

A.B. Simpson:

"To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

Our Lord's earthly life may be divided into three sections: before His passion, during His passion, and the forty day interval between His resurrection and ascension.

Like the afterglow in an Oriental sky still shining long after the sun has disappeared, or like the Indian summer with its soft light and lingering sunshine, these days seem to have about them a mystic glory half way between the earthly and the heavenly. His feet still touched the earth, but His head was in the heavens.

The story of those days is but partly told, but we know enough to afford us seven distinct messages from the departing Master.

The Reality and Significance of the Resurrection

Strange it is that this should need to be demonstrated to Christian disciples, but it is the church of Christ that today is beginning to discredit the physical reality of the Lord's resurrection. Therefore, God had made it a demonstrable fact supported by "many infallible proofs." The Roman guards who were stationed around the tomb and whose silly lie about the stealing of His body was the very best proof that that body had gone; the angel messengers who repeatedly announced that He was risen indeed; His repeated appearances to His disciples and the testimony of Thomas in spite of his own skepticism --these form but a little part of the chain of evidence that so acute a mind as Paul's considered unanswerable and that the profoundest judicial minds today have declared to be absolutely conclusive.

The nature of Christ's resurrection is as clear as the fact is certain. The picture given by the evangelists leaves no doubt of the absolute identity of the Christ of Easter with the Crucified of Calvary and the Man of Galilee. The very marks of the thorns and the spear were visible and tangible. So real was His humanity that they could handle Him and know by the evidence of their senses that He had actual flesh and bones and that He could eat the broiled fish they set before Him and distinguish the taste of the honeycomb as well. But so transcendently more mighty was His resurrection state than even His former physical life that His body could pass through the closed door and the stone that sealed the sepulcher without hindrance, and could rise and ascend to heaven in defiance of the law of gravitation without the faintest effort.

The significance of His resurrection is impossible to exaggerate. It is the fundamental proof of His Messiahship and of the truth of Christianity. It is the evidence of our justification. It is the source of our sanctification. It is the guarantee of our future resurrection. It is the pledge of all power that we can ever need in this present life, and is the pattern according to which faith may claim the "exceeding greatness of his power ... according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead."

The Abiding Presence of Our Risen Lord

This is assured by His own announcement, every word of which is weighted with such force and suggestiveness, "Lo, I am with you always," or literally, "all the days, even unto the end of the world (age)." The importance of the announcement is attested by the first word, "Lo," which calls attention to its extraordinary significance. The identity of His presence with His life on earth is emphasized by the present tense of the verb, "I am with you." It was not a promise of some future visitation, but a presence that never should be withdrawn. And the beautiful translation, "all the days," makes that presence as perpetual and as new as the dawn of each succeeding day. He is present throughout all vicissitudes of life's changes and trials. The promise is not "all the years," but "all the days" -- every day and every sort of day: the cloudy days as well as the sunny ones; the days of trouble as well as the days of blessing; the lonely days, the days of weakness and even failure, "all the days, even unto the end of the age."

And as if this announcement were not sufficient, He illustrated it by several manifestations which seem to be prophetic of the way He might still be expected to show Himself to His earthly followers. How unspeakably precious is the picture of His walk to Emmaus with the two disciples! How simple, how natural, how almost playful was the way in which the Master dropped in upon them! How touching is the delicacy with which He acted as though He would have gone farther, and waited to be pressed to tarry in their home! How gladly He accepted the pressing invitation! How gloriously He manifested Himself in the breaking of the bread, and then

how tactfully He vanished when the vision would have disturbed them from their simple life of faith if it had been further prolonged. So still He meets us along life's pathway. So still He sometimes unveils His glorious face. So still He quickly lets fall the curtain and leaves us to walk by faith and not by sight. How full of pathos is His message immediately after His resurrection: "Go, tell (My) disciples and Peter." So still He singles out the timid, the discouraged and the fallen. How full of comfort is that early morning visitation on the shore of the Galilean sea when the disciples had toiled all night and caught nothing, and the gray dawn found the Master there to supply their physical necessity and help them in their temporal distress, and then to lead them on to the higher lessons of suffering and service. It is in the light of these object lessons that we are ever to interpret that shining and everlasting promise, "Lo, I am with you all the days."

The Importance of His Word as the Vehicle of His Presence

It was as He talked with the disciples by the way and opened the Scriptures that their hearts first began to burn within them. He impressed upon them the prophetic word of which His sufferings and glory were the one continual burden. It is in His Word that we shall always find the Master near us. The warning of the beloved John concerning them that seduce us is that we are to continue in the Word which we have heard from the beginning. Spiritual manifestations are not always divine visitations. The test of every experience and of every spirit is the Word of Jesus Christ.

The Promise and the Presence of the Holy Ghost

How often this promise was repeated during the forty days. How imperatively they were bidden to tarry for His power. And yet the Lord began His ascension to anticipate the coming Pentecost, and as He breathed upon them, He commanded them to "receive ... the Holy Ghost." So still the Holy Spirit is a present fact and no believer need wait a single day for His coming, but the fullness of the Spirit is a larger promise and experience. As we wait for His infilling, there are heights and depths of power and blessing which are but as the pebbles on the shore compared with the mighty deep which lies beyond.

These after-Easter days should be for each of us days of the Holy Ghost, days of waiting for a deeper filling, a mightier baptism, a larger room for His incoming and a larger work for His outgoing through our lips and hands and feet and lives. Shall we take this blessed promise in its forcible, literal phrasing and prove it in both its meanings, "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye ... until ye be endued with power from on high." The sending has already begun. The receiving is already in process. The ending is on its way. But the largeness of the blessing demands more than a passing moment, more than a formal prayer, more than a hurried meal at a quick lunch counter; it demands even days of waiting on the Lord, nights of intense communion, and all the days and all the years of our earthly lives to give sufficient room and time for us to take in the whole significance of that mighty promise "that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

The Call to Service: the Great Commission

The Master's parting messages justified no dream of selfish spiritual enjoyment, but called for the most strenuous service for the souls of men and the kingdom of God. Here are some flash lights upon the life of service as the Lord has outlined it: "Feed my lambs," "Feed my sheep," "Shepherd my feeble sheep." And again, "As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you." We are sent ones, we are apostles, we are ambassadors. We are not here because of our earthly citizenship. But because we have come, like our Lord, from heaven where our spirits were born to witness for Him on earth. And pre-eminent above all other ministries is the Great Commission for the evangelization of the heathen world. The command, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" requires a personal ministry from man to man and for every man beneath the sky. The command to begin "at Jerusalem" passes on to us the great trust for the chosen people. "Go ye ... and disciple all nations" raises the commission to a nobler plane and makes us ambassadors for the King of kings and trustees of the Gospel for every kindred and tribe and tongue. The command, "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" lifts the outlook beyond any section of humanity, any circle of selfish patriotism, any form of religious selfishness, and makes the work of evangelization the one supreme ministry of the church of Christ and the one paramount responsibility of every disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. You certainly have not come into close touch with the risen Christ or caught the spirit of those last momentous days on earth if you are still inactive, indifferent or even neutral in this mighty enterprise which is the emergency work of our times and which is the one great business for which God has called and blessed us.

The Meaning of the Ascension

At length the forty days were ended, and in the simple story we are told that He led them out as far as Bethany and lifted up His hands and blessed them. "and it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven." It is sweet to remember that the last attitude of the Lord Jesus on earth was that of stretching out His pierced hands in loving benediction. As He rose higher and higher in silent majesty, their last remembrance of Him would be that shining face and those outstretched and gracious hands.

It was necessary that He should pass from the earthly scene and return to His native heaven. The disciples must know, the world must know, the ages to come must know that this little planet is not all of God's great universe. Away beyond the blue dome of heaven, beyond the circling horizon, beyond the rising and the setting sun, beyond the stars of light, beyond the last gasp of dying agony, the mouldering grave and the mourner's tear, there is another realm, there is a greater and a better world, there is a home above, there is a heavenly land, the home of God and the great metropolis of His mighty universe. And when He had passed through every stage of earthly experience from the cradle to the grave, He passed on and took His place at the right hand of God amid glorious angels and ransomed men. It was necessary that the children of God should realize through the ascension of their living Head that this old earth is not their home, but, like their Master's, their citizenship too is in heaven. The ascension of Jesus Christ shifts our center of gravity, our meridian of latitude and longitude, our pole star of hope and expectation from earth to heaven.

But Christ's ascension meant much more for Him and us. It meant a new and higher ministry for Him and us. It meant a new and higher ministry for Him. It meant His heavenly priesthood as our Representative and Intercessor before the throne, presenting our worthless names with acceptance to His Father, presenting our imperfect prayers with the incense of His merits and saving us by His life as He had already saved us by His death. It meant His glorious kingship as Head over all things for His body, the Church. There He sits enthroned above all principality and power and every name that is named, ruling and overruling, conquering and to conquer, King of kings and Lord of lords, completing His Church and preparing for His coming. Christ's ascension and ministry on high was just as necessary as His life on earth, His death on Calvary and His resurrection on Easter morning.

Where high the heavenly temple stands,
A house of God not made with hands,
A great High Priest our nature wears,
The Guardian of mankind appears.

He who for men their surety stood,
And poured on earth His precious blood
, Pursues in heaven the mighty plan,
The Savior and the Friend of man.
The Hope of His Coming

The Master Himself had passed from view and the last echoes of His voice in benediction had died away, when suddenly another voice fell upon their ears, the voice of two celestial angels. Up yonder a chariot cloud had received the ascending Lord, perhaps a cloud of innumerable angels, so high above the earth that their forms could not be distinguished and they appeared to mortal vision like a distant veil of mist. But for a moment the Savior lingered behind that cloud and sent from the heavenly retinue that had come to attend Him home two special messengers to bear His postscript to His loved disciples. And it was this. "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

Having sailed once from New York harbor for an absence of many months, the writer well remembers that just as the boat was about to leave the harbor, a messenger came to take ashore the last greetings of the passengers. There was only time for just a word, but that word from most of us was "Back soon." And that sweet hope cheered through the long months of parting the waiting hearts at home. This was the Master's thought as He left the harbor on time, on that old spring noontide on the hillside of Bethany: I have left you for a little while, but I will see you again and your hearts shall rejoice. Beloved, that is the goal, that is the outlook, that is the perspective of faith and hope -- not the cross, not even the resurrection, not the work of missions, not even the blessed presence of the Master and the power of the Holy Ghost. All these only lead up to that transcendent and eternal hope,

That one far-off divine event
To which the whole creation moves.

Dear friend, is that the goal to which you are moving? Have you inscribed on every friendship, every investment, every undertaking, every work, every joy and every sorrow, "Unto the coming of the Lord"?