

The Joy and Triumph of Easter

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Many problems crowd around the great event of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ which we commemorate at this season: and the study of these problems, to which so many devote themselves, is apt to obscure the fact which brings gladness to every Christian soul throughout the world today, and which is fundamental to all our hopes, and upon which all our holiest aspirations are based and founded. How significant it is that this, the profoundest mystery of all, and which transcends all others, is expressed for us in the simplest language! For the message of the Resurrection, stripped of all that which is merely local and temporary, is that Jesus Christ lives again, and lives for evermore: that death has no power over Him, or over those who are united by faith to Him: that the real problem of life has for ever been solved—the problem of sin, and its outcome of death.

What is the great and enduring message which the Resurrection brings to the hearts of the people of God? What have we got as proof of the Resurrection of Christ? Take the last two chapters in each of the Gospels, and you have a group of the most intensely human stories. The story of the weeping women at the tomb, and the appearance of the Risen Lord to them. The story of the man who doubted—doubted for fear, and doubted for joy. The story of a Sabbath evening walk, and of the mysterious Stranger joining two journeying disciples and commencing a conversation with them. The certainty of the message is, surely, attested by the simple manner of its telling.

Let us think of one of those tender human stories—the story of the weeping women, who were first at the tomb, and to whom first the Risen Lord appeared. We know the story well. How their love had survived this seeming falsification of their hopes. For when the Lord died, their hope died. But they loved Him still. They loved Him living: they will love Him dead. So they bring their spices to embalm His body, and to pay that loving tribute to which the human heart ever rises when those whom we love are taken from us. They did not bring their spices as a tribute to the living, but in devotion to the dead. So they draw near to the tomb, these grief-stricken women, not because they expect to find Christ alive, but because they believe Him to be dead. And their experience for all time, and for all believers, is full of the most encouraging and comforting truth. It was not first to Peter, the courageous, that the Lord appeared. It was not first to those who avowed unceasing loyalty to Him that He revealed Himself. But to those whose love persisted in its vigil, and in its desire to minister. It is to those who serve, and who love, to whom the vision ever comes.

The Rolled-Away Stone

What are the lessons that this story teaches us? First, that since He lives, difficulties are the thresholds of discoveries. Think again of the experience of these women. The great stone rolled before the mouth of the tomb, which threatened effectively to thwart all their loving intentions with regard to the body of Jesus, and the spices which they bore. What an insuperable difficulty it must have seemed to them! Well might they say to themselves, "Who shall roll us away the stone?" Two women, even strengthened by the intensity of their affec-

tion, could not have rolled away that great stone. But, lo, when they reach the tomb, they find that the stone has already been rolled away; that that which interfered with their purpose of love has disappeared, and the difficulty does not now exist. Moreover, the stone has not only been rolled away, but it has become the seat of an angel! And that is ever God's way with men. Difficulties which seem to thwart the expressions of our love and devotion to Him are miraculously rolled away, and become to us the very places of blessing. It is ever the way of the Risen Christ, such is the provision of His love. Indeed, as we read the story again in the light which we now have, and from the viewpoint which it is our privilege to occupy, there were really no difficulties at all, except those that the women brought with them. The difficulties were in the saddened, distracted hearts of the loving friends of the Lord. And so it ever is. Since Christ lives, there are no difficulties in the life of Christian consecration and discipleship, except those which we ourselves carry.

Notice, further, these women came expecting to find a dead body which might be served with such devotion as was expressed in their gifts; but they find a living Lord who is to be served, not by spices, not by garlands, but by the loving devotion of His people. What a wonderful discovery they made! Their difficulty, the very cause of their grief, turned into the joy which no man could take from them. If there had been no empty tomb, there had been no gospel of grace, no ascended Lord, no great High Priest at the Throne, no coming of the Holy Ghost upon the waiting Church, and no promise of the glorious appearing of the Lord. That anticipated difficulty and perplexity were transfigured into a cause of joy, deep, unspeakable, and full of glory. And so, since Christ lives, difficulties, of whatever sort they are, are but the thresholds of great discoveries, discoveries in the realm of power, and love, and grace, which words can never express.

A Prelude to Triumph

The second lesson is this: That since He lives, tests are but the prelude to triumphs. Think of what the intervening days had meant to these women: the darkness and the loneliness of that hour of bereavement, with all their hopes and aims shattered. Contrast their experience with that when in the light of the first Resurrection morning He whom they loved met them. How sharp the test, but how near was the triumph! We all know how a few seconds can change the course of a whole life. We all know how a casual meeting, a look, a word, can change the current of someone's whole existence, and alter the outgoings of its influence and power. How those few hours on that resurrection morning for all time

MY BLESSED SAVIOUR

Lord, keep those away who come to talk
About the ones they think at fault,
Whose minds are seldom stayed on Thee.
Lord, teach them the lesson You've taught me—
To love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart
And to love thy neighbor as self is a part;
Keep thy nail-scarred hand on mine,
My blessed Saviour, Lord Divine;
Keep me filled with Thy holy peace
That those who talk in passing may see
What my blessed Saviour means to me,
And learn the lesson I've learned from Thee.
—Mrs. Louise Grogan

changed the aims and hopes of a lost world, and of a lost race! But a few hours before these loving women had been victims of defeat: now they have been made conquerors through Him who is more than conqueror. But a few hours before their lives had been darkened: now they are radiant with a beauty which shall increase in glory "until the day dawns, and the shadows flee away". Their experience is typical and prophetic of the experience of all Christ's people in all the ages. Tests are the preludes to triumphs. Who has not known again and again the disappointment of rejected love. Take heart, O child of grace. That hour of darkness is but the prelude to triumph, a triumph which lives just beyond in the purged, vision where you will see your Lord more clearly. Who is there who does not know the darkness of some moral failure? Hard by, nearer than you can imagine, is the angel messenger, declaring that hope is not buried: and if buried, that it has risen again. What a brief thing sorrow is! "Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

The Message of Immortality

Once again we learn from this story that since He lives emotions are but the beginning of enduements. There is something ever fresh in these documents concerning the Resurrection. And as we have read the story yet again we have, perhaps, been arrested by the fact that these women who had come to the tomb with such heavy hearts departed with great joy—and fear. How conflicting it seems! What is there in common between great fear and great joy—the two strongest emotions of the human soul? They are two complementary elements in one great awe of God. We can understand these women being filled with fear — not a craven, cowardly fear — but a courageous, heroic fear. For at that open tomb, and in the presence of the angel messenger, and later in the presence of Christ Himself, they lost the fear of death, and they gained the fear of life. They learned that death was incidental, but that life was immortal. We who know the Risen Christ do not fear death, but life, life with its issues so eternal, life with all its potentialities and possibilities. The fear of life is just what the Psalmist and prophets spoke about under the name of "the fear of God". "The fear of life is the beginning of wisdom." We are to treat life, not jauntily, not as something to be laughed through: we are to treat life with all solemnity. "Blessed is the man that feareth life — that feareth the Lord."

"They went away with fear, and with great joy"—joy, not in outward security, but in inward satisfaction. Christ is living, and nothing else matters. Christ is living, and poverty, and loss, and ostracism, and scorn need have no place in our lives. Emotions are but the beginning of enduements, enduements for service, to which these weak women, in common with the whole body of believers, are committed and commissioned by the Lord. Their experience of joy and fear alone qualified them to "go and tell." Lose the fear of life, and you lose the power to serve. Lose the joy of the Lord, and you lose the power to mediate His Gospel. For in the Garden, with the Empty Tomb, and the Risen Christ, is to be seen the beginning of all missionary effort. Thus may Easter triumph and joy be for us all an eternal and abiding reality.

—The Evangelical Christian.