

CHAPTER VIII

Jesus and the Resurrection

"The time of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: Because He hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts 17. 30, 31).

THE entire passage beginning with verse 16, and going on to the end of the chapter, is of tremendous interest, but I have no thought of attempting to explain it all, though I hope you will read it carefully at your leisure, if not thoroughly familiar with it, for it is undoubtedly one of the finest examples of preacher's eloquence that we have anywhere in the Bible.

Paul appears here at his best from the human standpoint, but also speaks as a divinely inspired servant of Christ. Of Apollos we read elsewhere that he was an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures, and it is very evident from this sample sermon that Paul was a man of the same stamp, though on the other hand he did not particularly cultivate what was simply rhetorical, lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none effect,

But it was quite in keeping with his principle of being "made all things to all men," that, when he stood on Mars' Hill, the very centre of culture of the Greek world, he should meet those

Proud Attic Philosophers

on their own ground. So far as culture was concerned, he was every whit their equal, combining a thorough acquaintance with their literature, history, and customs, with a deep knowledge of the Word of God to which they were strangers. Thus he gave them that day a new and arresting message such as they had never heard before, and possibly many were destined never to hear again.

Notice some of the circumstances. Paul was waiting in Athens for several of his fellow-servants, who had returned to Thessalonica to find out how the new born Christians there were getting along. As he wandered about the city, his spirit was deeply stirred for he saw everywhere the evidences of idolatry. They worshipped everything in Athens, in fact an ancient philosopher once said, "In Athens it is easier to find a god than a man." There were images on every street corner, over every doorway, in every courtyard, found in every store, and every dwelling-house. Turn where you would, you were confronted by these

Signs of Pagan Darkness,

and Paul, as he walked those streets, knew that the things the Gentiles sacrificed, they

sacrificed to demons, and not to God; he knew that he was probably the only man in that city who had a knowledge of the true and living God, and of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet for the time being he saw no opportunity to give his message.

A Jewish synagogue, however, attracted his attention, and entering it, he claimed his right as a recognised teacher to speak, and there he presented the Gospel, disputing with the adherents of Judaism, and with proselytes, who were doubtless weary of the unsatisfactory character of idolatrous rites and ceremonies, and had sought out this place of instruction in the law of Moses.

In the market-place also he addressed himself to individuals, and sometime little groups would gather about him to whom he proclaimed the wondrous story of God's grace in Christ Jesus to a lost world. Little by little he drew the attention of the people, who were always interested in that which seemed new and strange. So we need not be surprised that at last certain philosophers of the Epicureans and the Stoics became interested in Him and his teaching.

The Epicureans

were those who said that man's supreme good is found in trying to please himself, that there is no use denying oneself; make the best of life by getting all the pleasure out of it you can, for you are going to be dead a long time.

We can hear the echo of this in the so-called self-expression philosophy of our day. We are in the hands of a remorseless fate; we had nothing to say about coming into the world, and there is no telling what will happen when we leave it. Just grit your teeth, don't show the white feather, make up your mind that "what cannot be cured must be endured." Stoicism has come down through the ages as the synonym for patient endurance.

Some of these philosophers asked, "What will this babbler say?" To them he seemed to be setting forth new gods. New gods in Athens! They had searched the world to find all of them. They had shrines for the gods of Babylon, Phœnicia, Greece, Egypt, and Rome. They worshipped them all, and yet this man seemed to know something about some new ones, because Paul preached "Jesus and the resurrection." They thought that Anastasis (resurrection) was another God. They had the god of peace, the god of victory, the god of justice, the god of love, all these different deified human attributes, and now they thought, "This man seems to have two new gods, one called Jesus, and the other, resurrection. We would like to hear more about them." And they took him up to Mars' Hill, or the Areopagus. This overlooked Athens, and was where the philosophers met for discussion. So they invited Paul to come up there and expound his new doctrines. Led by them, he wended his way to the meeting-place above, and at

once began to proclaim the message that he had been yearning to give them for so long.

He took his text from an inscription he had seen on one of their altars, and said, as it were, "I see you are a very religious people. You seem to worship every god known to the Greeks, and all other nations, and as I walked about I noticed an altar with the inscription,

"To the Unknown God."

Just such an altar has been unearthed recently. It was evident that these Athenians feared lest they might be neglecting some god whose name had not been communicated to them, and so they set up the altar that had attracted Paul's attention.

What a splendid text it made. They recognised the fact that there might be a god of whom they had never heard. And so Paul said, "Whom, therefore, ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you." I am here, in other words, to tell you who the unknown God is. How can anyone make known the unknown? God has made Himself known in the person of His blessed Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was there, indeed, to present Jesus and the resurrection, and let me say that no man preaches the Gospel unless he does preach Jesus and the resurrection.

There is no Gospel for guilty sinners apart from Christ, for the Gospel is God's message about His blessed Son. The Gospel is not good

advice to be obeyed, it is *good news to be believed*, and that good news concerns the Lord Jesus Christ, who came from the Glory that He had with the Father from all eternity down to the sorrow and anguish of the Cross of Calvary, where He bared His breast, that the sword of divine justice might be sheathed in His heart. He took our place and endured what we deserved. But that alone would not be the Gospel; there is something more needed. Paul preached

Jesus AND—

And what? "*And the resurrection.*" Every sermon that he ever preached was an Easter sermon; every sermon that the early apostles preached was an Easter sermon, for wherever they went they preached that Christ *died* for our sins, that He was *buried*, and *rose again*. The essence of their message was that He "was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4. 25).

So Paul preached Jesus and the resurrection, and we to-day proclaim the same, and we tell you in His Name, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10. 9, 10).

Notice how Paul prepared the ground for his message.

The Creator and the Created

First of all, they were reminded that the Creator must be greater than that which is created, and Paul directed their attention to the visible universe. It was very evident that the God who made it all could not be confined in one of their temples. He says, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of Heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things." He is not the God of one nation, but of all nations, and we are really one people, for He "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation." He has put upon men the responsibility to know Him, for He is not far from any of us.

There is no man anywhere that can say in the Day of Judgment, "I wanted to find God and could not," for "Closer is He than breathing, nearer than hands and feet." He is so close that if men will feel after Him, will stretch up empty hands toward Him, they will find His great strong hands reaching down to lay hold of them. God will never permit it to be said that any man honestly sought the way of life and failed to find it; that any man really wanted to be saved, and cried to God unheard.

This answers a question that troubles a good many people. I am often asked,

"What About the Heathen

that have never heard the Gospel, are they going to be damned because they have never heard?" No matter where a heathen man may be to-day, if he wants to know God, and honestly reaches out after Him, God will make Himself responsible to give that man light enough to be saved, for "He is not far from any one of us." "If haply they might feel after Him, and find Him."

This is the only place in the New Testament where we get the word "feel." I have often urged people to trust the Lord Jesus, and told them how He died for them, bore their sins on the Cross, and that if they will believe on Him, He has given His own Word that, "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." And then they say, "Well, I do *believe*, but I don't *feel* any different." That has nothing to do with it. The word "feel" is not a Christian word at all. The only place it occurs in the New Testament is here where Paul is speaking of the heathen. But you have an open Bible, you do not need to feel after God. What you need to do is to *believe* the testimony that He has given, and then you will be saved. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thine house" (Acts 16. 31) That is the word of the living God given through His servants of old.

“Feel” and “Feeling”

I said the word “feel” is found only once in the New Testament, but the word “feeling” is found twice. Once in Ephesians 4. 19, where it speaks of certain Gentiles and says, “Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness;” and again in Hebrews 4. 15, “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” Apart from these three instances, we do not find the words “feeling” or “feel” used in the New Testament. The moment you believe in Jesus, the moment you trust in Him, you pass out of death into life, out of condemnation into justification before the Throne of God.

In John 5. 24, Jesus says, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.” Notice the

FIVE DIVISIONS OF JOHN 5. 24.

1. “HE THAT HEARETH MY WORD.” Face this; be honest with your own heart. Have you heard the Word of the Son of God? Have you heard Him speaking to you through this blessed Book?

2. “AND BELIEVETH ON HIM THAT SENT ME.” Do you in your heart believe that God sent the Lord Jesus Christ to be the sinner’s Saviour, to die for you on the Cross, to rise from the dead for your justification?

3. “HATH EVERLASTING LIFE.” When do you get it? When you die? No, you get it *now*, from the moment you believe, from the moment you hear the Word of the Son of God, and believe in Him as the One whom the Father sent into the world to be the sinner’s Saviour. The trouble to-day is that people are stumbling over its very simplicity.

I heard of a man who wanted to be saved, and he was told to do penance for sin by putting hard dried peas in his shoes, and walking on them so many hours a day. This poor man did this and limped around the streets trying to make atonement. It would have done him just as much good if he had boiled the peas first.

But people are willing to do all kinds of hard things. They are like Naaman, who, when the prophet commanded “Go wash in the Jordan seven times,” said, “That is too easy a way.” But he had a wise old servant who suggested, “If the prophet had bid thee do some *great* thing, wouldest thou not have done it?” Why, of course he would. “How much rather then, when he saith unto thee, ‘Wash and be clean’?” If you had to give a great deal of money, say a great many prayers, make long pilgrimages, do vast numbers of charitable deeds, in order to get life eternal, how many of you would be willing to do these things? How much more when He saith to thee, “*Believe and live.*”

4. “SHALL NOT COME INTO CONDEMNATION.” Think of it! The Roman Catholic Version

reads, "Amen, amen, I say unto you, whoso hears My word and believes Him that sent Me, has eternal life and comes not into judgment, but is passed out of death into life." Is that not good news? Not a word about purgatory, not a word about confession to a priest, not a word about sacramental observances, not a word about penance; but here and now, the moment you put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, your sins are gone and you will never come into Judgment, but you have everlasting life. It is all for you. That is the Gospel Paul preached. And notice the next point,

5. "IS PASSED FROM DEATH UNTO LIFE." It is a settled complete salvation, giving a new standing before God to the believing sinner.

Observe the **THREEFOLD LINK WITH RESURRECTION**:

I. Resurrection and Repentance

But what if men do not accept it? Then there is the Judgment. He says that God has been very gracious with the heathen, "The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to REPENT." Repent means to change your mind completely, to have a new attitude. You had an idea you could save yourself by your good works, but you change your mind, and now admit that you cannot do a thing to save yourself, but that Christ must do it all. That is repentance, a change of attitude toward God. Instead of trying to do anything to save yourself, let Jesus do it all,

God "commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a Day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness, by that Man whom He hath ordained." God is going to judge the world in righteousness, but your case can be settled out of court, and settled to-day, so that you need never think of coming into judgment. But if you reject Christ, some day you must give account before His Judgment Throne.

II. Resurrection and Assurance

"Whereof He hath given ASSURANCE unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead." The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ is the ground of our assurance, that we shall live again after these bodies die. He says, "Because I live ye shall live also." We are told that, "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." Thus God has given assurance to all men of a *life after death*, "in that He hath raised Him from the dead." In the second place, He has given assurance unto all men that the sin question is settled in the death of Christ by raising His Son from the dead.

One Man in Prison for Another

Here is a man who has gone to prison for somebody else. He knew the other man was guilty, but knew too, that, in order to prove his own innocence he would have to expose his friend, and so he goes into court, and hears

the sentence to go to prison for one year. What must be the feelings of the other man outside? He says, "I have sent that man there; I deserve to go, but he is there in my place." Perhaps he goes to see him and the man says, "I took your place voluntarily, and I am quite content; you let me endure it." The other roams the streets and says, "I wonder how long he will be content; I wonder how long before he tells the whole story." But by and by a year has passed, and walking down the street one day he sees the one who went to prison for him, and he rushes up and says, "What does this mean?" "It means," is the reply, "that you have nothing to fear now. The sentence has all been endured."

So He, our blessed Lord, bore on the Tree the sentence for us, and now we who were once guilty sinners are free—"Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more." The resurrection is the proof that the sin question has been settled, that God is satisfied, "He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead."

III. Resurrection and Reckoning

In the third place, we have assurance in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, that some day all men are going to GIVE ACCOUNT to Him. This will be when He sits upon the Great White Throne. Think of giving account of your sins to Him after all He has done to save you from them.

Notice the THREEFOLD RESPONSE that Paul's

message had that day. "When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. . . . Howbeit, certain men clave unto him, and believed." I wonder if there are not people manifesting these three different attitudes toward the message to-day.

The Mockers

"SOME MOCK," some ridicule, some say, "Oh, we cannot believe this message about Jesus and the resurrection. We cannot accept it. We do not see how He could die for sinners, and rise again, and how men can be saved through believing in Him. God pity you if you are turning this message down. Some day He will turn you down, for He says in His Word, "Because I have called, and ye have refused; I have stretched out My hands and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all My counsel, and would none of My reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh" (Prov. 1. 24-26). God grant that you may not at last be exposed to such a doom. Do not turn it down, do not go away with a cold, careless sneer and say, "It is nothing to me."

The Deferrers

The second class said, "We will HEAR THEE AGAIN of this matter." They are the procrastinators. You may not be mocking, possibly you would not sneer at the Gospel message; you fully intend to be saved some day; you

are saying, "We will hear you again, we are not ready to close with Christ to-day. There is so much to occupy heart and mind these days; some other time. Let us alone for the present. Sometime we will give attention to these things." Remember the old saying: "Procrastination is the thief of time." There is a Spanish proverb which says, "The road of by and by leads to the town of never." How many have taken that road; have said, "By and by—some other day," and have gone on and on, until at last they have reached the other world, hopelessly lost, and that for ever!

The Cleavers

The third class, "Howbeit certain men clave unto Him, and believed." What a blessed testimony. God has recorded the names of two of them, one man and one woman, Dionysius and Damaris, who accepted the message proclaimed that day.

Men have an idea that what sinners need is more culture, more refinement; but if polite culture could have saved the world, Greece would have saved it long ago. But *Greece went all to pieces in spite of its culture*. It was the Gospel of the grace of God that saved the ancient world from ruin. And it is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that saves men to-day. I bring before you these two examples, Dionysius and Damaris, and I beg you to follow them as they followed Christ; believe the message, and go on rejoicing in Him.