

Victory!

by the Rev. J. Clark Echols

The crucifixion of the Lord took place on a stark hill outside of Jerusalem. It was public because the Romans thought that such displays would brutalize the Jews into submission. Indeed, the Lord's followers who watched were devastated. They saw no point, no victory, but only the end of everything they had worked for. Peter had even called Jesus "the Christ," the predicted Savior. He could only have received this knowledge by observing how the invisible God he worshiped was displayed in the words and acts of Jesus. And now this man, Jesus, was dying. It seemed that it was all over. We're told that the disciples didn't then remember the prophecies. Grief must have clouded their minds to what Jesus had told them, that He would rise again on the third day.

What was the purpose of this greatest of all miracles—the Lord's resurrection from the dead by His own power?

There was a Divine plan, established at the beginning. Its steps were set out, and Jesus followed them all. He fulfilled the plan, just as He fulfilled all the prophecies. The Lord came to earth and assumed a body—with a Divine soul within—so that through His words and works He could successfully reduce the hells to order and restore mankind's spiritual freedom. This genuine truth shines forth in all of the New Testament and makes everything that happened understandable. If the apostles had been able to see this clearly, they wouldn't have doubted.

With the final defeat of the hells during His passion on the cross, Jesus completed the purification of His mind; He released Himself from the limitations of mere finite thought and desire. There was nothing more in Him that the hells could attack. Jesus had made His mind, His spirit, and the essence of His character and personality one with the Divine that was within Him. Thus, He became one with the Father. He was no longer subject to the doubts and desires of His mortal flesh. He would no longer pray for strength as if to another person. And so He rose from the tomb. The tomb was empty on Easter morning because Jesus replaced His finite body with a Divine one—the Divine Human—glorifying Himself. Thus the mortal body was not in the tomb.

Is this not the obvious outcome of all that went before? Is it not the fulfillment of the Divine plan? The unique process of the Lord's incarnation, His teaching techniques, His power over nature and His power to heal and give life, the struggles with temptation, His acquiescence in the crucifixion, and the empty tomb—these are all evidence of the Divine plan at work, the plan for the spiritual salvation of mankind to eternity.

We have two sources of evidence for this. First we have the Old and New Testaments and the Writings. There, we find the information, the truths about the Lord's plan. Second, we have the capabilities and faculties of our own minds. Because of this we may wonder how the people of the day could be so blind? How could the disciples not have understood the Lord's purpose more fully while He was on the earth? The answer is because the Lord now "enlightens the internal spiritual man and the external natural man at the same time" (*True Christian Religion* 109). This means that the Lord can communicate with us in ways that He couldn't before. He can see us, hear our prayers, smell the fragrant sphere of our worship, and touch our hearts and minds. This

truly fulfills the Divine plan for salvation. The Lord no longer walks the earth, but, through His glorified Divine body, He has acquired the ability to reach us. He is no longer invisible. He is now our visible God.

This genuine truth is displayed in the New Testament through doubting Thomas. Thomas said that he wouldn't believe until he had touched Jesus himself. He was expecting a physical resurrection, perhaps with Jesus continuing His earthly work. But Thomas was wrong on two counts. First, it would have been better, the Lord said, to have believed without the necessity of an external sign. And, second, He was not returning to the limitations of a physical, mortal body. Upon seeing the Lord, Thomas became open to the enlightenment He offered. Thomas then understood and knew what he had been given: Jesus was now "My Lord and my God!"

We are urged to believe what our minds and hearts tell us to be true. The Lord will reveal Himself to us when we turn to Him, when we cease seeking merely external evidence for His existence and trust the enlightenment that He offers us from within. Trust in the Lord that is based only on physical evidence is a merely natural kind of trust. Love for the Lord that is based on His physical presence is a merely natural love. And knowledge of the Lord that is based solely upon His mortal body is a natural kind of knowledge. The Lord asks us to rise above merely natural things to spiritual, eternal things. He wants us to have a spiritual view of our life. By His work, He has offered this view to us, so that we may see His Divine plan in its fullness. He works from within and raises us up to see Him in His glorified Divine Human.

He need not be physically present to do this miracle. By means of the glorification, and through the accounts of the New Testament, He is present with us today in a far greater and more powerful way than the merely physical. His Divine Human reaches us from within ourselves, while His revealed Word impresses itself upon us from without. When these two come together, we find strength on all levels of our consciousness. We are able to touch Him as surely as Thomas could, and we can, with full understanding and confidence, proclaim Him "our Lord and God."

The goal for the Divine plan for the Lord's life on earth is accomplished. The Lord God Jesus Christ reigns today, in our hearts and minds. It is now up to us to avail ourselves of His Divine plan for our salvation, which is His—and our—final victory!

Amen.

Lessons: John 20, *True Christian Religion* 109