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Spiritual Antidotes (Feb 1958)

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Ronald McMillan

Every Christian Is Liable to be spiritually poisoned by the atmosphere which permeates this present evil world. Like a wise and skillful physician, Paul has prescribed effective antidotes for three symptoms produced by the spiritual poisons to which the Christian is exposed.

The Antidote For Declension

“Stand fast in the Lord” (Phil. 4:1). The Christian life demands courage and fortitude. There is a real danger of cowering and wavering in the face of opposition. When foes are arrayed against us and the battle is fierce, desertion is a distinct possibility.

We need to listen afresh to this timely appeal for resolute steadfastness. The proverbial qualities of the Spartan are to be in evidence, regardless of the strength of the enemy. The evil armies of error are advancing with fury. We dare not give ground!

Principle must never be sacrificed for expediency. If we are to become the “joy and crown” of another’s ministry, we shall have to be vigilant, vigorous Christians, overcoming instead of succumbing, resisting instead of yielding, withstanding instead of retreating. In this day of widespread departure and compromise, this message is surely seasonable — “stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.”

The Antidote For Dissension

“Be of the same mind in the Lord” (Phil. 4:2). In this exemplary church at Philippi, two ladies were at variance — two ladies who are commended for their noble support and labour in the spread of the gospel. How sad, yet how common! Differences will always arise, but these must not be allowed to spoil the harmony of our fellowship.

Recognizing that we belong to the same Lord, let the sweet ministry of reconciliation have its perfect way with us, that there “be no schism in the body” (1 Cor. 12:25). Strained personal relations among the Lord’s people should be adjusted without delay, lest they produce a withering bitterness that is the negation of every Christian grace.

The Lord’s wise instruction on this theme should be studied more and obeyed. Whether offender (Matt. 5:23-24), or offended (Matt. 18:15), you are required to act in order to win your brother. Let us examine our own hearts and circumstances as we read these words again. “Be of the same mind in the Lord.”

The Antidote For Depression

“Rejoice in the Lord” (Phil. 4:4). The pressures of modern life need not rob us of our joy. Constant communion with the Lord will ensure an equanimity that will enable us to withstand these pressures. We live in an “age of anxiety” when many are despondent; Paul’s exhortation has particular relevance. Our joy is independent of time or circumstance; it is both “in the Lord” and “always”.

While on earth, the Lord Jesus exercised a cheering ministry. Often He drove depression and gloom away with His “be of good cheer.” His pardon, presence, power, and protection are all guaranteed to His own (Matt. 9:2, Mk. 6:50, Jn. 16:33, Acts 23:11).

Paul referred to those “whose names are in the book of life” (Phil. 4:3). Here is ground for rejoicing. To those disciples who were exultant over their subjection of demons, the Lord replied, “Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven” (Lk. 10:20).

Let us heed these appeals as commands which require our immediate and implicit obedience, for “THE LORD IS AT HAND” (Phil. 4:5).

“He is Risen” --He Ever Liveth (Apr 1961)

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“He is Risen”

He Ever Liveth

J. R. McMillan

Paul of Tarsus could never be the same again! His life had been completely transformed; indeed, revolutionized by that memorable experience on the Damascus highway. With hatred in his heart, and bitterness burning in his bosom, intent on persecuting the Christians, he had set out on his journey, but on the way he had been arrested. A mighty light had shined upon him from Heaven, and Saul, the apt pupil of Gamaliel, had fallen in the dust beaten, baffled, and blinded. From his lips had escaped that broken acknowledgement, “Who art Thou Lord?” Paul would never be the same again! The persecutor had become the preacher; the Jewish extremist, the Christian evangelist; the Church’s chief antagonist, the Church’s chief apostle. How can all this be explained? Paul had seen the face of Jesus! This personal encounter with the Risen Lord, this unforgettable glimpse of the Glorified Saviour, had made the bitter bigoted Jew a mighty missionary, and at the last made him a martyr for the Christian faith. With cloudless assurance he has given his glowing testimony, “Last of all He was seen of me.”

The Risen Christ, the ever-living Lord, has been changing the characters and has been transforming the lives of men and women ever since.

The Historical Fact

Small wonder the transcendental truth of the resurrection of Christ has been termed, “The keystone of Christian doctrine, the groundwork of Christian conduct, the backbone of Christian testimony.” First Corinthians chapter 15 demonstrates how vital is this truth. Among other deductions, Paul states twice over, “If Christ be not risen.” This however is no mere repetition. In verse 14, “If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain,” the word vain means empty or void. In verse 17, “If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain,” the word vain means futile, that which accomplishes nothing, is ineffective and useless. Following his logic and reasoning, there comes the dogmatic assertion based on thoroughly documented and established facts, “Now is Christ risen from the dead.”

The message of the angel rings clear and true down through the ages, the certainty of which cannot be gainsaid, “He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay” (Matt. 28:6).

Historical facts cannot be established by any process of mathematics or by any scientific experiment. Historical facts depend upon reliable witnesses. When, therefore, we examine the case for the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, our leading question must be, “Were the witnesses reliable?”

Reliable Evidence

The principal followers of the Lord, we know, were humble Galilean fishermen. They had companied with Him for a few years, occupying a near place to Him, wondering at His words of wisdom, marvelling at His miracles of mercy. Yet, with all their unbounded admiration for Him and all their unquestioned confidence in Him, they did not believe in advance that He would rise from the dead (Mark 9:10). “They questioned one with another” (vs. 10). “They understood not the saying” (vs. 32). No, they did not believe in advance that Jesus would leave the grave. Neither did they believe after the event; that is, imediately after. When news was brought by the women, it seemed as idle tales to the disciples (Luke 24:11). Thomas was probably told by five different groups that Jesus was alive, but he still doubted and disbelieved. They were indeed “slow of heart to believe” (Luke 24:25).

These were the men who boldly declared that the Saviour whom others had cruelly crucified was now alive and glorified. They were men who were not easily persuaded. They were not the gullible type, ready to credit the first wild rumour that reached their ears. Very much the reverse, they were incredulous at the tidings, and not at all disposed to accept the evidence confronting them; nevertheless, they were finally convinced. They had seen Him, heard Him, walked with Him, talked with Him, and even dined with Him (John 21), henceforth nothing could shake their confidence.

They were punished, persecuted, put to death, but they were not silenced. No one could daunt or deter them from blazing abroad the fame of the Conqueror of the

Grave. Though once so timid and fearful, they now proclaimed the Risen Lord in the presence of His enemies, in the city of His rejection, only a few hundred yards from the vacant sepulchre. Because, as Luke phrased it so well in his preface to the Book of the Acts, “He showed Himself alive after His passion, by many infallible proofs.”

So much for His friends! What about His foes? Well, it appears that His enemies had great respect for what He said, and had even better memories than His disciples. A deputation interviewed Pilate and recounted His prediction that He would rise again the third day. In view of this they were empowered to take every possible precaution. Every loop-hole was to be blocked. No stone was to be left unturned. The risk was too great for any careless, perfunctory arrangement. There was the stone, the seal, and the soldiers. What elaborate precautions! All, observe, to guard a dead body! All in vain! “Up from the grave He arose, With a mighty triumph o’er His foes.” Christ made a mockery of all their calculated preparations, and well they knew it. When they realized that their precautions had failed, and failed miserably, they devised a wicked plot. The soldiers were bribed to tell a lie, to propagate a story that would not bear investigation. What a story! Surely the obvious course for them to take, if they really believed their own theory, was to search for and retrieve the body they alleged had been stolen. This would have silenced forever the reports that Jesus had arisen from among the dead. They had all the influence of the Sanhedrin behind them, the might of Rome on their side, yet they made no attempt to find the body.

Certain Identity

The question as to how the disciples recognized their Lord is sometimes raised. This can be easily resolved. There are two principal means by which identity may be established. First, by marks: those who have served in the armed forces will know that on their personal documents the authorities noted any scars or marks appearing on their bodies for identification purposes. When this is applied to the case of our Lord, we recollect instantly that when He revealed Himself to His own, “He showed them His hands and His feet.” They saw the wounds that men had inflicted upon Him, the indelible, unmistakeable marks of Calvary. Some casuist may object, however, and remind us that three men died on Golgotha, all with similar marks in their hands and feet. It would appear that John had anticipated this protest, for when he portrays the scene, he writes, “He showed them His hands and His side,” especially His side.

Second, by voice: it is said that no two voices are exactly alike. Ventriloquists can sometimes mimic other people’s voices, but then they are exceptional. The voice can be a very reliable guide to one’s identity. Think of the scene described in John 20. Hear the Saviour say with familiar tone, “Mary.” Ah, how quickly she recognizes the well-known, well-loved voice of her Master. Something similar may be suggested in John 21. When the stranger appeared on the shore and shouted, “Children, have ye any meat,” John, who seemed to know the Lord with singular intimacy, said, “It is the Lord.”

The Contemporary Christ

There remains, in addition to the biblical and historical evidence, one most valid and vital line of testimony to the fact of the resurrection of Christ, the witness of our individual hearts and experiences. We know that Jesus is alive. We hold communion with Him daily.