

VITAL VERITIES

"And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:32.

This simple text contains three mighty thoughts, namely, knowledge, truth, and freedom. Very few things are as important to man as "truth" and "freedom." Many have died for both. Others have used both to color a policy of baseness and selfishness. Some, who wanted license against law and morality, have shouted for liberty. Others who could not tolerate any contradiction of their own opinions, have shouted for truth. Yet many heroes have died for truth and freedom. This verse teaches a threefold lesson -- truth is, man may know the truth, and the knowledge of the truth brings freedom.

What is truth? Christ would answer, "I am the way, the truth and the life." So the way, the truth and the life cannot be separated. Early Christianity was referred to as "the way". Early Christians were those who were acquainted with the way, and Christ was that way. What is freedom? It is a deliverance from sin, from the bondage of the law, and from the tyranny of self. Freedom is an absence of desire to do wrong and a willingness to do right. Freedom is the perfect harmony of our desires and actions with the law of God. It is an opportunity to make the most and the best of all our capacities. Freedom is simply the prerogative we have with which to choose that to which we shall give our allegiance.

Truth does not help us to free ourselves, but it makes us free. During a plague in Malta some prisoners were offered their freedom on condition that they leave their isolated cells and nurse the afflicted. They accepted the condition, and thus won their liberty. Christ does better than that for us. He not only shows us how we may be free, but He makes us free. He breaks the shackles, issues the emancipation proclamation, and stands ready with the arm of His omnipotence to enforce the decree that everyone who believes in Him shall be free. Jesus Christ frees us from the guilt and penalty of sin and we shall never be brought into condemnation.

Sin makes prisoners; truth sets men free. Sin kills; Christ gives life. Falsehood brings death; truth means resurrection. This verse is a basis for three great Christian verities, fundamental in doctrine and indispensable in truth. Without these -- revelation, salvation and resurrection -- we have no basis on which to stand, no ground for salvation, no power to uphold us, and no hope to sustain us. We stand on these immutable truths of God as the mighty building rests on the impregnable granite. On these pillars stands Christianity's palatial home with its towering spires, golden domes and flashing radiance. On its summit God is enthroned with His Son, and from it flows the river of the water of life bursting from a thousand liquid springs sparkling like diamonds.

I. Revelation -- God's Plan.

"And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Matthew 16:17. In many ways God has revealed Himself to men.

1. He has revealed Himself through nature.

Let a man stand in the amphitheatre of wondrous nature! Let him behold the towering mountains with their sun-painted cliffs piling their huge heights heavenward. Let him view the ascending hills, floral cascades and enrapturing landscapes bathed in their beauty and vocal with anthems of music. Let him face the sunrise as it splendors nature everywhere with its golden rays and causes laughter in the heart of humanity. Let him see the rainbow painted by the fingers of God. On the sands of time everywhere are the footprints of God.

2. He reveals Himself through His Word.

As one opens and reads the Bible, one not only sees God's majesty and hears God's voice, but one feels God's power and is moved by His love. In God's Word creation takes on meaning, man takes on significance, and eternity takes on imperious moments. Here God's earnest desire to make Himself known to man becomes irrefutable. He spoke through prophets, led in definite ways as He spoke to Moses through the burning bush, sent the ten plagues upon Egypt, opened the Red Sea, rained manna from heaven, divided Jordan's waters and made Himself known in a thousand ways.

God seeks more earnestly to reveal Himself to man than Helen Keller's mother ever sought to reveal herself to Helen. The mother would stand over the daughter, take her into her arms and say, "Oh, Helen, mother loves you. Oh, if I could only get you to understand." At the same time Helen, imprisoned in darkness, was wondering, "Why do you not speak to me?" That is a faint picture of God seeking to make Himself known to man.

3. He revealed Himself through His own beloved Son.

"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." "In due season He sent His own Son." What a day when God sent Jesus, the Christ! He was the Son of God who kindled fires of deathless flame on Rome's icy dumbness and deathly sickness. Her art, her poetry, her philosophy were but making Rome a giant corpse for a grave marked by folly. This imperial power had defiled the sanctuary of God and stained its hands with the blood of the Redeemer. It was drunk with power, and enfeebled by pleasure, and paralyzed by sin. Christ made Rome over. He can make a saint out of the worst sinner.

II. Salvation -- God's Purpose.

God's one mighty motivating purpose is the salvation of the lost. This is an eternal verity. Jesus said, "The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." How could God be so good, so merciful, so condescending? The truth that "God helps those who help themselves" is a great one. I know a greater truth than that, God helps those who cannot help themselves. Into the life of such helpless ones Jesus will come, reveal His rays of love and pencil the heart with glorious salvation. He can change the sinner's dark night into golden fringed day.

God's purpose is salvation because men are helpless without a Saviour. They are lost without God, without Christ, and without hope. Pardon, salvation is the apex of God's interest in men. They do not merit salvation, God bestows it. He removes the guilt of sin, comforts sad hearts, gives treasures for tears, strength for weakness and freedom for slavery.

Villainous infamy withers life into death. It sends its malaria of poison to make stagnant every fountain and to make humid every flowing stream. Man's sins become pyramided until they stand like mountains. God, through Jesus, melts those mountains with the gilded flashes of fire from His compassionate heart. The glow of God's living light illumines man's pathway. Every heartthrob, every pulse beat of the Trinity is in behalf of the salvation of men. Christ's blood was poured out for the world's salvation.

"What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus!"

Christ willingly died on Calvary in order to give victory over sin's confederated forces. This story has come to us out of Russia. An American was talking to a Russian lieutenant in Moscow as he was leaving to help defend Stalingrad. "You are going to help defend Stalingrad," said the American. "I am" replied the lieutenant. "I am

going to do my best. I would give my right arm, I would give both my arms, I would give every drop of blood in my veins before I would see Stalingrad fall into the hands of the enemy!" Christ gave every drop of His blood in order to save the lost.

III. Resurrection -- God's Proof.

Had Christ not risen from Joseph's tomb, Christianity would have been rendered impotent. Christ's failure to rise from the dead would have been the most colossal disappointment the world could have experienced. Had He not risen from Joseph's tomb, the dark shadow would have deepened into midnight darkness. Perilous panic would have paralyzed man's faith and would have thrown the blackest pall of doom across all the earth. All ages from then on would have been "Dark Ages."

The resurrection of Christ is a proof of God's power. Had He not risen from the grave, His life and works would have become stumblingblocks instead of a highway to God. Had He remained in the grave, the spirit of despair rather than the spirit of deliverance would have been regnant. Christ's resurrection is a distinguishing characteristic between Christianity and other religions. Other religions have marks in common with Christianity, such as ethical rightness, teachings concerning man's relationships to men. But, without a resurrected, living leader, any religion is a dead religion. Yet there are those who claim that one religion is as good as another. The resurrection of Christ is the hallmark of Christianity. No other religion has a living leader. Therefore, they worship at the shrine of dead leaders. They glory in the tombs in which the dust of their leaders smoulder. Our glory is in the open tomb. "He is not here: for He has risen." Historic evidences, irrefutable arguments, and undying illustrations of His resurrection abound. Dismal wails characterize other religions. Christianity furnishes the world with burst of triumph.

When thrones crumble, dynasties pass away, and nature grows palsied, the certainty of immortality as proved by the resurrection becomes the anchor, the strength, and stay of Christians. The most desolate cry this world has ever heard, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" was changed into the most gladsome shout of triumph the world has ever heard, namely, "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore!" Christ's resurrection changed gloom into glory; defeat into victory; the curse of death into the course of destiny. He burst death's vaulted chambers, caused inquisitions to rock, foundations to crumble, and heaven to sing.

The resurrection as God's proof becomes the heart throb of our preaching. "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain." Preaching a living Christ, a powerful Christ, a saving Christ is not a gloomy but a glorious mission! We are to preach not as defeatists, but as conquerors. We are to preach to please God, not man.

With resurrection story we can tell the Christian mother that she will see again the darling babe she has laid to rest. We were able to tell mothers who were awake at the midnight hour, thinking of their Christian sons on the far-flung battle fields that should they fall, they will see them again.

"Somewhere on some bright tomorrow,
Down the thorny path of pain,
When we've trod the vale of sorrow,
We shall find our own again."

God's proof, the resurrection, becomes the ground of our hope. If Christ be not risen, then is your hope also vain. The disciples, made disconsolate and dejected by the death of Christ, became the heralds of a burning, compassionate, winning message after the resurrection of Christ. New hope filled their hearts. A new anchor held them. A new compassion burned in their souls.

You may recall the fact of the sinking of the submarine S-4 after it had been rammed by another ship. It carried the whole crew down into a prison of death. Ships sought to aid. Deep-sea divers, in desperate efforts, sought to rescue them. The oxygen in their tanks was fast running out. One diver, touching the side of the submarine, heard a tapping noise on the inside. He caught the code and understood the message given in dots and dashes. The dying men on the inside of that vault of death were asking, "I-s t-h-e-r-e a-n-y h-o-p-e?" That was their last message. For their physical rescue there was no hope. Christianity has a message of hope for trapped, sunken, doomed souls. Christ is risen! There is hope.

Ah, we can face life, its duties, its opportunities, its troubles, its sorrows with the assurance that comes from the fact, the certainty of the resurrection!

The attitude of the mother whose story went the rounds of the press should be our attitude. She had three sons in service. One night she did not close her eyes in sleep. Anxiously she thought about them all the long night through. The next day, word came that all three had been killed. Immediately she became calm, serene, composed. That night she slept sweetly. The next day a friend asked about the vast change in her attitude. "Before the message came," she replied, "I did not know where my boys were. Now I do know where they are; they are safe with the Lord!" What eternal, vital verities these are!