

The Development of the Testimony

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(Extracted from Scripture Truth Vol. 36, 1948-50, page 261.)

In considering the resurrection of Christ it cannot be too clearly seen that the whole sin question was met at the Cross: every claim of the Name, throne and majesty of God was settled there, and resurrection became a new beginning. Observe that God's beginning works out in a threefold way. First, in the birth of Christ, leading to the beginning of the ministry of reconciliation in His service. Secondly, in His resurrection, when further developments took place. Lastly, in His ascension, which introduced the Spirit's day, and the saints became the dwelling-place of God by the Spirit. Resurrection is a key truth of the Bible. It becomes for us the door out of our ruined condition into that which is for us a new order, though the oldest of all, being eternal.

"Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15: 20).

Thus the Lord entered into the place marked out for Him in the purpose of God. It was needful for Him "to enter into His glory" (Luke 24: 26). Being a key truth, resurrection runs right through the Scriptures. We have it **literally**, as in our Lord, and presently in His people. But in the Old Testament it is found **typically**, as in the case of Aaron's rod that budded, or at the deliverance of the Red Sea. We have it in a dispensational and **prophetic** way in the vision of Ezekiel 37; the dry bones brought to life. In a moral and **spiritual** way we have it in saints today by the operation of the Spirit — see, Ephesians 2: 5, 6; Colossians 2: 12. It provides a new platform for the working out of God's purpose as in a new world. Thus new creation is entered today in faith; a stainless, sinless order, where Christ is everything and all things are of God.

During the forty days that elapsed between the resurrection and the ascension there were many important transactions, all linked up with the Gospels, but looking forward to the Spirit's day. Yet finality in the ways of God, as combined with His purpose, could only be reached by the risen Man taking His place at the right hand of God. During this interval He brought His own into the same relationship as Himself before the Father, and, by breathing on them, linked them up with Himself in risen life. He opened their eyes and their understandings and then opened up for them the Scriptures. But for them to be united to the Man in the glory the Holy Spirit must come down, for only thus could this mighty transaction be brought about.

It is important that we should apprehend this beginning, which starts from the combination of the **revelation** of God and **approach** to God in one and the same blessed Person, who is now at His right hand. Surely this gives completeness to the whole divine scheme of blessing. Although there was much to be done, much that has been going on in the power of the Spirit ever since, still the two grand thoughts, that link together the ways of God in time and His purpose in eternity are seen in the Son of His love, the Man Christ Jesus. The One who went to the lowest depth of darkness and sorrow is now in the place of nearness and deepest joy, and from that point, God begins to work out all to eternal fruition, for His own glory and the good and blessing of man.

How remarkable it is that the Spirit in His coming passed by the Temple and its ritual, and took up His abode in the little company gathered in one place. There and then were formed the Kingdom, the House of God and the Body of Christ. These things were not known by the disciples at the moment

but were opened up to them and apprehended as they became conscious of the transition then going on from Judaism to Christianity. This new heavenly order had been planted and was gradually developing, while Judaism, in the forbearance of God, was gradually fading out. Gradual transition from one order of things to another marks God's dealings and, as the immediate coming of the Lord is sensed by believers today, who knows but we may have reached the beginning of transition from Gentile Christianity to the resumption of dealings with the ancient people of God?

The overlapping of the dispensations covered forty years; that is, the time between the Cross and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. All that time God was bearing with the apostate nation and graciously leading the converted remnant into the greatness of the heavenly and eternal system, proper to the Spirit's day. God was now dwelling here, and His voice would now go out from His house to the ends of the earth. A new fellowship was formed, a new community, which had become the vessel of the Spirit of God, and although small and insignificant to man and the world, it sprang from the eternal purpose of God, and would prove to be His masterpiece. Even in its early stages its enemies had to admit that its messengers had turned the world upside down.

Let us follow for a moment the advance of the testimony in these early years. The book of Acts traces its progress from Jerusalem to Rome. Two other important cities come in as landmarks in the journey, Antioch and Ephesus. The former at the close of the ministry of the Twelve as voiced by the Apostle Peter, and the latter when the public ministry of Paul drew to a close. Acts 1-12, give us the progress of the testimony from Jerusalem to Antioch. In this period two gifted men outside the apostolic band become prominent, Stephen and Philip. The advance from Antioch to Ephesus, which has especial interest for us as being Gentiles, is given in Acts 13-20, and shows the labours of Paul among the Gentiles.

In the earlier section, the remnant of the Jews, with which the church began, links it with the Gospels of Matthew and Mark: in the later section, the Gentile converts, fruit of the ministry of Paul, link up with the Gospel of Luke. All this is morally fitting, since the first two Gospels set our Lord before us in Messianic position, while to Luke it was given to set Him before us as the Son of Man. It is confirmed too by the way that Luke accompanied Paul in many of his labours.

To refer again to "the ends [revenues] of the world [ages]" (1 Cor. 10: 11); it will be recalled that the Laver, called "the great sea," which Solomon made for the temple, sat upon twelve oxen with their hinder parts inward and their faces outward; three to the north, three to the west, and the others looking to the south and to the east. It is remarkable that the march of the testimony under the control of the Spirit, as recorded in the Acts, agrees with this. The city of Antioch was the capital of Syria to the north, and there an assembly was formed by the labours of simple Christians. From thence Barnabas and Saul were called by the Spirit to carry the Gospel to the west. The water of the great laver ran through the body of the oxen and came out, it is said, through their mouths. If so, how it fits in with the words of our Lord, "He that believeth on Me . . . out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7: 38).

Paul's arrest brought to an end his public ministry as an apostle. The closing section of the Acts gives his two years' imprisonment at Caesarea, then the voyage to Rome, and another two years' confinement there. Meantime the wave of power seen in the early part of the book had begun to wane. It broke on the shore of man's inordinate degeneracy and the backwash was seen in the rise of the Gnostics. This was a system composed, it is said, of a mixture of effete Judaism, Grecian philosophy, Roman imperialism and superstitions from the east. It spread over the whole profession, and threatened to strangle the infant church. This may be looked upon as the time when men slept and the enemy

sowed tares.

The book of Acts covers a period of over thirty years, and carries us nearly to the time when both Paul and Peter were martyred, and Jerusalem destroyed in A.D. 70. Later came the time when the Apostle John became the vessel of the Spirit to write that which would meet the developing evil, while linking up with what had gone before. Here we get that which abides; the glory, power and majesty of God from eternity to eternity, against which the forces of evil will be for ever broken to pieces, as shown in the book of Revelation.

This book John wrote in the Isle of Patmos as a prisoner for the truth, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ. It has a peculiar connection with the book that has been before us, for the Acts is the link with the Gospels and all that has gone before, whilst the Revelation links the present dispensation with the future right through the millennium and into eternity.

John thus connects with Paul's finish at Ephesus in a double way. First historically, as bridging the gap between the time when the ministry of Paul had reached its highest point and the beginning of the descent which began at Ephesus in the departure from first love. Its awful depth was reached at Thyatira, when "that woman Jezebel" dominated the professing body, and right down to the God-defiant condition of Laodicea. Secondly, while the Divinely-given unfoldings of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians stand out in the height of their grandeur as characterizing the whole Christian age, the Apostle John is brought in to link with it what is, if possible, even richer and deeper — the very heart of God Himself.

But we must not put one against another where all is so infinitely blessed. It must suffice us to say that the Spirit gave through John something of supreme moral excellence — that display of God Himself, as He is revealed in Christ — which met the necessity of the moment. What He thus gave stands out in its rich and heavenly grandeur for all time.