

The Dead and the Living Christ.

A sermon preached in the church in Chester, N. S. on Easter Sunday, April 12, 1903.

BY REV. RUPERT OSGOOD MORSE.

Rev. 1: 18 I am the Living One, and I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

So spoke the glorified Christ to the exiled John. Behold this glorious one. He stood in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, his head, white as snow; his eyes as a flame of fire, his feet, like burnished brass; and his voice, as the roar of many waters. In his right hand were seven stars, out of his mouth proceeded a two-edged sword, while his countenance was glorious as the sun in his strength. What a being! No wonder John fell in fear at his feet! But that hand filled with glittering stars is as gentle as when its touch gave blind eyes their sight. It lifts the awe-filled disciple to his feet as the voice says,—"I am the Living One; and I was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

We are not surprised at John's fear, nor that his recognition of his Lord Jesus allayed every fear.

Notice.

I. We are here taught that Jesus was dead. Upon this point there can be no doubt. This glorious scene points back to Calvary. As Jesus committed his spirit into the Father's hand the Lord of Life died. The marvel was that he should die so soon. He had been on the cross but six hours. Two or three days usually passed ere life was extinct. Why Jesus died so soon we leave where inspired pens leave it, in the silence of God.

Two prophecies were fulfilled on the cross. Hundreds of years before it was written, "A bone of him shall not be broken." The soldier's commission to hasten the death of those on the cross that day, finding Jesus dead, break not his legs. But possibly Jesus has fainted. So to double assurance, "one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith there came out blood and water." And thus was fulfilled,—"They shall look on him who they pierced." This, too, made doubly sure Jesus' death. Of that death there is no shade of doubt. Yes, the Son of God, the Lord of Life, was dead.

But no malefactor's grave shall entomb Jesus. He has been sufficiently humiliated. His atoning work is done. Earthly honor shall now join with Heavenly. Now comes the next scene on earth's most tragic page. A Jewish Senator and a Jewish Rabbi appear. The wealthy Joseph of Arimathea asks of Pilate the body. He and Rabbi Nicodemus prepare it for its burial. Wealth furnishes the piety, and love the gentleness. Joseph opens his new tomb for its reception, and thus is fulfilled a third prophecy, "And with the rich in his death." The sun goes down. The darkness deepens. In yonder tomb, motionless, dead, the mighty Redeemer lies. No child of Adam was more truly dead than he.

II. This same Jesus is alive forevermore. This is his affirmative. The death and resurrection life of Christ is the very substance of the Pauline gospel. Paul says, Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. John was the first person to believe that Christ had risen from the dead. When he and Peter ran together to the tomb and found it empty, with no indication of a hasty exit, our implicit belief in the resurrection entered his life. That belief was nourished by the appearances of Jesus to his followers during the subsequent forty days. And now John's vision specially prepares him to herald Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life, for has he not seen the glorified Christ, and heard him say, "I am alive forevermore."

But recall again the new tomb, the great stone at its mouth, sealed with the Roman seal. See the armed guard pace to and fro guarding the resting place of the mighty dead. But spite of it all the grave is emptied, the Lord of life bursts the bonds of death, and overturns the throne whereon the grim despot death, has reigned so long in the regions of despair and gloom. No human eye witnessed that resurrection, no human hand rolled away that stone. God works his mighty resolutions silently. But though in the silence of the grave Christ conquered death, though with equal silence he came forth and showed himself to men, of that resurrection there is no more doubt than of his death.

And this resurrection of Christ is the sublimest fact of Christianity. The corner stone of the church is laid in his empty tomb. On this glad Easter morn hail him, the Conqueror of sin, the Vanquisher of death, the Pan-somer of the grave. The resurrection is the keystone of revelation. It has exalted music, poetry, sculpture, painting, and literature. Christ staked all upon it. It is the culmination of his prophecies concerning himself. The resurrection emphasizes and glorifies the incarnate one, the perfect life and atoning death. The apostles considered it a sufficient evidence for all their preaching. Dr. George Dana Boardman, in "The Epiphanies of the Risen Lord," has beautifully said, "The Resurrection sends forth in the Apostolic Theology as the epitome and very I-bel of Christianity itself. And well it may; for it involves the whole story of the incarnation. He who has risen must have died, and he who died must

have lived, and he who has lived must have been born. Jerusalem's empty tomb proves Bethlehem's holy manger. And so it comes to pass that belief in the resurrection of Christ is the touchstone of Christian faith, the key to the kingdom of Heaven."

The resurrection of Christ gives us a living Saviour. Those whom he himself called back to life are dead. The founders of other religions are as dead as the mummies of Egypt. But Jesus is alive forevermore. We worship a living Christ. A dead Christ is unwelcome in art and no less so in religion. We shall make no less of the cross but let us make more of the triumph over the grave. From the risen Lord we derive our divine life. With these glad memories we welcome with garlands of flowers and songs of triumph our living Lord on this glad Easter morn. We give him a carpet of flowers for his once pierced feet; we give him a crown of glory instead of thorns; and because he lives we shall live also.

His resurrection accounts for the existence of the church. The church exists. Canon Farrar has finely shown how the church has regenerated literature, sanctified marriage, ennobled woman, conquered the world, glorified God. But how will you account for the church without the resurrection? The apostles affirmed their faith in the resurrection. They were neither deceived nor deceivers. The resurrection is the crowning miracle of Christianity. To tell the apostle's appeal and to let it appeal. Paul said, "If Christ be not risen your faith is vain," but he adds, "Now is Christ risen." The truth has created a new heaven and a new earth. From the night of death a new sun has risen. Its brightness fills the world to day. Their witness to the resurrection was an important part of the apostles' ministry. At Pentecost, Peter said, "This Jesus hath God raised up whereof we all are witnesses." Later he explained the healing of the lame man thus:—"Be it known unto you all . . . that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, doth this man stand here before you whole."

"He is risen, sing ye praises,
Who his blood on Calvary spilled;
Shout it loud in farthest places;
What he promised, he fulfilled.
Who withstands? And why d'ssemble
See him mount in glorious worth;
Bright in triumph breaks he forth.
See how hell's black portals tremble,
As the conqueror at them drives,
Hallelujah! Jesus lives.

Us from death-doom to deliver,
Sank he in the grave's dark night;
Us to raise to life forever,
Rose he through the Father's might.
Death, thou art in victory swallowed,
All thy terrors overblown;
All thine empire overthrown;
Life is now achieved and hallowed,
Though the spoiler still bereaves,
Hallelujah! Jesus lives."

III. Our text shows Christ to be sovereign over death and Hades. He holds their key. The figure is one natural to a country of walled cities and gates. Death had reigned supreme. No tears could move, no prayers persuade him as he went forth for his victims. But one day a stranger entered the region of darkness, and seemed to yield to the monarch's power, only to make more emphatic his overthrow. Death was dethroned, discredited, destroyed by the Lord of Life. Christ's followers have now nothing to fear for he is King. Death's portal can only open at his permission. We need not fear to enter whence he returned in triumph. Because he lives we shall live. Standing by the empty grave of Christ we make Paul's triumphant words our own,—"O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Nay! The victory is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ.

If the resurrection be true, then is our Lord's divinity assured. It is the proof of his character as a true prophet, and a divine being. He claimed and exercised the power to rise from the dead. He rose. He is God. The stonement was finished, not on Calvary, but in Joseph's tomb. Christ's resurrection is God's, "Amen and Hallelujah," of humanity. If his work had been incomplete, and his stonement unaccepted he had never risen.

"Hark! the anthem answers; listen!
Faster and faster
Swells a psalm whose chorus angels
Shout abroad:
Come, O Lord undying! Hail, O mighty
Master!
Lo, the risen Saviour! Lo, the Christ
of God!"

Christ's resurrection is the promise of our own. Through the open grave he made a way along which all must pass, as surely as the first link of a chain draws after it all the rest. Scientists once talked of the improbabilities of the resurrection. (Science now argues, though fragmentarily, for the resurrection.) Unbelief may pile up untold high its denials. The rationalist may urge the difficulties. To all, there is one reply,—"Christ rose. There is no more reason to doubt it than there is to doubt that Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo. And if he rose so shall we. I admit that this doctrine presents difficulties. But there were difficulties to Christ's resurrection. He overcame them all. So can he overcome every difficulty to our resurrection. He who denies that the dead can rise denies that Christ rose. 'But now is Christ risen.' Then we too shall rise. Empty as was

Joseph's tomb, so empty shall be all the tombs at the sound of the archangel's trumpet.

"O'er the abysses of the grave and its
horrors infernal,
Victory's palm thou art raising in
triumph supernal;
Who to thee cling
Circled by hope, shalt now bring
Out of its gulf life eternal."

All hail, then, thou risen Jesus! Thou art he who once was dead, but who now liveth forevermore. At thy girdle are the keys of death and Hades. March forth thou Mighty Conqueror in thy sublime triumph! Let the bells peal on this glad Easter morn! With thee we bear the cross; with thee we may lie in the grave; with thee we shall rise in triumph; and with thee we shall sit on thy throne, no more to die, but to rejoice in the triumph thou hast won—Thou Christ of God, blessed forevermore.

Systematic Beneficence.

BY DR. H. C. CREECH.

(Continued from last week.)

Here some one will cry out almost indignantly that many people cannot afford it. We might as well say, however, that we cannot afford to rest from productive labor one seventh of our time. It God claims the tenth as well as the seventh, all we have to do is to pay it and leave results to him. But what are the results? In the case of the Sabbath, experience has proved, we are told, that a man can do more and better work in six sevenths of the time than in seven eighths. And in the other case, take the testimony of the tens of thousands of persons who have for years been tithe givers. Farmers, merchants, lawyers, artisans, all who have tried the plan faithfully, are more than satisfied, so far as known.

Let us take a few specimen statements chosen from among thousands. One writes: "I never knew a case where one-tenth was given that did not produce the most satisfactory results. I believe it to be about the surest way to prosperity that a man can possibly adopt in this world; it is just what the scriptures call it—the 'scattering seed which increaseth,'—while the opposite plan is the 'withholding more than is met, but it tendeth to poverty.'"

"I was in doubt for a long time," says another, "whether I ought to give largely to benevolence while in debt. I began to doubt, however, after a hard and unsuccessful struggle to get out of debt that I should ever succeed. At length I was persuaded that I was 'robbing God' to pay my creditors. My wife and I consulted over the matter and decided to give a tenth, which we have done, and God is prospering us beyond any previous experience."

Another man writes, "Really, to be honest with God is one of the most selfish things I know of; for it pays a hundred fold or more every time."

Some of the most eminent Christian writers of the early centuries took very strong ground on the subject of tithing. Thus Chrysostom, "the golden-mouthed," is quoted as saying, "O what a shame! that what was no great matter among the Jews should be pretended to be such among Christians! If there was danger then in omitting tithes, think how great must be the danger now!"

Also the great theologian Augustine, in the fifth century wrote: "Tithes ought to be paid from whatever may be your occupation, whether war, merchandise or some handicraft. Tithes are required as a debt. He who would procure either pardon or reward, let him pay tithes and out of the nine parts give alms. God who has given us the whole has thought it meet to ask the tenth from us, not for his benefit but for our own."

If any Christians desire ecclesiastical authority for the obligation of paying tithes, they may find it in the statement that eight councils of the early and medieval church, beginning with Ancyra in 314 A. D. and ending with London in 1425 A. D., proclaimed this duty, "resting it not on the authority of ecclesiastical law but on the sure basis of the Word of God."

The fact is that a clear case can be and has been made out in favor of the principle of tithing for religious purposes. A large number of our Baptist ministers and laymen are regular tithe payers. Some belong to "The Tenth Legion," some to "The Christian Stewards' League," some perhaps to other organizations formed for the promotion of tithing; but a much larger number doubtless are connected with no such union. Of all these it would be hard to find one who would willingly return to the old way of hap-hazard contribution. Why then is not the practice generally adopted? For several reasons. First, some people are stingy and are ready to find excuses for not giving more than they do. Second, some people are conservative and slow to change their practice, even for the better. Thirdly, many people see objections and apparent practical difficulties, and have never had these explained away. All the objections and difficulties, however, have been considered and successfully met by earnest advocates of the tithing system.

If any of the readers of this article have questions which they cannot answer in regard to this matter, let them write to me, or to Rev. G. O. Gates, D. D., St