

grounds: "Whereas there is a growing tendency, of which many of the churches recently built afford evidence, to depart from the arrangements hitherto characteristic of the Church of Scotland, and most suitable for her simple worship—the pulpit being now frequently placed in a corner instead of in a central position, and the Communion table in a chancel as remote as possible from the people—thereby affording facilities for a style of worship, and favouring a type of teaching, foreign to the Protestant and Presbyterian character of the Church of Scotland as by law established.

THE CHURCH AS THE WITNESS TO THE RESURRECTION & PREACHER OF THE RISEN LIFE.

FROM A SERMON AD CLERUM BY REV. MR.
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"And with great power gave the Apostles witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus."—Acts iv: 33.

The grand function and ever pressing duty of the Church to those who are still unbelievers, is the preaching of the Resurrection of Christ in all its power and with all its concomitant facts and deductions.

I hold the doctrine of the Resurrection to be above every other in importance and *the one* doctrine of our religion, rather than any other, which the disciples of Christ were commissioned to promulgate.

Such a statement may seem trite, and the declaration that for ages the Church has been preaching a secondary truth may appear startling; nevertheless I believe, from Scripture and from history, both can be shown to be true.

When Jesus sent out the twelve and afterward the seventy disciples it was not for the purpose of repeating the old Jewish traditions, but to preach the new life of the kingdom of God. The gospel of Christ was something *new* in the world; not because it contained maxims which had never been heard before. (We can all admit that many of the instructions given by the Master were very old when he appeared among men, without in the least lowering the character of the glad tidings of the kingdom.) It was *new* in that it had brought life and immortality to light, of which the world had but the faintest dream-vision before the Saviour came. Life from him received a new interpretation and immortality a new significance, for Jesus proclaimed the life of God in the soul of man in such a new way that some exclaimed, "Never man spake like this man," while others testified, "He spake as one having authority and not as the scribes."

When Christ said to Martha, "*I am the resurrection and the life*," he stated the grand, central fact of his religion. He was there, and then, the Spiritual Resurrection and regeneration of mankind. He was the light and life of men, and those who accepted him, lived on and by him, eating his flesh and drinking his blood in the truest sense, while they wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. The words that he spake and the acts which he performed *were*, according to his own declaration, "Spirit and life," (John 6:63). These are the principles that last; all other things perish.

Of all the truths revealed to us in nature and in God's written word there is no one equal to this "Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life." It is the Epiphany of the Son of God. It is the greatest tenet of the Christian creed and the sublimest fact mankind has ever heard.

Theology, morality and practical ethics go to make up our religious system and we find the same constituents in all the other religious systems of the human race. We are told by some that our sacred writings are simply compilations of ancient teachings; what of that? Some hold that those wonderfully beautiful expressions in the "Sermon on the Mount" were heard ages before Christ came to earth; what of that? What though the old philosophers did dream of the possibility of a future existence? In the words of the Gospel we have an express declaration of the truth, the like of which, in its fulness and power, no one of the ancient seers, in the wildest flights of his speculations, ever thought of; it is, *Jesus the Resurrection and the life of men, now and here*. This is the keynote of color in God's great picture of salvation, and the note of principality in the grand anthem of God's redeemed children.

For ages men have been drawing a line through the center of life, preaching about the present and the future as two distinct existences, instead of simply two phases of the one being, while the declaration of Christ is, "*he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die*." Life is *one*, and life in Jesus Christ is eternal from the moment of that spiritual resurrection which is brought about by believing in him.

When a man goes from this country to Europe he may put on new clothes and spend his time in an entirely different manner from his ordinary ones. He would live under different conditions and in the midst of other circumstances, but he would be the same man, with the very same life. This illustrates the kind of Resurrection life the Saviour and his disciples preached about. Not a spiritual existence apart from the body, but the material, temporal being saturated with the spirit of truth, love and holiness—the life of heaven and earth—the Christ life continuously manifested by those who have risen with him. What this hard, cold world needs every day and every hour is to have something of the *living* Christ put into it, which is not a formal act of religiousness, but an exemplification of that true religion which consists in going about doing good in Christ's name and for His sake.

The passage of Scripture which I am now speaking about was an assertion on Christ's part which a critical age required to be verified. This Jesus could not do by his teaching, nor yet by working miracles upon others. He *did* prove the assertion true, however by the greatest miracle this world has ever known, namely, *the raising of himself from the dead by his own power*. This is the miracle of history which completely overthrows the position on which modern rationalism rests.

The sharpest discussions between rationalism and Christianity have been in reference to this point; still, the Resurrection of Christ remains the most fundamental and decisive fact in all history, as it is also the most important article of that "good news" which the Saviour commissioned his disciples to preach to every creature. The joy of the Gospel, the hope of the Gospel, and the blessed assurances of the Gospel are all bound up in the fact of the Resurrection.

Christ's Resurrection is the demonstration of the truth of all the rest of his teaching and conduct, and the preaching of this truth with its attendant facts ought to be the object and end of the Church's life and constant endeavor.

We are told that the Resurrection Gospel comes out of the Good Friday Gospel, which is true; but the Friday circumstances, with all that had gone before in the Master's life of teaching, working, sorrowing and suffering, formed only the background and setting for the new and greater fact of the Resurrection; the former is nothing without the latter.

In spite of their original doubts and fears all

the disciples became unalterably convinced of the truth of Christ's rising from the dead; consequently they went everywhere testifying to that fact; and so we learn that from the day of Pentecost to the close of the second century little else was heard beside the marvelous declaration, "The Lord is risen," and the exhortation was, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." (Col. 3:1). The words of Jesus to the man who, when called, desired to go and bury his father, seem to have rung in the ears of all the disciples, "Let the dead bury their dead; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:60). So it is recorded in the fifth chapter of the Acts that the apostles "daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ,"—not dead but alive. St. Peter, speaking to Cornelius of the Resurrection of Jesus, said, "And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead."

We also find in this book and in the Epistles such direct testimony to the fact of the Resurrection being the great subject of the early Christian preaching, that we do not wonder at the marvelous growth of the Church during the first hundred years, nor at the statement made by the Jews of Thessalonica, that the apostles had turned the world upside down by such utterances.

St. Paul was called a "babbler," and was rejected by the Athenians because he preached "Jesus and the Resurrection," (Acts 17:18). In writing to the Romans, the same apostle says, "Jesus was raised again for our justification," (Rom. 4:25). St. Peter in his first Epistle, said, "Baptism saves us by the Resurrection," (3:21). And that we are begotten again unto the living hope by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible," (1 Peter 1:3). From these and many similar passages, it is plainly seen that justification, sanctification and eternal redemption are all made to depend upon the power of Christ's Resurrection. Of course without the dying there could be no rising again; but the point is this, that the early disciples made little of the death of Christ and a great deal of his Resurrection.

There is one remark of St. Paul's which has been harped upon by all branches of the Christian Church for ages, and which seems to militate against what I have been saying. It is found in 1 Cor. 1:23: "We preach Christ crucified." These words have been and are now taken to characterize that Gospel which the apostle everywhere declared, whereas they simply form that part of the argument in the letter. Think of what the writer says about the "wisdom of words," then substitute the name Messiah for Christ and see the force of the expression. A crucified Messiah could not be anything but a stumbling block to the Jew, and a dead man proclaimed as the King and Saviour of humanity nothing but foolishness to the philosophic Greek; yet notwithstanding all that, St. Paul says, we continue to preach this same Jesus who was crucified for you, but who *is* the power of God unto salvation, of body as well as of soul, through this Resurrection; and while the Greek may laugh and the Jew scoff, this is nevertheless the truth and the wisdom of God which is better and stronger than any of man's philosophy. That glorious passage near the close of the first letter to Corinth is the grand climax of the reasoning and shows us what the author considered the true subject of preaching; it is this: "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins, and we are found false witnesses of God. But now hath Christ been raised from the dead?" 1 Cor. 15:14. So in writing to Timothy he charges him to teach the same truth "according to my Gospel" he says, 2 Tim. 2:8. You will also remember that