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'THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION'

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There is a wonderful painting by Eugene Burnand, entitled *Le Samedi Saint* (Holy Saturday). It represents the eleven disciples gathered together with the doors shut for fear of the Jews, but there is no light of gladness, no smile of hope on their faces. It is the evening of the darkest day in their lives. Jesus lies in the tomb. Their hopes lie buried with Him. 'We trusted', they are saying, 'that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel'. 'We trusted—but now our trust is gone. In Galilee, beside the Lake, we saw His power and His glory. On Golgotha we heard His bitter cry and saw His dying agony. Then Joseph of Arimathea took His body and we laid it in the tomb. Jesus is *dead*'.

Peter sits with his head in his hands, and John, his face a study of conflicting emotions, is trying to comfort him but can find no words. Disappointed, discouraged, perplexed, baffled, bewildered as they think of the future, each face in the group is an individual expression of their common experience. Jesus is dead. 'We trusted that it had been HE who should have redeemed Israel. . . .'

Thanks be to God! the Gospel story does not end with the death of Christ. It does not close with His triumphant cry, 'It is finished'. Nor does the apostolic message. Christ's death was followed by His resurrection. Jesus was 'of the seed of David according to the flesh', but was 'declared to be the Son of God with power by the Resurrection from the dead'. He died for our sins and was buried and 'hath been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures'. Such is Paul's concise statement. He bases his belief in the resurrection of Jesus, first, on the prophecies and promises that he *would* rise, and then on the appearances of the living Redeemer because He *did* rise. He catalogues those appearances in order, appeals to his own vision of the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus, and then draws his conclusion: 'If Christ hath not been raised your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins. Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ

have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men most pitiable'.

It is with keen insight into the character of all evidence, and especially of this evidence, that Sydney Dobell wrote: "The anxiety of Paul to rest the whole value of his preaching on the Resurrection is a grand evidence. It makes the brain of Paul an evidence. He is surety for a world of unknown facts. So of the other apostles. And the *unbelief* of the apostles compared with their after-belief and the selection of the Resurrection as the master-fact, is inestimable testimony also to unknown evidential facts'.

One of the most remarkable things about the story of the Resurrection as given in the four Gospels is that all the accounts of these *eye-witnesses* emphasize the *doubts* of the Lord's followers. They were in a sceptical frame of mind and not ready to accept hearsay evidence. The women 'said nothing to any one for they were afraid' (Mark 16:8). When Mary Magdalene told them of her vision of a living Christ 'they disbelieved' (Mark 16:11). When they saw Him on the mountain in Galilee some worshipped Him 'but some doubted' (Matt. 28:17). The apostle Thomas kept his doubts a whole week and then he was convinced.

The faith of the apostles in the actual resurrection of Jesus Christ, therefore, was not a blind faith but open-eyed and built on accumulative and irresistible evidence. 'He showed Himself after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days', and the number of those who thus saw Him alive and recognized Him was more than five hundred (Acts 1:3; 1 Cor. 15:6). None of the apostolic band had the shadow of a doubt left after Christ's ascension and the great Day of Pentecost. They were changed men because Christ was alive for evermore. His resurrection was their living hope. It was the dynamic of their message, not only, but their daily experience. 'Him, God raised up the third day', said Peter, 'and showed Him openly. Not to all the people but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead' (Acts 10:41). 'Though He was crucified through weakness', writes Paul, 'yet He lived by the power of God' (2 Cor. 13:4).

'Jesus Christ', says John, 'is a faithful Witness, the First Begotten of the dead'. He is alive for evermore. Death can have no more dominion over Him, for He hath abolished death and brought life and immortality to light in the Gospel. This is the power of the new life in Christ. He is *in* every believer the hope of glory and the secret of victory over sin. Crucified with Christ, dead and buried with Him, but now alive in Him and *for* Him.

The Resurrection morning sheds new light—the light of Eternity—on all things mundane. Everything and every man is different because of this living Hope, this manifestation of God's power and God's victory at the empty tomb. 'If any man is in Christ he is a new creation. Old things have passed away'; all is new in the new Light of the Resurrection.

When men realize the presence of the living Christ, all life's values are determined by a new standard. 'Henceforth I will put no value on anything I have or possess save in relation to the Kingdom of Christ', said David Livingstone. We read in John's Gospel that 'in the place where HE was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a tomb'. That 'garden' still awaits us: It blossoms red with sacrifice. All the fruit of the Spirit ripens there. The power of His Resurrection enables men to face the world's deepest sorrows and needs confident in Christ, Who knows and cares and can supply that need.

The human heart hungers for two things, redemption from sin and life eternal. The most remarkable fact in the comparative history of religions is the universal belief of mankind in a *future state* of existence after death and the universal attempt to appease the so-called gods, or God the Almighty, by all manner of sacrifices and offerings. CHRIST is the fulfilment of both these needs. Although the notions of the future life are crude among primitive races they are real and have a dominant place in their thoughts. The very term *animism* connotes the superiority of the soul above the material world. Not only all primitive religions but all the great ethnic faiths teach immortality and have an instinct for eternal values.

Men believe in immortality because of the intrinsic incompleteness of the present life, because they have observed

that character often grows even when the faculties begin to decline, and because of the sensitive and imperative clamour of our affections. 'Love is stronger than death'. Something within us echoes to this 'voice' of the universe, and souls are drawn forward irresistibly on this one path to their eternal home. All things turn towards the heart of God, their Source and also their End. 'He who proclaims the existence of the Infinite', said Louis Pasteur, 'and none can avoid it—accumulates in that affirmation more of the supernatural than is to be found in all the miracles of all the religions; for the notion of the Infinite presents that double character, that it forces itself upon us and yet is incomprehensible. When this notion seizes upon our understanding, we can but kneel. I see everywhere the inevitable expression of the Infinite in the world; through it the supernatural is at the bottom of every heart'. Science speaks of infinite space, infinite time, infinite numbers, infinite life and motion. 'HE hath set eternity in their hearts' (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Death is not more universal than the longing of the human soul for *life*, more life, abundant life—such as Jesus Christ brought to light through His glorious Resurrection and Ascension.

'Whatever crazy sorrow saith,
No life that breathes with human breath
Hath ever truly longed for death.

'Tis *life* of which our nerves are scant,
'Tis *life*, not death, for which we pant,
More life, and fuller, that we want.'

This truth is proclaimed in the beliefs of the ancient Etruscans; in the so-called 'Book of the Dead' (which was really a book of *life*) by the ancient Egyptians; in the last book of the 'Laws of Manu!' on transmigration and final beatitude; in the elaborate popular eschatologies of Islam; even in the interpretation of Nirvana by the best Buddhist scholars.

The desire of all nations is, however, *only fulfilled in Christ—and in Christ alone*. Because Jesus Christ has brought life and immortality to light by His Death and Resurrection, He has given us a *unique* Message, one that is suited to the sins and sorrows of humanity the world over. It was at the grave of Lazarus that

Jesus preached the Gospel of the Resurrection. 'I am the Resurrection and the Life: whosoever believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die'.

This was the heart of Paul's Message. He preached Christ and the Resurrection. He knew no other Gospel; for there is and never will be another. Read Moffatt's version of 1 Corinth. 15:1-3, 14, 15; 'Now brothers, I would have you know the gospel I once preached to you, the gospel you received, the gospel in which you have your footing, the gospel by which you are saved—provided you adhere to my statement of it—unless indeed your faith was all haphazard. First and foremost, I passed on to you what I had myself received, namely that Christ died for our sins, as the Scriptures had said, that He was buried, that He rose on the third day as the Scriptures had said. . . . If Christ did not rise, then our preaching has gone for nothing, and your faith has gone for nothing too. Besides, we are detected bearing false witness to God by affirming of Him that He raised CHRIST—whom He did not raise, if after all dead men never rise'.

But Jesus *was Victor over death*. He removes the terror of the tomb. He has brought Life and Immortality to light in the Gospel. If in this life only we had hope in Christ, our message, and we ourselves, would be most pitiable. But we are ambassadors of the Conqueror of sin and death, the immortal King of Glory. Our Gospel is not for this life only but concerns Eternity, and is therefore of infinite value. All our Christian institutions, organizations, equipments, resources and methods are only means to an end. After all they are but the scaffolding for the 'house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens' (Read also Phil. 3:10).

The eternal values, latent for all who believe in the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, were the joy and inspiration of the apostles and saints and martyrs of the early Church. They won the world for Christ because they despised the world. They founded a spiritual kingdom in every land because their citizenship was in heaven. They laid the foundations of the Church in every city because they were 'pilgrims' and 'strangers' and looked

for 'the city that hath foundations whose builder and maker is God'.

There is no aspect of Christian truth that needs emphasis today more than this. Indeed we are 'progressives in theology' if we carry this message of the Risen Christ and of eternal life to the non-Christian world. The late Dr Diessman has asserted: For the last many years 'the discernment of the eschatological character of the Gospel of Jesus has more and more come to the front in international Christian theology. I regard this as one of the greatest steps forward that theological enquiry has ever achieved. We today must lay the strongest possible stress upon the eschatological character of the Gospel, which it is the practical business of the Church to proclaim. Namely, that we must daily focus our minds upon the fact that the Kingdom of God is near, that God with His unconditioned sovereignty comes through judgment and redemption, and that we have to prepare ourselves inwardly for the *Maranatha*—"The LORD cometh".'

This is indeed our missionary message, the everlasting Gospel of One who came, who died on the cross, who arose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and who is coming again. From Bethlehem and Calvary, from the empty tomb and from the clouds that hide Him from view, there streams the light of eternity. The great ellipse that includes the content of our faith and of our message to the world may be drawn as widely as possible, but it always has and always will have two foci—the Death and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and their relation to man's sin and his eternal destiny. This is the Gospel of the Resurrection.*

*This article is a chapter from the late Dr Zwerner's book, *The Glory of the Cross*—by kind permission of the Publishers, Oliphants Ltd., London who have recently republished the book in their Lakeland Series. Its message is as fresh and relevant to the circumstances and events we are living in today as ever, particularly in view of the growing unrest amongst the nations and the consequent hindrances to the progress of the Gospel. Dr Zwerner gave years of service in Mission work in the Middle East particularly in Arabia, which he related in his earliest book, *Arabia The Cradle of Islam*. His personal influence in one's own youthful service can never be forgotten.—Ed.