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Does the Bible Approve of Cremation—What About the Resurrection?

THE subject of the resurrection of the dead is surely one of the most vital and important in the whole Bible. That being so, it is surely necessary for us, as the Lord's people, to endeavour to understand God's plan concerning the hereafter; and not only the hereafter for true Christians, but also the hereafter for all the families of the earth.

At each Easter season we have the anniversary of the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is fitting to examine this wonderful event, the resurrection of Christ, first of all, because only on the basis of Christ's resurrection can any hope be established for the resurrection of Christians and for the world of mankind at large. The future hope of life for Christians and the world is based on the resurrection of Christ.

How important, then, is the Apostle Paul's presentation of the resurrection of our Lord, in his masterly 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians. From verse 12 in this chapter we note how helpfully this vital matter is presented to some who claimed —"that there is no resurrection of the dead."

. . . For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised; and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept" (verses 16-20). It will be noted that those mentioned as "fallen asleep in Christ" would be Christians fully devoted to the Lord, and that Christ, between His death and resurrection, also "slept"; He became "the firstfruits of them that slept."

Before investigating the wonderful outcome of Christ's resurrection respecting the benefits to be gained by mankind, let us note some of the details concerning our Lord's resurrection body in comparison with His earthly body which was nailed to the cross. We are aware that our Lord's fleshly body was taken down from the cross and placed in a new sepulchre by Joseph of Arimathaea, as described in John 19:38-42. It is very plain that Jesus' body was placed in the sepulchre and the stone was rolled to the door, sealing it from outside as the sabbath approached. Some people are perplexed as to whether the actual body of Jesus which was laid in the sepulchre was again used by our Lord in His resurrection appearances, and also went up to heaven at the time of His ascension. Some Scriptures help us in this matter, such as John 6:51. Our Lord speaking, says,—"I am the living bread which came down from heaven . . . and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." Obviously, when Jesus gave His flesh, His humanity, to redeem the world, it was not taken back again. It was a complete and full offering of our Lord's humanity, His earthly body sacrificed on the cross. Also in 1 Pet. 3:18 the Apostle Peter explains this to us helpfully. "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit." In other words, Jesus had been put to death a human being, and raised from the dead a spirit being. Further, in 2 Cor. 5:16, the latter part of the verse from the Amplified Version reads,—"Even though we once did estimate Christ from a human viewpoint and as a man, yet now (we have such knowledge of him that) we know him no longer (in terms of the flesh)." That is very plain. We do not know Christ after the flesh because He is risen spirit, at the right hand of God.

Seeing the Scriptures clearly state the Lord's fleshly body did not ascend to heaven at the time of His ascension, the reasonable question is, What became of His earthly body after it was placed in the new sepulchre? *We*

should be helped in this matter by observing how the Lord appeared to His disciples between His resurrection and ascension. A passage of Scripture in Luke 24 is most helpful. Two of our Lord's disciples were walking to Emmaus on the third day after Jesus' crucifixion. A man caught up with them along the road, whom they thought was a stranger. They were very sad, and the Lord, whom they did not recognise, asked them why they were so sad. They explained that Jesus was a wonderful prophet, and what He had done, and how He had been taken and crucified and laid in the tomb, and they said "this is the third day." After the Lord had explained the Scriptures to them—"Ought not Christ to have suffered and to enter into his glory?"—they invited Him in for the evening meal, constraining Him to stay. Verses 30 and 31 show the outcome. "As he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight." He disappeared from their sight, as though his fleshly body disintegrated. What had happened? The Lord had the power to materialise in human form, as angels had in previous times and in the time of our Lord. He vanished out of their sight by dematerialising the human body and resuming His spirit body. How do we know? See John 20:19, 26. ". . . 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." It is very obvious that Jesus could not come through the bolted doors with a fleshly body. No, He came in as the spirit being which He was since His resurrection, and created the human body inside, so that He could be seen by the disciples. Reversing the procedure, when His mission was accomplished He would dematerialise the fleshly body and leave the presence of the disciples as a spirit being, thus leaving the building without opening the doors. Does this seem hard to believe? Angels appeared as men and were seen on certain occasions, then dematerialised back into spirit form when their mission was accomplished. Could not the risen Lord do likewise? Yes, indeed! That procedure helps us to understand how Jesus' earthly body could easily be removed from the sepulchre, so that when He was raised in spirit, no earthly body would remain to be seen to hinder acceptance of the fact that Jesus was really risen from the dead.

In Psalm 16:10 we have a prophecy in respect of our Lord. This is written as though Christ is speaking to His Heavenly Father.—"For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (sheol, the condition of death); neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Had our Lord's body remained in the grave to corrupt, it would have hindered the belief that He was risen from the dead, so our Lord's body did not corrupt, it was removed supernaturally. Christ was in the spirit until, as occasion required, He appeared in human form to demonstrate to the disciples that He was really risen from the dead. So it seems God used means to remove Christ's fleshly body that had been crucified and placed in the sepulchre, so even if His fleshly body had been cremated it would not have interfered with his spiritual resurrection.

What about the followers of Christ and the world of mankind? Does the Bible approve cremation for any of the human family? Inasmuch as the word "cremation" does not appear in the Bible at all, we must conclude that it does not **approve** cremation. The first time the word "buried" is found is in Gen. 15:15, where the Lord said to Abram—"Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age."

Right throughout the Bible the word "buried" is used at the death of the prominent Biblical persons mentioned. In Acts 2:29 the Apostle Peter referred to David,—"that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day." Verse 34 states—"For David is not ascended into the heavens." The apostle in these verses was making a contrast between David and Christ. David was dead and buried in Peter's day, but Christ was risen. David was still in the death condition, awaiting a resurrection in due time; Christ had ascended to heaven, after appearing to the disciples at various times over the forty days between His resurrection and ascension. Right throughout the Bible then, all the patriarchs were buried, according to the records of God's Word.

We may wonder why cremation was ever used, in view of the clear statements of the Bible that burial of the departed was the custom from earliest times. Investigating this matter from the Encyclopaedia Britannica, we find that cremation started with the heathen races of the eastern world. The Romans copied it from the Greeks. And the Indians and the Japanese have always been cremationists, as have the Burmese. The Chinese, however, have never adopted cremation since it is the desire of every Chinese to be buried in the soil of his country, no matter where he may die. The modern development of cremation dates from about 1874 when the Queen's surgeon, Sir Henry Thompson, published a book entitled—"Cremation: the Treatment of the Body After Death." In this book he said that the proposal to adopt cremation in recent times originally proceeded from Italy. Even then, there was much opposition of the church in England and the Home Secretary, with the result that progress with cremation was slow until the close of World War 2. Progress in Australia and New Zealand with cremation has also been more marked since the 2nd World War. In Britain cremation is controlled by Acts of Parliament which require certificates from two medical practitioners as to the cause of death. Although the law is not so rigid in most countries, the general principle is to ensure that cremation shall not be a means of concealing crime, and that proper safeguards shall be established in the public interest.

Examining the Scriptures in regard to Christians and the world at large we have the words of Jesus in John 5:28, 29,—“All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment.” It is very evident that Jesus was speaking here of two main classes of mankind in the resurrection day, those that have done good and those that have done evil. But a very important point to note is that both classes are to “come forth” from the death condition, being awakened from the sleep of death. The words of the Apostle Paul in Acts 24:15 agree with our Lord’s statement, as we would expect. The apostle says—“There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.” As with Jesus statement, so here Paul refers to two main classes of mankind. Let us consider each class separately, keeping in mind that the resurrection of Christ Himself is the one and only basis or hope of resurrection for any of the human family.

Returning to 1 Cor. 15:20, we see that Christ at His resurrection became “the firstfruits of them that slept”, impressing that our Lord was asleep in death until the third day—until the morning of His resurrection. In this connection two important texts come to mind with reference to the term “firstfruits.” In James 1:18 referring to the Lord’s people, James says,—“Of his own will (God’s will) begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” In other words, God is taking out a class of firstfruits, begotten of the holy spirit by the word of truth.

Again in Rev.14:4, referring to the true Church of the Gospel Age, we read,—“These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first-fruits unto God and to the Lamb.” Inasmuch as we saw in 1 Cor. 15:20 that Christ was the “firstfruits of them that slept”, it means Christ was the first of the firstfruits class. In other words, there are others also to be associated with Christ in this wonderful firstfruits class. The remainder of the firstfruits unto God, and also the after-fruits of God, are well explained in Eph. 4:8. “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” More clearly, as the margin of our Bible reads—“He led a multitude of captives.” He preceded the whole human family, which was in captivity to death, and is leading them out of death. And what a multitude requires to be led out of captivity! First of all He leads out of death the Church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven, (Heb. 12:23).

This great multitude our Lord is leading out of captivity is so well explained in 1 Cor. 15:21, 22—“For since by man (Adam) came death, by man (Christ Jesus) came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” What a wonderful promise we have here. The apostle is really saying that as many of mankind as have a dying life through Adam are to have a living existence through Christ’s sacrifice, upon the terms of obedience, as we find from other Scriptures. It may be asked, Are all those who are to be made alive through Christ to be made alive at the same time during the resurrection? The apostle answers this question in verse 23, of 1 Cor. 15,—“But every man in his own order.” The resurrection is going to be very orderly. “Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming”,—rather His presence. In this verse 23 “Christ the firstfruits” refers to the church, the body of Christ, the anointed firstfruits unto God of His creatures. As the Apostle declares in 1 Cor. 12:12, “As the body is one and hath many members (our human body), and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ.” What about these anointed firstfruits unto God of His creatures, who are the first of the multitude of captives to be released from captivity in death? Is there anything that could interfere with their resurrection to life, to live and reign with Christ a thousand years, such as cremation of their earthly bodies? Certainly not. The apostle helps us in 2 Cor. 5:1-5,—“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” This is a lovely passage, telling us that true Christians who are really devoted to God and begotten of the holy spirit, when their earthly house be dissolved they have a building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; in other words, a spiritual body to possess in the first resurrection.

The Apostle Paul is not saying that the faithful followers of Christ in his day would immediately receive their heavenly house not made with hands when they died, but rather at the time of the first resurrection this would be so, and Paul quotes his own case to Timothy in support of this truth in 2 Tim. 4:6-8. “I am now ready to be offered . . . Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” Paul did not expect to receive his crown immediately he finished his course. It was “laid up”, reserved in heaven, as Peter also says of those who are kept by the power of God (1 Pet. 1:4-5).

This agrees with Paul’s further statement in 1 Cor. 15, this lovely chapter on the resurrection, in verses 49 and 50. “As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” In other words, they that attain to the heavenly kingdom will be spirit beings. Even the Apostle John did not know what a spirit being is like, and we do well to accept the Word of God. In 1 John 3:2, we read—“Beloved, now are we the sons of

God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." Not Christ being changed back to be like us humans, but faithful Christians will be changed to be like Him, the risen Christ. He could go into the room to His disciples when the doors were locked. When the Lord led His disciples out to the Mount of Olives at the time of His ascension, it appeared to them that His fleshly body went up to heaven; but in fact it was dematerialised, and He went up a spirit being, to be at the Father's right hand. "As we have known Christ after the flesh, yet henceforth know we him so no more." "Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more; but ye (disciples) see me (shall see me); because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). Should we not reason, then, respecting the firstfruits unto God, that as they are not to be fleshly beings with fleshly bodies, but rather spiritual beings with spiritual bodies, there would be no hindrance to their resurrection if their bodies were cremated, seeing the earthly house or tabernacle will not be used again in any case. This does not mean the Bible approves cremation, but it means the bodies laid in the grave are not the bodies raised in the resurrection.

We have seen that those who have done good come forth to a resurrection of life—life with Christ in the heavenly kingdom. What of those who come forth to a resurrection of judgment? In Isa. 26:9 we have the assurance that when God's judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. This will be a teaching and training time, a trial time for all humanity. We have the answer clearly presented again in 1 Cor. 15:35, 37 and 38. "But some one will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? That which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain; but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body." In other words, those who have been true Christians, proving faithful unto death, will have a spiritual body as it pleases God. Those of mankind who have not become Christians, millions of them very good people, will have an earthly, fleshly body in the resurrection, as it pleases God. "To every seed his own body." How do we know? Because we read the earth is to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea, and this is for the majority of mankind who will be subjects of the kingdom. There will be Garden of Eden conditions throughout this wide world. "God giveth it a body." God has the personality of every being in His keeping, and surely can implant the very life principle, the personality, of every being into a body fitting for each individual—a spiritual body for each of the Church of the firstborn, and a fleshly body for the personality and mind of each human being who has ever lived. "Thou sowest not that body which shall be"—in each case, either spiritual or earthly.

While we see that cremation of the earthly body will in no way interfere with the resurrection of the dead, yet the Scriptural accounts of burial show that the Bible does not approve cremation. Burial appeals to us as being more in keeping with the Lord's desire for us as Christians. Our rejoicing, however, is in the fact that the resurrection of all mankind will take place in new bodies fitting for their sphere in life for Christ's Kingdom, both heavenly and earthly. The Church, in the first resurrection will be joint-heirs with Christ in the spiritual phase of that kingdom; and all the remainder of mankind in the earthly resurrection will be subjects of that Kingdom. And all this great salvation from death is based upon Christ's loving sacrifice for all, and His resurrection to the Father's right hand of power, to bring about the blessing of all the families of the earth. For all who have yielded their lives to the service of the Lord the words of the Apostle Paul have special appeal, as found in Phil. 3:10-11. "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

Israel Today

THE following extracts from a report by one of our brethren living in Israel, sent to a Convention in U.S.A., have been received recently. Our readers will no doubt appreciate this interesting review of events connected with the ingathering to Israel of many Jews from Russia.

If one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, then it was about two and a half days ago that the Lord said He would bring up the Children of Israel from the land of the North and bring them back into their land. Now that word is prospering in the thing whereto He sent it, (Isa. 55:11).

You will recall that two years ago I mentioned that the Jews in Russia were beginning to stir and demand the right to return to Israel. A year ago, their insistent demands had begun to bear some fruit. Now the Jews from Russia are arriving in Israel at the rate of about five thousand a month. This emigration is not to the liking of the Russian authorities. They thought that by letting out a few ring-leaders of the Jewish repatriation movement they could take the steam out of the movement and more easily control those who remained. But the granting of exit visas to the leaders showed their assistants that the iron door could be forced open, at least a crack; so they, too, applied for visas and, after the inevitable difficulties, received them. More and more followed suit. Applicants

for visas immediately lose their jobs. Quite a number have been arrested on trumped-up charges and imprisoned in work camps after sham trials. All the red tape of bureaucracy is brought into play to delay proceedings. But in spite of all the efforts of the Russians to discourage and obstruct it, the movement to return to Zion is gathering momentum.

Why do the Russian officials yield to the pressure of this movement? If they don't want to issue visas, why don't they simply refuse to issue them? The answer is that the Achilles' heel of Soviet policy is ideology—words, ideas, doctrines. Their power is based on their ability to get people to believe in Moscow-centered communism, whether that belief is accomplished by persuasion, indoctrination, or brain-washing. The chances of realising their ambition to control the world depend on their ability to convince a large number of people in every nation that the salvation of the world comes from the Kremlin. Now there exists in the Soviet Union an underground information service that is composed largely of intellectuals and is far from being exclusively Jewish. Through its activities, the names of newcomers to the camps and the condition of sick prisoners are known not only throughout the U.S.S.R., but also outside. This knowledge in itself would not be very troublesome if it did not spread. But Jews all over the free world are in contact with each other and can apply very telling pressure. If Sylvia Zalmondson and Ruth Alexandrovich are seriously sick in Russian prison camps, their only crime being that they want to go to Israel, and only a few people know about them, then they can stay where they are. If, on the other hand, their pictures are carried in street demonstrations in the major cities of the world, so that even the communist parties in western countries start inquiring about them, then the Soviet authorities seriously consider releasing them (as they have already released Sylvia) rather than answer too many questions. Widely publicised documented evidence of inhumane treatment of its citizens by the Russian government is a pressure the Soviet leaders find very difficult to resist, because it lowers their stature in the eyes of their adherents and prospective adherents in countries outside the Soviet block. Rather than face such adverse publicity, they are inclined to correct the situation, however reluctantly.

When the Amalekites tried to prevent the Exodus from Egypt to the promised land, the Children of Israel gained ground as long as Moses held his hands up and lost ground when he let them down. So now, the Jewish nation all over the world can help their brethren win their battle for release from Russia if they will continue in prayer for their release and in actions corresponding to that prayer. But Moses' arms got tired. Instead of giving him super-human strength to hold his hands up as long as necessary, God gave him Aaron the high priest and Hur, the son of Caleb, to help hold his hands up. In the present situation, Aaron could picture the members of the royal priesthood still in the flesh, while young Hur could represent other sympathisers, both inside and outside the U.S.S.R., who encourage the Jews in this effort. It would seem that one way in which we can help to hold up the hands of Moses at the present time, and thereby actually participate in the exodus from Russia (the land of the north), would be to proclaim publicly the current beginnings of the fulfilment of the prophecy of Jeremiah 16:14-15, along with the assurance that when God starts to do something He sees it through to a successful conclusion, (Isa. 66:9-10).

Another example of Aaron's assistance to Moses took place in Egypt. When Moses, with stammering lips, proclaimed God's words, "Let my people go", Aaron repeated them in clear tones that rang in the ears of Pharaoh. Now the Jews of the free world are directing toward the rulers of Russia that same demand; and it is the privilege of those whose understanding of present Truth enables them to discern the Lord's times and seasons to point out

to the public at large that in our day God is fulfilling His promise by the mouth of Jeremiah. This is not a one-time matter. Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh repeatedly before he finally let the Israelites go, under the pressure of the tenth plague.

There may be an interesting parallel between the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea and the destruction of the armies of Gog and Magog after the deliverance of the Jews from the land of the north.

In our Memorial Service here in Arad, we again included a reading of Jeremiah 16:14-15 and a prayer for the fulfilment of this prophecy. We are happy that tens of thousands of Jews have already come from the Soviet Union.

Several years ago, I mentioned the possibility of a Convention in Jerusalem in 1974. I don't know whether it is the Lord's will or not to hold such a Convention. Perhaps it would involve many Truth friends in spending money that could be put to use in better ways in His service. I know of no reason for objection, legal or otherwise, as long as it is a Convention of Bible Students and not a public witness effort. Those attending would have to realise that they are guests in Israel and that any effort to make converts is extremely distasteful to Israelis and is particularly repugnant if it appears to be disguised as something else. Friends who would be willing to restrain for these few days the laudable urge to spread the Truth would find this an opportunity to meet with some of like precious faith from other lands and to compare notes on our understanding of the Scriptures. They would see the land where

our Master walked as a man and the City of Jerusalem, from which the Word of the Lord will go forth to bless all nations. Some might sense with us the presence of the King of Israel on the holy hill of Zion and rejoice with us in seeing our Master's brethren restored to their land and blessed here. The time for this commemorative gathering would be in the fall of the year 1974. It could start with Rosh Hashana (the Jewish new year's day); or it could quite appropriately take place during Succoth (the feast of Tabernacles), a festival which the prophet Zechariah 14:16-17 says will be celebrated annually at Jerusalem. If a considerable number of the Lord's people are enthusiastic about this idea, I will take that as an indication that it is the Lord's will for the Convention to be held; if not, I will understand that this was just a pleasant dream of my own.

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It is nothing for a man to hold up his head in a calm; but to maintain his post when all others have quitted theirs, and there to stand upright when other men are beaten down—this is praiseworthy.—Seneca.

Lessons from the Great Teacher

THE childhood home of Jesus was Nazareth, although He was born in Bethlehem. The people of Nazareth would of course feel a certain sense of pride in their fellow-citizen whose fame was spreading throughout all Galilee and Judea. Hearing of the mighty works and wonderful teachings given at Capernaum, they not unnaturally said to themselves, Well, of course He will soon return to His own town and give us a sight of His wonderful power. And *yet*, they reflected, Is not this Jesus, whose mother and brethren we know, and who has for a long time been identified with Joseph's carpenter shop?

They could scarcely believe what they had heard. How could it be that so soon after leaving home He had become so famous and so powerful? He never did such miracles in all the years that we knew Him, said they. They did not, of course, understand as we do that He received His power as a special benediction when He was thirty years of age, as a result of His full consecration of His life to the Divine service, that devotion being symbolized by His immersion in Jordan.

The Synagogue At Nazareth.

At length He came to Nazareth. It was on a Sabbath day. For long years He had been recognised as one of the few able to read, and had done the congregational reading of the Holy Scriptures. This was therefore just what they wished and expected Him to do on the Sabbath day of His return. He went into the synagogue and received from the custodian the scroll bearing the lesson, and read the lesson for the day.

Thus far all went well; but when Jesus began to comment upon passages of Scripture there was a commotion; first whisperings of disapproval, and finally an outburst of wrath against Him. Ay! they thought, this young man has quite lost His head since He left us! We know indeed that His people of Nazareth have a mean name throughout the country, that ours is reputed to be a mean city of little learning; but who would expect that one of our own citizens would return to our midst and tell us to our faces that we are not worthy of having an exhibition of His power—such as He has given to other cities and to their people!

Their pride and patriotism made them wild. They drove Him out of the synagogue with angry demonstrations. They insulted and jostled Him and led the way toward the rear of their city, not daring to lay hands on Him, but merely as a mob gnashing upon Him and pushing onward in a direction in which they desired that they might lead Him to the brow of a hill, and then push Him over.

For a little way Jesus went, but then He turned and passed through their midst, overawing them by the dignity of His presence, and perhaps realizing that their course towards Him was merely a corroboration of what He had said respecting their unworthiness to have a share of the blessing of God which He was distributing.

The Truth That Angered.

What were the words that thus angered them? At first we read, "All bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth." What, then, made the change? It was the plain declaration that because they did not appreciate Him enough, because they did not believe in Him fully, therefore it would not be God's will that He should perform any miracles for them. He backed up His statement with illustrations from the

past which angered them still more. He said that in Elijah's day there was a famine in the land, and that Elijah was not sent to the widows of Israel, but to a widow across the border, in a Gentile city.

Again, Elisha was not sent to cleanse the lepers of Israel, but did cleanse a Gentile, Naaman. Alas, for the power of pride! "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Instead of the people of Nazareth getting angry and resenting these things, they should have said, Tell us, then, of our faults and help us to overcome them. If God has blessings, surely we, as Israelites, may have our share, if we will but come into the right attitude of heart. Instruct and pray for us. But the proud cannot see their difficulties, hence the Scriptural declaration of the special favor and blessing to the humble.

The Lesson From Isaiah.

The lesson for that Sabbath was from Isaiah 61:1-3. It was an excellent text, and the sermon on it was from the very ablest of all teachers. The whole difficulty was with the heart condition of the hearers; and this is true of many a sermon and many a lesson. How His hearers should have rejoiced to know that they were living in the day of the fulfilment of these words! He had been anointed by the Father with the holy spirit, that He might declare good tidings to the poor. Surely many of them were poor and needy!

We read further that Jehovah sent Jesus to heal the broken-hearted. Oh, how those words ought to have appealed to all in that audience! How they **would** have appealed to any that were brokenhearted! The difficulty probably was that they were hard-hearted. Satan has hardened the hearts of mankind in general. God's promise is that under Messiah's glorious reign He will take away the "stony hearts" and give them "hearts of flesh."

The declaration further was that the blind would receive their sight, that liberty would be granted to the captives, that the bruised and injured would be healed, and that "the acceptable year of the Lord" would be proclaimed. These were indeed wonderful words of life! No wonder we read that "they wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth."

"Deliverance To The Captives."

This part of the message might have been applied in part to themselves. Were they not captives, bound by the fetters of sin, bound also by the fetters and chains of heredity, sickness, imperfection and death? Were not some of them actually blind also, as respects the eyes of their understanding? Evidently the time for them to see had not arrived—they were not in the condition to receive the blessing of the anointing of their eyes of understanding. Were they not all bruised by the fall, imperfect, blemished, wounded, sore—mentally, morally and physically—and was not the Great Deliverer there to set them at liberty, in part at least, from these difficulties? Surely that was a favorable moment, and they were a favored people!

But the work that Jesus was doing was merely the proclamation of these things, with a few illustrations or examples of healing, etc. The real time for Him to accomplish the deliverance of the captives, the liberating of the sin-bruised, and the giving of sight to the blind, that all might sing the praises of God and appreciate His favor—these actual blessings belonged to the Messianic Kingdom time. What Jesus was doing was merely a foreshadowing of the great things to be accomplished future—"In the Times of Restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His Holy Prophets."—Acts 3:21.

Proclaiming "The Acceptable Year."

This brief expression, so little understood, pointed out the special work of Jesus, far more important than the miracles. The term, "acceptable year," or acceptable time, refers to this entire Gospel Age of more than nineteen centuries. It is "the acceptable time" in the sense that during this period God is willing, through the merit of Christ's sacrifice, to accept from amongst the sinners a Little Flock of joint-sacrificers to share with their Redeemer in His Kingdom.

No opportunity had been granted in the past to become dead with Jesus, to present their bodies living sacrifices, to walk in His footsteps, to fill up the afflictions of Christ, to suffer with Him. The proclamation of this opportunity waited until Jesus had made His own consecration, and all who accepted His Message and became His followers did so under this invitation or proclamation. It was the privilege of becoming the sons of God by a begetting of the holy spirit. (John 1:13.) The acceptance of these sacrifices began at Pentecost and still continues. Who can say how soon the door of privilege to offer acceptable sacrifices may close? Then the door to the High Calling, to the Bride class, will **be** shut—forever. Other blessings God has, but not other privileges than those of this Age for suffering with Christ and for participating with Him in His reign of glory.

Question Box

Question:—What is the understanding of Matt. 27:52, 53?

Answer.—That these verses do not teach that some of the saints were resurrected at the time of the earthquake, etc., at our Lord's crucifixion, is evident from other Scriptures, such as Acts 26:23—"That Christ should suffer and that he should be the **first** that should rise from the dead." Also Col. 1:18—"The first-born from the dead, that in all things he might have the pre-eminence." The one or two who, like Lazarus, were brought back from death, were not resurrected to life, but merely brought back to this dying condition and in course of time again passed away, and were buried to await the resurrection.

This passage in Matthew seems quite out of accord with other Scriptures. The oldest M.S.S., the Sinaitic, omits the words "and the graves were opened", in verse 52, also "and went", in verse 53. It seems likely that when the earthquake occurred at the time of our Lord's death that the rocks being rent some bodies were thrown up and came to view, and yet were not noticed until after the resurrection of Jesus. The day following our Lord's death being the Jewish Sabbath, when all would be quiet, and Jesus being raised early the next morning, would seem to support this view of the matter.

Question:—Why did our Lord say to His disciples, "He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one" (Luke 22:36, 38), and then afterward say to St. Peter: "Put up thy sword into its place; for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword"?—Matthew 26:51, 52.

Answer:—We should note the circumstances. Jesus knew that His hour was come in which He would be betrayed, made prisoner, and the next day be crucified. It was necessary to show that His capture was not made by force, but that He voluntarily permitted Himself to be taken and crucified. The Father might know, the angels might know, and His disciples might know that He had powers to ask of the Father legions of angels for His defence and protection from the hands of His enemies: but others could not know this. It was desirable that it should be clearly manifested that Jesus and His disciples could have defended themselves, as St. Peter, indeed, started out to do when he drew his sword and cut off the ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus promptly healed the ear and instructed Peter to be non-resistant, and surrendered Himself, merely requesting that His disciples be not molested.

The circumstances demonstrated that our Lord surrendered Himself voluntarily, and therein was the lesson. Had there been no swords in the company of His disciples, it might have been claimed that no defence could have been made. The having of the swords made possible the exhibition of the courage of the disciples, and the willingness of Jesus to submit Himself.

When Jesus said that if necessary their garments should be sold to purchase a sword, the Apostles responded that they had in their company two swords; and Jesus answered, "It is enough." They were intended merely for a demonstration, and not for defence.

Nothing in this Scripture seems to give any warrant to warfare, nor to the implication of some that Jesus desired His followers to take the sword. True, not all who have taken to the sword have perished by the sword, and not all who have avoided the sword have preserved their lives, but it is a general principle which the Lord discusses. He who prepares himself for warfare and trouble will be pretty sure to get plenty of it, according to the general course of the fallen human nature. On the other hand, the Lord's disciples are enjoined to "follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."—Hebrews 12:14.

The Key to Living is Giving

A very favourite story of mine is about two **seas** in Palestine.

One is a sparkling sapphire jewel,
Its waters are clean and clear and cool,
Along its shores the children play
And travellers seek it on their way,
And **Nature** gives so lavishly Her choicest gems to the Galilee:

But on to the south the Jordan flows
Into a sea where nothing grows,
No splash of fish, no singing bird,
No children's laughter is ever heard,

The air hangs heavy all around
And Nature shuns this barren ground:

Both seas receive the Jordan's flow,
The water is just the same, we know,
But one of the seas, like liquid sun,
Can warm the hearts of everyone,
While farther south another sea
Is dead and dark and miserly—
It takes each drop the Jordan brings
And to each drop it fiercely clings,
It hoards and holds the Jordan's waves
Until like shackled, captured slaves
The fresh, clear Jordan turns to salt
And dies within the Dead Sea's vault:

But the Jordan flows on rapturously
As it enters and leaves the Galilee,
For every drop that the Jordan gives
Becomes a laughing wave that lives—
For the Galilee gives back each drop,
Its waters flow and never stop,
And in this laughing, living sea
That takes and gives so generously
We find the way to life and **living**
Is not in keeping, but in **giving!**

Yes, there are two Palestinian seas
And mankind is fashioned after these!

Helen Steiner Rice.

EVIL.

Keep clear of personalities in conversation. Talk of things, objects, thoughts. The smallest minds occupy themselves with persons. Do not needlessly report ill of others. As far as possible, dwell on the good side of human beings. There are family boards where a constant process of depreciating, assigning motives, and cutting up character goes forward. They are not pleasant places. One who is healthy does not wish to dine at a dissecting table. There is evil enough in man, God knows. But it is not the mission of every young man and woman to detail and report it all. Keep the atmosphere as pure as possible, and fragrant with gentleness and charity. —John Hall.

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