

## Thoughts from John 20

Notes of an address by N Anderson.

As I consider this wonderful chapter I am impressed with some of the features of the first day of the week.

Christianity is a matter of the first day of the week; Judaism is a matter of the seventh day. While we think in terms of time when we talk of days, let us reflect that Scripture uses time terms in regard even to eternity. 2 Peter 3: 12 and 18 — "The day of God" — which goes beyond the kingdom day of 1,000 years rule, and (J.N.D.) — "the day of eternity." Hence we connect the first day of the week with the new creation order of things. The seventh day belongs to that earthly religious system of things which crucified Christ; the first day belongs to the blessed sphere of heavenly blessing which finds its acknowledged centre in the glorified Christ. That day is with us now.

Here, in John 20, this first day of the week is a matter of the empty tomb! This speaks to our hearts of the triumph of God, the victory of Christ, and the vanquishing of all that is opposed to God. The empty tomb tells us that it was not possible for our Lord to be holden of the pains of death. Those heavenly things which fill the pages of John's gospel, as also the whole range of earthly things of which the Old Testament prophets so glowingly wrote — all rest securely upon the finished work of Christ and shall be displayed in the light of the empty tomb. Thank God, the tomb *is* empty, otherwise we would not be here as we are today. Does the sense of wonder, triumph, grace and glory, of the empty tomb, grip our souls? As it does so, form and depth are given to heart-desires after Christ.

Matthew 28: 6 — "He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Note the angelic language; not "where the Lord *lies*." Are we appreciative of the fact that He is not here? Then we shall desire to know Him where He is. How blessed to company, in a sense, with a Mary Magdalene. His absence made her a mourner here, made the world an empty place for her, and she wept, "because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." He was the supreme, governing Object of her affections and the loss of Him made her desolate indeed. Thank God, while we are deeply conscious of His absence from the world, Scripture would teach us that we have not lost Him, rather have we gained Him in another scene. The spiritual poet has written, "Thy cross has severed ties which bound us here, Thyself our treasure in a brighter sphere." He is risen! an empty tomb and a risen Christ! Well may we exult.

This gospel, displaying to us the glories of our blessed Lord, does not give us the historical fact of His ascension. In John He is the ascending One. In the 6th chapter we are reminded that He was the bread which came down from heaven. At the close of His discourse in that chapter many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him. Had there been some waning of His irresistible attraction? — far be the thought. He had spoken to them of His death as the alone basis for the bestowal of eternal life, and of the imperative necessity of their appropriation of His death — under the figure of eating His flesh and drinking His blood — if they were to have this eternal life. This brought to light their shallowness, "This is an hard saying; who can hear it?" As they turned away from Him He asked them, "Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before?"

So in this gospel He was the ascending Christ! To Mary, in verse 17 of our chapter, He said, "Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God." Yes, He would ascend and *now He is the ascended Christ!* If the bars of death could not retain Him, He certainly could not be

detained here. Someone has said, "Earth is not the domicile of risen men" — this as to the saints of God, for in the coming millennial reign of Christ, to which the brother was referring, those who compose the assembly of God shall be where they belong — with Christ in glory. *He* has already gone there. Do we not read in John 13, ". . . Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father . . ."

Ere He went He accomplished that work which glorified the Father and made it righteously possible for men to join Him where He has gone. The riches blessing of men before God is the gift of eternal life, and this capacitates men for the knowledge of divine Persons in the relationships and affections proper to them. As we know God, we enjoy Him and as we enjoy Him we respond to Him. We repeat then, that Christianity is a matter of the first day of the week, of the empty tomb, of the risen Christ, of the ascended Christ. Yet the shadow of the death of Christ still lies athwart this sinful world. How gladly, yet perhaps too easily, do we assent while gathered where and as we are today. When we go our several ways tonight will we still assent? When we go to our homes, and to our everyday necessary things, will we still say, "Yes, the Cross of Christ shadows this whole world order of things. However can we be at home where He is refused?" How practical are the implications of this for us all. How impossible for us to accept them save as we do so in the view of His empty tomb, and in the good of that first-day order of life and blessing which is the believer's portion. Herein lies the secret of true moral power — occupation with the ascended Christ.

Communication from Him is a mark of true Christianity! How he must have voiced Mary's name! She recognised Him then and turned about saying "Master." One cannot but think of that saying in Proverbs 19: 22 (J.N.D.) — "The charm of a man is his kindness (goodness)." Here was the true Shepherd addressing His own by name. This was the out-breathing of intimate affection. He said to her — "Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father, but go to My brethren and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God." He had already said in His unique prayer to the Father, John 17: 26, "And I have declared unto them Thy Name, and will declare it."

One of the distinctive features of the first day of the week order of things is the knowledge of the Father. What our Lord had declared here before the cross, He being the manifestation of that eternal life — the character of which was that it was with the Father — He now repeated as the risen and ascending One. With this declaration of the Father there was also the announcement of a new relationship — "My brethren." As thus associated with Him it is ours to know this "out of the world condition of love and relationship, into which redemption brings us." Before the cross He had said, "One is your Master, even Christ; and ye are brethren."

Now the distance is gone. If His incarnation bridged the distance, redemption has removed it, and our links are with Him on the other side of death. When ascended the line of communication would be for ever established between Himself and His own. We cannot have Him back as He was before the cross — "Touch Me not."

This would rebuff any endeavour on the part of any to connect Him with that world from whence He has gone. "For I am not yet ascended." would imply the blessed possibility of association with Him where He is now as with the Father. May we get into the spirit of this; He is entirely apart from this present course of things and He encourages faith and affection to be apart from it too, in the enjoyment and power of communion with Him where He is ascended.

Another feature of this first day of the week order is the knowledge of Himself in His own unique relationship to the Father. He said, as none other could, "My Father." Here is the affirmation of His

Sonship. He had brought into incarnation that relationship in which He had ever subsisted before time began. His passage through this wicked world had not impaired nor diminished His Sonship one little bit and now, with the cross behind Him and the glory before Him, He attests His unchanging relationship in these blessed words, "My Father." Another has said, "As to being Son in the eternal state He says, "I came forth from the Father and am come into the world" again, "I leave the world and go unto the Father," and you have no Father if you have no Son. If I do not know Him as Son when He came into the world, I have no mission from God at all. And you get, too, "the Father sent the Son" (J.N.D.)"

In verse 19, ". . . came Jesus and stood in the midst." Christ in the midst of His own! Do we know the blessedness of gathering to His Name alone? "For where two or three are gathered together unto My Name, there am I in the midst of them." As taking His place in the midst of His own He said unto them, "Peace be unto you." He would have them in tranquillity of spirit in His own company before God. In order for this there must have been the removal of everything which stood between them and God. He showed unto them His hands and His side. There was the evidence of that love which had taken Him down unto death — the death of the cross. There He had accomplished propitiation and substitution. He had met the claims of glory and the need of ruined men! His work was done! The glory of God had been maintained. A righteous basis of standing for men had been laid. So He said, "Peace be unto you." Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. Whilst that memorable scene is past nonetheless, where saints gather in His Name alone, something of that gladness is their portion Especially, whenever on the first day of the week they accord Him His place and portion. Then He again said, "Peace be unto you."

Not now to set them at rest before God, but rather to give them that needed calmness of spirit in which to face a hostile world in service to and for Him, as He had Himself been here for the Father. This too, is a feature of the first day order of things: the representation of Him as He had represented the Father. For this they needed the life of the new order. "He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye (the) Holy Ghost." As the Head as well as the Centre for gathering, He gave them life in the Spirit's power. Then He commissioned them with the evangel of grace, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them."

He also sent them with a sense of holy discipline — the sense of divine government, "and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." Is this as acceptable to us as is the commission of grace?

Christianity then, I repeat in closing, is a matter of the first day of the week; the empty tomb; the risen and ascended Christ; the new relationship; the new revelation — the Father; the new life; the new Centre; the new Head; the commission of grace and the exercise of holy discipline. May we all seek that available grace which will enable us to enter into the practical good of these blessed things, under the drawing power of Christ's irresistible charm.