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PREPARATION OF THE HEART

THE preparations of the heart in man are from the Lord. God's methods have design and foresight. The Old Testament was a grand "Gospel-preparation" for the New. John the Baptist's mission was to "prepare a people for the Lord". And in the Lord's own disclosure of Himself to individual men and women it is noteworthy that the decisive moment was usually preceded by some preparatory discourse or miracle, as with the blind man of John ix, and with the woman at the well. Other instances will doubtless present themselves spontaneously to the mind of the reader. The critical moment of revelation does not occur in a vacuum.

The object of this paper is to draw attention to the remarkable circumstance that the resurrection-appearances of the Lord were, so far as the Gospel narrative informs us, almost invariably preceded by some form of verbal or visual testimony. Consider the facts. Before they had actually met the Lord in resurrection, John saw the linen clothes lie, and believed; Peter had received the rumour from the women of the empty tomb, and he, too, noted the grave-clothes, and how the napkin lay, wrapped together in a place by itself. The apostles first received the message from the women who had been at the sepulchre. The two on the way to Emmaus had the Scripture expounded to them by the unrecognized Christ before their eyes were opened to know Him. The eleven again had the testimony of these two, in addition to that of the women and of Simon Peter, who in the meantime had seen the Lord. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were given a vision of the descent of the angel of the Lord, and the two men in shining garments reminded certain of the women of the Lord's own words concerning His rising from the dead, and plainly told them, "He is not here but is risen." And the five hundred brethren who saw Him at once could not have been ignorant of the testimony of the apostles.

Nor was it otherwise with the apostle Paul. He must have heard the testimony of Stephen, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God," and have been impressed by the direct objectivity of Stephen's last words, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." That this was indeed so is shown later by the Lord's words to him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."

Must not all this be taken into account when considering the evidences of the resurrection? The direct eye-witness of the twelve is indeed the objective basis of our Gospel testimony, but their witness came not merely from logical proof but from spiritually apprehended knowledge. It is God's will that men should come to know the reality of the resurrection, not by scientific knowledge, as if scientific method, that modern idol, was the one valid guarantee of truth, but much more by a test that tries the disposition of the heart and mind, namely, the test of faith. It is not that the facts were incapable of scientific or experimental proof; the Lord's words, "Handle Me and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see Me have," put that beyond question. But the Lord chose to reveal Himself in a way that made men yield themselves to conviction, not by an overwhelming vision, but by a method that brought memory of His spoken word, the affection of their hearts, the disposition of their minds, and the mutual evidence of others like-minded with themselves, into full play.

Thomas is a notable instance of this. He would have direct proof before committing himself, but the Lord said to him, "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed." Faith was encouraged before direct vision was given. So we now, too, still in the body, walk by faith, not by sight. Though we were not there when they crucified our Lord, yea, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. The "means of grace" used by God are many and various, and draw us to Himself with bands of love, gently, as with the cords of a man.

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