

1 Corinthians - Commentaries by John Gifford Bellett

Short Meditations, Eras of Resurrection (15:22-28)

As to the whole of this chapter, I may say there is an order in the parts of it, which it is edifying to discover and meditate. It might be entitled, " The story of grace and of glory in the light of the resurrection." The order of which I speak is this.

Verses 1-4. The fact of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus is stated.

Verses 5-11. This fact is proved by many and different witnesses, by those who saw Him on earth after He rose, and by one who saw Him in, glory after He ascended.

Verses 12-19. The value of the fact thus stated and proved, is here, in beautiful order, set forth. All is declared to depend on it-the interests of those who are dead, and of those who are still alive and laboring; indeed of all sinners, that is, of all mankind.

Here ends the story of grace in the light of the resurrection, because we have been taken out of our sins.

Verses 20-28. Here the story of glory begins in the light of the same mystery. The risen Lord is looked at as a first fruits, the pledge of a harvest, which harvest is to be gathered " at his coming," and then, with Him to be carried through the kingdom and into the age when " God shall be all in all." This may be read in connection with 1 Thess. 4 and Rev. 20; 21

Verses 29-38. Incidentally, the apostle takes up certain thoughts here. He owns that if there were no resurrection, he, himself indeed, would be a fool, suffering for nothing. But he says That those are rather the fools who question resurrection, for they have neither the knowledge of God Himself, nor of the lesson which sowing-time and harvest teaches us.

Verses 39-49. In these verses He resumes the story of glory in the light of resurrection. He had already shown us, in verses 20-28, the journey through which the risen saints were to be carried, as from glory to glory; now he shows us the persons or bodies in which they are to take that journey.

Verse 50. In this verse he teaches that such a person alone could take such a journey.

Verses 51-57. Here he teaches us the wondrous process by which this new person or body is to be taken up or assumed by the saints. And he further lets us know, that this will be the sharing of the victory which the Lord Jesus has already gained.

Verse 58. Here, in this last verse, he briefly draws the moral or practical lesson of this great mystery.

This seems to be the natural structure and general contents of this wondrous, magnificent chapter. I am about to look, however, more particularly at verses 20-28.

As I have already said, in the great treatise on this mystery which we get in the whole of this chapter, the apostle (having already asserted it, then proved it as in the mouth of witnesses, and then shown the need and indispensableness of it) in these few verses proceeds to teach us the different eras of resurrection and things that are to take place both during them and after them. It is a scripture very rich and beautiful in its communications.

In the first place we learn from it, that the Lord Jesus was all alone in the day of His resurrection. He occupied that moment Himself, and of the people, as I may say, there was none with Him-not one. " Christ the first-fruits," as we read here. Because His resurrection had qualities which were peculiar; altogether so. It was a resurrection from the dead, a victorious resurrection, life in victory over the power of death, a victory wrought out and won by Himself. But it was the only resurrection which had this quality or character in it. Resurrection was due to Christ. He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. (Rom. 6:4.) It was not possible that such an one could have been holden of death and the grave. (Acts 2:24.) He Himself likewise could say and did say, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (John 2:19.) And He was speaking of the temple of His body.

All this was peculiar, as I need not say, and could not be said of any other. Resurrection was due to Him; and besides, He had the power of it in Himself, or by virtue of what He was. Therefore, we see Him alone in the first-fruit era of resurrection, " Christ the first-fruits." And this had been typified under the law, by the reaping of a sheaf at the beginning of the harvest (and before any of the new corn had been eaten), and by the waving of it, just as it was, before the Lord. (Lev. 23:9-14.)

But then, Christ in resurrection, being called " the first-fruits," pledges a harvest. This is the significance of such a title. Accordingly, in due season the harvest follows-and this constitutes the second era in the series of resurrections. As we go on in this scripture to read, " Afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." And this is anything but solitary. Countless thousands shall be there, all the elect from the beginning to that moment, for all of them are " children of the resurrection." (Luke 20:36.) But like the previous resurrection of the first-fruits, it will be a resurrection from the dead, a victorious resurrection—this quality, however, separating it from the other, that it is a victory over death not gained by this multitude, but conferred upon them; not due to them, but in infinite grace bestowed upon them, and bestowed upon them by Him who has already been " the first-fruits," or, as He is elsewhere called, " the firstborn from the dead." They rise from the dead, or in victory, simply because " they are Christ's," as we read here. He had risen in His day just because He was who He was and what He was; they now rise just as simply and as merely because they are whose they are. " They that are Christ's at his coming." This is the harvest of Lev. 23,

following the first-fruits-the ingathering. Or, it is at least as that ingathering. We are said to be " a kind of first-fruits of his creatures." (James 1:18.) And, blessed to tell it out again, we rise, like the Lord Himself, from the dead, or in victorious resurrection. " If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies, by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." (Rom. 8:11.)

This being accomplished in its season, as we read, " at his coming," and as we see further shown to us in 1 Thess. 4, then, again in its season, we reach the third resurrection-era, called "the end." (Ver. 24.) But here, we have new thoughts suggested to us.

This is a resurrection not worthy of the name -consequently it is only implied and not expressed here. It is not a victorious resurrection, or a resurrection from the dead, like the preceding one, but simply and ingloriously a resurrection of the dead, a coming up of the unregenerate, of those whose names are not written in the book of life, to receive the fruit of their works from the judgment of Him who sits on the great white throne. It is, as I may express it, a judicial, not a victorious resurrection, a resurrection not to life but to judgment, as is anticipated by the Lord in John 5:29, and as is exhibited by the prophet in Rev. 20:11-15.

This is something new, and of a solemn character indeed. " I will sing," the harp of prophecy says, " of mercy and of judgment." The sunny seasons of resurrection at which we first looked, resurrection to life and in glory, are now succeeded by one season of resurrection which summons the dead to judgment and the lake of fire. And we need different seasons in our souls as we read these different things. We ought to know the joy of anticipating the resurrection from the dead; and we ought to feel what awful forewarnings and foreshadowings scripture gives us of the doom of those who do not, in this age of " long-suffering," this " acceptable year," this " day of salvation," touch Christ in the crowd,

and get virtue out of Him. But we are cold and narrow-hearted. Indeed we are. But so it is, again I say; the voices of the prophets tell of mercy and of judgment-of resurrection from the dead, as to glory, and of resurrection of the dead, as to judgment. "The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." (John 5:28, 29.)

We have, however, much connected with this third resurrection season, in these few verses in 1 Cor. 15. For the Spirit is pleased, in this wondrous chapter, to write out for us a large piece of the history of resurrection, as well as to assert and prove the fact of it. He has already, as we have seen, taught us about resurrection, as to the eras or seasons in which it is to occur; now He goes on, by the apostle, further to teach us what is to accompany the third and last of these eras.

We learn several things, weighty in themselves, serious and interesting, and fitted, like all prophetic truth, to regulate and enlarge our thoughts on the great subject of God's dealings with this ruined world of ours, and His purposes touching the various displays of His own glories.

We learn, that the Lord Jesus having received a kingdom after the second resurrection era, will for a time (here left undefined), hold it, and order it in a way to reduce every enemy in subjection to Himself, even death.

Having done this, and thus fulfilled the office and business of " the Kingdom," under commission from God, having been faithful to this great stewardship, He will deliver it up, " deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father," that " God may be all in all." That is, that God Himself may then be displayed in some, doubtless, ineffable form of glory worthy of Himself and worthy of His eternity, when all stewardships in the hand of Christ have been fulfilled, when grace in the age of long-suffering, and power in the age of the kingdom, have fulfilled their commission.

Synchronously with this delivering up of the kingdom, and this great closing action, the third resurrection -season will take place. It will be, as we have seen, a resurrection of the dead, and to judgment. The judgment shall take place before "the great white throne," and the doom of the dead then judged is to be " the lake of fire." And this action will be in full consistency with all that which accompanies it-because, it will be another witness, that the Lord Jesus is there subduing all things to Himself. It will be an action of "the kingdom "-just as the casting of death itself into the lake of fire will be another action. All tells of the full subjection of that

moment to Christ in everything-that He has been able to subdue all things to Himself as we read in Phil. 3-and that then, it is high time, fit time, glorious time, to lay power and stewardship aside, and enter on God's own eternity-when " a scepter of righteousness" may yield to " a dwelling " of " righteousness." (Heb. 1:8; 2 Peter 3:13.)

But I must notice two or three things connected with this more particularly. Christ, we read here, " delivers up " the kingdom. This will be the very first time, in the whole course of the world's history, in the lengthened succession of thrones and dynasties, that " power " has been given back to the hand that had committed it. One of the beasts of Daniel after another had his kingdom taken from him. He had been untrue to that which was entrusted to him, and the stewardship was taken away from him. This is the common history. There has never been an " enduring " kingdom, for there has never been a " faithful " kingdom. There has as yet been no, " righteous " scepter, and therefore as yet no " unbroken " scepter. The nations of the earth are judged, as well as the four great beasts or empires—" the little hills " as well as the " great mountains." This we see in Isa. 15-24, and in Jer. 25, where the cup of God's indignation is sent from one people to another, till every land, every nation, is made to drink of it.

And I need not add, that the nation of Israel, and the throne of the house of David, were just as untrue as any, and more guiltily untrue than any.

Messiah stands not only " pre-eminent," but " alone " in His kingdom. He will be " the true and faithful " king, as He has already been "the true and faithful " witness and prophet. (Rev. 19:11.) He will order His kingdom in judgment and justice. He will hold His scepter in righteousness, and keep His kingdom-house as it ought to be kept. (Psa. 101) And therefore there is no taking of it from Him to give it to another more faithful than He. He can give an account of His stewardship, though He prove to be the only One that has ever been able to answer when so challenged. (Luke 16:1; Psa. 82) There will be no taking of the kingdom from Him, but He will " deliver it up," as One that has

been infinitely faithful, faithful to the utmost jot and tittle, to Him that appointed Him.

This is all simple, but all precious; and this is all conveyed to our thought, in full assurance, by the words " When he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father "-or, as the words might be, " When he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father."

This is one of the blessed secrets concerning the Lord Jesus which we learn in this magnificent though short prophetic word. There is a passing touch or stroke of beauty, which I must also notice, in the midst of the great and weighty communications of this scripture. It is this-that " death " is the only enemy which is specified or signalized here, as being destroyed, or put under the feet of Christ. In a general way we learn, that " all enemies " are to be subdued; but "death," and death only, is named individually or specifically here.

There is a stroke of beauty in this. This is keeping the great subject of the whole chapter still in view-for it is a writing on resurrection. Other prophets will tell us of the subjection of other things to the scepter of the Lord Jesus in the day of His royalty. Daniel tells us, that He is to break in pieces every other kingdom, and fill the whole earth with His own. Isaiah tells us, that the earth, in that day, shall be full of the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. The Psalmist again and again tells us of all creation owning Him in His universal Lordship. John can call Him, " King of kings, and Lord of lords;" and can hear the whole world shouting, " Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." All this, and far more of like glory, is told by the prophets of God touching the coming sovereignty of the Son of man. But there is no one feature in the wide range of this universal monarchy, and all-conquering, dominant power, signalized here, but the destruction of death in the mighty sweep and sway of the kingdom of Christ. And again I say, there is a touch and stroke of beauty in that, as resurrection was the theme of the whole chapter.

ALL that has been for the Lord or from the Lord among His saints shall be owned in His day. All grace in them, all love, all service, all suffering for Him or for righteousness, all forms and measures of these things and kindred things, shall be accepted and honored. But so, I add, all learning of His mind shall have its acceptance with Him, and its own proper joy in that day, It may be but small in comparison, but it will have its measure. Servants, lovers, imitators, martyrs, shall be accepted then, but so shall disciples. I claim a place in that day when " every man shall have praise of God," for those who, in the midst of human mistakes and misjudgments, have learned, and prized, and held to the thoughts and principles of the divine wisdom, of the mind of God in the progress of His dispensations.

Showers Upon the Grass: Being a Few Brief Letters and Papers, 1 Corinthians 11:3-18 (11:3-18)

Covering is the proper sign of woman. It expresses the subjection she owes. But the woman is mystically the Church; and thus, if a woman appear in the congregation covered, she appears duly, with the sign of subjection to Christ or the man (Eph. 5:24.) But it expresses also the protection she receives. And thus, if she do not appear covered, she publishes her own shame. For she does not carry the token of her proper state, but appears rather as a captive, or as a suspected woman. (See Num. 5; Deut. 21.) She ought therefore on these two accounts in the congregation to appear covered. But there is another reason why this should be. She should be covered "because of the angels"—for angels are learning lessons from or through the Church (Eph. 3:10), and the uncovered head of the woman would teach them a wrong lesson. Or, if "the angels" be the elders or ministers, then because of them the woman should be covered, lest she should afterward have to confess her error (Eccl. 5:6). But the man is not to be covered in the congregation, because, mystically, the man is Christ, and "the image and glory of God"—and it belongs not to Christ to bear the signs of either subjection owed, or of protection claimed—quite different from the woman, who is, mystically, as I said, only the Church, "the glory of the man." Christ is Lord and Savior of the body (Eph. 5:23.); that is, claims my subjection, and rendering protection, instead of owing subjection and claiming protection. If the man, therefore, were covered, he would sadly dishonor his head, Christ. The covered head, accordingly, is most suitable to the woman, but most unsuitable to the man, in the assembly; and the Spirit, speaking by the apostle, would not allow it to be neglected, though most graciously he pleads the question with the saints, to lead themselves to approve it.

As to verse 5 of this chapter, I judge that the apostle means simply the place where praying or prophesying is going on, as in the Church or assembly of the saints. I do not think that his language implies that the women were themselves either to pray or to teach, because in verse 4 the very same words are used as to the man, and we are sure that all the men are equally to be uncovered in the place of prayer, though most of them may never engage actively in it. And so also those men, or male brethren, who do at times in the assembly either teach or pray, yet when merely sitting silent in their places, are to be as much uncovered, as when they are actually ministering. So that I judge the Apostle speaks of the place of prayer and teaching, or of the condition of the assembly. He legislates that, without assuming, that women necessarily are either to teach or to pray. In 1 Timothy 2, on the other hand, it is not the mere condition of things in the place of prayer, or the mere appearance of the male and female, the Apostle has in hand, but the actual services of the assembly, and then he expressly requires the silence of the woman.

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