

The Lord Jesus' Forty Days

Luke 24: 44-53; Acts 1: 9-11.

The "Forty Days" of Scripture.

Sixteen Addresses.

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CHAPTER 16 — THE LORD JESUS' FORTY DAYS.

RESURRECTION SCENES: GALILEE AND BETHANY,

You will remember that on a previous occasion I stated that when He rose from the dead the Lord was interviewed on eleven occasions. Seven of these we have already considered — the five times He was seen on the first day, by Mary, the women of Galilee, Peter, those who went to Emmaus, and by the company in the upper room without Thomas. Then a week later He appeared to them when gathered together, Thomas being present, and afterwards to seven of the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias.

But there were more than these — for in 1 Corinthians 15 the Holy Ghost records some occasions which you do not get in the Gospels. Among these we read, "After that He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once" (1 Cor. 15: 5). The question arises whether this apparition coincides with that recorded in Matthew 28: 16. The Lord had said to the women, "Go tell my brethren, that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me" (Matt. 28: 10). The message was not to "the apostles" but to "my brethren," and it suggests itself to my mind that this invitation gathered a good many together. It was not merely that the *apostles* were to go and see Him there, but the *brethren*. Affection for Christ will always carry the true heart to the spot where He is, and He cares for nothing else. We set much store by intelligence, because it makes something of us. We are told not to be "unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is:" but depend upon it that it is affection He values.

Concerning the apostles we read, "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where *Jesus had appointed them*" (Matt. 28: 16). The eleven evidently obeyed His word, but the five hundred, if they saw Him at this moment, reaped the reward of affection. "And when they saw him, they worshipped him, but some doubted" (Matt. 28: 17). The doubt mentioned here may be the reason for this appearing being omitted in 1 Corinthians 15, as are all other occasions concerning which any unbelief as to the truth of the apparition was evidenced at the moment of its narration. On the other hand, the fact just stated as to the studied elimination

by Paul of *all* occasions where doubt was flung on the truth of the Lord having been seen, lends weight to the thought that we must not identify the appearing to the "eleven" and the "five hundred," since the latter are cited as irrefragable testimonies, while the former was not mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15. The fact that some then doubted might invalidate their witness. Anyway they are not cited. I should therefore incline to think that the appearing to the five hundred was on a separate occasion, and possibly the ninth.

"After that he was seen of James" (1 Cor. 15: 7), is the brief and only account we have of this appearing. It would seem to be the tenth. Over what took place on these two appearances God has flung a veil. The five hundred saw the Lord, and so many witnesses could not be mistaken; their testimony was thus invaluable from Paul's point of view. The position which James held afterwards in the Church has led to the thought that he may have at this moment received instructions from the Lord which, later, were of value to His saints.

What the Lord said to the eleven is of great interest, and full of comfort to us. While addressed to them, His words are of immense value to us, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28: 18). If we got hold of this immense truth, we should not be so poverty-stricken spiritually as we often are. This sad condition obtains oftentimes just because we have not realised that He has all power, and it is at the disposal of faith and affection. The commission to teach and baptize all nations doubtless had special reference to the apostles, but His closing words here, "And lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28: 20), have carried with them deepest comfort and support to all His own from that day to this. Well indeed may we rest upon them in simple faith. The hope of our hearts is to be *with Him*. Meantime what sustains these hearts? He says, "I am *with you*." The Lord is coming back to take us to be where He is, but till then He is with us. Matthew's Gospel closes by showing us the Lord in the midst of His people, saying, "I am with you alway," i.e., He *remains* here.

Now turn to Mark, and see the way in which that Gospel closes. "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark 16: 15). Notice how His heart desired that what His own disciples enjoyed should be enjoyed by others. I know very well that some may say, Was not this apostolic? Yes, primarily, but He was talking to His people, and I believe the spirit of the words is to be abiding. Again, some one may say, This is not the day in which God is working among the heathen. See how Mark opens, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1: 1). Where and when would you expect these glad tidings to be promulgated? Surely everywhere and at all times, and in connection with this look at chapter 13. There is a very striking word there. The Lord is telling His disciples what sorrow is coming to Israel, and then adds, "And the *gospel* must first be published among all nations" (Mark 13: 10). But probably you will say, Does not that mean the gospel of the kingdom? If you will go back to Matthew 24, you will read these words, "And this *gospel of the kingdom* shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (ver. 14). Now Matthew 24 is not Mark 13. While Matthew 24 tells us that the gospel of the kingdom will be preached as a witness to all nations before Messiah again comes, what we have in Mark's Gospel is this, there is never to be a moment during His absence in which His disciples are not to be busy carrying forth the gospel. The thought of the Lord recorded by Mark appears to me to be quite different from that recorded by Matthew. The latter is a widespread testimony, given largely by the Jew, I gather from Scripture, that will go out, by-and-by, to every nation as a

witness that He is just about to return, but, as presented in Mark's Gospel, it is what He desires, and what the Spirit of God has led to in this our day. Devoted men and women have gone and are going out, with their lives in their hands, to carry the glad tidings of His grace to those who have never heard them.

Servants of Christ are today telling needy, weary souls nearly *everywhere* of the Son of God and from my heart I say, "Lord, sustain, cheer, help, and bless them." I am deeply thankful for any who, at great personal risk, and with real devotedness of heart to the Lord, have gone to tell weary souls in heathen darkness of the glory of the Person and the value of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is easy for others less devoted to stay at home and criticise their work. The day of the Lord will show which path He esteems the better. The commission of Mark 16 is very plain: "Go ye into *all the world*, and preach the gospel to *every creature*. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Coupled with believing is the honest confession of His name, and that takes the character of baptism — putting on the name of the Lord in that way. Doubtless this commission was primarily apostolic, but who would dare say it ceased at their death.

The Gospel of Mark closes as you would expect it to. The toil of the true servant is rewarded. "So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God" (Mark 16: 19). Now look at the difference — He is not seen remaining here upon earth, as in Matthew, He is at the right hand of God — all power is in His hands, and He gives us the grace and cheer of His presence as we pass along here. All power is in the hands of the Anointed Man at God's right hand, upon whom our eyes should be fixed steadfastly. "And they went forth and preached *everywhere*, the Lord working with them." Where do you and I preach? There is a great lesson in this, and we may take great encouragement. If the Lord bids you go forth with His Word, and you are simple in following His guidance and leading, you will find the Lord working with you as He did with them then. Christ reigning at the right hand of God and *working* with His own on earth is the close of Mark's Gospel. Matthew's Gospel closes with Christ *remaining* on earth, Mark's with His *reigning* in heaven, Luke's with His *retiring* from earth, and John's with His *returning* to earth.

Now turn to Luke 24. One charm of this chapter is that it gives us the last occasion on which the blessed Lord was with His people here. If we had only this Gospel, as I have before said, we should think the contents of this chapter happened on one day. Morally it is one day; it is the resurrection day, and has one particular character. One point to notice is the place the Scriptures have in it. "Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the scriptures" is recorded that day (Luke 24: 45). He tells the disciples that "all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me" (Luke 24: 44). I should like to press on you the importance of the Scriptures — of the Old Testament Scriptures. You can have no real value for God's things if you do not tenaciously hold all His Word. I have heard this part of God's Word spoken of very lightly. See the way the Lord Jesus speaks of and puts the stamp of His authority upon the whole of the Scriptures. When He walked with the two to Emmaus, we have already seen how "he expounded unto them in *all the scriptures* the things concerning himself" (Luke 24: 27). What a wonderful two hours' walk that must have been. What must it have been to hear Him open up the Scriptures about Himself — what an unfolding of type, figure, and shadow — what a never-to-be-forgotten moment.

Now observe, why, when together with His own, He opens the Scriptures, and also opens their understanding. They had not yet received the Holy Ghost, but we have, so the Lord expects a Christian to have his understanding opened. Why oftentimes do we not understand? There has something come in which hinders our souls being taught of Christ. But they were to be sweetly taught of the Lord, and the whole company, apostles and others, as we have seen, get a cheering commission, as He says to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name *among all nations*, beginning at Jerusalem."

Observe that the commission was to preach to "all nations," as recorded by Matthew and Luke, and to "all the world" as given in Mark. That is wide enough. It is the individual servant who is responsible to carry out the commission. He does not exactly say "Go" to the Church, because the Church does not teach or preach — the Church is taught, and preached to. It is to the individual, because ministry is the exercise of the gift given to the individual by Christ. He communicates that gift, and He alone should direct its use. He holds the stars in His right hand, in Revelation 2: 1, for they belong to Him, and Him only, hence the possessor of any gift is responsible only to the Lord for its exercise.

Further, notice that repentance and remission of sins were to be proclaimed, "beginning at Jerusalem." Jerusalem was the worst spot — the place where He was murdered. Observe also to whom He says, "And ye are witnesses of these things." It was not only the eleven who were there when the Lord came into their midst, hence it was not an apostolic company. It is good to remember this, and Scripture is very clear as to it. "And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and *them that were with them*" (Luke 24: 33). The apostles were there, but the brethren were there, and the sisters also I judge. The two from Emmaus joined them, and then to the assembled company the Lord comes and communicates His mind, saying finally, "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24: 49). They had to wait for the coming of the Holy Ghost. We have not to wait now, for from the Anointed Man in glory the Holy Ghost has come, and with Him has come power for all that we are called upon to be and to do as children of God, and servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without doubt the Holy Ghost is often grieved in us by the allowance of the flesh, and the outflow of the "rivers of living water" of which Christ spoke (John 7: 38), is checked or hindered.

What is the reason of this? I read lately of a town that was supplied with lovely water from a large lake in a mountain, but one day the water stopped. Men went to look if the lake were dry, but found that it was all right, the source was unchanged. Then an anonymous letter was received directing attention to a plug having been put in the supply pipe. That was keeping back the water, and when it was removed the water flowed on as before. Don't you think sometimes a plug gets into our supply pipe? Ask your own heart what is the plug that has got into your soul's history, and is hindering you from being a real living Christian carrying Christ everywhere, and being a source of blessing to everybody. I desire to ask myself a similar question. Let us take out the plug. My hand cannot take your plug out; we have to get before the Lord individually that He might remove whatever is hindering the inflow of the living water. "Rivers of living water" are to flow through us to refresh and bless others. How little conception we have of the way the Lord

would use us, as the channels of communication between Himself and needy souls! It is not a question so much of gift as of spiritual state. Too much is often made of a man with a gift, and saints are putting too much on the shoulders of those possessing gifts. It really is a question of individual devotedness to Christ, and of walking with an ungrieved Spirit. If that be our state, the Lord can use us, for grace is more important than gift.

The disciples were to wait till they were endued with power. We have not now to do so, for the Holy Ghost has come and dwells in every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is all power, hence to speak now of a weak Christian is an anomaly. A powerless saint is a being that is not contemplated in Scripture. If you and I are filled with the power of the Holy Ghost, we shall not speak of weakness, we shall not speak of ourselves at all. We shall be filled with Christ, and out of us will flow the "living water," i.e., Christ will come out in our life and testimony, and others will thereby be affected and blessed.

Having given His disciples their commission and promised them the Spirit, Jesus led them out as far as Bethany. Why Bethany? Apparently that was a spot He loved. It was there that He had been received and cared for (Luke 10: 38). It was there that Mary sat at His feet and heard His word, and there, when He raised Lazarus, it was the place where His glory was demonstrated as Son of God (John 11: 4-40). It was there they made Him a feast, and Mary anointed His feet (John 12: 1-3). It was from thence He went to Jerusalem to receive the kingdom and the crown, if His people would give it Him, but they would not, and He went back to Bethany (Mark 11: 1-11). It was the spot where He was really appreciated, and where there were hearts that truly loved Him, and He cared for their affection.

Do you think He has changed since then? Do you think He is in anywise different? Where He sits at God's right hand, do you think He is indifferent to the beating of your heart and mine? I trow not. In Acts 1 the angel speaks of Him as "this same Jesus." Where was He yesterday? At Bethany. Where is He today? At the Father's right hand. Where will He be tomorrow? Back to Bethany (see Acts 1: 11; Zech. 14: 4). What will He then again find? Hearts that appreciate Him. He came to earth by Bethlehem to fulfil Scripture. He went from it to heaven by Bethany, where He had been prized and loved, and where they had made much of Him.

This is the last time He had His own together round Him upon earth, and then it was that he lifted up his hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." He goes up with His hands uplifted in blessing — in a priestly character. In Mark He goes up as a faithful Servant whom God honours; but in Luke, it seems to me, He goes up in a priestly character, His hands uplifted in blessing. Have they ever been letdown? Surely not. We read that in the battle between Israel and Amalek: "It came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side, and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek" (Ex. 17: 11-13). No Aaron and Hur are needed to hold up the hands of the blessed One of whom I speak. His hands have never got heavy. He has been blessing ever since — carrying on a ministry of love that makes the heart dance with joy.

Our hands hang down sometimes; hence we are told, "Lift up the hands which hang down" (Heb. 12: 12). Why do our hands hang down? Because our eyes are not fixed simply on Him. The source of maintained power is Christ. Well said another, "THE SECRET OF PEACE WITHIN, AND POWER WITHOUT, IS TO BE ALWAYS AND ONLY OCCUPIED WITH CHRIST." These words I would give you as a motto for life.

Luke's Gospel closes with a worship meeting, fit ending to the wondrous "forty days" we have been considering. "They worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God" (vers. 52, 53). This is as it should be. Luke's is emphatically a Gospel of joy; there is a great deal about it all through. It begins, continues, and closes with joy (see Luke 1: 14, 44, Luke 2: 10, Luke 10: 17, Luke 15: 7, 10, 23, Luke 24: 41, 52). You show me a joyless Christian, and I will certainly show you a weak one. Possibly you will say, you do not know my circumstances. True, but the blessed One who has gone on high knows all about your circumstances and mine too, and the Spirit of God has said, "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8: 10). We need to dip our feet in oil, like Asher, we should then be acceptable to our brethren, and should also prove, "And as thy days, so shall thy strength be" (Deut 33: 24, 25). joy and strength go together always. We should cultivate the spirit of the scene before us. The Lord was blessing His own, and they are seen one moment praising Him, and then going back to their homes full of joy. Was not that grateful to the Lord? How it should stir up our souls to seek to be like them in our walk and ways down here.

We hear a little more of this touching incident in the Acts of the Apostles. There we read: "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1: 9-11). Notice here that they *looked* STEDFASTLY; in Acts 2: 42 they *continued* STEDFASTLY; and in Acts 7: 55 Stephen *looked up* STEDFASTLY into heaven. It is a great thing to be stedfast; we are often vacillating, and hence there is no power. But they hear blessed news as they stedfastly look up. This same Jesus was to come back in power in the clouds of heaven. The angels say, You have seen Him go up, but you will see Him come back here. He is going to establish all the thoughts and purposes of God in relation to earth.

But before that takes place there is something for you and me, dear fellow-believer. He is coming to take us to the spot where He is Himself. I do not think that we should view the hope of the Church, i.e., the coming of the Lord for us, as given in 1 Thessalonians 4: 15-17, as that which will merely take us out of the scene of difficulty. We should desire to live here for the Lord. It is a blessed thing to go on, and it is a serious thing to be cut off in the midst of your days.

Dear friends, are you weary of the road? You want and you may get the power and grace of heaven to uphold and strengthen you in the spot where you are. Paul could say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4: 13). Christ was his competency in every trial. He had a desire to depart and be with Christ, but knew that it was better for them that he should remain, and help others, and so remained (Phil. 1: 23, 24).

But the blessed Lord is coming for us, and in the meantime He wants our hearts to be kept in the enjoyment of His love, and, in true affection for Himself, waiting for His coming back into the world, out of which He has been cast, but where yet He will get His rights, and His name be honoured from pole to pole, and His name be the theme of every tongue. But, before that day, He is coming to take His Church to be with Himself in the spot where love reigns. It will be a very blessed moment when that occurs.

Thus we terminate our review of these striking periods of time. The last two "forty days" of Scripture exceed all the others in their varied lessons for our souls. How could it be otherwise, since they unfold His ways, who is the "Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending"?

If the earlier of the series show the necessary judgment of God on the sin of the first man, who lost all by doing his own will, how do the later describe the victory, and show the well-earned glories of the last Adam, who retrieved all by His obedience in carrying out God's will. All God's counsels and purposes from eternity centre in Him, who was the Man of His reserve. What we have been considering in His life, death, and resurrection, reveals the moral glory and personal worth of Jesus in a way that might well capture our hearts, bind them to Him, and make Him the object of our deepest devotion.

Let us not then, for one single moment, forget that now is the only opportunity we shall have of, showing our affection for Him. Life will soon be over for each of us. We have but one life, let us live it for Jesus. Well said the apostle Paul, "The love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5: 14, 15). That is a sound, just judgment, and the one who has really tasted the Lord's grace will seek to let it be the ruling maxim of life. We live in a day when deep-toned devotedness to Christ is urgently called for.

May it be yours and mine to heed His call, "Follow thou me," and surrender all that we have and are to Him and His service. Soon we shall hear His blessed voice calling us on high, to see and ever be with Himself.

How blessed will it then be if we should hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25: 23).