



LESSON II.—APRIL 12.

I. Corinthians xv., 20, 21, 50-58.

Golden Text.

Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.—I. Corinthians xv., 20.

Home Readings.

Monday, April 6.—I. Cor. xv., 12-21.
 Tuesday, April 7.—I. Cor. xv., 22-32.
 Wednesday, April 8.—I. Cor. xv., 33-45.
 Thursday, April 9.—I. Cor. xv., 46-58.
 Friday, April 10.—I. Thess. iv., 13-18.
 Saturday, April 11.—John v., 21-29.
 Sunday, April 12.—I. Cor. xv., 1-11.

(By R. M. Kurtz.)

THE RESURRECTION.

20. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

21. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

50. Now, this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

51. Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.

52. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

53. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

54. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory.

55. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

56. The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.

57. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

INTRODUCTION.

At Easter we usually give special attention to the subject of the resurrection. This is right, for the doctrine of Christ's death and resurrection is the hope of the world. As Paul says: 'If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.' But we make a mistake if we confine the study of this inspiring theme to one particular time of the year. It should at all times be one of the uppermost subjects in the mind of the Christian.

The book from which our lesson is taken is the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, written toward the close of his long residence in Ephesus. Paul writes with a view to correcting errors and throwing light upon questions imperfectly understood. The subject of the resurrection was one of those in dispute, as we learn by verse 12 of this chapter, 'Now, if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?'

This fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians is one of the great chapters in the Bible. It is called 'The Resurrection Chapter,' and has attracted especial attention on the part of Bible students and commen-

tators. Stanley says it is 'the earliest extant account of the resurrection of Christ.' Farrar remarks, 'No human words ever written have brought such comfort to millions of mourners as the words of this chapter.' It is, then, worthy of unusual attention. In taking it up we are to consider one of the most solemn, most vital and most hopeful subjects that the Bible has to present to us.

In the first part of the chapter Paul deals with the proofs of the resurrection. This event had taken place about twenty-five years before, and the risen Christ had been seen by a large number of persons, several groups, and individuals of whom he particularly mentions. Last of all, Paul himself had seen him. He presents an overwhelming mass of evidence of the fact that this Jesus whom men saw nailed to the Cross, and left there until he died, and whose dead body was pierced by a Roman spear, before it was taken down and prepared for burial—this same Jesus was actually seen alive by scores and hundreds of creditable witnesses after he had risen from the dead. From offering proof of the fact, the Apostle then goes on to discuss its importance, showing the hopelessness of our faith, and the false nature of the Gospel if the resurrection were not a fact.

CHRIST THE FIRSTFRUITS.

'But now,' says Paul, in introducing verse 20, for the arguments upon the fact of the resurrection and its importance have been given and he proceeds to take up its meaning. Christ, he says, has become the firstfruits of them that slept. This is an allusion to the ancient ceremony of the offering of the firstfruits, referred to in Leviticus:

'Bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest; and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted for you.' Leviticus xxiii., 10, 11.

In this connection there are also recalled the words of the Saviour, 'The harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.' Matthew xiii., 39. So then, those who are saved through Christ are a part of the great harvest of which Christ is already the firstfruits. The Revised Version reads 'the firstfruits of them that are asleep,' indicating the whole company of saved dead in all ages, who are to be raised at the coming of Christ. Since death came by man, that is, through Adam's sin, so by man that is, by Christ, who was made man for our sakes, came the resurrection of the dead.

In verses 22-34 the apostle continues to discuss the great importance of the resurrection and shows its place in the complete work of Christ. He must reign until he has subdued all things, the last enemy being death. He conquers death first by his own rising, then by the resurrection of the dead through him. Paul further asks what hope we have if the dead rise not. From verses 34-49 he speaks as though answering someone who made a doubtful inquiry concerning this doctrine by asking as to the resurrection body. Paul shows that death and the resurrection may be compared to the sowing of a grain of wheat; the kernel sown dies, but springs to life again in a new form. What is sown in corruption and weakness is raised again in incorruption and power. In verse 50 he sums up in a sentence what he has just been saying. Then he proceeds to enlarge upon the resurrection itself.

A MYSTERY.

Well does Paul speak of what he is about to show as a mystery, something hard or impossible to understand. It is a mystery that invites the mockery of the skeptic and unbeliever, who stumble over this as they do over many other things in the Word of God that are a source of great hope and joy to the devout soul.

'We shall not all sleep,' that is, be in the grave, for, upon the return of Christ there will of course be a living generation of men. Among them will be thousands of sincere believers in Christ, doing his will while they continue upon the earth, inspired by this 'blessed hope.' When the hour that God alone knows has

struck, the trumpet shall sound, and, in the twinkling of an eye, the dead shall rise, and then we who are living Christians 'shall all be changed,' putting off the old perishable garment of mortality for the new and imperishable garment of immortality.

When this takes place, when death has been overcome by our Lord then shall be brought to pass the saying, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' Isaiah xxv., 8. The Revised Version gives it, 'He hath swallowed up death forever.' The prophet Hosea also sings, 'I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grace, I will be thy destruction,' Hosea xiii., 14.

One of the difficulties of the mystery here is about to declare is found in verse 50, in the statement that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.' This is one of the passages sometimes used against a future reign of Christ upon earth, but that is a forced interpretation. The idea is that this old earthly body, with its corruptible nature, is not to share in the future order of things, ushered in by the resurrection of the just. 'There is,' says Paul in verse 44, 'a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.' To be with Christ at his coming we must share his resurrection state, must have this spiritual body. Look at I. Thessalonians iv., 13-18, and notice not only the more complete explanation of the resurrection, but the great hope concerning the friends who have died:

'But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.'

The word 'prevent,' as used in this passage, means 'to go before.' The living, Paul means, shall not be caught up before the dead. But do all the dead come from the grave at this resurrection? You will notice that Paul here speaks of all those raised as being caught up to be with Christ and the redeemed forever. For answer let us turn to Revelation xx., 4-6:—

'And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall reign with him a thousand years.'

A VICTORIOUS SHOUT.

Again we find Paul uttering a shout of exultation as he realizes the wonderful truth he has just been uttering. Death has lost its sting, the grave its victory. 'The sting of death is sin,' that is, were it not for the knowledge of sin and our sinful natures, death would not have its terror for us. 'The strength of sin is the law,' the law, having been violated, will make the offender feel the weight of his sins. But we who are saved through Christ feel none of these terrors, for we have hope in this first resurrection. Notice the spirit of thanksgiving, as well as of joy, shown in verse 57:

'Therefore, the resurrection being assur-