

The Evidence of the Living Word

John 20:1-10, Easter Sunday

March 31, 2013

Beloved of the Lord.....When we go to a cemetery or graveyard, we never expect to see empty graves. That is contrary to all our experience and reason. When we are there, we all know just a few feet below our feet, there are corpses and decaying bodies, and there is nothing pretty about anything pertaining to death. Even when we are very young children it is not long before we attend our first funeral. I still remember my father crying when his mother died. I still remember my departed grandmother leaving her house on an ambulance stretcher. Death is horrible and what can we compare on earth to it? The more we love someone the deeper it hurts to see them go. Death puts a scar on every heart and it fills our hearts with fear. Old age is not the cause of death, neither is disease, war, or bloodshed. The answer as to why all men die is clearly given in the Bible. The Bible says, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." All men are by nature afraid of death for the simple reason we all know we have sinned against God. Death is punishment for our sin, and even worse than death we fear the punishment in the hereafter.

The opposite of death naturally is life and there is much life in the world. Our world is teeming with life, but where did it come from? Obviously there is an Almighty God above who is the cause and origin of all life, for only God could create the beautiful life of a child which we call a baby. And if you want a good picture of what life really is, you need to watch children playing. Yet even in the midst of such happiness and joy all of us adults know children die too, and what breaks the heart more than a funeral of a child?

If then there is to be any hope for sinful mortals, this HOPE must come from above. When the little Baby Jesus was born with life in Bethlehem, He one purpose in mind, to suffer and die for our sins, and rise again in glory. When we see this innocent and tender Child growing up becoming a Man, we must never forget this is not just any Man, but the very Son of God come with power to save! And so when this Man is nailed to the cross, when you see blood dripping from his hands and feet, in all truth you are seeing your own gracious Lord who is bleeding and dying for your sins. Taking your place, Jesus is paying your price, my price, the entire debt to God we owed for sin. The Sinless is punished so we sinners go free.

Having accomplished all things, His dead body was quickened in the tomb the third day, His divine soul returning to His body. With divine power He rose again, rising in glory, and so passed through the stone door as if it wasn't there. In this triumphant resurrection dear sinner, you should see God doing something great for you, He is giving you the power to conquer death itself and the power to rise again in glory, simply by faith in Christ Jesus. Just as He died for all, so He rose for all, and in His resurrection the Judge of all sinners is slamming down His gavel and saying of all sinners, "NOT GUILTY" and "YOU ARE FREE, FOR MY SON HAS PAID YOUR PRICE." If then anyone here wants to conquer death today and live forever with Jesus in heaven, only one thing is

necessary for Jesus has said, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." Do you see now how death has been swallowed up in victory? Do you see now how faith in Christ conquers all? You were dead but now by grace you live. "He is not here, He is risen as He said." Now let us:

I. Examine the evidence of the resurrection. Mary Magdalene was the first to the tomb on that blessed Easter morning, perhaps just a bit before the other women. "It was yet dark" when she reached the sepulcher. Seeing the stone rolled away, without further investigation she immediately runs and finds Peter and John saying, "They have taken away the Lord." Rather than knowing or believing the Scriptures concerning Christ's resurrection, she operates under the assumption of what her eyes see and do not see. "They have taken away the Lord....and we know now where they have laid Him."

From this startling information, Peter and John race to the tomb, probably operating under the false assumption given by Mary. Being weak minded, we do this all the time. We operate under false pretences and jump to the wrong conclusion rather than searching the Scriptures. John is the first disciples to arrive at the tomb. Perhaps out of reverence John doesn't go in right away, but impulsive Peter does without thinking. They also examine the physical evidence. Christ is not there. But far more puzzling, "the napkin, that was about his head, was not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself." This is the clear witness of Scripture. Why would this be, Peter and John wonder? If the body was stolen, no thief would take the time to unwrap the body, and so neatly lay things in order. Luke 24:12 tells us Peter wondered "in himself at that which was come to pass." John however "saw and believed" the Bible says. This means John was convinced from this physical evidence, Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, but looking back as John writes what we call the Gospel of St. John, he adds the commentary "For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead." We will speak more of these Scriptures a little later.

Since there are always unbelievers of the Word, let us briefly discuss some theories men have invented in order to deny the bodily resurrection of Christ. THEORY ONE is the disciples stole the body. Remember that when the angels came down from heaven and rolled away the door, the guards passed out in fear. When they woke up again they ran to the city and told the priests and elders, but these bribed the soldiers with hush money. Matthew 28:15 says, "So they took the money and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day." Even when Matthew thus wrote the book of Matthew, this deceit was well known. It makes no sense however. For it was the Jews themselves that requested Pilate have the tomb guarded, and then the very guards they acquire later give witness of the angel and the empty tomb. Moreover if a thief stole the body, why would they take to carefully unwrap the body and neatly lay the linens in order? Besides there were many eye witnesses that morning which investigated the evidence carefully, for neither they believed. And they were all eye witnesses later to the risen Christ. They believed and so should we. The SECOND THEORY (now) is called the *Swoon Theory*. They say Jesus

passed out on the cross and woke up later in the tomb. That is laughable, for no man could unroll that stone from inside, moreover are we to believe Pilates soldiers were not smart enough to identify a dead body on the cross? And didn't they break the legs of the thieves so they would die and suffocate, but such was not necessary for the dead Christ? Didn't they thrust a spear into His side so that it poured out water and blood? On top of that, when Christ gave up the ghost, wasn't there a terrible earthquake so great rocks and bolder split apart, wasn't the veil in the temple torn in two, and doesn't the Bible say in Matthew 27:54, "Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God." The THIRD THEORY is the hallucination theory, namely the disciples imagined it all. We know however Jesus appeared multiple times to multiple disciples in different circumstances and places and none of them believed at first until they saw with their own eyes. Did they all have separate hallucinations with such great detail? When in history has there been such a unified hallucination of so many people? Is it sensible to believe such? And didn't the risen Christ Himself give permission to doubting Thomas to "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust *it* into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." The LAST THEORY is the FRAUD THEORY, namely the disciples just invented the whole thing. But if that were true, the Jews who hated and crucified Christ would have seen to it the disciples were exposed for such a lie. Just look at all they did to cover up the truth. But more importantly, we see all these disciples firmly believed in the risen Christ because they literally saw Him on multiple occasions, even for 40 days before His ascension. Moreover, in First Corinthians 15:6 we are told that after His resurrection, Jesus "was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep." This letter to the Corinthians was written some 25 years after the resurrection, and still a good portion of the 500 were living eye witnesses to Christ's glory.

II. Blessed are they who have not seen, yet believed. While God was certainly good and gracious in His many appearances to His disciples to prove the truth of His resurrection, what we need to understand today is we have a far greater witness of the resurrection in our own Bibles, for "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God". This literally means the black and white words printed on your Bible pages (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, etc), these words themselves are literally "God-breathed." When you hear the Gospel, or even when you read these living Words, God's own Spirit is working thereby to breathe saving faith into your soul, thereby releasing you from your prison of sin and death, "for God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved". Remember then what Jesus said to Thomas, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed *are* they that have not seen, and *yet* have believed." If then you want to be saved from sin and all the horrors of death, you must see in Christ your Savior who by His own blood conquered your sin and your death for you on the cross and in the resurrection. If only you "search the Scriptures" you will see your everlasting life on every page of the Bible, for as John

said, these things are written "that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

There is spiritual death in this world and there is spiritual life given by the Spirit above - hope from above. When a person lives in unbelief, they are truly a captive to the devil himself, for they are blind to the most blessed truth, that Christ Jesus "came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." What instead do such unbelievers then see? Unbelieving men reason: God becomes man? God is nailed to a cross? God bleeds and suffers and dies and rises against so we are forgiven? Ridiculous! Impossible! Preposterous! That is not reasonable to them. Yet at the same time what do these scoffers of Christ believe? Trusting in their works they are afraid of their god and their guilty conscience has no peace. They bow to a thousand idols and they say a thousand prayers, but they can never be sure their God is listening or even cares. They bow to Mecca or the Wailing wall. The pope prostrates himself in Rome and washes feet. They wear special clothes, they say special things, they keep themselves from meat or they fast during day and gorge themselves at night. But in the end, in that cursed hour when death draws near, they tremble with fear inside because they don't know if they are forgiven. We pity them, we pray for them, we witness to them, for we know what they don't know, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" and "I know *that* my redeemer liveth, and *that* he shall stand at the latter *day* upon the earth" and "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." "He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Whatever your sins may be then dear friend, remember Jesus is a Friend of Sinners, and He came only to give you life, not "with gold or silver, but with His holy and precious blood, and by His innocent suffering and death." The whole purpose of Jesus coming and living and dying and rising again is firmly declared in His own words which you ought to firmly believe, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly." Believing in Him you will surely have life "more abundantly" for "Blessed are they who have not seen, yet believed." Amen.