

EASTER DAY SERMON

NEW AND BEAUTIFUL SETTING FOR THE OLD, OLD STORY.

FOUNDATION OF OUR FAITH

Simple and Unlearned Can Learn the Great Lessons of the Anniversary of Our Risen Lord in the Words of the Text: "And Their Eyes Were Opened, and They Knew Him, and He Vanished Out of Their Sight."

Entered according to Act of Parliament of Canada, in the year 1904, by William B. B. B., at the Dept. of Agriculture, Ottawa.

Los Angeles, Cal., April 3.—In this sermon the Easter story receives a new and beautiful setting, which appeals equally to the simple and the learned. The text is Luke xxiv, 31, "And their eyes were opened, and they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight."

This is Easter day. The lessons with which the anniversary is fraught are at the very foundation of our faith. They are so momentous that the imagination is overwhelmed by their import. The facts are few, but how vital, how significant they are! Let us try to look at them from a different standpoint from that to which we are accustomed.

Transporting ourselves in thought to the city of Jerusalem on that eventful day, we hear rumors about the sitting of the Sanhedrin, at which the humble Nazarene was condemned, but we pay no attention to them. I listen not to the excited reports flying everywhere that the high priest and his hirelings and the officers of the law, led by the Apostate Jews, had captured Christ in the garden of Gethsemane. I mingle not with the multitudes that are crowding the courtyards, in which Pilate is the judge and Jesus the prisoner. I gaze not at the awful scene when Christ hung upon the cross and his dying lips parted in their last agony. I go not with Mary down among the lilies to the tomb on the first Easter morn. But when the sun has bathed the Judean hills in great waves of light I would point you to a couple of pedestrians wending their way from the Jerusalem capital toward the little village of Emmaus. As these two ordinarily dressed men walk on I see them accented by a third traveler, who appeared over the hills. And now, as these three come nigh to the village, I would see them enter a humble home. Then, while they are at supper, I would show you why the stranger revealed himself to these two disciples as the risen Christ.

Easter afternoon's revelation in the first place, comes as a welcome encouragement to all those who are earnestly and prayerfully trying to increase their faith by reaching out for more light. It comes as a divine demonstration that the prayer of a broken hearted father, once made to Christ, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief," is one of the most beautiful and yet humble prayers of earnest beseechment. It is a holy inspiration that though we sometimes in spiritual life have to walk as a blind man feels his way along, step by step, yet if we go on trustfully and prayerfully and hope-fully Christ, after awhile, will reveal himself to us in all his glory.

Why do I entertain this hope? I find ground for it in the fact that one of the earliest appearances of Christ on this first Easter day was to the two men who had doubted the fact of his resurrection. Christ, when upon earth, dealt with men as we deal in our loves with our kith and kin. Supposing that I was a young man and had gone off to a four years' war. Supposing after a long series of adventures I should come back to my native town. Who would be the first person I should want to see? Would I wish to go and call first upon my school friends or upon a merchant in whose store I used to work as a clerk? Would I care first to see my old society friends and the boys with whom I used to play baseball in the village lots? Oh, no! If I was a young man the person whom I would honor or first with a visit would be my mother and then my father and my sisters. If I was a married man the first person I would honor after my return home would be my wife and then my children.

After important absence we always seek first those whom we would honor the most. Whom did Christ first seek after his resurrection? Was it the gentle John, or the brave Luke, or Mary, the widow mother, or Matthew, who sat at the seat of custom, or James, or the steadfast Lazarus? Oh, no. The first person whom Christ honored after the resurrection was the sinful but the repentant Mary. The next persons whom he honored with his divine presence on the first Easter day were the two disciples on the Emmaus road, who were honest doubters. These two men had seen the crucifixion. They had heard the wonderful report of Mary from the tomb. They knew the tomb had been emptied of Christ's body, but they could not understand how the miracle could have taken place. Christ appeared straightway unto them. Oh, ye honest doubters, do not despair. Hold fast to your belief, though it be small. Plead, Pray. Keep on seeking for more divine light, and Christ will some day reveal himself to you all as he once revealed himself to his two troubled disciples on that Easter afternoon in the Emmaus village.

I have always been very thankful that Christ made this revelation on Easter day to the two honest doubters at the Emmaus village. Ah, my friends, the honest doubter ought to have our sympathy instead of our execration. Some people by natural mental construction always must have a fact proved to them before

they are willing to believe. They do not realize that "faith is the evidence of things not seen." They always demand the evidence.

Certain minds naturally demand sight of the golden links which bind together the great laws of cause and effect. A friend one summer evening turned to John Tyndall, the famous British physicist, and said, "Tyndall, can you behold such a sublime Alpine sunset as this and not feel that there is a God?"

"Oh," he answered, "I feel it. I feel it as much as any man can feel it, and I rejoice in it, but the trouble is I cannot prove it." Ah, yes, there are many doubters who doubt honestly about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. There are scores of men who cannot explain how all these things happened. But, my friends, on this Easter day, if you will only reach out for more light as did the two honest doubters of the Emmaus road Christ will ultimately reveal himself. But, ye honest doubters, mark this: There are two ways to doubt. The wrong way is to let your doubts, as did Tyndall, obscure the divine revelation, which you may have for the asking. The honest way to doubt is to hold firmly to the divine revelations you have, with your mind open to receive newer and fuller revelation, which will surely come to you and in the end banish all your doubts. If you are an honest doubter stand this day by the emptied tomb of a risen Christ and say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Easter afternoon's revelation, in the next place, came to these two doubters when on their way to their own homes. Who were these two men? We don't know. But when reading carefully the Scripture lines we are led to suppose that they were among the inhabitants of this little village of Emmaus, which was about sixty stadia, or seven and one-half miles, distant from the Jerusalem capital. In other words, these two disciples of Jesus Christ were villagers. When they heard that their Lord and Saviour was to be tried for his life they immediately went down to the capital to see if they could help him. There they stayed through the awful scenes of the crucifixion. But when the crucifixion was over, and their tears of sympathy mingled with those of Mary, the mother, and the strange reports of Mary Magdalene had been reported to them, they had to return to their home duties. And while they were going back home to look after the farm stock and take care of the crops Christ appeared unto them on the Emmaus road.

It is a beautiful Easter thought that Christ will reveal himself to us in his sanctuary. But I glory today over the fact that Christ can and will reveal himself to us on Easter afternoon on the Emmaus road. He can and will reveal himself to us while we are cooking the Easter dinner, or while we are dressing the children for the Easter afternoon Sunday school, or when in the evening hour, with the children gathered about the piano, we are singing the Easter songs. The other day, when calling at the home of a very dear friend, I saw this beautiful sentiment written upon the wall over the sideboard of the dining room: "Christ is the head of this house, the unseen guest at every meal, the silent listener to every conversation." Yes, yes; that written sentiment is true. Christ on Easter noon and Easter afternoon and Easter evening and Easter night is ready to enter the humble home of the Emmaus disciples as he is also ready to stand on Easter morning amid the decorated pilbits of the

imposing cathedrals and of the city churches and of the little village meeting houses. Easter afternoon's revelation came, in the next place, as a solution of prophetic mysteries. The two disciples must have known the Scriptures, but they had not understood the prophecies concerning Christ, and not until he explained them did they perceive that the events which had so puzzled and distressed them were precisely those which had been predicted centuries before. It came as a right visual perspective to those whose eyes were focused too far off to properly appreciate the eternal significance of the momentous events which had just happened. What had the death and the horrible crucifixion of their dear friend and leader, Jesus, to do with the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah, written hundreds of years before? Did the words "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter" imply the occurrence of such a national tragedy as that just ended? Perhaps these men did not stop to consider or think. Did the words of their Saviour, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up," allude to the resurrection of Christ's own body? Perhaps these disciples did not know of consider or think. But when on the Emmaus road the stranger appeared and said unto them, "O fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken," and then, beginning "at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself," then they saw, then they knew, that it had been foreseen that Jesus should rise from the dead.

Have there not been in our own lives and in the lives of our dear ones prophecies which on this Easter afternoon find their fulfillment in the risen Christ? How about that fulfilled prophecy in your mother's life? Years ago she marked the favorite psalm of Martin Luther as her special comfort. In the quiet of her own room she used to read over and over again these words: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." When your father was taken sick and financial trouble came, and from an earthly standpoint your mother had nowhere to turn, did not that Forty-sixth Psalm come true? Was not the gospel prophecy fulfilled in God being her refuge and strength? When your invalid sister died, what

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was the strange peace that remained with her on her way to the grave? Did she want to leave her young husband and baby boy? Did she turn a deaf ear to the sobs that were being sounded about her dying bed? Oh, no! She was as a Christian at peace because thousands of years ago God had promised, "The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my loving kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenants of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." How have God's promises been fulfilled in your own life? Have not all your past troubles been the means, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, of working together for your good? Christ was the fulfillment of prophecy in the Emmaus revelation. Christ is also the fulfillment of prophecy in our own lives.

But again I learn from those Easter afternoon lessons that Christ only appeared unto his disciples when they felt their own helplessness without his divine presence and sustenance. If these men, walking along that Emmaus road, had said to themselves, "Well, Jesus is dead; perhaps it is just as well that he is gone; anyhow, we can get along now perhaps better without him than with him," Jesus would never have revealed himself unto them. But what did these two men practically say? They said: "Oh, what shall we do, what shall we do? The Christ upon whom we have leaned, the Christ whom we have followed, the Christ whose words have been our meat and strength by day and by night, is gone. What shall we do? What shall we do? Let me read to you their very words. When this stranger accosted the two disciples they told to him their story. Then in a despairing tone they said, 'We trusted that it had been he who should have redeemed Israel.' Yes; 'we trusted,' but now all their hope was gone. They were hopeless without Christ. But when Christ revealed himself then their despair was changed into triumphant hope."

My friend, on this hillside overlooking the little Emmaus village do you feel helpless unless you have Christ? Do you pin to him all your faith both for this world and the next? If you do Christ will reveal himself to you. If you do not he will never reveal himself. In your Easter hopes I want you to feel the absolute dependence upon the divine power which my pious ancestor did many years ago. Rev. Nathan Birdseye was among the most famous New England divines of his day. He lived in Connecticut and was not only very wealthy, but lived also in the time when the people of New England owned slaves, and he also owned them. There came during his lifetime a prolonged drought which threatened not only to destroy the crops, but also the cattle and the men and women of that region. Old Nathan Birdseye one day gathered his family and servants together and made this simple yet earnest prayer: "O God, thou knowest that without thee we can do nothing. Save me and my family and people. Save my cattle and my crops. Save us, O God, save us! Thou who didst rescue the children of Israel in the wilderness, rescue us now!"

But I cannot close without a practical application to our future work in our relationship with our fellow men and fellow Christian disciples. When Jesus revealed himself to his disciples in the little Emmaus village, what did they do? Did they rejoice? Yes, they rejoiced as gladly as did the old father in the parable of the prodigal son, who cried out in ecstasy, "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this,



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thy brother, was dead and is alive again and was lost and is found!" But these two disciples did more than merely stay at home Easter evening and rejoice with each other. Their happiness over the Emmaus revelation was too great to be housed within four walls. They immediately started back to Jerusalem. They said to each other: "Come, come, come! Let us go and tell the apostles and the other disciples that we have seen the risen Christ. Come, come, come! Let us have them rejoice with us as we rejoice, as we have wept with them when they wept." We can now see them running back to the Jerusalem capital on Easter night, and Easter darkness was not made an excuse for laggard feet. They ran, Aye, they ran as fast as their limbs could carry them to tell of the risen Christ.

We are all ready to carry good news to our fellow men. From this church embowered with flowers, where we have seen the risen Christ in vision and heard him in song and sermon, shall we not carry the news everywhere? The news! Aye, tell the glorious news that Jesus has risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept.

But there is one other fact that I would impress upon your thoughts in this Easter afternoon revelation. As soon as Christ revealed himself unto his two disciples he vanished out of their sight. If we do not at once receive Christ when he reveals himself, in all probability we shall never receive him at all. One moment he is here, the next he is gone forever. Some of us in our past lives know when we saw him. We know that there was a certain moment of a certain service when Jesus came to us and said, "Here am I," and if we had not at that moment received him as our Lord we would never have received him. O men and women, are you this Easter day in the Emmaus village? Are you standing in the little village seven and one-half miles from Jerusalem and having a divine revelation and yet will not accept the risen Christ? God forbid that my Saviour's scarred feet and scarred brow and scarred side should in this Easter afternoon's revelation appeal to you in vain!

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