

April – June 2007

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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)  
BIDEFORD**

# FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

*“Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when He had so said, He shewed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.” (John 20:19-20)*

Of all the recorded post-resurrection appearances of the Saviour, the majority occurred within the same twenty-four hour period; namely the very day of His resurrection, which was the first day of the week. Each one of these incidents has its own special significance. However, the fifth such appearance (related in John 20:19-24 and Luke 24:36-48) is perhaps more important than any considered thus far. It was of an ‘official’ character, and of a very solemn nature. This was the first appearance of the Lord to the apostles as a **body**; and this corporate manifestation occurred on the **first day of the week**.

Here is to be seen the formal inauguration of certain New Testament principles. By Christ’s official appearance to His gathered people on this day in particular, He set His seal upon it, instituting the first day of the week as the **Christian Sabbath**. It was the first time that the disciples had ever met in this fashion, and no sooner had they joined themselves together, than the Saviour appeared unto them. Thereby the Lord hallowed the day for public assembling and corporate gathering. It was also the occasion when the great fact of His resurrection was evidenced, and so the day itself became a lasting weekly memorial to that wondrous event.

The disciples began immediately to observe this day, for exactly a week later they convened again (as the sixth appearance describes – cf John 20:26). By the end of the Apostle John’s long life, the

practice was well established in the Church, for as Revelation 1:10 records, he was “*in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day*”. There would have been no doubt about the writer’s meaning among the recipients of that letter – the Early Church had adopted and established the first day of the week for united worship. It was regarded as the day of spiritual duty and privilege; the commemoration of the Resurrection of Christ and His mighty victory over Death and Hell which that event signified.

It was at the first assembling of the Lord’s own that He came with His lovely greeting: “*Peace be unto you*”. On that original corporate gathering, there was great fear in the minds of the disciples, and understandably so. But the words which the Lord brought to them were precisely what they needed. He assured them that peace had been made with God; that He had borne away the burden of guilt and sin; that atonement had been made by the blood of His cross. How this message allayed their fears! How it stilled their troubled hearts! Integrally associated with the Lord’s Day is, not only a coming together for worship, but also the **proclamation of peace** to the guilty heart, and a message of pardon to the penitent sinner.

This principle of ‘one-day-in-seven’ set apart for God was instituted at the commencement of human history in Eden, and continues in the New Testament age as the first day of the week. This was ratified and sanctified by the Great Head of the Church, by His presence among His assembled people on the first resurrection day. For the Christian the Lord’s Day is equally valid and precious, and its observance is of the utmost importance. Still the Saviour gathers in the midst of His assembled people – though His form may not be seen, His nearness is verily experienced. He comes with messages of love and grace to the labouring conscience. Rightly did the Puritans describe this day as ‘the Market-Day of the soul’ – when

all secular business is set aside, and the saints do trade with Heaven in spiritual and eternal goods.

This ordinance has been perpetuated through the history of the New Testament Church to the blessing of countless numbers; and who can compute its true value to the saints? The doors are opened and they assemble, mingling their voices in singing the hymns of Zion, bowing together in humble prayer and worship, enjoying fellowship one with another, and hearing glorious eternal truth unfolded from Holy Scripture. Thus does Heaven's blessing descend upon every believer, giving sustenance for the earthly pilgrimage, and bringing the eternal Sabbath of rest ever closer.

Another feature of this First-Day appearance was the **confirmation of the disciples' faith** which it engendered. As they joined together they were greatly troubled and perplexed. The Lord's primary objective was to assure them that they need fear no longer! He then proceeded to give them reason for such assurance, so that their faith might be established on a sure foundation. *"And He said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have. And when He had thus spoken, He shewed them His hands and His feet"* (Luke 24:38-40). The Lord gave the disciples full evidence to confirm their faith, since these men were to be the authorised channels of Divine Truth from thenceforth. The very object of the Lord remaining with them for this brief period was to make known unto them fundamental things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. This was achieved at His various appearances, when He showed Himself to those whom He had chosen, by many infallible proofs. The qualifying criterion of an Apostle was to be an eye-witness to the resurrection of Christ, for upon this cardinal truth the whole Christian faith rests. On this point there must be conclusive evidence – the disciples' faith must be fully confirmed, or else their

preaching would be in vain. So at their inaugural corporate meeting, Christ supplied irrefutable proof. He appeared in bodily form, and showed His hands and feet. This was no apparition or phantom; *“It is I Myself”* said Christ, *“handle Me, and see”*, “I have flesh and bones”. Then to further prove the point He asked for food, and having received a piece of boiled fish and a portion of honeycomb, He ate it in their presence. There could be no mistaking it: ten men witnessed the event.

*“Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.”* (Luke 24:45-48). What confirmation this was! Nothing could be more conclusive. Their very senses were appealed to: the sense of **sight** by looking, the sense of **touch** by handling, and the sense of **hearing** by the words which the Saviour spoke.

There is yet more truth to be seen in this fifth appearance, for in the detail of it, light is cast upon the believers’ **hope of immortality**. *“How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?”* (1 Corinthians 15:35) is an age-old question. The manifestation of Christ, and His invitation *“handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have”* gives the answer. Several facts are established regarding the eternal state. Concerning Christ, the **same body** in which He died and was buried, came forth at His resurrection. So will it be with all, on the Last Day. If this were not so, it would not be a resurrection: a rising again implies that the thing raised has first been laid down. It is not a creation, but a bringing to life again of that which existed before. All disputes as to the physical and practical possibilities are irrelevant, for this is the realm of Omnipotence.

The resurrection body of Christ was capable of passing from place to place without experiencing the restrictions imposed by walls, doors and other obstacles, to which mortal bodies are subject; yet His was a material body. Such will be the case with all the Redeemed in their final state – having bodies of flesh and bone, yet totally unrestricted by the physical laws which apply at present. Theirs will be a form, as Paul describes: “*like unto **His** glorious body*” (Philippians 3:21). At the Last Trump, all Christ’s people will be raised in like manner as their Lord: “*we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is*” (1 John 3:2) – bodies unbound by time or place, able to pass from world to world without effort or limitation.

Another problematic issue, resolved by this appearance of the Lord, is the question of recognition in Heaven. Christ appealed to the disciples’ sight: “Behold! Look! It is I!” – the one with whom they had companied on earth. If the Saviour could be easily identified in His resurrection body, then the believer has no grounds to doubt the recognition of loved ones, nor indeed any of the saints, in Glory. To harbour any such misapprehension is a serious spirit of unbelief, and a failure to accept the reality of bodily resurrection.

The record of John’s Gospel goes on to tell: “*And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost*” (John 20:22). Four metaphors are commonly employed in Scripture to describe the Holy Spirit. The **dove**, signifying gentleness and love; **Fire**, with its fervour and consuming power; **Water**, with its purifying action; and **Air** – the medium which conveys sound to the ear, vitality to the lungs, and is thus the great life-bearer upon this earth. By **breathing** upon the Apostles, the Lord presents the Holy Spirit under this latter and most impressive symbol, as the very source and strength of their life. As breath is to the body, so is the Holy Spirit to the soul – the essence and origin of

spiritual life. The actual advent of the Holy Spirit was not until seven weeks after the Resurrection. In this ordering, the Divine plan is seen, not enacted until “*the day of Pentecost was fully come*” (Acts 2:1); but to these ten disciples, the Saviour gave a pledge or ‘earnest’ of that which would come to pass not many days hence, and for which they were bidden to wait (cf Luke 24:49).

Consider the sad and poignant words of John 20:24, “*But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came*”. The Lord had gathered with His own, but Thomas had missed the great event. The reasons for his absence are not recorded. Perhaps he was unwell, or engaged in a perfectly legitimate duty; but the inclusion of this verse, and his state of heart at the time (revealed later) seem to indicate otherwise. Maybe the risks of joining with the Lord’s people deterred him, or home comforts detained him, or he was content to rely on a second-hand report from those who attended. Such excuses are prevalent today, but are equally invalid. Thomas could and should have been present. By his non-attendance he weakened the corporate body, and forfeited much personal blessing, remaining in his state of fear and doubt for at least another week. It is a very serious matter when Christians forsake the ‘assembling of themselves together’ (cf Hebrews 10:25). Missing members in a local Church greatly impoverish the congregation, whilst foregoing the precious presence of their risen Head. Alas that it should ever be recorded of any believer ‘He, or she, was not with them when Jesus came’. The Lord deigns to meet His people where they gather together in His name. Let every saint ensure that He finds them present!

These are all matters pertaining to the Kingdom of God, set out so remarkably by the post-resurrection ministry of Christ during the forty days which preceded His Ascension.

W. H. Molland  
(transcribed by R. J. Steward)

# *The Resurrection of Christ*

*“I delivered unto you ... how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that He **was buried**, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures”* (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

I have two words for you this evening – “**was buried**” – and I have chosen them because they are the vital link between what went before and what came after. That which **died**, was buried, and that which was **buried**, rose again the third day. In other words our theme is the **bodily** resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is **alive bodily**. If so, where? And how? Let us consider this great truth under three aspects – (i) the features; (ii) the fact, and; (iii) the fruit, of Christ’s bodily resurrection.

## **THE FEATURES**

The first feature of the resurrection we shall consider is that it was according to the Scriptures.

The Scriptures are the final and sole standard of Truth. What God has revealed settles the reliability or otherwise of any statement we may make. Right from the beginning God gave hints and suggestions of what He finally planned and brought about. So on the first page of the Bible we read “*the earth brought forth*” (Genesis 1:12) and we find this happened on the third day. Later, in Genesis 22, we read how Abraham is told that he is to slay the one in whom all the promises of world blessing as Messiah and Saviour lay. For three days Isaac was to his father a dead son – **on the third day** he came to the place of sacrifice and told his men: “*I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you*” (v. 5). Note the plural – **we** will come again – and when he sacrificed the ram instead of his son, he received him alive on the **third day** (cf Hebrews 11:17-19).



In Genesis 42:18 we read how Joseph recognised his brothers when they came into Egypt, though they did not recognise that all-powerful government official as their brother. He puts them in prison together, and on the **third day** he said to them: “*this do, and live*” – life on the third day!

In the Book of Esther we read that Mordecai brought Esther news of Israel being under sentence of **death**. She must plead for her people. For thirty days she had not been invited into her husband’s presence; if she went in uninvited **death** would result, unless he stretched out his sceptre in mercy to grant her **life**. Consequently, she said to her people, “*fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day*”. They and she did so, and on the third day Esther took her way to the King’s audience chamber, and when the King saw her, he stretched out his sceptre towards her. She found **life** on the third day!

Psalms 16 tells us that God’s Holy One would not see corruption but be shown the path of life. Isaiah 53:9 tells us that “*He made His grave with the wicked, (plural) and with the rich (singular) in His death*”; whilst in verse 12 we read “*He shall divide the spoil*” – alive after death! So there is much in the Old Testament that speaks of a resurrection.

When we come to the New Testament we find that our Lord many times warned His disciples that He would be killed and on the third day rise again. After Peter’s confession in Matthew 16:21 He began to warn them of His approaching death at the hands of the elders, chief priests and scribes, and that His resurrection would follow. Again in the next chapter, after restoring the demon-possessed child to his father, the demon having been expelled, He says, “*The Son of Man shall be betrayed...And they shall kill Him, and the third day He shall be raised again*” (Matthew 17:22-23). Later, in chapter

20:19, He adds further details of being mocked by Gentiles, scourged and crucified, and the third day He shall rise again.

Another feature of the resurrection is that in spite of all these warnings, the event was unexpected by most of the believers. Mary Magdalene thought He was the gardener, until He said to her “*Mary*”. The two on the Emmaus road thought He was a stranger in Jerusalem until He broke the bread. The assembled disciples thought He was a spirit until He said “*handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have...Have ye here any meat? And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And He took it, and did eat before them*” (Luke 24: 39-43). Thomas was not there on the first occasion, and said he would not believe until he saw the print of the nails. Eight days later the risen Saviour tells him to “*Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands*” and Thomas exclaims, “*My Lord and my God*” (John 20:27-28). Yet though His friends forgot His promise to rise, His enemies remembered and sought from Pilate a seal and guard for the tomb – which God derided. When the earthquake was over, and the disciples subsequently filled Jerusalem with the news that He was alive, His enemies could not produce any mutilated body to scotch their fearless allegations.

One further feature is worthy of consideration. **Doctrine** is involved. The Scripture of our text does not say **Jesus** died, but “**Christ died**” in other words it was Messiah the Son of the Blessed, whom God sent forth from above to take our flesh and die our death, to be delivered for our offences, and raised for our justification. As Peter said on the day of Pentecost, “*Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it*” (Acts 2:24). He as Lamb of God had put away sin, and finished the work the Father gave Him to do, and had drunk the cup the Father willed Him to drink. God accepted His obedience and raised Him from the dead.

## **THE FACT**

The fact of the resurrection is attested by the empty tomb and the change in the disciples from fearfulness to bold witness in the very place where Christ had been raised, and opposition was greatest. Note the persistence with which the disciples charged the high priests with the murder of God's Son, and proclaimed God's reaction. "*Ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: Whom God hath raised*" (Acts 2:23). "*And killed the Prince of Life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses*" (Acts 3:15). "*Whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead*" (Acts 4:10).

Peter when loosed from prison still declares: "*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree*" (Acts 5:30). He declares to Cornelius: "*Whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed Him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him **after** He rose from the dead*" (Acts 10:39-41).

The testimony begun by eleven men has spread to the whole wide world and no enemy, from Nero to Stalin, has been able to stamp out the Church which bore that witness, even though the blood of the martyrs has underlined the joyous note. The Lord Jesus Christ lives seated at His Father's right hand far above all heavens (cf Ephesians 4:10) and one day will rise thence and come again (cf Psalm 110:1).

## **THE FRUITS**

What are the fruits of this truth? The first fact we note as arising from our Lord's resurrection is that all who have died in Christ will rise again with new bodies – spiritual bodies – cf 1 Corinthians

15:44, 52; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17. Believers who survive to His coming will have their bodies changed like to His glorious body.

Another fruit of our Lord's resurrection is the existence of His mystical body the Church, including all who are washed in His blood, born again of His Spirit, all one in Christ Jesus now, and some eventually to be called from every tongue, tribe and nation till the number of the elect is complete.

Because Christ has risen and gone away He can give us His resurrection gift of the Holy Spirit to make His presence real everywhere, **to** every believer and **in** every believer. So in face of fret and worry, irritability and besetting sin, Jesus Christ **lives** to give us victory. Have we fears for the future? For Church or family finance? **He lives.** "*The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want*", so God grant we may enjoy His risen power and presence.

"I know that my Redeemer lives:  
What joy the blest assurance gives!  
He lives, He lives, who once was dead;  
He lives, my everlasting Head."

F. A. Rayner

## ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2007 D.V.

Saturday 3.30 p.m. & 6.00 p.m. Tea served 5.00 p.m.

Lord's Day 10.45 a.m. & 6.30 p.m.

*Preacher:* Mr R. J. Steward  
(Minister, North Road Chapel)

*a cordial invitation is extended to all*

# The First Begotten of the Dead

## *RESURRECTION'S GREAT ORIGINAL*

The word ‘resurrection’ is central to the Christian’s vocabulary – and rightly so – for it is a theme of fundamental importance to the Faith. It cannot be dispensed with, or denied. Heart-belief in the raising of the dead is essential to Christian testimony: *“if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt **believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved**”* (Romans 10:9). In the absence of this vital doctrine, the saints’ profession is jeopardised, and the veracity of Scripture called into question: *“if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witness of God”* (1 Corinthians 15:13-1). Thus exhorted, every believer seizes by faith upon this wonderful teaching of bodily resurrection. It is recorded at length in the Bible, preached upon from pulpits, sung of in hymns, and commemorated every Lord’s Day.

However, familiarity with this tremendous subject must not diminish its miraculous and supernatural quality in the Christian’s thinking. The Gospel records are well-known and frequently expounded; but this regularity must not remove the wonder and awe which ‘resurrection’ justly inspires. When the Saviour arose bodily from a Judean tomb two millennia ago, it was an event of immeasurable magnitude and import. Here was a complete reversal of the natural order enforced throughout history; inexplicable and unprecedented. So phenomenal was this occurrence that the very fabric of creation was convulsed, and the Earth shook in a mighty earthquake. Angels descended upon the place to glorify the scene, whilst hardened soldiers became instantly as dead men (cf Matthew 28:2-4).

There had been past occasions on which others were miraculously recalled from death, both in the days of the prophets (cf 1 Kings 17:22, 2 Kings 13:21), and during the Lord's earthly ministry (cf Matthew 9:25, John 11:44). Even as Christ uttered His last words upon the cross, certain graves were opened and their former occupants walked abroad for a season (cf Matthew 27:52-53). Yet it is evident that none of these 'risings' can compare with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The young men from Zarephath, Shunem, Bethany and Nain returned from death with exactly the same mortal bodies in which they had expired. Though their natural lives were temporarily reinstated, at length they all died again. But "*Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him*" (Romans 6:9). His resurrection is unique, and eminently superior to any other – for He was the first to be raised in incorruption, glory and power. He rose with an immortal, spiritual body, no longer dependent upon natural means of sustenance, but endued with the "*power of an endless life*" (Hebrews 7:16). For this reason, Christ is styled in Scripture as "*the firstfruits of them that slept*" (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23) and "*the first begotten of the dead*" (Revelation 1:5). He is the archetype of a process not to be repeated until the Last Day – He is resurrection's great original.

The astonishing fact of Christ's resurrection is prefigured in Old Testament prophesy. There is amazement and incredulity contained in the question of Isaiah 63: "*Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in His apparel, travelling in the greatness of His strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art Thou red in thine apparel, and Thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with Me*" (Isaiah 63:1-3). The interrogator in these verses beholds a figure who appears to be mortally injured, since his clothing is

stained as if with blood. He comes from the direction of enemy territory – Edom, and Bozrah (a word denoting ‘enclosure’, or ‘stronghold’). Who could possibly survive in such a wounded condition? What warrior could thus single-handedly engage his foes, and still return alive? It is hard to imagine!

Here are striking parallels with the return from death of the Saviour. For the Scriptures clearly teach that though His body was raised glorious and perfected, it still bore all the marks of death by crucifixion. As He Himself said, “*Reach hither thy finger, and behold My hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into My side*” (John 20:27); or again, in the language of Revelation, Christ appears “*clothed with a vesture dipped in blood*” (Revelation 19:13), “*And I beheld and in the midst of the throne...stood a Lamb as it had been slain*” (Revelation 5:6). Whilst these graphic images seem gory and unpalatable to human sense, the fatal injuries which Christ sustained, and forever wears, serve a vital purpose. They attest to the reality of His death and supernatural resurrection. There is no room here for the alternative hypotheses of doubtful sceptics. How could death have possibly been evaded? How could His subsequent life be anything but miraculous? These dreadful lacerations of His body give the truth to His words: “*I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore*” (Revelation 1:18).

As John also noted, Christ still bears these hallmarks of sacrifice in His ascended state in Heaven. As the hymn-writer puts it:

“Crown Him the Lord of love!  
Behold His hands and side,  
Rich wounds, **yet visible above**,  
In beauty glorified.”

For ever in Heaven the saints will have a perpetual reminder of the great work which brought them, and keeps them there; and eternally enjoy the blessings which Christ’s sacrifice procured. So whilst His

garments are sprinkled and stained with crimson, He is nonetheless “*glorious in His apparel*”.

“The blood that on the cross did flow  
Shall ever be in memory;  
Eternity is far too short  
To tell aright the story.”

Another unique feature of the Saviour’s resurrection is the fact that He engaged His **own strength** to accomplish it, and could rightfully claim responsibility. The likes of Lazarus or Jairus’s daughter could not take any credit for restoring themselves to life; but the case of Christ is altogether different. Raising the dead is a work of God alone – He is the sole author and giver of life, whether physical or spiritual. So by His personal involvement in His own resurrection, the Lord Jesus gives proof of His Deity and Godhood, and is “*declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead*” (Romans 1:4).

The miracle wrought in the garden tomb was the work of **Triune God**. The Father was engaged (cf Ephesians 1:20, Acts 2:24), as was the Holy Spirit (cf Romans 8:11, 1 Peter 3:18); yet Christ adds this testimony: “*I am the resurrection, and the life*” (John 11:25), “*I have power to lay [My life] down, and I have power to take it again*” (John 10:18). When He said “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up*”, “*He spake of the temple of His body*” (John 2:19, 21). Never man spake like this man – nor could they, but Christ was life itself, and thus had the power to vanquish and overcome death. The character depicted in Isaiah 63 goes on to describe his experience in the realm of the enemy: “*I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me*” (v. 5).

This highlights another aspect of the Lord’s death and resurrection which increases its supremacy and singularity. By this process, Christ achieved His great triumph over the powers of Death and



Hell. The Redeemer speaks through the prophecy of Hosea: “*O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction*” (Hosea 13:14) – but how was this Divine objective to be realised? From the gates of Eden onwards, Death reigned – the King of Terrors – a seemingly inescapable principle of mortality passed upon all humanity. The Lord reveals His plan of attack by parable: “*how can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? And then he will spoil his house*” (Matthew 12:29). If the prison house of Death (cf Job 30:23) was to be breached and spoiled, it was necessary for one to go thither, and soundly defeat its dreadful Warder. Such a work required one endued with Divine power, and yet rendered mortal, in order to die – it needed God Incarnate, the Lord Jesus.

Thus in due time Christ came, God in flesh, “*He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil*” (Hebrews 2:14). For three days and three nights, all creation waited to know the outcome of His mission. Which of the two would prove the stronger? Then suddenly, the quiet of early morning on the first day of the week was gloriously broken, and beyond all hope or expectation, the Saviour arose! He came forth mightily from the realm of Death and Hell “*And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it*” (Colossians 2:15). He brought life and immortality to light, and showed the proofs of His victory: “*I...have the keys of Hell and of Death*” (Revelation 1:18). All Heaven rejoices with the words “*Behold, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed*” (Revelation 5:7) while the saints on earth add their lesser songs:

“Jesus Lives! Thy terrors now  
Can O Death, no more appal us;  
Jesus Lives! By this we know  
Thou O grave canst not enthral us. Hallelujah!”

The superiority of Christ's resurrection also consists in the repercussions and consequences it has for all His believing people. If the Gospel record ended at Calvary or the tomb, there would be no grounds for faith, nor hope of salvation. The Saviour's rising from the grave, (and subsequent Ascension to the Father's side) is integral to the work of Redemption; and it is by this means that great spiritual blessings proceed to the saints.

For example, the work of Justification (the imputation of Christ's righteousness to all His chosen people) hinges upon His resurrection. To "*us also...it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was **raised again for our justification***" (Romans 4:24-25). Other effects of the Lord's rising from the grave are explained elsewhere in Scripture: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you*" (1 Peter 1:3-4). Here the apostle by inspiration reveals that new birth, the hope of salvation, and spiritual inheritance are all incumbent upon the resurrection, and secured by Christ's conquest of death.

When Christ the Testator died, the New Covenant could be enacted to the eternal blessing of all His Elect (cf Hebrews 9:16-17). Now by rising again from the dead, He can perform the role of Executor, and ensure that His people receive their promised inheritance. In consequence of the resurrection He is able to "*go and prepare a place*" for the saints (cf John 14:2-4); to demonstrate that glorified humanity may inhabit Heaven, unashamed amongst the sinless angelic hosts. He is able also to sit at the right hand of God, where He "*maketh intercession*" for His own, and is their perpetual Advocate with the Father (cf Romans 8:34, 1 John 2:1).

The most significant outcome of the resurrection is conveyed by the word ‘firstfruits’. These were the foremost samples from the field and vineyard, which under the Jewish system, were presented to the Lord as an offering, in the hope of a bountiful harvest to follow: *“Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine”* (Proverbs 3:9-10). In like manner, Christ’s rising from the tomb stands as a pledge and earnest of a greater resurrection to come, when all His people shall be gathered in. *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterwards they that are Christ’s at His coming”* (1 Corinthians 15:22-23). He is called the first begotten of the dead, implying the existence a larger family in which He is *“the firstborn among many brethren”* (Romans 8:29). Having tasted death, and experienced resurrection, He will bring these many sons unerringly to glory by the same route (cf Hebrews 2:9-10).

The Word of God is filled with promises in this regard, all drawing parallels between the resurrection of Christ, and that of His believing people. *“If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him”* (2 Timothy 2:11); *“[He] shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body”* (Philippians 3:21). This union and identification with their Lord will continue for the saints, into the unending ages of eternity, since God, *“for His great love wherewith He loved us...hath quickened us together with Christ...And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in ages to come He might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus”* (Ephesians 2:4-7).

In the glorious account of Christ’s resurrection may every believing reader behold, by faith, their own!

R. J. Steward

# Editorial

The Divine work of Salvation, and the redemption of God's elect has at its centre two great events. These are the death of the Lord Jesus Christ upon Calvary, and His rising again from the dead three days later. The immensity and importance of these phenomena cannot be fathomed by human sense or reason. In the first case, eternal, infinite God is seen, contracted to man's brevity, shrouded in flesh, expiring upon a cross. "'Tis mystery all – the Immortal dies! Who can explore His strange design?" In the second instance, this same crucified Saviour is observed to break forth from the grave with mighty power, in a glorified resurrection form, demonstrably proving that Death had no dominion over Him.

The magnitude and gravity of these two occasions is only increased by their consequences for Christ's believing people. His atoning death as sacrificial substitute has wrought cleansing for sin, propitiation of wrath, and reconciliation with God. In rising from the dead, He finished and sealed His work upon earth, guaranteeing the justification and ultimate blessing of the saints, and giving the earnest of their bodily resurrection in a coming day. Thus the New Testament Church was established, and the final epoch of history commenced.

The Christian who, by faith, realises the significance of these events, and their implications on a personal and spiritual level, will be burdened with the desire to commemorate them henceforth. Such momentous occurrences demand a lasting memorial, since they stand at the zenith of all time and eternity. The past purposes of God, and the course of humanity, all looked toward this great double miracle – the death and resurrection of Christ. It is fitting that in every subsequent generation, the Church should look back to Calvary and the empty tomb, and honour them by solemn remembrance.

Anticipating this need, the Scriptures give very clear instruction concerning two vital ordinances. One is the **Lord's Supper** – designed and instituted by Christ Himself – which focuses particularly upon His Calvary work: “*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till He come*” (1 Corinthians 11:26). The other is the **Lord's Day** – sanctioned and blessed by the Saviour's attendance and appearance upon it – which provides a weekly commemoration of His resurrection. The continual observance of the first day of the week by the Church, from the initial convocation in the Upper Room and onwards, is irrefutable (cf John 20:19, 26; Acts 2:1, 20:7, Revelation 1:10, etc). Here then are the two Biblical ceremonies, Divinely appointed, to perpetuate and exalt the memory of two unspeakably great events.

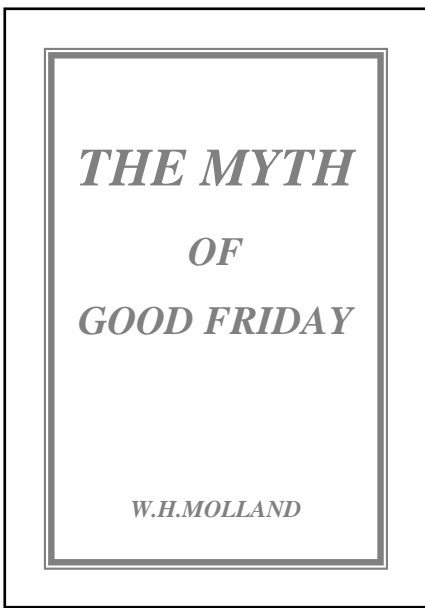
It is troubling to note that in this present generation, the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper are gravely imperilled through neglect and disobedience in the Church at large. Sanctifying the Sabbath and ‘keeping it holy’ is a process practically unheard of. Very few seem to recognise the true import of the Lord's Day, (as a testimony to Christ's resurrection past, an opportunity for spiritual resurrection in the present, and a pledge of general resurrection yet to come). The Communion service too, is often found relegated to an infrequent formality, characterised by hollow superstitious ritual, or deprived of its symbolism by modern gimmickry. Connection with the two awesome events, for whose remembrance these ordinances are appointed, is being dangerously eroded.

By sad and ironic contrast, many Christians will gladly devote their energies to another, entirely alien festival, by which they claim to celebrate the Lord's death and rising again. It is nowhere to be found in Scripture, but gives proof to its origins in its name – ‘Easter’, derived from ‘Astarte’ – a supposed goddess of fertility. The true pedigree of this wholly unbiblical rite is plain to see, from

its timing according to phases of the moon, to its Pagan emphasis upon Nature and animal life. Secular sources and the media make no secret of its history, which can be traced from ancient idolatry, through its adoption by the Papacy, to its present incorporation in the so-called ‘Christian calendar’. Who can speak of ‘Reformation’ when these Rome-promoted feasts persist unchecked? That such rampant heathenism could become entangled with the most precious elements of the Faith is a master-stroke of the Devil. That it continues to pollute the worship of God in this annual celebration is an indictment upon the Church. For “*what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?*” (2 Corinthians 6:16) – none whatsoever!

God in His sovereign purposes ordained the death and resurrection of His only begotten Son. He has also appointed the means whereby these two wondrous events are kept in perpetual remembrance. Let the dictates of God be faithfully observed – and all the inventions of man be totally rejected.

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This concise booklet examines the background to the observance of ‘Good Friday’, distinguishing between ecclesiastical tradition and the truth of Scripture. It is recommended reading for every enquiring Christian. (A6-format, 22pp.)

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