

THE GLORY OF THE CROSS

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MARSHALL, MORGAN & SCOTT, LTD.
LONDON AND EDINBURGH

1938

CHAPTER TEN

"THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION"

"CHRIST our Forerunner conquers Death, pushes open the double doors which shut us from Eternity, and lets the soul pass through. The Eternal Wisdom, going by way of Cross and grave into the atmosphere of Reality, showed us this path, this secret: and confided to us the Cosmic Word of Power, the 'Open Sesame' of the spiritual world.

"The LIGHT of the World had done little for us had it failed to illuminate the darkness of the grave, to sanctify the horror of contact between the wonder of flesh and the inexorable tomb. 'Venite et videte locum': come, see the place where Perfect Love has lain.' " -- John Cordelier in the "*Path of Eternal Wisdom*."

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 "**he rose again 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: "**Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins**" (I Corinthians 15:12-16).

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 skeptical frame of mind and not ready to accept hearsay evidence.

The women "**trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man, 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**" (Matthew 28:17).

The apostle Thomas kept his doubts for 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. "**To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God**" (Acts 1:3) and "**After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep**" (I Corinthians 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 of their daily experience. **"Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly"** (Acts 10:40). **"For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you"** (II Corinthians 13.4). **"Jesus Christ,"** says John, **"who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood"** (Revelation 1:5).

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 be in CHRIST, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away, all is new in the new light of the Resurrection morning.

"LIGHT of Eternity, LIGHT divine,
Into my darkness shine,
That the small may appear small,
And the GREAT, Greatest of all:
O LIGHT of eternity shine!"

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 **"Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre"** (John 19:41). 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 gods, or GOD, by all manner of sacrifices and offerings.

CHRIST is the fulfillment 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 to 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 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 infinite motion. **"He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end"** (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Death is not more universal than the longing of the human soul for life, more life, abundant life, such as JESUS 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 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 for life eternal is fulfilled in CHRIST and in CHRIST alone. Because JESUS 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.

Earnest seekers after truth in all nations see an invisible world, hear inaudible voices, and try to lay hold of intangible realities; therefore they will never be attracted by a missionary message that is not other-worldly.

It was at the grave of Lazarus that JESUS preached the Gospel of the Resurrection. **"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live"** (John 11:25).

This was the heart of Paul's message.

He preached CHRIST and the Resurrection.

He knew no other Gospel. **"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures . . . And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not"** (I Corinthians 15:1-3, 14-15).

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 have 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.

The social Gospel has its place and its power, for CHRIST came to heal the broken-hearted and give liberty to the captive. We dare not neglect the ethical content of the Gospel message, and its severe demands. But nothing so appeals to the individual as the Gospel of the Resurrection.

The Gospel is not, as Bolsheviks allege, an opiate for the poor and miserable, forced down their throats by the rich and arrogant.

The Gospel is the proclamation that the things that are seen are temporal and that the unseen things are eternal.

Now in a world full of injustice we may have to partake of the fellowship of CHRIST's suffering; but by faith in Him we shall attain unto the Resurrection of the dead. **"Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself"** (Philippians 3:21).

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 to-day more than this. Indeed we are

progressive in theology if we carry this message of the Risen CHRIST and of eternal life to the non-Christian world.

"For the last thirty years or so," says Dr. Deissman, "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 to-day 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 unconditional 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 hath He done and shall we not adore Him?
This shall He do and can we still despair?
Come, let us quickly fling ourselves before Him,
Cast at His feet the burden of our care.

Flash from our eyes the glow of our thanksgiving.
Glad and regretful, confident and calm;
Then through all life and what is after living,
Thrill to the tireless music of a psalm.

Yea thro' life, death, thro' sorrow and thro' sinning.
He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed:
CHRIST is the end, for CHRIST was the beginning,
CHRIST the beginning, for the end is CHRIST."

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