

The Living Christ

J.R. Miller:

It always does us good, to focus on the gospel of a risen, living Christ. We need it in our life of care and struggle. It is an old truth--but it is one we forget; one, at least, whose power over us needs constant renewal.

The women were heart-broken when they did not find the body of their Friend in the sepulcher. But suppose they had found it there, still held in the power of death? Suppose Jesus had never risen--what would have been the consequences? It would have been as if the sun, moon, and stars were all blotted from the sky!

If you lay imprisoned in some great fortress, and one who loved you went forth to try to rescue you, and fell and died fighting upon the walls, you would cherish the memory of your friend's valiant effort on your behalf--but you would still remain in chains, undelivered. So would it have been with those whom Christ came to save--if He had perished in death and had not risen. He would have been defeated in His great effort, and those for whom He gave His life--would have been eternally lost.

Think of all the hopes of which the empty grave is the symbol--hopes for ourselves and for our dead who have fallen asleep in Jesus; hopes for this life and for the life to come--and remember that none of these would have been ours--if the women had found the body of Jesus in the grave that morning.

The angel said, "He is not here--He has risen!" Matthew 28:5. Until that morning, death had been an unquestioned conqueror. Into his dark realms--he had been gathering his harvests from all the generations of men. Every human life--the rich, the poor, the great, the small, the strong, the weak--had been compelled to yield to death's scepter, and to pass under his yoke. Nor had any ever come back from his dark prison! True, a few people in Old Testament days, and a few at the bidding of our Lord Himself, had been returned to life; but these were not permanent resurrections. They only came back for a little while to the old life of struggle, suffering, sorrow, and pain. Until that first Easter morning, no one had ever disputed death's sway or wrested himself from the grasp of the conqueror.

"Why do you seek the living among the dead?" asked the angel. That is, why do you seek the One alone who really lives. He lives in Himself--a life underived, independent, original. Our lives are only fragments. We do not have life in ourselves. How frail we are, even physically, fainting under light burdens, tiring on short journeys! And how weak we are in our purposes, in our endeavors, and how we falter and fail in our efforts! How helpless we are in the face of opposition, driven like swirling autumn leaves before the storms! How little we accomplish! How small an impression we make on the world's life! But in contrast with all this, think of the infinite life of Christ, perfect, full, rich, changeless, eternal. He is the Life, the living One. We live only in Him. Our broken fragments of life--have their hope only in His eternal life.

The women had brought spices, expecting to find His body wrapped in burial garments, lying in the rock. "He is not here!" said the angel.

Too many Christians look yet for their Christ, among the dead. They do not get beyond the cross and the grave. They see Christ, as only the Lamb of God who takes away their sin. They think of Him as accomplishing in His sufferings and death--the whole of His work of human redemption. They do not think of a living Christ who intercedes for them in heaven, and who walks with them on earth in loving companionship.

The cross must never be forgotten! In a certain very real sense--Christ saved His people by giving Himself for them. The cross was the fullest, completest revealing of divine love--that earth has ever seen! There the heart of God broke--that its streams of life might flow out to give life to the perishing world. To leave a dying Christ out of our creed is to leave out salvation. The prints of the nails are the proof-marks on all doctrine, on all theology, on all Christian life. He who dims the luster of the cross of Christ--is putting out the light of Christian hope, by which alone souls can be lighted homeward. We must never forget that Jesus died--died for us!

But if our faith stops at the cross--it misses the blessing of the fullest revealing of Christ. We do not merely need a Savior who nineteen hundred years ago went to death to redeem us--but one who also is alive--to walk by our side in loving companionship. We need a Savior who can hear our prayers. We need a Savior to whose feet we can creep in penitence, when we have sinned. We need a Savior to whom we can call for help, when the battle is going against us. We need a Savior who is interested in all of the affairs of our common life, and who can assist us in time of need. We need a Savior who can be our real Friend, loving us, keeping close beside us always. We not only need a Savior who saved us by one great act wrought centuries ago--but one who continually saves us by His warm heart throbbing with love today, walking ever by our side.

It is for love--that our hearts hunger. The bread that will satisfy us--is not the bread merely of memorial, the memory of a great devotion and sacrifice long, long since--but the bread of His love, living, present, warm, and throbbing. Nothing less than a living Christ will do for us! That is what the gospel brings to us. It tells us of Him who lives. He was dead--the nail-prints are in His hands--but He is now alive forevermore! He is risen! He loves us now, today, always. He is ever with us!

While we praise the love that was crucified for us--we crave love from a Savior who lives. Memories of affection are not enough to feed a hungry soul. Memories of a friend who has gone away may be very sweet. They fill our life with fragrance. The fragrance of love departed stays in a home, like the perfume of sweet flowers when the flowers have been borne away. But how unsatisfying are the mere memories of our friend--when our heart hungers for love's presence and touch and tenderness! No more will the mere memories of the love that died on the cross for us--satisfy our cravings for Christ. "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God!" cries every human heart. It is only as we realize the truth of a living Christ--that our hearts are satisfied. We crave love--a presence, a bosom to lean upon, a hand to touch ours, a heart whose beatings we can feel, a personal friendship that will come into our life with its sympathies, its inspirations, its companionship, its shelter, its life, its comfort. All this the living Christ is to us.

The angel's word to the women, with its gentle chiding, may be spoken also to Christians whose dead have been laid in the grave, "Why do you seek him who lives, among the dead?" We think of our godly friends as in the grave--instead of in heaven. Sacred, indeed, becomes the little spot in "God's acre" where the body of our beloved sleeps. All we know of our friends--is associated with their bodily presence. The soul looks out through eyes that we can see. The love that is so tender, reveals itself to us in the touch of a real hand, in the tones of a human voice, and in the glow of a living face. Everything about the dear life becomes sacred--the attitudes, the footstep, the chair, the room, the desk, the books, the tools, the garments, the places made familiar by association. We cannot see the inner life; we know our friend only in the body in which his spirit lives. Hence it is hard for us to think of him apart from this well-known body. When death has come, and the body is only a frail and empty tent out of which our friend has moved--it is hard for us to think of him as being elsewhere. It is natural that we should still prize the body that has grown so dear.

The women came with their spices to anoint the body of Jesus. That was beautiful. It is fitting that we plant flowers upon the graves where the bodies of our beloved sleep. We keep in sacred remembrance, everything in which they live. We believe, too, in the truth of resurrection. Christ has conquered death, and holds in His hand--the keys of the grave. Our beloved shall rise again. It is right, therefore, that we should honor the body of the friend who was so much to us in life.

But too many think of their Christian dead--only as sleeping in the grave. Their eyes look down into the darkness of the tomb with sad longing, and not upward toward the brightness of heaven with blessed hope. The angel's voice is heard today, speaking to every sorrowing heart, "Why do you seek the living, among the dead?" Our sainted ones have entered into eternal life.

The truth of the living Christ, should lift all our days out of dreary commonplace, and fill them with heavenly brightness. If only we realized the power of the endless life--it would make all life glorious! The expectation of continuance, of a future, affects all our life. If we knew there would be no tomorrow, that when the sun goes down tonight it would not rise again, that with the night's horizon all life hereafter would be cut off, the tasks to be taken up again no more forever--would we care for the things we are doing? It is the hope of tomorrow which gives meaning to the duties and tasks of today. The things we are doing seem worth doing, because they are beginnings which shall have their fuller meanings, their completeness, in the days to come. It is hope that gives interest and zest to life.

No matter how dark life may seem to us, while the living Christ appears--all is well. His presence illumines any gloom; the shining of His face gives peace in any storm.