

Mary evidently did not hear what the other women heard from the angels. Considering the hateful viciousness of the enemies of Jesus she may have surmised that these enemies had stolen the body in order to desecrate it even more or to use it to capture His followers.

Peter, an older and larger man than John was not able to run as fast as the younger John, so John outran him to the tomb. But John hesitated at the entrance to the tomb while Peter rushed on into the tomb. The fact that the grave clothes were so orderly laid aside was a sign of lack of haste. The very fact that the linen bandages were there at all infers that the body was not taken by grave robbers in haste for they would have little need to lay aside the cloths in such a manner.

What did the disciple John believe after entering the tomb and observing the neatly placed grave cloths. Did what he saw there satisfy him entirely? Was he so credulous a person that in this moment he wanted so desperately to believe he was able from the empty tomb and the linen cloths to come to a "resurrection faith" without any further evidence? We know this is not so for the disciples were incredulous—they would not believe at first. They were hard-headed men who refused to believe that He was raised from the dead, except on more

evidence than the report of the women (cf. Luke 24:11, 41). Thomas was more stubborn than all the rest requiring to see the nail prints in the Master's hands before believing. There does seem, however, to be a spark of faith ignited in the heart of John here. Westcott puts it this way, "The use of the word (believed) . . . points to the calm patient acceptance of a mystery as yet in part inexplicable with full confidence in the divine love . . . indicating something still to be more fully shown, and the apostle waited in trustful expectation for the interpretation."

Whatever the faint glimmer of hope within the apostle's breast it was not built upon any knowledge of the Old Testament prophecies and promises concerning the resurrection of the Messiah (20:9) or any evidence other than the empty tomb. It seems strange that the disciples did not remember all the many prophecies Jesus Himself had made concerning His resurrection! The women believed on this basis (cf. Luke 24:1-11). Perhaps the disciples were too busy with seeking places in the kingdom when Jesus made His prophecies to remember them or their Jewish prejudices as to the nature of the Messiah caused them to misunderstand or count His prophecies of no significance.

There may have been hope (cf. Luke 24:19-21) but they would not believe until they had actual concrete evidence. The talk of the women seemed to them an "idle tale" (Lk. 24:11). So, with the body of the Master gone they could hope but they could do little else by remaining at the empty tomb so they returned to their dwelling in Jerusalem.

While we are thinking about the empty tomb let us consider some of the attempts of the skeptics to supply an answer to the fact of the empty tomb. One thing is certain, the tomb was empty. The record states that even the enemies of Jesus testified to His certain death and the empty tomb. As Wilbur Smith puts it, "Something happened to the body of Jesus when it was taken down from the cross. The New Testament testifies that it was placed in a tomb . . . On Sunday morning, for one reason or another, that tomb was empty, as everyone admits—Christian, unbeliever, disciple, scoffer, Jew and Gentile, conservative, and modernist." Notice here what the historical record witnesses as to the empty tomb: (a) The women testify to it being empty; (b) Peter and John found the tomb empty; (c) The guards appointed to watch the tomb came and reported the tomb was empty; (d) The Sanhedrin did not even so much as question the story of the soldiers or go and see for themselves but concocted a lie that the soldiers were to repeat in order to offer an explanation for the empty tomb!

Consider this first attempt by the enemies of Christ to explain the

absence of His body from the tomb: (a) It was a story spread by bribery; (b) It was ridiculous—how could the soldiers *know* what happened to the body if they were asleep! (c) The disciples would not steal the body—they would not want to risk further antagonism of the Roman soldiers and other authorities and they had absolutely no reason for stealing the body and furthermore their subsequent lives makes such an allegedly diabolical plot unthinkable!

In considering the other attempts to explain the empty tomb we have borrowed from both A. Dale Crain's essay and "Therefore Stand," by Wilbur Smith. There is a theory that the body of Jesus was stolen by His friends (Joseph, Nicodemus and the disciples). There is positively no evidence that this was done. If His friends did remove the body, why did the Sanhedrin have to bribe the soldiers to tell it. Another skeptical theory is that the enemies of Jesus stole the body. But what is the motive for this?! Certainly there could be no greater help to the cause of His enemies than to keep the body *in* the tomb! Furthermore, if they had removed it and hidden it, why did they not produce His body when the apostles began to preach His resurrection in the very courts of the temple?! That would have stopped Christianity for good!

There is a theory that the women went to the wrong tomb. Could anyone forget within a few short hours where a precious loved one had been buried? If the women went to the wrong tomb then the angels were in the wrong tomb and Peter and John went to the wrong tomb! Furthermore, this was not one tomb among many in a public burial ground but was in a garden, belonging to a rich man, hewn out of solid rock, near the place of His crucifixion, with guards and a Roman seal upon it! And the women didn't know which one it was—or forgot?? This is so ridiculous a theory that even many skeptics ridicule it! Another theory is called the "Swoon Theory." According to this theory Jesus did not actually die, but merely fainted away and was revived by the coolness of the damp tomb and rose up and rolled away the stone Himself. How could anyone who had endured physically what Jesus had endured revive Himself in some seventy-two hours enough to roll away a stone which possibly five women could not move?! He had been beaten to the point of fainting with the Roman scourge; He had not had rest for two nights; He had been crucified and left to hang for six hours; His side had been pierced and a great amount of His blood had flowed from the gaping wound; He had been wrapped and bound in grave cloths. This theory makes the record a complete and deliberate contradiction and lie for the record says that even Pilate was satisfied that Jesus was dead. If Christ did merely swoon then the apostles are liars and Christ is the greatest fraud the world has ever

known. There is a theory called the "Vision Theory" which explains the resurrection as a supernatural but ephemeral vision given to the apostles and women and others. If the appearances of Christ were not bodily appearances why do the gospel writers make it so plain that Christ showed the nail prints in His hands and the wound in His side—why did He eat with the disciples?! There is the "Optical Illusion" theory which says that a ghost-like appearance of Jesus was produced in some natural way. This would not explain the empty tomb at all. Furthermore, Jesus made enough appearances, both night and day, to enough people, in such close proximity to the subjects that it would be impossible to defraud all those to whom He appeared! Finally, there is the "Hallucination" theory which relegates the claimed appearances to the realm of subjective apparitions of the imagination. Still, we have the record of the empty tomb—was that a hallucination too!? St. Paul claims that He appeared to over five hundred people at once—are we then to suppose over five hundred identical, individual, subjective hallucinations? Besides the Lord made varied appearances over a period of forty days in many widely separated places to all types of people (even to one of His enemies, Saul of Tarsus). The empty tomb makes the hallucination theory an absurdity.

The factual and historical evidence for the empty tomb is so overwhelming that skeptical scholars are baffled as to how to explain this phenomenon. One skeptic has said, "The empty tomb must be thought out on doctrinal, not historical or critical grounds." The relevance of the resurrection and its meaning may be theological, but the facts surrounding the resurrection such as the empty tomb and the appearances of Jesus are strictly historical matters. The people are real people; the places are geographically definite, the enemies were not mythical beings.

### Quiz

1. What happened after the burial of the body of Jesus by Joseph and Nicodemus?
2. When did the women come to the tomb? Day and time?
3. Why, when the angel told the women Christ had risen, did Mary Magdalene say to the disciples, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb"?
4. What did John "believe" (v. 8)? What is the meaning of v. 9?
5. Refute the story explaining the empty tomb spread by the soldiers.
6. Give five other theories of the skeptics and refute them.
7. The meaning of the resurrection is theological but what of the facts surrounding the account of the resurrection?



## THE APPEARANCE TO MARY

*Text: 20:11-18*

11 But Mary was standing without at the tomb weeping: so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb;

12 and she beholdeth two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.

13 And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him.

14 When she had thus said, she turned herself back, and beholdeth Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus.

15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.

16 Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turneth herself, and saith unto him in Hebrew, Rabboni; which is to say, Teacher.

17 Jesus saith to her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father: but go unto my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God.

18 Mary Magdalene cometh and telleth the disciples, I have seen the Lord; and that he had said these things unto her.

*Queries*

- a. Why did Mary not recognize Jesus when she saw Him?
- b. How did she recognize Him at His calling her name?
- c. Why did Jesus say, "Touch me not"?

*Paraphrase (Harmony)*

But Mary stood just outside the entrance to the tomb weeping alone in the garden. And while she was continuing to weep she stooped and peered into the tomb and there she saw two angels sitting where the body of Jesus had lain—one at the head and one at the foot. The angels spoke unto her saying, woman, Why are you weeping? She replied, Because they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have placed His body. Then she turned and, without realizing that it was Jesus, noticed him standing near-by. Jesus asked her, Woman, why are you weeping—whom are you seeking? Supposing him to be the gardener, she plead with him, Sir, if you have taken him from the tomb, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus called her name gently, Mary! Startled, she turned and spoke to him in Hebrew, saying, Rabboni! Teacher! Jesus restrained her, saying,

Do not hold on to me now. I have not gone up to the Father yet. Go and tell my brethren that I am soon going to return to my Father and your Father, my God and your God. And so Mary Magdalene told the disciples, I have seen the Lord and she told them what Jesus had said to her.

### Summary

Jesus appears to the weeping Mary Magdalene. Overcome with joy she makes a move as if to fall at His feet and cling to Him. He cautions her that He has not made His final return to their midst but must soon ascend to the Father and that she is to go and witness to His resurrection.

### Comment

Peter and John have left the garden. Mary Magdalene has returned to the garden tomb alone. She evidently did not meet the other women and hear from them what the angels have said concerning His resurrection. Now that she has time to contemplate the awfulness of her suspicions she bursts into tears. "They" have taken his body. Just who she suspects we do not know—perhaps she thinks the Jews have taken His body. She stoops and looks in the tomb to confirm her suspicions. For the first time she sees the angels and they begin to converse with her about her sorrow. Mary is still persuaded that the body of Jesus has been taken. As she is answering the angels there is perhaps a sound in the garden which causes her to turn and see the figure of a man approaching. The light was still dim and there may have been an early morning fog and Mary's eyes were blurred with tears. She did not recognize the man. He began to ask her her reason for being in the garden. He wanted to know the reason for her sorrow. What other man would be there at that hour and be questioning her as to her presence except the gardener. Supposing him to be the gardener she assumed he would know if the body had been removed and so she questions him.

Jesus spoke her name. It would be in that gentle but firm tone which she knew so well. Startled and surprised with joy and relief, she immediately recognizes Him and cries out, "Rabboni!" The word means "Teacher," or "Great Teacher." It is a title of profound respect among the Hebrews. Only seven great leaders of the Jews have ever been given the title (among whom were Gamaliel I and Gamaliel II). As she cried out "Great Teacher," she made a movement as if to fall at His feet and cling to Him. The Greek word *baptesthai* is used of that clinging to the knees or feet which was adopted by suppliants.

Jesus forbade her doing so saying, "Do not hold to me." Why did Jesus forbid her to do so? Not because it was indecent; nor because

she wanted to test the reality of His resurrection for He did not forbid Thomas such a test; nor because her doing so would in some mystic way disturb the process of glorification; but because He wanted Mary (and the other disciples later) to understand that this was not His permanent return to visible fellowship with His disciples. He had promised His disciples to "return in a little while" (Jn. 16:16) and perhaps Mary felt that the little while was over and He was now to be visibly with them forevermore. Hendriksen paraphrases thusly, "Do not think, Mary, that by grasping hold of me so firmly you can keep me always with you. That uninterrupted fellowship for which you yearn must wait until I have ascended to be forever with the Father." Before the visible fellowship is restored Jesus must ascend to the Father for His Highpriestly work ("the little while") (cf. also Acts 3:19-26).

Then Jesus commissions Mary Magdalene to go and tell the disciples, not specifically of His resurrection as the angels commissioned the other women, but Mary is to tell them that Jesus is ascending (present tense) unto the Father. Although He will yet appear for forty days He is in the act of ascending to the Father.

Jesus now calls the disciples by a new name. He has called them "children," "sheep," "disciples," "friends," "branches," and other names but now He calls them "brothers!" This new relationship has a significant bearing on His commission to Mary. She is to tell the "brothers" that Jesus, the elder brother, is going up to be with *His* Father and *their* Father, *His* God and *their* God! (cf. Heb. 2:5-18).

And so Mary, went with all speed, to tell the disciples as they mourned and wept (cf. Mk. 16:10-11) just what Jesus had told her to tell. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her they would not believe it. The words seemed as an idle tale to them (cf. Lk. 24:9-11).

### Quiz

1. Why did Mary think Jesus was the gardener?
2. What does the word "Rabboni" mean?
3. Did Jesus say, "Touch me not?" What did He actually say?
4. Why did Jesus forbid Mary to cling to His feet?
5. What new relationship between Jesus and the disciples is emphasized?
6. What did Mary Magdalene have to tell the disciples that was different from the message of the other women?

### THE APPEARANCE TO TEN DISCIPLES

*Text:* 20:19-25

19 When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were,

for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you.

20 And when he had said this, he showed unto them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord.

21 Jesus therefore said to them again, Peace be unto you: as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you.

22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit:

23 whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

### *Queries*

- a. Why did Jesus show them His hands and His side?
- b. What is the significance of the commission by Jesus in v. 21?
- c. Does v. 23 teach that the apostles were the successors to the sacerdotal authority of Jesus in right to forgive men their sins?

### *Paraphrase (Harmony)*

Now while they were going, behold, some of the guard came into the city, and told unto the chief priests all the things that were come to pass. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave much money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and rid you of care. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying was spread abroad among the Jews, and continueth until this day.

And behold, two of them were going that very day to a village named Emmaus, which was threescore furlongs from Jerusalem. And they communed with each other of all these things which had happened. And it came to pass, while they communed and questioned together, that Jesus himself drew near, and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him. And he said unto them, What communications are these that ye have one with another, as ye walk? And they stood still, looking sad. And one of them, named Cleopas, answering said unto him, Dost thou alone sojourn in Jerusalem and not know the things which are come to pass there in these days? And he said unto them, What things? And they said unto him, The things concerning Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people: and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we hoped that it was he who would redeem Israel. Yea and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things came to pass. Moreover certain women of our company amazed us, having

been early at the tomb; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. And certain of them that were with us went to the tomb, and found it even so as the women had said: but him they saw not. And he said unto them, O foolish men, and slow of heart in all that the prophets have spoken! Behooved it not the Christ to suffer these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they were going: and he made as though he would go further. And they constrained him, saying; Abide with us; for it is toward evening, and the day is now far spent. And he went in to abide with them. And it came to pass, when he had sat down with them to meat, he took the bread and blessed; and breaking it he gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to another, Was our not our heart burning within us, while he spake to us in the way, while he opened to us the scriptures? And they rose up that very hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon. And they rehearsed the things that happened in the way, and how he was known of them in the breaking of the bread, and that he appeared to Cephas.

When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and saith unto the, Peace be unto you. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they beheld a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and wherefore do questionings arise in your heart? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye behold me having.

And when he had said this, he showed unto them his hands and his side. The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord. Jesus therefore said to them again, Peace be unto you: as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Spirit; whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.

And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have ye here anything to eat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish. And he took it, and ate before them.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them

when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord, But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe.

### *Summary*

The Lord, after appearing to Mary Magdalene and the other women, chooses to manifest His resurrected glory to two of His disciples on the way to Emmaus. Overjoyed with their experience they return to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples. Jesus then appears before all the disciples except Thomas, commissions them, empowers them and eats with them.

### *Comment*

Between the appearance to the women and the appearance to the ten disciples in the upper room in Jerusalem, Jesus appeared to two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus. These two disciples were despondent at the death of Jesus because all their glorious Messianic hopes had died, they thought, with Him there on Golgotha's brow. They had heard rumors that He was alive—His tomb was empty—but they had not seen Him. Perhaps these disciples were going to Emmaus to rest, get away from all the uproar in Jerusalem, and to think over the events of the last few days. Emmaus was probably only 7 or 8 miles from Jerusalem. Jesus met them or overtook them and walked on with them to Emmaus but they did not recognize Him . . . "their eyes were holden." Barnes notes that it was not some miraculous veiling of their own eyes that occurred but that He appeared to them in a form they were not used to seeing (cf. Mark 16:12) and they were not expecting to see Him anyway and they simply did not recognize Him as He walked and talked with them. As He began to remind them of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies and apply them to Himself, their hearts began to "burn within them." And then, as they were eating with Him, the familiarity of it all opened their eyes and they recognized Him. And they arose that very hour and hurried back to Jerusalem to report to the rest of that little band of despondent disciples. Just who these two disciples are we are not certain. One was Cleopas and the other seems to be most probably, Peter. There are some commentators who believe the second disciple was Luke because of the fact that only Luke records the event and his record has the flavor of that of an eyewitness. Just how Jesus vanished out of their sight is not certain either. The account seems to indicate that it was a miraculous "vanishing." This would be in keeping with His miraculous entrance into a room which had the doors shut to outsiders.

In John 20:19 we notice a special emphasis on "the first day of the

week." John might just as well have said, "Now when it was the evening of the first day." But he emphasizes by saying, "Now when it was evening of *that* day, the first of the week." The first day of the week, being the day of Christ's resurrection, is the chief of days, the day of Christian worship (cf. Matt. 28:1; Mk. 16:2; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1; Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10).

There was something about the sudden appearance of Jesus in their midst where they were gathered on that evening that must have been beyond natural for the disciples were "terrified and affrighted." John seems to record that the doors were "fastened" to show some significant difference regarding the properties of the risen body of Jesus. The idiom of the Greek indicates that the Lord's appearance in their midst was with breath taking suddenness and completely unexpected. They had "fastened" the doors on account of their fear of the Jews. Their Master had been slain and there may have been word rumored that the Sanhedrin was looking now for the disciples of the Nazarene to condemn them also.

Jesus was suddenly in their midst, speaking in a calm and soothing manner, "Peace be unto you." It was a familiar phrase for He had used it often in addressing His disciples. The disciples were terrified believing they were beholding one who had returned from the unseen realm of the dead—a spirit, Luke tells us. But immediately Jesus held forth His hands and showed His feet which were pierced with the prints of the nails. He commands, "handle me, and see!" To dispel their doubts and fears He bids them prove to themselves beyond any doubt that the One in their midst is the same One with whom they walked and talked the last three years.

This is one of the unique features of the revelation of Jehovah-God, whether that revelation be in the Old Testament, in the Incarnate Word, or in that revelation given by the apostles—the invitation, yea, the command, to test and prove the credibility and authenticity and divine nature of such a revelation. No other religion has ever been so insistent, *that its claims be tested and verified and none has ever offered such undisputable evidence, for such verification.* The disciples were not asked to place their trust in some mystic philosophy, nor in imaginative man-made gods—they were given empirically verifiable evidence for the supernaturalness of Christ. The resurrection of Christ was not only His spirit but His body also.

But how, if Christ was resurrected in a body, was He able to be suddenly in their midst if the doors were "fastened." We like the conclusion given by Hendriksen, "Scripture gives no answer. Some day we'll understand."

Our text here in John does not say whether they "handled" Him or not. Luke (Lk. 24:41) seems to indicate that they did not but "still disbelieved for joy, and wondered" until He ate the broiled fish with them. Then they were glad and rejoiced.

So Jesus said again, Peace be unto you. Then He gives them their commission: "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you." There is more than a command here—there is also a warning and a promise. Just as the great Apostle, Jesus, was sent to preach the will of God and to be persecuted and suffer for His glory, even so the apostles were sent to preach and be persecuted for His glory. They were to "fellowship His sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). There is also the promise of victory. They would also know "the power of His resurrection" (Phil. 3:10). They were to receive a divine commission and they were to be given divine credentials through the power to work miracles (cf. Heb. 2:4).

"So send I you, to labor unrewarded

To serve unpaid, unloved, unsought, unknown,

To bear rebuke, to suffer scorn and scoffing,

So send I you, to toil for me alone

Verse 23 has long been a problem. The Roman Catholic Church has used this verse to teach that the so-called successors of the apostles (the popes and priests) have the authority to forgive men of their sins. Such a doctrine is technically called "absolution." Not even the apostles themselves had any authority of their own to grant absolution—the forgiveness of sins. One need only to turn to Acts 8:14-24 to find one example of an apostle being asked to grant absolution in the case of a man confessing his sin. The answer of the apostle Peter is, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray the Lord, if perhaps the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee." This passage in John 20:23 does not grant the apostles the power of absolution. The verbs *apheontai* (they are forgiven) and *kekratentai* (they are retained) of this verse are in the perfect tense in the Greek. Now the perfect tense means "an action having been completed in past time with a continuing result." Literally translated verse 23 would read, "whose soever sins ye forgive, they have already been forgiven them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they have already been retained." It is very interesting indeed that in the other two instances where Jesus similarly commissioned the disciples (Matt. 16:19; Matt. 18:18) the verbs are also in the perfect tense! There the verbs are *dedemena* (has already been bound) and *lelumena* (has already been loosed).

In founding the church, declaring the will of God and preaching the gospel of repentance and remission of sins by the blood of Christ and men's obedience to the gospel, the apostles merely declared on



what terms, and to what people God extended forgiveness of sins. What ever they preached on earth had already been decided in heaven. Only God can forgive sins. The apostles and all who have preached since are merely heralds of the covenant which has already been ratified, once for all, in heaven.

The apostles were given here by Jesus a symbolic prophecy of the special baptism of the Holy Spirit when He "breathed." The literal baptism of the Spirit would come upon them on the day of Pentecost and would empower them with miraculous power in order to confirm the already-ratified message which they were to preach afterward. The Holy Spirit did not give them any inherent authority to grant absolution of sin.

### *Quiz*

1. How does John put emphasis on the "first day of the week?"
2. How did Jesus get into the room of the doors were "fastened?"
3. What, according to Luke, did Jesus say when He showed them His hands and His feet?
4. What all did Jesus mean when He said, "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you?"
5. Show how verse 23 does not give the apostles or any other mortals the right to forgive men their sins.

### THE APPEARANCE TO THOMAS

*Text: 20:26-29*

26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Jesus cometh, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and see my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and put it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

28 Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

29 Jesus saith unto him, Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

### *Queries*

- a. Why did Jesus think it necessary to make a special appearance for Thomas' sake?
- b. Why are they who have not seen and yet have believed said to be "blessed?"

### *Paraphrase (Harmony)*

And afterward he was manifested unto the eleven themselves as they sat at meat; and he upbraided them with their unbelief and hard-

ness of heart, because they believed not them that had seen him after he was risen.

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Jesus cometh, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and see my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and put it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing. Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Because thou hast seen me, thou has believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.

### Summary

Thomas, who was absent at the Lord's first appearance to the disciples, was told of His appearance insists upon more proof. The Lord Himself appears especially for Thomas. All Thomas' doubts flee.

### Comment

Thomas, the twin, was absent at the first meeting together of the disciples. Why he was absent we are not told. Perhaps he was investigating further the reports of the women about the empty tomb. Immediately after the Lord's appearance to the "Twelve" (ten disciples in all) that first Sunday night, they went as a body and found Thomas and told him excitedly, "We have seen the Lord!" (v. 24). But for some reason, known only to Thomas, he could not satisfy the despondent longing of his own heart with just their testimony—*he had to see for himself!* If it is fair to characterize Thomas from two previous statements of his (Jn. 11:16; 14:5), we may think of him as one who tends to be pessimistic—to see the dark side. It was not that Thomas was a confirmed agnostic or skeptic—he believed readily enough when there was enough evidence to sweep away his natural inclination to despondency. Actually, Thomas was no more a "doubter" than the other ten disciples—he was just not at the right place at the right time. The other ten disciples were filled with the same despondent doubt (even though they had the testimony of the women and the two back from Emmaus) until Jesus appeared to them that first Sunday evening. Thomas simply demands the same evidence which was necessary for the other ten to overcome their doubts. Foster says, "The gradual development of their faith and the fact that fear, doubt, misunderstanding, and the obstinate insistence upon absolutely indubitable evidence caused them to be slow to believe but it adds to the power of their testimony as witnesses."

The disciples have not left Jerusalem and gone into Galilee as the resurrected Lord has commanded them through the women (cf. Lk.

24:3-8; Mk. 16:2-8) and another week has elapsed according to 20:26. As Hendriksen points out John is "employing the inclusive method of time-computation." Thus "after eight days" would be the next Sunday evening when the disciples had gathered together again—probably in the same place as on the previous Sunday evening. Again the doors were "fastened." But again Jesus appeared suddenly and stood in the midst of them. Again He calmed their beating hearts with, "Peace be unto you."

It is worthy of note that Jesus has, in all His appearances at this time, appeared only on the first day of the week. There can be little doubt that He did it to especially consecrate and dedicate this day in the minds of the apostles. We notice also that the disciples have not yet come to that boldness and courageousness of faith which they later knew (Acts 4:13; 4:19-20; 5:29). They still have the doors "shut" for fear of the Jews.

Jesus does not waste any time but gets immediately to the point of this appearance. He commands Thomas to come forward and "touch and see and believe." The question is always asked, "Did Thomas actually touch His hands?" In all probability he did! (cf. Lk. 24:39; I Jn. 1:1-4). There is no possibility of hallucination or extreme credulity here! Either Thomas actually saw and "handled" the resurrected body of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth (as well as the women and the other disciples) or the writers of the gospel accounts are the most dastardly deceivers and frauds the world has even known. There are just two alternatives: either the evidence is overwhelmingly sufficient to call forth faith and surrender to the divine, omnipotent, omniscient, resurrected Lord Jesus—or—the gospel writers deliberately lied and duped millions of their contemporaries and the gospels then are not morally worthy of consideration for they are lies. Only two alternatives are worthy of honest men: let us hear no more that the gospels are untrustworthy historically speaking but may form the basis for morality and social action—this is neither reasonable nor morally upright.

There was no question lingering in the mind of Thomas. He was of an "honest and good heart." Once the evidence was sufficient he surrendered his mind and heart to the demands of the fact. It is as Alexander Campbell has written, *facts are moral*, they demand a decision. Facts are the basis of faith and faith is the motivating force of feeling. The facts caused Thomas to trust (have faith) and thus leading to the emotion of his heart and soul poured out in, "My Lord and my God!"

There must be no doubters among the men upon whom Jesus is to thrust the responsibility of establishing the church and preaching the

gospel in the face of a whole world against it. There must not be the slightest hesitancy, question, or problem about His victory over death and Satan. There must be absolute and abiding conviction on the part of each one commissioned to this great task. Furthermore, Jesus appeared to Thomas out of His love for Thomas. God desires to give every man enough opportunity to know of Christ's victory over death and Satan, but now the responsibility to present the facts to every man is upon those who are His disciples. Jesus will not appear to men again until He comes to judge the world. Then those who pierced Him will see Him—but then it will be too late!

R. C. Foster notes, "John opens his gospel with a profound statement concerning Jesus as the incarnation of God. He closes his gospel with this great declaration of Thomas which is a result of actual experience and association. Thomas sums up in one dramatic explanation the message of the entire gospel. The disciple who doubted the most gives at last the final statement of his faith. Thomas hails Jesus as God and Jesus accepts the identification as Thomas worshipped Him."

Why does Jesus pronounce this last "beatitude" of blessing upon those who believe without having seen? Faith which results from seeing is good; but faith which results from hearing is more excellent. If men had to verify every basis of life or every statement of history to their own senses before they acted, virtually nothing would ever be accomplished! We could not all personally and minutely verify everything we accept as fact and allow as motivating principles in our lives. The faith of multitudes through the centuries has rested, not upon their own personal sensory perceptions, but upon the testimony of competent witnesses. We do not accept the fact that Washington was the first President of the United States of America on the basis of our own sight, but of the testimony of accredited witnesses.

Another matter to be considered here is the weight of the accumulation of testimony over against the possibilities of our own senses being deceived. It is no wonder Jesus said, "blessed are they who, though not seeing, are yet believing."

### Quiz

1. Why did Thomas refuse to accept the word of the other apostles?
2. Was Thomas any worse than the rest of the apostles in his doubt?
3. What day did Jesus appear to the eleven, Thomas being present?
4. What two alternatives are left for those who read of the gospel account of Thomas' experience?
5. Why are those who believe without having seen blessed above those whose faith needs to see?

## THE AIM OF THE GOSPEL

*Text: 20:30-31*

30 Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book:

31 but these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name.

*Queries*

- a. What are the "other signs" of verse 30?
- b. May belief in Jesus' deity be attained in any way except through the gospel record?

*Paraphrase*

Jesus did indeed perform many other signs in the presence of His disciples which have not been recorded in this book. The signs of Jesus which are recorded in this book have been written in order that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Anointed One, the Son of God, and that continuing to believe you may have life eternal in His name.

*Summary*

The purpose of the recorded gospel is to engender faith in the deity of Christ resulting in eternal life.

*Comment*

This is the climax of the Fourth Gospel—not the conclusion, but the climax. Chapter Twenty-one is the conclusion in the form of an epilogue.

It is quite clear from John's statement here in vv. 30-31 and from just a cursory reading of the other gospel accounts that none of the gospels ever set out to give, nor claimed to give, a full account of the life of Jesus. What they have recorded, however, is historically and factually accurate. The brevity of the accounts in no way denies their historicity!

But why are the gospel records so brief? Would it not be to our advantage to know every detail of Jesus' life as a youngster and a growing man? It is also quite clear that the gospels are not intended to be complete biographies of Jesus' life. We like the statement of R. C. Foster in his *Life of Christ Syllabus*: "The narratives of the life of Christ are condensed in order to be the more effective. They are sufficient for the purpose of presenting adequate evidence, extensive enough to challenge a life-time of study, and yet not so voluminous as to overwhelm the reader with a mass of unnecessary records. The brevity

of the scriptures is one of the foremost proofs of their divine inspiration. Contrast the gospel narratives with any biography in print, whether of Napoleon, Lincoln, or any other famous person!"

The purpose of John has been all along to show that Jesus of Nazareth is the Incarnate Word—the Very Son of God, co-equal with the Father—indeed Immanuel, God with us! This was John's stated purpose in his Prologue (1:1-18). These climactic verses 30-31 show us that from start to finish the Fourth Gospel is a book of signs that Jesus is the Son of God. This is the first purpose of the book.

If the deity of Christ be established and told in a vivid and captivating way then men will be led to believe in Him and gain eternal life. This is the stated second purpose of the gospel record: to bring men to faith and salvation in obedience to the will of Christ (i.e., in His name). The purpose of the gospel record has just been vividly portrayed in the experience of Thomas: he has been brought to a complete faith in the deity of Jesus and commits his life unto Him. "The Fourth Gospel began with the unfolding of the mystery of life which has its source in the Word. It closes with the offer of life to all who will accept Jesus.

It is worthy of note that John uses the present tense of the verb *pisteno* (believe) and so literally it means to believe and keep on believing. Hendriksen says, "Note: continue to believe. Remember Cerinthus, who was trying to undermine the faith of the Church in the deity of Christ! That faith must be strengthened. The enemy must be repulsed."

It may be that John had in mind, writing his gospel toward the end of the first century, a refutation and defense against Gnosticism. But the use of *pisteno* in the present tense is so common an idiom of the New Testament writers simply to state the nature of saving faith that it seems beside the point to connect it with a refutation of Gnosticism.

Whatever the case, John climaxes his gospel with his version of the good confession. But, as Foster suggests, it now includes the profounder meaning of the crucified and risen Christ, and of the Son of God who has given final proof of His claims.

### Quiz

1. Did the gospel writers intend to give a full account or biography of the life of Jesus? How do you know?
2. Why is the brevity of the gospel records more to our advantage?
3. What are the two purposes of the gospel record?
4. How do these two verses tie in with and climax the entire Fourth Gospel from start to finish?