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Pressing Toward the Mark

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forward to those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the coming of God in Christ Jesus." - Phil. 3:13. 14.

FEW IN the nominal church see any particular mark or any particular prize with definiteness; to be sought and to be attained. The majority are merely fleeing from an imagined eternal torment, which pursues them as a fear, a dread, a nightmare, a horror, from the cradle to the tomb. Others of the Lord's people (chiefly of "this way") have had the eyes of their understanding illuminated by the Holy Spirit through the divine Word, and have gotten a glimpse of the great prize which God has set before the elect Church of this Gospel Age. No wonder if these are enthused with the glorious spectacle which (the natural) eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man to conceive of, but which "God hath revealed unto us by His Spirit"! No wonder, either, if they have given more attention to the prize than to the mark which must be attained ere the prize is won.

Full; of enthusiasm and appreciation of divine love, these have entirely lost the fear of eternal torment, and have learned that this doctrine is of Satan, and not of God; from man, and not of the Holy Spirit; from the dark ages, and not the teachings of the inspired words of Scripture. They have learned, too, that what Scriptures seem to give any color of sanction to this blasphemy against God's character and plan are certain parables, symbols and dark sayings which misinterpretations have more or less glossed and colored in the common translations of the Scriptures.

It is quite common for this latter class to think and to speak of "running for the prize," and to measurably lose sight of the fact that it is not the prize that we run toward, but the mark: that the prize is entirely beyond our grasp;-as the Apostle expresses it above, "I press toward the mark." Whoever reaches the mark of character which God has established for the elect will receive the prize; and whoever fails to reach that mark of character will fail to get the prize. It is therefore a very serious error to run for the prize and forget or ignore or disregard the "mark," which must first be attained.

The thought that a certain standard or mark of character is necessary to all who will pass divine approval as "overcomers," and hear the Lord's "Well done!" is an astounding one to many. Many have thought of the Christian race as merely an avoidance of open sin; others have included an

avoidance of secret faults; others have gone still further, and have included a general disposition to sacrifice many interests of the present life; others have gone still further, and have understood the test of discipleship to be full self-surrender to the Lord, a full sacrifice of earthly life and all of its interests to the will of our Head, the Lord; -- but almost none have thought that all our sacrificings and experiences and self-denials must lead up toward and eventually bring us to the "mark" of character which God has set for the "elect" -- else they will not get the prize of joint-heirship with Christ in the Millennial Kingdom. Nothing, probably, has contributed so much to this oversight of a "mark" or fixed standard of character than the false interpretation given to our Lord's conversation with the dying thief on Calvary.

It is indisputably reasonable, that God has some standard or test by which He will determine who are worthy to receive the great blessings and honors offered to the elect-who are worthy to be members of the Body of Christ and to share His Millennial Kingdom -- what shall constitute faithfulness in those who "seek for glory, honor and immortality," and who are "the called and chosen and faithful." The Apostle, in our text, unquestionably declares that there is such a mark, and that all who are running with any hope of attaining the desired prize must be running toward that mark, and must attain it or lose the prize. And we see, too, that the Apostle judges himself according to this standard, and declares that at the time he wrote he had not yet reached this mark or standard of character development. Such reflections cannot but awaken in the hearts of all who are in this race earnest desires to see distinctly the mark toward which we must run: and it should stimulate each and all of us to run the more patiently and the more perseveringly, and to watch day by day the measure of our progress toward the grand mark which the Lord our God has set before us.

We notice that the Apostle has in mind foot races, and we see the forcefulness of the illustration: (1) As the racers must enter the race-course in a legitimate manner, so must we get on our race-course in a legitimate manner, through the only door-faith in the precious blood which redeemed us and justified us before God. (2) Those who enter the course must be regularly recorded or registered as runners; they must positively declare their intention, else they will not be in the race. So with us having been "justified by faith," and having been informed of our privileges in connection with this race, and the attainment of its prize, it was incumbent upon us to declare our intention to make a covenant with the Lord, and to thus be regularly entered-our names being written, not upon earthly church rolls, but in the Lamb's book of life -- "written in heaven." - Heb. 12:23.

With foot-racers there is a prize offered also, but it is not the prize that is hung out to their view while on the race-course; it is not the prize toward which they run, but the mark. There is the quarter mile mark, the half-mile mark, the three-quarter mile mark, and the mile mark at the close of the race; and each racer watches for and encourages himself as he passes one or another of these marks by the way, until finally he reaches the last one, the mark for the prize. And this watching of the marks by the way, and reckoning up to the standard, is a great incentive to him -- an encouragement as he speeds along, a reminder if he is going slackly. So, too, it is with the Christian runner in the narrow way toward the mark of the great prize which God has promised-joint-heirship with His Son, the Lord of glory. It will encourage us to note the marks on our way, and to perceive our progress -- if we are coming nearer and nearer and nearer to "the mark for the prize" -- the mark which wins the prize. And if any be careless, indifferent, slack, in his running, nothing could be a greater stimulus to him than the knowledge that only his own carelessness or slackness can lose him the prize.

What is This Great "Mark" of Character Set Before us by Our God?

We answer, it is stated under various names; as for instance, our Lord Jesus mentioned it when He said, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." (Matt. 5:48.) The same mark is mentioned by the Apostle when he says that God predestinated that all who will be of the elect must be "conformed to the image of His Son." (Rom. 8:29.) These two statements differ in form, but are the same in substance. The same mark is mentioned again by the Apostle when he says, "The righteousness of the Law is fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit." And again he tells us that "Love is the fulfilling of the Law." (Rom. 8:4; 13:10.) Here, then, we have an aggregated definition of what constitutes the "mark" of Christian character, in the elect: it is God-likeness, Christ-likeness, Love. The requirement, therefore, would seem to be that the Lord's people, holy and elect, must attain to the same character or disposition of love that God possesses and that was manifested also by our Lord Jesus.

But some one will say, How can we, "who by nature are children of wrath, even as others," ever hope to attain to so high a standard or mark of character as this, that we should love as God loves, as Christ loves? We answer, that we need never hope to attain to this high standard as respects the flesh, for so long as we are in these mortal bodies, and obliged to use their brains, we will necessarily be more or less opposed by the selfishness which through the fall has come to have such complete possession of our race through the mental, moral and physical derangements incidental to six thousand years of depravity.

The attainment of this mark of perfect love is to be an attainment of the heart, of the will -- the new will, "begotten, not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," through the Holy Spirit. Nor do we find, nor should we expect that the new mind would come up to this standard at the beginning of our Christian experience. The new mind, although inspired of God through the exceeding great and precious promises of His Word, is nevertheless our own will, and more or less circumscribed by its channel and instrument, the human brain. Hence the Apostle informs us that the new mind must constantly fight a battle against the flesh, and that its victory means the death of the flesh -- that it cannot be actually perfect until the "change" shall come, by which this newly begotten will shall receive its spiritual body in the first resurrection. But since the receiving of a spiritual body in the first resurrection will be the receiving of the prize, we see that the race toward the mark and the attainment of that mark must be made by the new mind while it is still in this mortal body or "earthen vessel." - 2 Cor. 5:2-4.

In a word, the new mind must grow, must develop. As the Apostle exhorts, we, as new creatures, must grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of God--the growth here corresponding to the running in the figure under consideration. We must run or press nearer and nearer to the mark day by day, week by week, year by year, until it shall be attained, -- if we would gain the prize. Nor is it merely a question of time, for we all know some who have been a long time in the race and have made comparatively little progress in the cultivation of the gifts of the Spirit, the sum of which is comprehended in the one word, perfect love -- the mark.

And we probably all know some others who have been a comparatively short time in the narrow way who, have made great progress, -- going from grace to grace, from knowledge to knowledge, from glory to glory -- rapidly nearing the mark. And we know some who, so far as human judgment can discern, have reached the mark; but of these more anon.

That we may clearly comprehend this subject, let us notice how small were the beginnings of this grace of love in our hearts; and let us hope that many, as they trace the matter here, and compare it with their own experiences, will be able to find large developments in their own characters -- that

they have passed one after another of the quarter mile marks in the way, and that they are rapidly nearing, if they have not already reached, "the mark; of the prize."

(1), The beginning of our experience as Christians the Apostle expresses, saying, it was not that we first loved God, but that "He first loved us" that attracted us to Him. (1 John 4:19.) A sense of justice told us that since God had so loved us as to redeem us at so great a cost, and to provide for us so great salvation, it would be as little as we could do -- it would be our duty to love and serve Him in return. This beginning of love we will designate as duty-love. It lacked in many respects qualities which now permeate our love for God, which is of a higher, a more advanced character, because we have grown in grace, and in knowledge, and in love. The Apostle seems to speak again; of this same duty-love, when he says, "The love of Christ constraineth us [draws out our love in return]; for we thus judge that if one died for all, then were all dead [under divine sentence, the curse]; and that we who live [who have been justified to life through faith in Jesus' redemption] should henceforth live not unto ourselves but unto Him who died for us." (2 Cor. 5:14, 15.) Here again it is the "should"-love or duty-love,-the first, the crudest, the simplest development of our love toward God, our starting-point in the race toward perfect love.

(2) After we had exercised the duty-love and sought to obey God, not only in the avoidance of sin, but also in sacrificing our earthly interests and rights for His sake and the truth's sake, in obedience to His will-in obedience to duty-love-we began to find in our hearts an appreciation of the principles of righteousness; we began to love righteousness-justice, mercy, love: not at first with a fervency of love, but rather with respect for the glorious qualities of the divine character, plan and law. This was our first quarter-mile mark, so to speak-love of principles of righteousness.

(3). The more we learned to love these elements of divine character, the principles of righteousness which find their perfect representation in the divine being, and through which the divine being is revealed to the eyes of our understanding-in that proportion the true love of God (based upon principles rather than upon duty), conies into our hearts. So to speak, here in the race-course we had gained the second quarter-mile mark -- love of God's character; even though we had not yet discerned the length and breadth and heights and depths of that character, we had begun to love the Lord in the true way-from appreciation not only of what He had done for us, but also and specially for what He is-from appreciation of His character.

(4) Love of God from this latter standpoint as the representative of every grace and every virtue, as the representative of righteousness, and the opponent of every injustice and inequity, led us to seek and to follow out these principles amongst our fellow-men, as well as in our own characters. As we began to love truth, purity, nobility of character, wherever it could be found, we found some of it in a mottled and streaked condition even in the world of mankind: we found that the original law of God, written in the heart of Father Adam, although largely erased and obliterated from the hearts and consciences of his children, is not wholly gone-that to some extent, especially under the influence of Christianity in the past eighteen centuries, some features of this perfect law may be dimly discerned amongst men.

But our scrutiny, backed by our increasing love of these principles of righteousness, found nothing satisfactory amongst natural men -- nor even amongst those professing godliness -- professing to be followers in the footsteps of Jesus. We found these all, like ourselves, far short of perfection, far short of the glory of God. But as the true love, of right principles, burned in our hearts more and more fervently, we learned to sympathize with the entire "groaning creation, and to "love the brethren"; for in the latter we perceived a class inspired by the same spirit by which we ourselves had been begotten of God, the spirit of the truth; we saw some of them struggling as

we had struggled, with appreciation only of the duty-love; we saw others who had gained a higher conception than this, who had learned to appreciate the principles of righteousness and to love them, and to hate iniquity, and further, to love the God who is the embodiment of these. And the realization that these "brethren," like ourselves, were gradually approximating the divine standard -- "pressing toward the mark" -- filled us with interest in them and in their battle against sin and its weaknesses, and against the Adversary and his beguilements. We became more and more interested in their welfare and overcoming in proportion as we were striving and making progress in the same "narrow way." This love of the brethren we did not have at the beginning; it marks a distinct progress in our race toward the "mark"; we might term it the third quarter-mile mark. But although a grand attainment was achieved when this love of the brethren reached the point of willingness to "lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16), yet it was not the full attainment of the "mark" for which we are running.

(5) The "mark of the prize" is a still higher attainment in love;-the one which we understand the Scriptures to point out as the very highest attainment is that of loving our enemies-not merely tolerating them, abstaining from injuring them, etc., while thinking evil of them; but far beyond this, it signifies the full purging out of all anger, malice, hatred, envy, strife, not only from our actions but also from our words, and even from our thoughts, our sentiments. It means such a complete triumph of love in our hearts as not only loves God supremely and delights to sacrifice in His service from love of the principles represented in His character, and love for the brethren, which makes us careful of their feelings and interests, and ready to lay down our lives on their behalf, to deliver them from evil, or to avoid putting a stumbling-block in their way, but it means additionally that the love of God has been so thoroughly shed abroad in our hearts that we can love and do love every intelligent creature, and delight to do good unto all men, and, to serve all men' as we have opportunity, especially the household of faith. - Gal. 6:10.

This does not mean that the love which we have for the world must be of the same kind that we have for the Lord, who is the personification of righteousness, and for the "brethren," who are striving to have Love, the righteousness of the Law, fulfilled in them through Christ. It means rather a sympathetic love; a benevolence such as God Himself exercised toward the whole world of mankind. It does not mean that we are to love the world in the sense condemned by the Apostle when he said, "Love not the world, neither the things of the world." (1 John 2:15.) It does mean the attainment of the condition indicated in the expression, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever should believe on Him might not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16.) It is a love for the world, which will not only be glad to see them lifted up out of degradation and sin to holiness and purity and righteousness, but which will be glad to cooperate to these ends as opportunities may offer -not, however, anticipating God's love and the development of His Plan of the Ages; 'but co-working with God in that great Plan which He has promised shall eventually bring, during the Millennial Age, blessing to every creature through the elect class now running in this race for attainment of the "mark," to win the great prize of joint heirship with His Son. This perfect love, which, including the other developments, extends even to enemies and those who injure us and speak evil of us falsely for Christ's and righteousness' sake, is the fourth mark in the race-"the mark for the prize."

While it is well for us to notice these various steps in the progress of our race toward the "mark," we are to remember that the illustration does not fit perfectly, but that rather while there is this order of progression it is less distinctly marked in our experiences, in which duty-love but gradually leads into the higher forms, remaining, but subordinately, to the end. It is a part of the blessed arrangement of God that those who are running in this race are not reckoned with according to the flesh, but as "new creatures," according to the spirit, the mind, the will, the intention. We may never hope to attain to this grand "mark" of perfect Love in our flesh, so that

every act and every word would give full proof of the real spirit of love which fills our hearts. Some may have greater weaknesses and defects in the flesh than others, and hence may be less able than others to uniformly and thoroughly show the real sentiments of their hearts. But God looketh at the heart; it is the heart that He sees running in this race; it is the heart which is to attain to this "mark" set before us in the Gospel-this mark of perfect love, which includes even our enemies. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

If now we see clearly that perfect love is "the mark of the prize," we see something to strive for in our daily lives; a condition which we can by God's grace attain, and which must be attained if we would be counted worthy a place in the Kingdom. The Lord is not selecting the members of the Bride of Christ by an arbitrary election; neither is He selecting them on the lines of a mere sentimentality; He is selecting them on the lines of character, heart-development; and those who attain this likeness to His Son, this "mark" of the prize, this standard of what is pleasing and acceptable to the Father-these, and these alone, may have confident hope of joint-heirship with our Lord. How important, then, that each runner in this race follow closely the Apostle's injunction to lay aside every weight and hindrance, and to run with patience the race set before us in the Gospel-"looking unto Jesus," the author of our faith, until He shall have become the finisher of it (Heb. 12:1) giving us grace to conquer, and keeping us through His Word and through His providence unto the end of the race.

Each one on this race-course should examine himself, rather than examine others, in respect to progress in this narrow way; for each knows his own heart condition and the weaknesses of his own flesh better than any other knows these, the Lord alone excepted. Let us each note just where he is in the race-course, rejoicing that he is in the race at all; considering it a great privilege to be thus called and privileged to enter in this race. If we find that we have passed the first quarter-mark, let us rejoice and press on. If we find that we have passed the second also, let us rejoice so much the more, but not slack our running. If we find that we have passed the third quarter we may properly rejoice so much the more, and press with vigor on; and if we have attained to the fourth mark, of perfect love, which includes even enemies, we have indeed cause for great rejoicing. The prize is ours, if we but remain faithful. But, as the Apostle says, "Having done all, stand" -- with all the armor on; stand in various testings which will then, as much as ever along the race-course, be brought to bear against us to divert us away from the mark, before the great Inspector and Giver of rewards shall say, "Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joys of thy Lord." - Eph. 6:13-17.

It is indispensable to those who have reached the mark of perfect love that they shall keep actively engaged in the service of the Lord, laying down their lives for the brethren; because he who loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, what assurance hath he that he really loves God, whom he hath not seen? (1 John 4:20.) Such must stand, not only as representatives of God and of the principles of righteousness, but as representatives of those strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, and in the faith of His Word, -- ready and willing and efficient in the encouragement of other runners in the race-course, that they likewise may attain to the "mark." As the Apostle says: "As many, therefore, as are perfect, should be of this mind; and if in anything you think differently, God will reveal this to you; but to what we have attained, let us walk by the same line. Brethren, become joint-imitators of me, and watch those who are thus walking, as you have us for a pattern." - Phil. 3:15, 17, Diaglott.- Watch *Tower*, 1901.

Wonderful. Aids to Strengthen Faith

"Hearken to Me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged. Look unto Abraham your father, For I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him." - Isa. 51:1, 2.

TO BOTH Jew and Christian the matter of claiming relationship to Abraham has been of much importance. In the ranks of both in their respective ages, true and false claims to this relationship have been made. A large number of his descendants by natural generation who laid great stress on that fact, made the mistake of failing to distinguish between an outward and an inward condition. They failed to take into account that "he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; but he is a Jew which is one inwardly." (Rom. 2:28, 29.) Similarly, among those appropriating the name Christian the same distinction must be recognized. The peculiar mark or identification of the true seed of Abraham is found in the words of both Jesus and the Apostle Paul. To those of His own day Jesus said, "If ye were Abraham's children, **ye would do the works of Abraham.**" Their evil works and unbelief belied their claim. Had Abraham been present with them, he would have acted in obedient faith, accepting Jesus as the One whose day he waited for. Thus Paul also writes, "Abraham believed **God**, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. . . . So then they **which be of faith** are blessed with faithful Abraham." - Gal. 3:6, 9.

This faith is characterized by a prompt unwavering response to the will of God, a faith that recognizes the need of full dependence on God to work out His purposes, and a faith ready to follow God's leadings, trusting Him fully through the most trying circumstances. This seems to be the special intent of our opening text, addressed, as it may well be, to all who desire to be found true children of Abraham: "Look unto Abraham your father," observe his obedient faith, note his long years of trial and triumph, and see how "I called him, and blessed- him, and increased him."

It cannot be otherwise than profitable then for us to look over the record of Abraham, "the father of the faithful," noting how he was blessed and increased. Was there ever a greater trial of faith borne by any servant of God? Many severe tests of faith came to others subsequent to Abraham's day, and in all ages, but of none has God asked as great things as He did of this man, who, because of his outstanding faith and obedience, so well deserved the name "the friend of God." The severity, of the ordeals he endured is well expressed by Paul in the fourth chapter of Romans, where reference is made to three distinct features of Abraham's character first, "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations"; second, "He considered not his own body now dead"; third, "He was fully persuaded that what He [God] had promised, He was able also to perform." (Ver. 18, 19, 21.) This was assured confidence, notwithstanding the fact that everything from a natural viewpoint was against the realization of what had been promised, a faith that "staggered not" at seeming impossibilities, a faith resting entirely on the word of God. What emphasis may well be put upon these words, "Abraham believed God."

This was wonderful faith. Perhaps we can appreciate it considerably more if we pause long enough to note a few circumstances under which it was demonstrated. Abraham had no sacred Scriptures by which to be "thoroughly furnished unto all good works," such as we may turn to. He had no faith-strengthening record of God's integrity in keeping His promises, such as we have in the history of thousands of years of His faithfulness. There was for Abraham no "great cloud of witnesses" to turn to for inspiration in times of faith's severe testing. Neither did he have a company of contemporary kindred spirits of strong faith and similar hopes with whom he could

commune and thereby know that encouragement and stimulation diffused by such contacts. He must wait for a quarter of a century before the promised son came, and a few years later as good as slay him on an altar of sacrifice in obedience to God's command. All this without a Bible to turn to for comfort and help, without a precedent to cling to, and most important of all, he lived long before there was a Cross on which God had so abundantly manifested His love, and on which a Surety had been provided as a guarantee of the complete fulfillment of every redemptive promise made. At best he had but a kernel, a single promise in which the fulfillment of his hopes lay hidden, in contrast to the great unfolding of that promise given to us. And yet for all of these things absent in his experience yet present in ours, how remarkable his faith, and how needful for us this lesson if we too will possess the faith that pleases God. Since, in the progressive Plan of God "some better thing for us" in the way of high calling privileges, greater than anything held out to Abraham, is our portion, it follows as a certainty that "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required." How possible it is that we might be weighed by this rule and found wanting in the true faith, that kind of faith Peter makes so precious, "**much more precious** than, of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire."

Abraham's Journey Over Unknown Pathway

In that remarkable, and to us now, inspirational review of the heroes of faith given in the eleventh of Hebrews, a reference to Abraham is worth noting just here. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." (Ver. 8.) He became an exile from friends and went out alone with God, leaving everything with Him—a pilgrim starting out for unknown parts with nothing but a vision of an inheritance "afar off." In a far distant day he visualized his seed multiplied, and a "city whose builder and maker is God," but the way thereto, the tests of faith and endurance to be experienced through many long years, he knew not. God kindly veiled his eyes from the coming great trials until one by one these were reached. But how happy the ending of the record. In time all these trials of faith were passed successfully, the pilgrim reached a splendid consummation, an ending very beautifully told in Gen. 25:8, "Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full." What a record! We remember he was already a man of threescore and fifteen years, and childless at that, when the journey into the unknown land was begun. There he waits twenty-five years for the promised son, and until all possibility of a child through the ordinary processes of nature must be abandoned, and yet, "Abraham **believed God.**" By and by Isaac is born, and other tests of faith follow, leading on to the supreme ordeal on Mt. Moriah. It was out of all these experiences with God that there came at last the time of "ripe old age, and satisfied" consummation. The King James Version beclouds this text by a faulty translation, or rather by introducing two words not in the original. "A ripe old age, and full of years" is a repetition of thought, whereas the better rendering contains two very beautiful ideas. Moffatt gives this rendering, "dying in a ripe old age, an old man, after a full life." Fenton gives it as "a ripe old age, and satisfied." A life ending in ripeness and full of abundant blessing seems to be the thought. This is the record of "the father of the faithful," out of which the message comes to us his children according to faith: "Look unto Abraham your father," "he whom I called out alone, and whom, because of his obedient faith, I blessed and increased." What a blessing to seek and fervently desire to obtain!

God in Grace Gives Aids to Faith

The profit to us of Abraham's story will be great or small depending on our careful study of the important features in the record left us. Evident it is that God intends we should seek to emulate this spirit of faith, and thus give evidence that we are indeed children of Abraham by faith. These lessons may not be overlooked, therefore, without great loss to ourselves.

Ours too is a faith journey over which God in kindness veils our eyes from trials to come, or until such experiences will serve His purpose best. And though God tries our faith in permitting these tests to reach us, He will never forget His promise to us, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee." This has always been God's way, and it is well illustrated in His dealings with Abraham, and the story written for our encouragement. As we have previously noted, he did not have many of the aids to faith we have today, but God did give him at least one aid. Had He not said to Abraham, "Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: . . . So shall thy seed be." These words have a deep significance. They conveyed more than the thought of looking up to note an innumerable host of stars. The words, "if thou be able to number them," suggests something of impossibility on Abraham's part. It was beyond his power to count those myriad stars, but we are told by the Psalmist that God "telleth the number of the stars; He calleth them all by their names." (Psa. 147:4.) The impossible to Abraham was so small a thing to God. The stars could therefore speak to Abraham not only of numbers, but also of an omnipotent Power in which he could absolutely trust, and know that nothing is too hard for the Lord. The shining stars would remain a sign of an immutable pledge. How often through his years of trial the eyes of God's "friend" must have turned heavenward in the night watches to read that pledge again and again. Can we not believe that as old age brought him into the last decade of his hundred years of life, and no seed as yet given him, that he went out on many a starlight night just to look up at the stars and repeat the promise on which his hope rested, "So shall thy seed be"? Is it unreasonable to believe that on the nights he spent on that memorable journey to Mt. Moriah, where he expected to sacrifice his Isaac, that those stars spoke to him as the very voice of God, enabling him by faith to count on God to even raise Isaac again from the dead in order to fulfill a promise He could never forget or break.

Significant it may or may not be, but this test of his faith was not where the "sands of the seashore" might be seen so easily, but it was where the stars could be clearly seen. Thus it was not the downward look to the sands, the earthly side of things, but an upward look toward the heavenly lights. Surely when Abraham "considered the heavens," he was given strength to believe God fully able to perform all His word. The myriads of stars would aid him in holding fast the assurance that though he might have to give up his Isaac, he need never let go his faith in God.

Will God do less then for those now privileged to be "children of Abraham"? Theirs too is a walk of faith, and as we have seen, a walk toward a greater inheritance than that promised to Abraham, and corresponding tests of faith to be expected. Ours are the many, many advantages which were not possible to "the father of the faithful"-inspired Scriptures, many precedents on which to strengthen faith, a "great cloud of witnesses" leaving shining examples behind for us, and boon companions in the same walk of faith to speak those needed words in season to weary pilgrims. All of these we have to cheer us on our way. How varied are the ways in which God encourages us onward, and so fully has He spoken to us through His Word, that we may well inquire, "What more can He say than to you He has said?" What more indeed!

The Favors of God only for the Humble

Returning now to the first text quoted at the head of this discussion, we note its import, "Hearken to Me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the **rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged.**" In this we have something the Lord wants all His favored people to, ponder carefully. One outstanding fact in all God's dealings with men must never be forgotten, and this has been well expressed by the Apostle in Rom. 9:15, 16, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." All is of God's grace. This same lesson He sought to impress on Israel in the early days of their national history by saying, "The Lord did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: but **because** the Lord loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers." (Deut. 7:7, 8.) The greatest of all favors embraced in the great Plan of the Ages is that which pertains to the call of the Church. And that no one privileged to enjoy this calling may have occasion to boast, or to lose sight of the fact that all is of 'grace, we have the Apostle reminding us again, "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no **flesh** should glory in His presence." (1 Cor. 1:26-29.) Thus to us the reminder comes that our happy relationship to the Lord is not because we are more worthy of it than many others might be, but it is wholly of the grace and loving-kindness of God. This then is the reason why the completed Bride of Christ, the Church, is throughout Scripture portrayed as a special manifestation of the love and perfect workmanship of God, "That we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ." - Eph. 1:12.

It is therefore to this class, called not because of greater worth, but called, consistent with God's way of choosing the weaker to confound the mighty, that Peter's words are applicable, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." (2 Peter 1:4.) As in the Lord's dealings with Abraham, so again with us, how great a part is centered **in the promises** of God. There is perfect consistency in this since with both Abraham and with us, faith in God's operations and in His power to carry His purposes through is of paramount importance. This same principle is seen to have been true in the experience of Jesus, for is it not written concerning Him: "Who for the joy that **was set before Him**" endured to the end of His earthly life and work. Standing on the promises has indeed been the place where the victorious saints of all ages have needed to stand steadfastly in order to gain their triumphs.

Remembering then the rock and pit from which divine love has lifted us, and keeping in mind the divine power by which God's ultimate purpose for us may be attained, how much we will need to cultivate the faith of Abraham, trusting God's promises fully, and staggering not at any seeming impossibilities of our reaching the end set forth in our high calling, notwithstanding the lowly soil whence we came. Is it not to this end God has spoken and shown for our encouragement that He is "willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel," that "we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us"? And this further word is for us: "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward" -- "a full reward" -- "If **we** hold fast the confidence and the **rejoicing** of the hope firm unto the end." - Heb. 6:17; 10:35; 3:6.

These assurances are laden with hope of "an exceeding and eternal weight of glory" which "eye bath not seen, nor ear heard," but which God has brought within the range of our faith vision as stupendous realities yet to be ours in full; therefore we may rejoice "with 'joy unspeakable and full of glory." All of these promises and encouragements to faithfulness are by the Word associated in our present life with "the good fight of faith," and with "enduring hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ." A conflict that is real and strenuous is the way that leads Home, but for it "the Lord will give strength unto His people; the Lord will bless His people with peace," and, "When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?" (Psa. 29:11; Job 34:29.) Thus like Abraham we should be "strong in faith, giving glory to God."

Looking Toward the Stars of Promise

In many ways we see a correspondency in the call of Abraham and its results to him, and the call we too have heard, with its aspects of the separated life, its pilgrim character, its testings, and its magnetic visions of "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." So, too, we find that like him we are sustained and constrained by the immutable **promises of God**, and therefore as Abraham could "strengthen himself in the Lord" by calling to mind His promises, and looking- at the stars so directly associated with his hopes, we may scan our heaven wherein we are "seated, and see it studded with stars of promise and assured hope, all meant for our encouragement. Does not God say to us in reference to those faith strengthening gems shining about us in heavenly places, "Look, and tell their number, for so shall I do for you"? It is impossible that we could number all the words of comfort, of love, of encouragement, of protection, and of final victory through His grace, which He has spread out before us as we "sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." To attempt numbering them all would be attempting the impossible to us, but the God who remembers the number and the name of each orb of light on which Abraham gazed, also knows every promise made to us, every word of hope He has inspired, and there has not, there cannot fail "ought of any word that He has spoken." All shall find fulfillment to those who live as did Abraham, walking in obedient faith, staggering not at the difficulties of the way, but accounting Him as competent and faithful who has promised.

As we "look now toward heaven," our spiritual heavens, what shining gems we may see assuring us of our special place in the close, intimate heart love of God. Let us turn our attention to but a few of these. Appropriating the loving terms by which God ever speaks to His obedient and faithful ones, "sweeter than honey to our mouth" we find these: "The Lord's portion is His people"; "For the Lord hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation." And of that "habitation of God through the Spirit," in condescending grace He says, "This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it." Precious words to a waiting Bride, who can respond: "I am my Beloved's, and His desire is toward me." And hear Him affirm it afresh: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn thee." "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," and, "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands." "He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of My eye." "Thou art all holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto Himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth," "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people," a special treasure, who "shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels," jewels He will prize as "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints." What a constellation of precious expressions of His love are these illustrative passages from His Word! Who could fail to be strengthened while pondering them!

As an illustrative life of the godly man the life of Abraham was complete. How like us he appears when, despite all of God's reiterated promises he asks: "Whereby shall **I know** that I shall inherit it?" "And, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him," in the midst of which, like a loving Father, God renewed again the certainty of His promise. Does it not so happen to us also? "When darkness seems to veil His face," and when at times we cry "All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me," God would have us know that "The stars of heaven are shining on, though these frail eyes are dimmed with tears," and so we "to His gracious promise flee."

But dark hours have their purpose, and their compensations too. How true the words, "Darkness shows us worlds of light we never saw by day." So it is in Christian experience-some gems of inspired writ can be seen in their full brilliancy only when "clouds surround our lonely way." What a halo of glory shines in on some deep trial when we see it in the rays of the admonition: "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him: For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." While we "rejoice **in hope** of the glory of God, . . . we glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation works out endurance; and endurance, approval, and approval hope; and this hope is not put to shame." Therefore, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation for when He is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord bath promised to them that love Him."

Look at yet another of these stars in the firmament of our heavens: "Unto you it was graciously given on behalf of Christ, not only to believe into Him, but also to suffer on His account," and then, "If we suffer with Him we shall also reign with Him." Gazing at these great orbs of profound revelation, can we do other than say, "If God but still my portion is, be such experience mine"? for "Thy judgments, Lord, are true and right, and brighter every day." Then come what may, the language thus inspired in our grateful hearts will be, "Gladly will I toil and suffer, only let me walk with Thee."

And so we might go on exploring our heavenly estate. Endless groups of soul-uplifting messages from our gracious Father we could find gathered around some outstanding texts, such as shine like suns midst satellites of associated words of light and life. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" to reveal it. What a central sun that "Little Gospel" is, around which revolves a host of the brightest statements in the Word of God. O how many such groups, beautifully related groups of celestial clusters, we may lift our heart's eyes to see, and yet, like the astronomer scanning the literal heavens, confess our present equipment inadequate to reach the utmost bounds of these "heavenly places in Christ Jesus." In this realm Paul saw "breadth, and depth, and height," to "the love of Christ, which surpasseth knowledge." And the Apostle knew, and so may we, that until that which is perfect is come, and revelation is complete, the promise of Jesus made to the one who loves Him supremely will continue to hold true. "I will love him" and more and more "manifest Myself to him." For true it is, "Search we may for many years" through the pages of the written Word, "still some new rich gem appears." Just as truly is this so in seeking, as did Paul, to attain to the full, "the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord."

What more then can He say to us than in His revelations He has said? Asking us to walk the way of faith, keeping a clear vision of things not seen as yet by the natural eye -- over us, round about us He spreads the promises of His excellent Word. Rejoicing in all these purposes in His will for us, contemplating the greatness of the love that planned it all, and using all that God has given to strengthen and encourage us on our way, can we do otherwise than determine that "we are not of those who draw back." Let us prove that above all other objectives, our gratitude and love are such as will make possible to us the faith blessings now, and the eternal inheritance soon, reserved by God for Abraham's children of this age of faith. Thus may it be ours to reach a similar happy journey's end to that of Abraham, attaining "ripeness," "fulness," and "satisfied" for ever in the joys of divine approval.

Hosanna to the Son of David

THE growing distress of Israel is very prominently displayed in the news of the day; but how few there are who sense the full import of it. Although they themselves do not realize it, one of the immediate results of these persecutions is the making of the Jew one, even at a time when many of them, having no faith in the promises of God, as recorded by their own Prophets, are desirous of being absorbed into the nations among whom they may be residing. The very decrees of dictators are sharply separating Jew from Gentile; and the recent decree cutting off the Jew from all institutions of learning in Germany, and their being barred from even the public enjoyment of arts, calamity though it be, will yet only serve to turn Israel's attention to a re-examination of their own Law and their Prophets. This must be so; these troubles and calamities must continue upon Israel until they are prepared to "look upon Him whom they have pierced, and mourn for Him." - Zech. 12:10.

Israel does not yet "look." Israel is blind. Christ as their Messiah has been hidden from them since their rejection of Him; even as Jesus said: "Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." - Matt. 23:39.

This statement of Jesus at first glance may seem odd, when we remember that it was but a day or so previous to this that, as He was riding into Jerusalem, the multitude *had* shouted, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord;" and *had* acclaimed Him as their Messiah as they hailed, "Hosanna to the Son of David:"

No wonder they shouted Hosannas to Him as the Son of David "Never man spake as He spake." He "had compassion on the multitude" and healed them of their diseases. It was a time when there was a general expectation, of the appearance of the promised Messiah, who, according to their Prophets, was to be of David's line. In all that Jesus had done and taught He had revealed Himself to them as the long promised Messiah. And what more natural than, when He -came riding into Jerusalem on an ass, in fulfillment of Zech. 9:9, that they should exultingly shout: "Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest."

"The "Son of David" is a distinct title and not a mere expression, and to the Jewish mind this title had associated with it certain definite promises of God. The vast extent of these promises they did not know-could not know. They would have been content to see the Messiah restore Jerusalem to the prestige and splendor that was hers under David and Solomon. The minds of the immediate disciples of Jesus, even after the resurrection, at the time of the ascension, could rise no higher than to ask, "Wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

There could be no mistaking that the Messiah was to come of David's line; for, it is recorded that God spoke to David through the Prophet Nathan thus: "I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for My name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be My son." (2 Sam. 7:12-14.) And to make it more emphatic, the Lord gave an oath to David that the promise was sure, even though many of David's sons should depart from serving Jehovah; "If his children forsake My law, and walk not in My judgments; if they break My statutes, and keep not My commandments; then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless My loving kindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer My faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips.

Once have I sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before me." - Psalm 89:1-5, 2.8-37.

The Promise to Abraham to be Fulfilled Through David's Son

Considering these two passages of Scripture we find that David has been promised (1) a house, or posterity; (2) a throne, or royal authority; (3) a kingdom, or sphere of rule; (4) all this to be enduring, to last forever; (5) disobedience to be visited by chastisement, but, the covenant is sure.

"My Word that goeth forth out of My mouth shall not return unto Me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." "Incline your ear, and come unto Me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even *the sure mercies of David*." - Isa. 55:11, 3.

David's sons were disobedient, and served not God as David did. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom was disrupted, ten of the tribes revolting against Rehoboam and forming the Kingdom of Israel, under the leadership and rule of an alien to David's line. The Kingdom of Judah, composed of the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, even though under the rule of David's line, who were promised the chastisements and corrections of the Lord, departed more and more from the living God, until they were completely overturned, their polity destroyed, their city and temple sacked and leveled by Nebuchadnezzar, and they themselves carried captive to Babylon.

Where then is the supremacy of the Jew under the rule of David's Son that Jehovah has so solemnly pledged? It is being held in abeyance.

The Apostles themselves could not grasp this truth at once. It was gradually unfolded to them under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. At a conference of the Apostles and Elders, occasioned by the controversy over the rite of circumcision, James finally grasped the truth concerning God's purposes in the Kingdom call being extended to the Gentiles, without in any way nullifying His promises of a Jewish Kingdom under the rule of David's Son, saying, "Simeon hath declared how God at the first [in the call of Cornelius] did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name. And to this agree the words of the Prophets, as it is written [Amos 9:11 12], After this I will return, and build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: that the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom My name is called." - Acts 15:14-17.

Even though the call to joint-heirship with Christ has been extended to the Gentile believers, God is still the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; for, it still is Abraham's seed that God is selecting and developing; Gentiles are now being inducted into the blessings and promises which were originally extended to natural Israel. "God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew." - Rom. 11:2.

It is further explained that "blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness [full number] of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved [from blindness and ungodliness]: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is My covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." (Rom. 11:25-29.) "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice. . . . Afterward shall the

children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days." - Hosea 3:4, 5.

The Prophet Amos connects the return of Christ and the final regathering of Israel with the Davidic covenant.

"I will raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, ... and will build it as in the days of old: . . . And I will bring again the captivity of My people of Israel, . . . and they shall plant vineyards, . . . they shall also make gardens, . . . And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord." (Amos 9:8-15.) In Isaiah 11:1, 12-14, this is also apparent. So too, in Jer. 23:5-8. Note that in these two latter passages the "Branch" is definitely an individual of David's family, and is so denoted with a capital letter. In other words the "Branch," is the Son of David promised in the Davidic covenant. "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. . . . *Therefore*, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that they shall no more say, The Lord liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north -country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land." - Jer. 23:5-8.

Now, "the Son of David" is distinctly a Jewish title. We are able to understand the incident of the Syrophenician woman, if we bear this in mind; for, when she "cried unto Him saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord,. Thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil," He "answered her not a word." Why not? He Himself explains, that as the Son of David, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. 15:21, 24.) David's rule was over Judah and Israel; and as the Son of David, Christ is King of the Jews. It was the query of the Magi as they came to worship Him at His birth, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" And to Mary it was revealed that "the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever." - Luke 1:32-33.

To be given the throne of His father David, as we know, will necessitate re-establishing the Davidic rule over Israel; for that rule has not been in evidence since Zedekiah, the last king of David's line, was removed by Nebuchadnezzar. The restoration of the Davidic rule is spoken of in Zechariah, twelfth chapter. In the tenth verse the Prophet foresees the opening of the eyes of Israel to their judicial guilt in the rejection of their Messiah; so he writes: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications; and they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born." "And in that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." - Zech. 13:1.

This can only mean their final acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ on their behalf for their cleansing from judicial guilt and moral impurities. (Gal. 3:13.) This, of course, cannot occur until their blindness is removed. This might well be illustrated by the experience of Hagar as recorded in Gen. 21:19. In great need of water, Hagar could not perceive its nearness until "God opened her eyes." The water was there, but her eyes needed to be opened; and in Israel's case the "fountain for sin and for uncleanness" is within reach of faith, but they, too, need their blindness removed, "which veil is done away in Christ." - 2 Cor. 3:14, 16.

Yes, they acclaimed Jesus with Hosannas and blessings on that day of His entrance into Jerusalem. They hailed Him "the Son of David," and were moved to enthusiasm by the prospect

of having the immediate enjoyment of all those blessings so abundantly set forth in their Scriptures as being consequent to the appearance and reign of their Messiah; but they did not understand the necessity of their redemption from the curse of their Law before those blessings could come. They did not know that Jesus must give Himself a ransom, and accomplish that redemption by His death on the cross; and thus open the way for a new covenant arrangement, whereby God could pour upon them all that He had promised. Their enthusiasm, as they cried "Hosanna," was more or less emotional; they were not deeply convicted, else how could they as energetically cry but a few days later, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Let His blood be upon us, and on our children."

The blessings that are to come to Israel are far beyond their imaginations and hopes. Consider it, "I will put My law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know Me from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." - Jer. 31:33, 34.

What about a heavenly, spiritual kingdom can perform all the promises included in the new covenant arrangement? What earthly potentate can take away stony hearts and give hearts of flesh? Man may rule over the lives of men; but only a divine, spiritual power can rule *in* the lives of men to restore the godlikeness that was in the original creation.

Israel surely will again "see"; but what an experience is pictured for them in the Prophets before that is accomplished! before they, "laboring and heavy laden," come to Christ for rest-even the time of Jacob's trouble." (Jer. 30:1-7.) Their eyes are blinded; they cannot yet see. Today their plight is becoming more acute. Seemingly a great calamity is befalling them; but we, who discern, perceive the Lord's Arm being stretched out in His providences to bring about that great phenomenon, the national conversion of Israel; to bring them to "look *upon* Him whom they have pierced", to acclaim in earnestness, "Hosanna to the Son of David, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest."

"Many Infallible Proofs"

No. 3

A short series of meditations, both devotional and doctrinal, on "Jesus and the Resurrection."

"The Lord is risen indeed." - Luke 24:34.

IN THE previous meditation of this series our attention was drawn to the fact that in the paragraph which extends from verse 5 to verse 19 (of 1 Cor. 15:5-19) the Apostle runs together and interweaves two themes. One of these, namely, the historical testimony to the resurrection of Christ, we considered. In this meditation we propose to consider the other, namely, the moral absurdities which one is forced to maintain who denies the resurrection.

In this part of his argument the Apostle develops four logical consequences which must follow if the resurrection be denied. If there be no resurrection of the dead, he insists, then these four things must be true

- (1) Christ is not raised. - 1 Cor. 15:13.
- (2) Our preaching is vain and your faith is vain. - 1 Cor. 15:14, 17.
- (3) Those who fell asleep in Christ are perished. - 1 Cor. 15:18.
- (4) We are of all men most miserable. - 1 Cor. 15:19.

Now his first point is obvious. Jesus was a man, a human being, and if all men perish in the grave, the Man Christ Jesus perished in the grave. But to suppose that **this** man thus perished is, in St. Paul's view, impossible.

Peter, on the day of Pentecost, gave expression to the same thought when speaking of Jesus, he declared: "Whom God raised up, having loosed the grip of death, because **it was** not possible that He should be holden of it." -- Acts 2:24.

Death is the wages of sin, and Christ was without sin. It was morally impossible that **He** should remain in the grave. If **He** did not rise -- if all He gained by His grace and wisdom, His piety and love, was thirty odd years of toil and sorrow, culminating in a shameful death under a frowning heaven, what is God that we should serve Him? what is life that we should love it? what is virtue that we should pursue it? If we believe in a God at all, if we believe that righteousness and love are His attributes, it is utterly, monstrously illogical to suppose that under His rule, by His ordinance or permission, the best Man, the Man so wise, so gentle, so pure and holy, that at His Name every knee bows in reverence, after a brief, sad, life, full of labor, grief and defeat, went down into the thick darkness of annihilation. Such a life as His morally **demand**s a life beyond the grave. A story so fair must have a sequel. A work so divine must mount to its natural and appropriate conclusion. If He who hung upon the cross did not rise to the very heights, there is no God, or God is not righteous. This is the dilemma to which Paul reduces those who deny a resurrection. We can no longer believe in a just and holy God if Christ was not raised. But if He, if one man, if the Man Christ Jesus was raised from the dead, how say some that there is **no** resurrection of the dead? The raising of one man proves that there is a resurrection, that that there **may** be a resurrection for all.

Raised Again for Our Justification

His next point is: If Christ be not raised, then is our preaching (not the act of preaching, but the substance of what was preached) vain, and your faith is also vain; ye are yet in your sins. - 1 Cor. 15:14, 17.

To affirm that the Christian faith should fail to redeem men from sin is as absurd, in the Apostle's judgment, as that the life of Christ should end in death. This time the absurdity is not so obvious; it needs to be elaborated. What, then, did the Apostle mean when he said that if Christ be not raised, they were yet in their sins? Some have supposed that he meant that they were left without any standing before God—that they were still without justification, still reckoned unrighteous by God. In Romans 4:25 the Apostle tells us that Jesus "was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification." Here, then, in agreement with that Romans passage, he must mean that if Christ be not raised, we are not justified; the burden of our sins must have proved too great a burden for Him; by His death He has failed to expiate sin: He has not accomplished the atonement for which we had hoped; we remain under the condemnation from which we had thought to be saved.

This may, indeed, be in part, his meaning; but it falls very far short of being his complete meaning. Those who do take it as exhausting the Apostle's meaning do so because of a tendency to resolve Christ's work almost, if not quite, wholly into 'a plan of procuring pardon for the sinner, to view it too exclusively in its relation to the penalties of the law, **and to make holiness a consequence rather than an integral part of salvation.** The resurrection of Christ is certainly a proof -- nay, it is the proof -- that His death has been accepted by the Almighty as an all-sufficient offering on our behalf. But while this is doubtless true, it does not seem to us to be the point the Apostle is here making, and is certainly not his whole meaning.

The Power of His Resurrection Manifest in Lives of Believers

The point of his argument, it seems to us, may be expressed in this way: Any faith or religion which does not hold out a hope of eternal life, a hope of life beyond the grave, is incompetent to deliver men from their bondage to evil. The same thought finds expression in verse 32 of this chapter. There he affirms that if men believe they are to die like beasts, they will live like beasts; that if they have no hope of a resurrection, they will say "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." He does not say that this should be so, and for himself and other noble specimens of our race it would doubtless not hold true; but for the great majority of us, alas, it would prove unquestionably true.

Does not universal history confirm his thought? Have not men in every age when hopeless and despairing of the future, resigned themselves to the cravings of appetite and passion? Is it not because of a practical atheism—a practical belief (whatever the outward profession) that this life ends all, that the world has reached its present state of chaos, and is heading rapidly towards anarchy? If St. Paul had not been able to point to a resurrection which gave assurance of a life to come, he might well have felt that the Gospel he preached was vain and that the faith of his hearers was likewise vain. But the Gospel hope of a resurrection, which he had preached amongst these Corinthians, and which by faith they had embraced, had not only justified them from sin in God's sight, but had changed their lives. It was accomplishing their deliverance from sinful lusts, was doing that which, if there be no resurrection hope, could not have been accomplished.

It may thus be seen that the Apostle's point of emphasis, whatever else his words may be taken to mean, is that the changed lives of the Corinthians was a proof of the soundness of their resurrection hopes. If Christ be not raised, we are yet in our sins. We remain under the penalty certainly, but especially under the **power** of sin. In ourselves we are "without strength." It is only as we are joined to the risen Christ, as branches to the Vine, that we are introduced into that "newness of life" and given strength to walk therein. The fact that these Christians to whom Paul wrote had already come so far from the darkness of their old lives, and were progressing so well in the new, was in itself a proof that there was a living, risen Lord to whom they could thus be joined. If Christ be not raised, ye Corinthians are yet in your sins, and this, manifestly, is not the case, for you have forsaken sin as your natural element, and no longer live therein.

Are Those Who Fell Asleep in Christ Perished?

His third point is: If there be no resurrection for men, and there can be none if the perfect Man was not raised, then those who fell asleep in Christ perished.

This, of course, is simply a deduction from the first consequence; for if Christ were not raised, those who slept in Him would share His fate—the Christian dead would perish as He perished, whom they loved and served. But St. Paul draws out this deduction, and lays emphasis upon it, we suppose, because he knows it would touch the hearts of his readers and predispose them to receive the truth. It is hard for us to believe that we shall perish when we die; for even when the body grows weak with age, the spirit is young and strong; we feel capable of much and higher work; life has held out many promises not yet fulfilled. Imperfect, weak, and faulty as we know ourselves to be, we feel that we have it in us to become good and brave and wise, if we can only rise into more favorable conditions; and therefore we find it hard to believe that God will cast us away, and with us all the pains He has taken with us—that He will not condescend to find a place and service for us in some mansion of His house. But it is harder still to believe that the men and women we have loved, those noble teachers who taught us what we know, those godly parents who brought us up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, who even amidst the frailties of the flesh were yet distinguished by so much that was pure and noble and beautiful, who so wound themselves about our hearts, not only by the ties of natural affection, but by secret charms of character, hidden, it may be from the world, but known in the privacy of the family and the home, and who fell asleep peacefully in Christ -- it is hard to believe that these have perished.

Deep down in our hearts, beneath all our hopes of life and goodness for ourselves, there may lurk a profound distrust of ourselves; but these, who have been so good, who have loved us so well, who have done so much for men, who have been so serviceable and honorable, and who, when they went from us, seemed more fitted for usefulness than ever, are we to believe, can we believe, that they also have perished? that they have no hope of a resurrection? It is incredible, inconceivable. What! all the wise teachers who have departed this life stored with high faculties trained to noble uses; the martyrs who, for the love they bore to the truth, went bravely to their deaths; prophets and apostles who wrought righteousness; our fathers and mothers who, in their generation, served God with a constant heart; our innocent children whom we lost in infancy or childhood, whose brief lives were a round of love and purity—are they all gone, never to be resurrected? Has God no place for them, no use for them in His vast universe? Have they after delighting the world with their nobleness, their large charity, their wisdom, their self-sacrifice, their innocence, passed into an oblivion from which they will nevermore emerge? If they have, what is life but an evil dream, with no God to order it, but only a dark, blind chance? That the obstinately wicked and perverse should thus perish we could understand; but that the holy and

beloved dead who fell asleep in Christ should have perished -- this is incredible to us as long as we have any faith in God and His wise ordering of human life. They have not perished; they do but sleep; and in God's due time they will be awakened from the sleep of death in resurrection.

Virtue is Its Own Reward

The fourth and last absurdity which St. Paul mentions as resulting from a denial of the resurrection is found in verse 19 which reads: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

It is not that the value of virtue and piety depends altogether on there being a life to come. The Apostle is not discussing the question whether virtue and goodness are not in themselves a great reward. They have their intrinsic claims upon us. Even though we expired at death with no hope of resurrection, it would still be well with us that we should deny the lusts of the flesh and, remembering God, live soberly and righteously in His sight, dwelling, so far as lieth in us, at peace with all men. The Apostle who proclaimed to his hearers at Athens a God in whom all men live and move and have their being; who recognized the craving of the human heart, apart from direct Christian instruction, after an invisible and supreme Ruler of the universe; who exhorted the Philippians to the practice of whatever things were true and honorable, just and pure, lovely and of good report -- he could never have said that a virtuous life, in the commonest acceptation of that term, and apart from the hope of a resurrection, would have made men "pitiable." No one would have allowed more fully that virtue must bring with it its own reward, and that even for its own sake it was worthy to be pursued.

We Labor for Eternity

What, then, does the Apostle mean in the language he employs in this 19th verse? We answer: The Christian life is self-conquest, self-denial, for ends so large that they cannot be reached in this world. To us, as we often say, the present life is our preparation, our school, in which we painfully acquire the virtuous habits, the likeness to Christ, we are to manifest hereafter. If there is to be no hereafter, our painstaking efforts have been largely wasted; we have been mocked and deceived. Our life has been built up on a delusion; it has been ordered on too vast a scale. We have labored for eternity and in preparing for that, we have failed to secure from the few short years of time that have been ours, all they might have yielded us of innocent pleasure and enjoyment. Can anything be more disappointing, is anything more "pitiable" (as the word translated "miserable" more exactly means), than to have thus been diverted from our proper aim and happiness? to have flung away our years in chasing a bubble that bursts as we stretch out our hand to grasp it?

Think of St. Paul. Here was a man of the highest capacities and gifts. He devotes them to teaching a mere fiction. To teach it he endures innumerable hardships, incredible labors; denies himself (not the gratification of sinful cravings which he does well to mortify, but) all the sweet, innocent pleasures of life, which he might otherwise have enjoyed. And all for what? All for nothing -- all for a lie. Here is a life the most toilsome and hazardous, and it closes in frightful, irreparable disappointment. Is it so much as conceivable that God should betray His noblest and most heroic children into a confusion so pitiable, a defeat so hopeless?

'What Shall We Say to These Things?'

Unless, then, we are prepared to believe these monstrous absurdities, that, though there is a just and wise, a powerful and loving God, the best of men are the most to be pitied, the noblest perish unrecompensed, that God rewarded the perfect life of Christ with annihilation, we must believe, as the Apostle goes on to say in the next verse: "Now is Christ risen from the dead, the first fruits of them that are asleep." St. Paul will not permit us to detach the resurrection from the Christian faith and still call ourselves Christians. He affirms it to be of the very essence of the faith. In our previous meditations we saw that he will not suffer us to suppose that he and the other witnesses of the resurrection were misled by their hopes, or were deceived; he affirms that they were **false** witnesses and not mistaken if Christ did not rise. Our only alternative lies between believing a series of incredibilities, to believe in which, would simply be the death of all love to God and man; or believing in the resurrection of our Lord, and in the hope of a resurrection for all mankind, which His death secured for our race, believing in which, promises life and peace and joy everlasting. If it be hard for us to believe a miracle of grace and mercy, it would be harder still for us to believe in an unjust and cruel God, who betrays us, by a lie, into vain endeavors after holiness and virtue, and then, as a reward for our credulity, smites us into sudden and eternal death. With this sole alternative before us, if we must accept four absurdities so monstrous and unnatural that they dethrone God and reduce human life to an evil dream, or believe in a supernatural act of grace-supernatural to us, but most natural to Him-our choice is not hard. We cannot part with God; we must believe in Him; and therefore we believe also in Christ. We believe that God raised up Christ from the dead, and rejoice in the sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection unto life. We believe that God both raised up the Lord Jesus, and will also raise us up by His power.

"Put to Death in Flesh, but Made Alive in Spirit"

Before closing this meditation we wish to add a word of caution. Up to this point in the Apostle's argument (verse 20), he has carefully refrained from all mention of the question as to the various natures to which it is possible men may be raised. Not until verse 35 does he introduce that phase of the subject into his exposition, and take up the question: "With what manner of body are the dead raised?" He has been occupied with the basic, fundamental theme that there is a resurrection of the dead. He has insisted that Christ Jesus was raised, but he has not said He was raised as a man.

He has insisted that there is to be a general resurrection of the dead, but whether they are to be raised as men or to some other plane of life he has yet to inform us. That he will do so clearly and authoritatively we have no, doubt, for our inspired instructor is one who "shrank not from declaring anything that was profitable." (Acts 20:20, A. R. V.) It is our hope to consider this intensely interesting and profitable portion of his exposition in our next meditation. Meantime, while rejoicing in the words he addressed to the men on Mars Hill, that God had appointed a day in the which He intended to judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He had ordained; "whereof He bath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31), we may be preparing our minds for his further enlightenment by pondering the words of the Apostle Peter in reference to our Lord: He was "put to death in flesh, but made alive in spirit." - 1 Pet. 3:18, Diaglott, word for word translation.