

John - Commentaries by Edward Denny

Miscellaneous Papers, Grave-Clothes., The

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JOHN 20:1-10JOH 20:1-10

MARY

"The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulcher, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulcher. Then she runneth, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid him."

PETER AND JOHN

"Peter therefore went forth, and that other disciple, and came to the sepulcher. So they ran both together."

JOHN

"And the other disciple did outrun Peter, and came first to the sepulcher. And he stooping down, and looking in, saw THE LINEN CLOTHES LYING; yet went he not in."

PETER

"Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the, sepulcher, and seeth THE LINEN CLOTHES LIE, AND THE NAPKIN, THAT WAS ABOUT HIS HEAD, NOT LYING WITH THE LINEN CLOTHES, BUT WRAPPED TOGETHER IN A PLACE BY ITSELF."

JOHN

"Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulcher, and HE SAW, AND BELIEVED. For as yet they knew not THE SCRIPTURE, that he must RISE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD.

BOTH

"Then the disciples went away again to their own home."

WHEN the angel of the Lord, as described in Matt. 28, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone from the door of the sepulcher, we are nowhere told that his object was to open the tomb, as is often assumed, to let the Lord out. It was, on the contrary, to tell the women, Mary Magdalene and the others, that Jesus was risen; to give them a view of the inside of the cave, so that they might see that the Lord was not there to furnish them moreover, as we shall presently see, with an undeniable evidence of the truth of the happy tidings which he had come to announce. The fact is, before ever he came the Lord had awakened to life, had emerged from the sepulcher. The great stone which closed up its mouth being no obstacle to Him; clothed, as He now was, with a spiritual body, He could as easily pass through it as a spirit could do; in fact, as His own disembodied spirit had done in the act of reuniting itself with His body; just as afterward, when, the doors being shut, passing through every barrier, He came and stood in the midst of His assembled disciples. All which, observe, was done, not by independently putting forth the almighty power of Deity, which of course had He chosen it He could easily have done; but that, acting still as the servant of Him who had sent Him from heaven into the world to bring life and immortality to light, and who now had raised Him to life, He, as the risen Man, was showing that He was no longer in a natural body, such as He previously had, but on the contrary in a spiritual one, the Firstfruits of them that slept, the Head of the new creation of God.

And now let us turn to the chapter alluded to, Matt. 28:5-7, and hear how the angel speaks to the women. "Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen "from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into" Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you." Here we have the blessed announcement that Jesus was risen, and at the same time the angel's invitation to the women, either to look into or enter the tomb, and thus to prove for themselves that such was the fact. And how, it may be asked, were they to do this? The mere fact of His not being there would be no proof that He was alive, inasmuch as that, as Mary Magdalene thought, the body might have been stolen. There must then be more meaning in the words of the angel than at first sight appears; and when he says, "COME, SEE THE PLACE WHERE THE LORD LAY," he must have meant to direct their attention to something more than the mere spot where the Lord had been lying. And that such was the case we gather from Luke 24 and from John in the above passage (ch. 21.), the latter especially, where the grave-clothes are noticed as lying on the floor of the cave, the trophies, as I believe, of the resurrection power of Jesus over death and the grave. But how is this? it will be asked. How did they prove that Christ was alive? and in what sense are they to be regarded as trophies, seeing, as we repeat, that the body might have been taken away, and its wrappings left behind in the sepulcher? In answer to this we reply, that we believe it to be quite a mistake to suppose that they lay, as in ordinary circumstances would be the case, scattered in a confused heap on the floor of the cave. The fact, I apprehend, was quite otherwise. There they lay, undisturbed, unchanged as to their appearance and form, just as they were when the body of Jesus was in them. They had not been unrolled by the hand of another, as in the case of Lazarus when he came forth from the tomb: He had passed out of them as a spirit would do, with no effort whatever, by the divine power of God, even His own power, and that

also of Him who raised Him to life. This was miraculous,—quite supernatural. None but Jesus Himself could have freed Himself thus from the thralldom of death. This then is that which the angel meant when he said to the women, "COME, SEE THE PLACE WHERE THE LORD LAY." He pointed, we may suppose, as he said so, not to the spot merely, but to the grave-clothes which lay on that spot— the marvelous, incontrovertible evidence that the Prince of Life, the Mighty Victor, had conquered: that He who had passed through the valley of the shadow of death had taken up that life which He had laid down for His people.

All this, as we have said, we gather from the description in Luke 24 and in John 20. When Peter, we read, went into the sepulcher, he beheld the linen clothes there, —alone—"by themselves," as it is rendered (Luke 24:12), that is, without the body, which had miraculously disengaged itself from its cerements, leaving them there just as they were, , "lying"—that is, lying there undisturbed and at full length as when the body was in them, watched over by two angels, one at the head the other at the feet, during the three days and nights, we believe, that the Lord slept in the grave, in the same spot where Mary Magdalene afterward saw them. Then as to the napkin or cap that was about His head: this we find was "not lying with the linen clothes," but was "wrapped together in a place by itself;" wreathed together in folds—, as it had been when on His head: it lay apart from the garments the length of the neck, namely the distance that the head is from the rest of the body, at the point where the neck comes, all just as it was when Jesus was there. Such I believe to be the simple explanation of John's description of that which met the eyes of the two disciples as they entered the sepulcher.

And now with regard to the passage at the head of this paper, John 20:1-10. Here we find the two disciples, Peter and John, on the report of Mary Magdalene, who fancied that the body of Jesus had been taken away, making together for the sepulcher; John outstripping the other. John however does not enter the tomb; but looking into it, is struck with something strange and unusual in the disposition and general appearance of the grave-clothes. After which Peter, overtaking his companion, goes in, and has a full view of the grave-clothes: he sees the linen clothes, as we read, lie, and the napkin that was about the Lord's head not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. What we are to understand by this description we have already said. As to Peter, however, we do not here learn what impression the peculiar appearance of the grave-clothes makes upon him; whether he was convinced or not that Jesus had risen. Not so as to John: he next going in, sees and believes: while Peter was inside and he outside the sepulcher, he had time to ponder on what he had had only a glimpse of at first: and now, on a closer inspection, finding that the casket, though despoiled of the jewel, so to speak, is still locked, he is convinced by this fact that the whole thing is supernatural—miraculous—that the body, though not there, had surely not been stolen, according to Mary's report; and that Jesus had by His own power freed Himself from the grave-clothes, and consequently that He was alive. His faith however, it must be allowed, is of a very low order: both he and Peter ought to have believed the scripture on this point; both the written word and the word of Jesus Himself having taught them to believe that He would rise again from the dead. But they lost sight of both. And now, assuming that they both were convinced, when they do believe, it is, as in Thomas's case, not on the scripture of truth, but on the evidence of their senses that their faith rests. Hence their faith is inoperative: they go away from the tomb, and seek their own home. Love surely, had it been fully in exercise, would never have allowed them to rest till they had either found Jesus Himself or ascertained what had become of Him, whether He was still upon earth or had ascended to heaven. A sad failure this; the result, as we have seen, of their defective views of the word as to Christ's resurrection; too much, alas! like that of the Sadducees as to the doctrine of the resurrection in the abstract: all springing, in the case of the latter, from the same evil root ignorance of scripture; as shown in the answer of Jesus to their caviling arguments, "YE DO ERR, NOT KNOWING THE SCRIPTURES, NOR THE POWER OF GOD." (Matt. 22:29.) This surely reads a very solemn lesson to us: it shows us that, so far as we fall short of simple faith in the word, we of necessity dishonor the Lord and lose our own blessing. Miracles, providences, mercies, all hold their due place in the economy of God, and as such are to be valued by us: but let them take the place of the word—let us make them the ground of our confidence—that moment we sink into the weakness of nature; and whenever the temptation arises, we shall assuredly act like the two disciples, when they went away from the sepulcher and listlessly sought their own home.

Miscellaneous Papers, Love Unto the End.

JOHN 13:1-5. JOH 13:1-5

"Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end."

"And supper being ended, (the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him;) Jesus (knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God) riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded."

This is a deeply affecting and beautiful passage, exemplifying in a wonderful way the Lord's love to His own, at the close of His path upon earth, when about to return to that home which for a season He had left for their sakes, and still more for the sake of Him whose name it was His object to glorify. It opens as follows: "Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father." Now here, observe, a set time is fixed, a given moment is specified; leading us surely to look for some equally definite act on the Lord's part, something either to be done or uttered by Him at the time expressed. However, on reading the close of this passage, all that we find is, that "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." Now love, an inward affection of the heart, as it is, and not of necessity issuing in any act of the hand or utterance of the lips, in its very nature is neither bounded by time nor fixed to a moment. What then, we ask, has He done, as shown in the passage before us? apparently nothing; HE HAD LOVED THEM BEFORE, AND HE STILL LOVES THEM. Hence we are tempted to think that no conclusion is reached, that the thought is imperfect, the sentence unfinished. This however is wholly inconsistent with Him whose words are the very essence of divine wisdom and knowledge; and hence, on looking a little more closely at the passage, we are led to the conclusion that the verb —to love, is here intended to convey the thought of love not merely felt, but of love carried out and embodied in action; and that it prepares us for what we find in the sequel, namely, Jesus ungirding Himself, and washing the feet of the twelve. This, observe, was a mystical, typical action, a pledge to His own of His guardian care of them when He should no longer be with them: it showed that, as they passed through a world where they would be

sure to encounter defilement, He would be at hand to wash the stains away from their feet, to keep their consciences clean, and enable them to walk worthy of their high calling as the children of God in the midst of a world sunk in iniquity. And this He would do for them as long as they needed it, even "to the end"—to the last hour of the sojourn of the Church upon earth. For, observe, the love here expressed is by no means confined to the apostles, it reaches to all, they being a sample at that moment of the whole elect body. So, were we to paraphrase the closing words of this paragraph, we should express ourselves thus: "Having loved His own which were in the world, HE GAVE THEM A TOKEN, A PLEDGE, OF HIS UNCHANGING LOVE TO THEM UNTO THE END; He showed them that, as He had loved them before, He would love them forever."

And now, having explained the former of the two above paragraphs, we will proceed to the latter, in which we find that for which the first had prepared us, namely, the actual description of Christ's washing the feet of the twelve. The bare narrative, divested of everything extraneous, is as follows: "And supper being ended, Jesus riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments, and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded." These are simply the facts, the two, passages here omitted being each of them evidently parenthetical, and, as such, not actually needed as regards the bare history, and yet at the same time most needed in order to set forth and illustrate that love which led Jesus to speak and to act as we find Him here doing. They are as follows. First: "the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him." Secondly: "knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God." How striking, how contrasted with each other these two passages are. In the first we find the powers of darkness marshalling their forces, the traitor moved by the devil to compass the destruction of Jesus. In the latter, we learn how the Lord at that moment, in view of His death on the cross, was realizing all that He was, and all that was His. From heaven, from God, He had come; and to heaven, to God, He was going again, there to be seated, to take His place on the throne of the Father, as Lord of all things in heaven and in earth: and He, blessed Lord! in the face of all this, in the full realization of the hatred and rejection of man on the one hand, of God's love and complacency, His full acceptance of Himself and His work, on the other—of His humiliation, in short, and His glory, He thus humbles, He ungirds Himself, and washes the feet of those who were so soon to forsake Him, and one of them, alas! to betray Him! What marvelous grace, what unspeakable love, what amazing humility! Well may we take courage and go on our way rejoicing, when we see what a Savior and Guardian we have to keep and defend us. Our object however is not so much to comment upon it, as to bring out the structure and sense of the passage; believing that when these are discerned, it will come home with fresh power to the heart. Observe, the two things which we have noted above are, the true meaning of the verb, to love, as used in this passage; and the moral connection of what we find in the two parentheses with the action of Jesus in this scene at the supper-table.

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