

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

Mark 16:1-8

When Christ died on Calvary darkness covered the earth and filled the hearts of His disciples. The light of their lives had gone out. As Christ had foretold, they were as sheep without a shepherd. Probably they remained somewhere in Jerusalem because of fear.

The story is told that, on the day that Wellington of England met Napoleon at Waterloo, arrangements were made to relay the news of the outcome of the battle from one ship to another, by semaphore, across the English Channel. A group of men stood anxiously waiting on the shores of England. Suddenly, the ship closest to the shore began to signal the message. Letter by letter, the anxious men on the mainland read the words: "Wellington defeated..." Then a bank of fog cut off all view of the ship. Was that all? If it was, that could mean the end of England. After some moments, moments that seemed like hours to the waiting Englishmen, the fog cleared away and the signaler began his message over again: "Wellington defeated Napoleon!"

This story is a vivid illustration of the experience of the disciples of Jesus following His death upon the cross. On Calvary, the only message that the hearts of the disciples could read was: "Christ defeated..." But, on the first day of the week, the resurrection morn, the whole glad message came through: "Christ defeated death!"

There had not been time to render the last services to the body of Christ. Because the Sabbath had intervened, the women who wished to anoint His body had not been able to do so. On Saturday evening after six o'clock, when the Sabbath had ended and the first day had begun, three women were seen buying spices for the anointing of the body of Christ, which two of the number had seen laid in the tomb. The three were Mary of Magdala, Mary, the mother of James and Salome. These devoted women had watched the crucifixion from a distance, and had been careful to observe where the body of Christ had been laid. Quite early the next morning they set out on their way to the tomb of Joseph to anoint the body of their Master. Usually the bodies of loved ones were anointed at the time of death, but there had not been any opportunity for these friends of Christ thus to honor Him. Belatedly, therefore, they went forth to perform this traditional ceremony which meant so much to the Jews.

It is to the eternal credit of these women that they loved Christ enough to take risks and to make sacrifices. Their love lasted right through darkness and death to the resurrection morning, and their love was lavish. Nicodemus had already bestowed a hundred pounds of spices on the body and tomb, but that was an expression of his love, not theirs; they must bring their own, the best and the most they can give. As to when and where they would meet, they had arranged the night before, so they did not sleep late the next morning. As they hastened to the tomb through the bracing early morning air, they were worrying about and discussing how they were to get the great stone rolled away from the entrance to the tomb. In front of the opening to the tomb there ran a large groove, and in the groove a circular stone as big as a cart-wheel, and the women knew that it was quite beyond their strength to move a stone like that. Upon their arrival at the tomb, they discovered that their concern had been entirely unnecessary for, looking up, "they saw that the stone was rolled away." That sort of discovery accounts for the motto, "Don't worry; it may never happen." We are so disposed to take for granted difficulties which may not arise. So often dreaded difficulties are never encountered. We worry about how we are going to remove this or that stone, and then, in the morning, we find that the difficulty does not exist.

The attitude of the women was that they had come to pay the last tribute to a dead body. The attitude of the disciples was that everything had ended in tragedy. The errand of the women was one of love but also of unbelief. The Master had promised to arise on the third day, but on that Sunday morning the women were approaching the tomb, expecting to anoint His dead body.

Of course, it never occurred to either of these devout followers of Christ that He had come out of the tomb. When the women entered the open sepulchre to perform their sad ritual, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side of the tomb. They were simply amazed at what they saw. Seeing that they were too frightened for words, the heavenly messenger sought to quiet them by urging them not to be afraid, and telling them that he knew they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth Who had been crucified, and Who was not there because He had risen. The mighty deed was done; the victory was won; death was destroyed, and the grave was conquered.

Those who had come and seen were bidden to go and tell what they had seen. "He is not here. See! There is the place where they laid Him. But go! Tell His disciples and Peter, 'He goes before you into Galilee. There you will see Him as He told you'." The risen Lord wanted His disciples to hear the glad news, especially Peter. The shame of his denial still haunted Peter. He wondered whether his Lord would ever forgive him for his inexcusable cowardice. Peter must have been feeling very badly at the time, and his Master in infinite mercy remembered him, not to censure, but to comfort. There is no friend like Him. He is the great Forgiver and the great Lover.

APPEARANCES OF THE RISEN CHRIST

Mark 16:9-14

Many attempts have been made to discredit the fact of the physical resurrection of Christ, but there are many incontrovertible truths which establish it. Perhaps three kinds of evidence should be introduced as proof of Christ's resurrection.

1. The testimony of four creditable writers.
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John testified to the reality of Christ's resurrection.
2. The circumstantial evidence.
 - (1) The empty tomb.
 - (2) The transformation of the apostles.
Christ's resurrection changed them from despair to a courage which could not be shaken.
 - (3) Christ's resurrection was not challenged in the first century.
 - (4) Christ's resurrection brought about a change in the day of rest.
"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7).
"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come" (I Corinthians 16:2).
3. Christ was seen by many after He arose.
"And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: 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. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time" (I Corinthians 15:5-8).

Dr. A. T. Robertson listed eleven appearances of Christ after His resurrection in the following order:

- (1) To Mary Magdalene, at the tomb. Mark 16:9-11.
Various attempts have been made to smear her character. Some have portrayed her as a sinful woman of the streets. All that we know about her is that she had been possessed of demons, but after Christ cast out seven demons she was ever after devoted to Him in service.
- (2) To other women, in Jerusalem.
"And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (Matthew 28:9-10).
- (3) To the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Mark 16:12-13.
- (4) To Simon Peter, in Jerusalem.
"And they rose up the same 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 told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread" (Luke 24:33-35).
- (5) To the disciples in Jerusalem, with Thomas being absent. John 20:19-25.
- (6) To the eleven, in Jerusalem, on the following night. John 20:26-31.
- (7) To the seven disciples by the Sea of Galilee. John 21.
- (8) To more than 500 on a mountain in Galilee. Matthew 28:16-20.
- (9) To James the brother of Jesus.
"After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles" (I Corinthians 15:7).
- (10) Again to the disciples. Luke 24:44-49.
- (11) To an unknown number on Mount Olivet just prior to His ascension.

Christ's resurrection assures us of a living Intercessor, guarantees us sufficient faith for service and guarantees our own resurrection and immortality.