

Resurrection, Ascension, and Enlightenment

*“Touch me not; for
I am not yet
ascended to my
Father: but go to
my brethren, and
say unto them,
I ascend unto my
Father, and your
Father; and to
my God, and
your God.”
—John 20:17*

ON SUNDAY EVENING, April 9th, throughout the world many earnest followers of the Master will memorialize his death, and their privilege of receiving the benefits of his ransom sacrifice. They will do so by partaking of the emblematic “bread” and “cup,” as Jesus requested the apostles to do while in the “upper room” with him on the night before he was crucified.

One week later, on Sunday, April 16th, the professed Christian world will commemorate Jesus’ resurrection, which the Scriptures declare occurred on the “third day.” (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19) We note that there is a difference of a few days in the timing of these events. The date of the Memorial of Jesus’ death is calculated based on the actual day

of his crucifixion according to the Jewish calendar. This was on the 14th day of the month Nisan, which this year begins after sundown on April 9th. The commemoration of Jesus' resurrection on April 16th is based on a date set by the Christian world to always fall on a Sunday. The true reckoning of Jesus' resurrection in 2017, however, is four days earlier, and corresponds to the morning of Wednesday, April 12th.

Forty days after his resurrection Jesus ascended to his Father. Ten days thereafter, or fifty days after our Lord's resurrection, the Holy Spirit came upon the waiting disciples in Jerusalem. This was the Day of Pentecost—which means “fiftieth day.” (Acts 1:1-4; 2:1-4) These events—the death and resurrection of Jesus, his ascension to the Father, and the subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost—were of vital importance in the outworking of God's plan of salvation.

An earlier article in this issue of *The Dawn* titled “The Blood of Sprinkling” gave special consideration to the meaning of the Memorial celebration as it relates to the death of Jesus as man's Savior and Redeemer. In the ensuing pages, we will focus our attention on the three other important events referred to in the title of this article. Surely, at this season of the year, when our hearts and minds dwell more particularly upon them, we are especially blessed by meditating upon the precious lessons of truth which are conveyed through these notable events of God's plan.

RAISED BY GOD'S MIGHTY POWER

We recall that meaningful prophecy concerning Jesus, in which he expressed confidence in God's

power, saying, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." (Ps. 16:10) The Hebrew word translated "hell" in this verse is *sheol*, which means "the grave"—that is, the condition of death. Jesus knew that to provide for man's redemption, he must go into death—*sheol*, the grave, the Bible hell. (Matt. 20:28; John 12:23,24) He had made no claim, however, of an ability to raise himself from the dead.

The Apostle Peter, speaking on the Day of Pentecost, quoted the above prophecy of the psalmist, and then stated emphatically, "This Jesus hath God raised up." (Acts 2:27,32) Paul, in confirmation of this, refers to the mighty power of God which was exercised to raise Jesus from the dead, and to exalt him to his right hand. (I Cor. 6:14; II Cor. 13:4; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 12:2) He told the brethren at Ephesus that he was praying that the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened to know the hope of their calling and "exceeding greatness" of divine power which was exercised in the resurrection of Jesus. This same power, Paul says, is also available to "us-ward who believe." (Eph. 1:17-22) By this enlightenment we can look at the things "which are not seen," but which are "eternal in the heavens."—II Cor. 4:18; 5:1

In Colossians 3:1-3, Paul says that if we are "risen with Christ" we would "seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." To know that Christ was so highly exalted, and to be assured that we can attain to heavenly glory with him, is surely blessed to contemplate! Another reason we should be overjoyed to know that Jesus has been highly exalted has to do with our imperfections, and the possibility that we might be

discouraged by them. Paul says, “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”—Rom. 8:34

SPIRITUAL THINGS NOT YET UNDERSTOOD

Happy though the disciples were to be assured that Jesus had been raised from the dead, it was not until after Pentecost that they understood this precious truth with respect to his making intercession for them in the presence of God. The wonderful bond of friendship Jesus’ little band of followers had developed with him was chiefly on a human basis. They did not yet understand spiritual things. They believed wholeheartedly that he was the Christ, and that he would establish the long-promised Messianic kingdom. In his miracles, they saw evidence of the many earthly blessings he would bestow upon all through the agencies of that kingdom.

When Martha met Jesus returning to Bethany after her brother, Lazarus, had died, she said to him, “If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.” Jesus answered her, saying, “Thy brother shall rise again,” to which Martha replied, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Then Jesus said, “I am the resurrection, and the life. . . . Believest thou this?”—John 11:21-26

Martha believed, as did Mary, because of the miracles they had seen him perform, and his marvelous teachings and gracious words which he spoke. Indeed, all the disciples believed that he was the Messiah. How thrilled they must have been

with the thought of being followers of one who had such inherent power that even a mere touch of his garment healed the sick! They loved their Master, but at first only affectionately so.

When Jesus was taken from them and crucified, their sorrow was deep and bitter. It seemed that all their hopes, which had been centered in him, were frustrated. It is no wonder, then, that when Mary Magdalene discovered the empty tomb, and reported to Peter and John that his body had been stolen, they hastened to see for themselves. (John 20:1-3) What a miracle it surely must have been for her, crushed in spirit by disappointment at not seeing the body of her Lord, to then hear “Mary,” and realize it was Jesus who stood before her and called her by name. She cried, “Rabboni; which is to say, Master,” and apparently sought to embrace him.—vss. 15,16

“TOUCH ME NOT”

It must have seemed strange to Mary Magdalene when Jesus responded, “Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father.” The word here translated “touch” comes from a Greek word meaning “to attach,” and is used in both a literal as well as figurative sense in the New Testament. This word is used where reference is made to individuals “touching” Jesus or his garments to being healed, and in accounts which tell of his touching various ones in connection with his miracles. (Matt. 8:3,15; 9:20; Luke 6:19) In these cases a literal touch seems to be implied.

It is this same Greek word that John uses when he assures us that when one is begotten of God, “that wicked one toucheth him not.” (I John 5:18)

In its use regarding the Adversary's touch, while the result is the opposite—being as it were the touch of death—it is seen to have a figurative meaning. Satan is not able to touch, or “attach,” himself to the mind and character of those begotten by God's Holy Spirit, so as to influence their efforts to faithfully carry out the terms of their consecration to God.

Throughout their association with Jesus, the disciples, including Mary, had witnessed the “touch” of his presence—his words, kindness, understanding, and love. He had called them his “friends.” (John 15:15) The disciples’ “attachment” to the Lord was deep and abiding, yet, with their limited understanding, it was still mostly an earthly tie. Mary, now suddenly realizing that Jesus was no longer dead, but alive, and standing beside her, reached out to attach herself to him. She desired to never again be deprived of the blessings of his presence. This was a natural response, but it was merely a human blessing which she sought.

Jesus told Mary the reason she should not attach herself to him, saying, “I am not yet ascended to my Father.” That is, he would not be in her presence much longer, for he would soon ascend into the heavens. The risen Lord then told Mary to go to his brethren “and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” Mary did not understand the meaning of these instructions, nor the reason for her not then enjoying the “touch” of the Master's presence. Nevertheless, she did as Jesus asked, and gave his message to the other disciples.—John 20:18

Jesus told his disciples the night before his death that he was going to his Father, and that then

he would send the “Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit”—the “Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father.” (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13) Thus, when Mary carried the message to them from Jesus saying that he had not yet ascended to his Father, they probably remembered his promise, but still they would not comprehend its meaning. It would not be possible for them to do so until after his promise was fulfilled and they had received the Holy Spirit to enlighten and comfort them.

FROM EARTHLY TO SPIRITUAL

Jesus’ response to Mary on that resurrection morning was a way of saying that his relationship to her, and to all his disciples, was now to be on an entirely different basis. No longer were they to think of him in terms of human friendship, nor merely as a mighty one to heal physical diseases and infirmities. He was saying, in effect, that from now on, the blessings to flow out from him to his followers would be accomplished through the Holy Spirit, and this Comforter could not be sent to them until he had ascended to his Father.

Mary and the disciples were to learn that their relationship to Jesus was no longer to be on a human basis. While he miraculously appeared to them a few times after his resurrection, at the end of forty days, he ascended to his Father, as he had promised. Now, their relationship to him would be by faith, and through the enlightenment and comfort of the Holy Spirit. The Apostle Paul later wrote of the new spiritual standpoint from which Christ should be viewed by his followers once they are Spirit begotten, saying, “From now on we regard no one from a

human point of view [according to worldly standards and values]. Though we have known Christ from a human point of view, now we no longer know him in this way.”—II Cor. 5:16, *The Amplified Bible*

Even before Jesus ascended to his Father, his limited association with his disciples between his resurrection and ascension was designed to help them realize that a great change had occurred. They soon comprehended that they were no longer going to be with him and enjoying his companionship in the same manner as they had before he was crucified. While he was doubtless invisibly present with them most of the time during those forty days, they saw little of him, and each appearance in their midst was so different from the others that they were unable to become familiar with him as a human being.

At the same time, the fact that he could appear and vanish at will, even when they were behind closed doors, would help them understand that he was no longer hampered by fetters of flesh. This, together with his announcement that “all power” had been given to him both “in heaven and in earth,” would help to prepare them for what the Holy Spirit later fully revealed. (Matt. 28:18) While he had been put to death in the flesh, he had been made alive in the Spirit—or, as Paul states it, a “quickening spirit.”—I Cor. 15:45

Perhaps now they began to vaguely realize the meaning of what the Master had said to Nicodemus when he explained that those who are “born of the Spirit” can go and come as the wind—that is, with great power, yet invisibly. (John 3:8) When Jesus was with them in the flesh, he no doubt became

weary at times. Hanging and suffering on the cross, he said, "I thirst." (John 19:28) Now, however, although they saw little of him, there was nothing in his demeanor to indicate that he was in any way subject to human limitations or experienced any physical suffering.

JESUS ASCENDS

Jesus' last visit with his disciples was most impressive along this line. After telling them that they would receive power through the Holy Spirit, he instructed them to be his witnesses "in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Then, as they watched, "he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight." (Acts 1:8,9) This, they knew, was something far beyond the ability of a mere human to accomplish.

"They looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up." (vs. 10) What a dramatic climax this was to the series of experiences through which they had passed during the forty-three days since their Master was arrested and put to death. Two angels appeared after Jesus had ascended, and they asked the disciples, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" (vs. 11) The angels did not wait for a response. They knew that these men were now so overcome by their mixture of emotions, and so utterly unable to comprehend the meaning of the events to which this was such an amazing climax, that they were unable to answer.

Then the angels explained, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into

heaven.” (vs. 11) It is the “same Jesus” whom they had seen go into heaven, who would return at his Second Advent. He was the same loving and understanding personality with whom they had been associated during his entire earthly ministry. He had the same righteous character, and was still engaged in the fulfillment of the same plan of his Father’s authorship. Now, however, he was no longer a human being whose physical touch healed the sick, or who they could attach themselves to in a human fashion.

While still in the flesh as a human being, Jesus said to his disciples, “The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” (John 6:51) The risen Jesus, who appeared to them during the forty days following his resurrection, was a highly exalted spirit being. This Jesus could enter the room while the doors were closed and locked, and could appear and vanish at will. He could be with his disciples for forty days without being seen except as he appeared to them, and then be miraculously taken up into the heavens and disappear from their sight. However, after his ascension, Jesus would never be seen again by the natural eyes of the world, nor by the natural eyes of his followers. (John 14:19; I John 3:2) Indeed, his return would be unknown by mankind in general. Only his brethren would be aware of it, not by their natural sight, but rather by watching for the “signs” that Jesus had given to his disciples, which would indicate his presence at his Second Advent.—Matt. 24:3-47

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

After Jesus’ ascension, his disciples returned to Jerusalem as he had instructed them, and abode in

an “upper room” where they “all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.” (Acts 1:12-14) It was not necessary for them to tarry long, for in ten days the Master’s promise to send the Comforter—the Holy Spirit—was fulfilled. It was under its enlightening influence that they could fit the experiences of the previous weeks into a pattern that was understandable and inspiring. It was by this same power of the Holy Spirit that Peter could preach his stirring sermon in which he pointed out the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus. It was a sermon so powerful that 3,000 were caused to be “pricked in their heart.”—Acts 2:37,41

Among the women who had tarried at Jerusalem, and were also recipients of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, was undoubtedly Mary Magdalene. She now understood why the risen Lord had told her not to become attached to him because he had not yet ascended to his Father. She knew that his ascension was necessary in order that the Holy Spirit might come upon them. How much more precious and enduring, Mary realized, were the blessings her Master was now able to shower upon her and all his brethren, than were possible while he was in the flesh.

Instead of laying hold of his physical being in the hope of obtaining virtue and strength, Mary knew that she could, through prayer, go “boldly unto the throne of grace,” there to “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:16) Through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, Mary and all

of Jesus' disciples would rejoice in the spiritual fellowship with the Father and with the Son which had been made possible by his death, resurrection, and ascension.

PEACE AND COMFORT RECEIVED

Before his crucifixion, Jesus had said to his disciples, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, . . . shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."—John 14:26,27

Beginning at Pentecost, the disciples experienced the fulfillment of this promise. They were puzzled and discouraged for a while when their Master was crucified. However, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, as a Comforter sent from God, they now had peace. It was a peace born of confidence in the Father's wisdom and love in caring for them. This "peace of God, which passeth all understanding," would keep their "hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."—Phil. 4:7

GOD'S PLAN REVEALED

The power of the Holy Spirit opened the eyes of their understanding to behold the glory of God as it is revealed through his loving plan for the redemption and salvation of both the church and the world. It called to their remembrance the wonderful words of life which Jesus had ministered to them before he was crucified, and reminded them of his promise that those who left all and followed him into death

would have “treasure in heaven.” (Matt. 19:21) They now knew what that treasure was.

The apostles knew and taught that we may hope to live and reign with Christ, conditional upon dying sacrificially with him, and that we will be made like him and see him as he is. (II Tim. 2:12; I John 3:2) They recognized, however, that this glorious heavenly reward would not be attained until the Master returned, so his promise that he would “come again, and receive” them, and all his people, unto himself, was the basis of a most blessed hope.—John 14:3

Moreover, the apostles clearly understood and taught that their hope of life eternal depended upon the resurrection of the dead. They knew also that all mankind is lost in death unless there is a resurrection. They saw that by Jesus’ death, and his resurrection by the Father, assurance was provided to both the church and the world that, through him, all will have the opportunity for everlasting life, either in the heavenly or earthly phase of God’s kingdom.—Matt. 6:10

These truths were clearly understood in the Early Church. Today, they flood our minds and inspire our hearts, as once again, in a special way, we call to remembrance he who said he was the “resurrection, and the life.” (John 11:25) Jesus could not be held in death because his Heavenly Father used his mighty power to break those bands asunder. Let us rejoice in the assurance that he who was made alive in the Spirit, and appeared in the presence of God for us, has now returned, and soon, if faithful, we will be with him and see him as he is. ■