

THE TRIUMPH OF GOD

"Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:3-4).

This text sets forth the truth of the complete Christ--the truth of the humanity of Jesus and the deity of Christ--inseparable parts of a glorious picture. It declares the Jesus of earth: "Jesus Christ our Lord which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh." Here is testimony of His physical birth, of His becoming man, of His historical birth at Bethlehem. The Jesus of earth begins with His incarnation--a supernatural event in the realm of nature that makes Him both God and Man--the God-Man.

John Masefield, the British poet laureate, wrote a work called "The Trial Of Jesus." It is semi-historical and semi-imaginative, but withal a reverent treatment of the theme. At one point in the story Masefield related a conversation between Pilate's wife and the centurion who had charge of the crucifixion. Procula says to Longinus: "Do you think he is dead?" To which Longinus replies, "No, lady, I don't." "Then where is he?" asked Pilate's wife. "Where is he?" exclaims the centurion, "Let loose in the world, lady, let loose in the world where neither Roman nor Jew can stop his truth."

Such is the victory of God that we witness in the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Jesus Christ the Saviour let loose in the world where none can stop Him! They crucified Him to silence Him, to get rid of Him, to stop Him cold; but God raised Him from the dead that nothing might silence or stop Him world without end.

What is the nature of this triumph of God that we witness in the resurrection of our Lord?

I. The Triumph Of Truth Over Error.

By His resurrection, says our text, Jesus was "declared to be the Son of God with power." The resurrection is God's voice; it is God at the microphone, making a declaration to men. Mark what is declared: "Jesus Christ" is "the Son of God." But that is the very thing that was denied by those who put Him to death. They said, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I come down from heaven?" (John 6:42). When, on one occasion, they were on the point of stoning Him, He asked them, "Many good works have I shown you from My Father; for which of these works do you stone Me?" They answered, "For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makes thyself God" (John 10:32-33).

And when He was on trial, "the high priest asked him . . . Art Thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am." Whereupon the high priest said in a rage, "Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned Him to be worthy of death." (Mark 14:61-62, 64).

Here then was an intolerable contradiction: Jesus Christ insisted that He was the Son of God; they denied it. Who was right? Where did the truth lie--with them or with Him? If He was not the Son of God, they were right both in the denial of His claim and in the charge of

blasphemy. Let us not blur the issue: Jesus of Nazareth was either the blessed Son of God or He was the blaspheming son of Joseph. Which was he?

If you want the answer, look at the resurrection. Gaze into the empty tomb. Study that band of disciples, themselves completely changed from doubt to assurance, going forth in His name to see the lives of men everywhere transformed by His power. What does it mean, if it does not signify that truth is vindicated over falsehood?

Alexander Maclaren does not overstate the case when he says, "Either Christ rose again from the dead, or His claims are a series of blasphemous arrogances and His character irremediably stained." But He did rise, and His resurrection clears the decks! It gives the lie to the charge that He was only a man like ourselves. Manly though He was and is, He was somehow more: He was "the Son of God with power."

Through the centuries billions of people have died. Out of all these deaths there is one, and just one, that has somehow driven its way so powerfully into the consciences of men that millions of them hang their eternal hopes upon it. Add to this the historically attested and spiritually dynamic fact that He arose from the grave to live through the centuries, not as a fading memory or a romantic ideal, but as a living, companioning presence, and you have evidence enough that He was in very truth "the Son of God with power."

Yes, the resurrection proclaims the victory of truth over error. The falsehood that Jesus Christ was a pretender and a blasphemer is hurled back, while the validity of His claims and the reality of His deity are flung out like some color-fast banner for all the world to behold and to confess.

II. The Triumph Of Love Over Hate.

Imagine yourself listening one day to the Lord Jesus Christ as, near the beginning of His ministry, He spoke the Beatitudes. "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake" (Matthew 5:3-11). How lovely that blessedness of the godly life all sounds! Then imagine that you saw no more of Him until, some three years later, you came suddenly within sight of Mount Calvary, where He was being crucified. Suppose you had tried to reconcile the sweet and charming things you had heard Him say in the Beatitudes with these grim happenings going on before your eyes. It can't be, you would have said to yourself. These things are in hopeless clash: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" "Jesus bearing His cross went forth"; "Blessed are the merciful" "They came to a place called Golgotha"; "Blessed are the peacemakers" "There they crucified Him."

Let us frankly admit that on the hard surface of things it would have appeared to you that all of these beautiful sayings of our Lord were just so much talking. Love, justice and mercy? They never get you anywhere in this jungle of a world, except to a cross. So it seemed then, and so it seems now, unless you are keen enough to look beneath the surface of things.

To be sure, the man who sits in the seat of the scornful can see much that adds fuel to the fire of his scorn. Here is a clipping from a newspaper: "A Good Samaritan motorist took pity Wednesday afternoon on a hitch-hiker with a sore foot; and as a result the Good Samaritan lost his car, \$120 in cash, and his faith in thumb-wagging travelers." The language is saved from bitterness by its touch of humor, but the cynicism, however, is there: it doesn't pay to be kind."

Admittedly, we live in a world where often, without any relief of humor, love goes unrequited, kindness goes unrewarded, bravery goes unnoticed and decency goes undefended. Looking at it from one angle, one might say that the perfect illustration of this reversal of values was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. His enemies left Him on a cross, white and silent in death.

Is that all? No, thank God, it isn't. They left Him in death, but God didn't. God raised Him up. They raised Him up on a cross in hate; God raised Him up from a tomb in love. Look at what has been happening ever since. Their hate brought their ruin; His love has brought Him to even higher eminence in the affection and worship of discerning men and women.

The resurrection of Christ is God's warning to all of us that we should not be too quick to decide when the real victories of life are being won. Bitterness and pride and sheer force may win a battle, but they always lose the war. Hatred throws its weight around and looks momentarily like a winner. In the end, however, love will be found singing its deathless music when hatred and greed are flat upon the floor.

A navy chaplain brought back this story from the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific. In a village there he had a thrilling meeting with a native Christian minister. The brother in Christ there pointed to an old man a few paces away, lying on a grass mat. "That is our chief," he explained. "He is about one hundred years old. He was a head-hunter." The chaplain said he felt like shuddering as he looked at the tattoos and other disfigurements on the old warrior's body. Today, old and stricken, he is the head of a Christian tribe. How did it happen?

Well, of course, it didn't just happen. Things like that never do. Fifty years ago a white missionary landed on the island. The difficulties he faced and the threats upon his life were almost unbelievable. He took it all, courageously, and, what was more impressive, graciously. For every rebuff he returned a kindness. For every threat he gave back a promise. For every display of hostility and hatred he gave back a manifestation of good will. Finally his devotion to them and to Christ captured their hearts. And now the missionary has been gone for more than ten years. When he left the life of the village was entirely transformed and a native church was firmly established under the leadership of this fine pastor who told the story to the chaplain.

What is the triumph of God? What is the victory? There you have it enacted once more, as it has been thousands of times since Calvary. It is the victory of love over hate.

III. The Triumph Of Grace Over Sin.

Where do we get this message of the triumph of grace over sin? You don't get it in the heathen cults, with their rituals of fear and their horror of death. You don't get it in nature. Where then do we get it? The Christian answer is: at Calvary and the empty tomb! As Paul expressed it, Christ "died for our sins and rose again for our justification." Here in fact is more than forgiveness; here is a new life. Here is something greater than a new start; here is a new man. Only Jesus Christ Who is "declared to be the Son of God with power" can produce that.

Paul assures us that it was by "the Spirit of Holiness" that Christ was raised from the dead and declared to be the Son of God. When we, as Christians, are fully given over and given up to Christ, we too may live and witness and serve and suffer and triumph in the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what we may call the risen life with Christ here on earth. It is the way of renunciation, dedication and faith. What a triumph--the victory of grace over sin!

IV. The Triumph Of Life Over Death.

It was by the "resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," says our text, that our Lord was declared to be the Son of God with power. Because death is the final and deepest sign of man's finiteness and sin, Jesus Christ chose to pitch the final battle right there. He pitched it, and He won it. Because He won we have a Christianity with a resurrection in it.

As for Jesus Christ our Lord, He does not so much argue for the survival of the soul. His wisdom takes it for granted; His whole teaching is built upon it; the prayer with which He died rose from His lips in the confidence of it; and, to climax it all, His resurrection followed as the open and unanswerable witness to it.

On a June evening in 1910, O'Henry, the famous short-story writer, lay dying. As the shades of death gathered about him, he motioned for his nurse. "Nurse," said he, "bring me a candle." "A candle," she asked, "why do you want a candle?" "Because," he answered grimly, "I'm afraid to go home in the dark." He need not have faced death as darkly as that. Had he known the Lord Jesus Christ, there would have been trust instead of dread in that lonely heart of his.

Thank God for the power and the peace of "The Triumph of God."