

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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He Shall Return as He Went

When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven. (Acts 1:6–11, KJV 1900)

When Paul faced the challenge of defending the faith before Greek philosophers on Mars Hill, he started with their own past philosophers, quoting from two of them, but interpreting their words quite differently from their ideas. He quickly launched from that point into his primary focus, "Jesus, and the resurrection." (Acts 17:18) Throughout New Testament teaching, Jesus' resurrection serves as the foundation for our belief that we shall also be raised, not to inhabit an ideal world on this planet, but, like Him, to ascend "...into heaven."

Jesus' ascension into heaven was not in spirit only. The disciples saw His body ascend into a cloud, I suggest a cloud of glory, not of fog. Further, the angels who spoke to them affirmed His bodily ascension, "...this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven...." Did the disciples live with Jesus for their years of following Him, including His physical body? Yes, and that Jesus, body included, was taken into heaven. That same Jesus, body included, shall also return "...in like manner." He ascended in glory; He shall return in glory. He ascended victorious; He shall return victorious.

Although he does not go into details about the image, Paul tells us that he saw the resurrected Jesus, fully qualifying him to be one of Jesus' chosen apostles. The most likely occasion to which he referred was the recorded encounter that he had with Jesus on the road leading into Damascus. (Acts 9:1-8, 22:1-11, 26:9-18; 1 Corinthians 15:8) John begins Revelation with an account of Jesus appearing to him on his prison island. (Revelation 1:10-16) He describes a physical body, but a body so changed in glory that the glory shines far brighter than the physical image.

The centrality of Jesus' literal, physical, bodily resurrection and ascension is foundational to every major New Testament doctrine, not just its teaching regarding our personal bodily resurrection. (Philippians 3:20-21) Consider just one example.

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:5)

In this key passage on Jesus' mediatorial work, Paul makes specific reference to "the man Christ Jesus." At the least, "the man" includes some reference to Jesus' physical body that He inhabited during His time on earth. Paul didn't say, "...the spirit Christ Jesus," but "...**the man** Christ Jesus." If we follow Paul's reasoning in this verse, if Jesus does not inhabit that same body today in heaven where he went at His ascension (Acts 1:11), we have no mediator. When Christians refer to Jesus' time on earth as His Incarnation, they are liable to leave the question of His present bodily status unaddressed. He didn't occupy a human body just during those thirty three plus years. He occupies it today in heaven, crucial to His present work as Mediator between God and men.

We find no Scripture to indicate when on our calendar Jesus shall return. Just during my lifetime, I have observed several men, often radio or television preachers, who claimed to have discovered some hidden truth that enabled them to tell people precisely when Jesus would so return. One of them, Harold Camping, got it wrong, but didn't learn. At least twice after missing the specific date of Jesus' return, he tried again, but each time he was wrong. His predicted date for the Second Coming came on the calendar and went, but Jesus didn't sound the trumpet or return. If we follow Scripture, we learn that date-setting is not to occupy our minds or distract our testimony to Jesus and His resurrection and glory. If you play the prophet only to see the passing of time bear incontrovertible testimony to your error, your whole testimony to Him loses its credibility. In our study passage, Jesus rebukes the disciples for seeking a supposed restoration date and directs them to invest their spiritual energy to their testimony of Him.

Often the simple Scriptures reveal far more to us than we grasp. While we strain at gnats and

swallow camels in our pursuit of "Big truth," we become inexcusably ignorant of the simple truths of the gospel that we should know and manifest by the testimony of our life's conduct. Our failure to manifest Jesus' life and ethics in our daily conduct, and especially our interactions with other believers, will utterly destroy our credibility as witnesses to Him and to His truth. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15) When we promote ourselves as theological experts, but fail to practice what Jesus taught us to practice in our daily life, again especially toward other believers, we reduce ourselves to theoretical philosophers, and we lose all credibility to bear personal witness to our Lord and to His grace in our lives.

The witness of Jesus is as valid through the testimony of the gospel as it was to the disciples who were eyewitnesses of His life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus never physically visited Galatia during His time on earth. He was not crucified there, we know. But, when Paul visited Galatia and preached the gospel to the people there, they saw the evidence of Jesus. When he wrote the Galatians in rebuke for their departure, Paul reminded them of the gospel that he preached to them and that they received.

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? (Galatians 3:1)

"...evidently set forth" means that Paul's preaching to the Galatians revealed Jesus' life, sufferings, death, resurrection, and work as he preached to them. Jesus was crucified in the outskirts of Jerusalem, not in Galatia, but Paul's preaching to the Galatians so presented Jesus and His crucifixion with evidence to support this fact that the Galatians were in the same position as those who did witness His actual crucifixion in Jerusalem. Therefore, as Paul reasons, they were foolish and without excuse when they rejected Paul's preaching and believed the false gospel that Paul's detractors taught them.

When Paul wrote the Thessalonian Church, he taught them comforting truth regarding the Lord's return. His objective in teaching this early church the truth of the Lord's return was not to indoctrinate them in one or another dispensational theory, pre-trib, post-trib, or mid-trib. You don't understand these terms? Great! You are blessed not to know them. Paul had a far more important objective when he preached the gospel of the Lord's return.

Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:18)

For persecuted, discouraged, and distressed first century believers, the thought that the Lord and His return was so thoroughly designed and would be so precisely executed, all for the Lord's glory and for

the eternal joy of His people, nothing they faced in this life could diminish their joy at the thought of His return. And so Paul intended his gospel to them.

For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:3-4)

He shall return as the disciples saw Him ascend. And when He returns, we shall immediately experience a change that involves our whole selves, body, soul, and spirit, all changed to appear with Him in glory forever.

Inspired by the Holy Spirit to write his words, Paul taught a firm and sound belief in the Lord's return that imposed present, immediate, and life-changing power onto those who believe this truth.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. (Colossians 3:1-2)

John teaches the same truth.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 John 3:2-3)

"...we shall be like him." If He ascended into heaven and glory in His physical body, so shall we. We shall fully experience Him as He is today in glory when we are resurrected, and body, soul, and spirit unite in heaven to praise Him forever.

Paul and John speak as one voice. Both inspired writers show us the iron-clad link between belief in the Lord's glorious return to how we live now. Do you believe in the Lord's return? In our physical, bodily resurrection? How convincingly do you prove that belief in your daily conduct? In how you interact with other believers in the "Household of faith"? If you rejoice at the thought of eternity praising God for redemption, one voice in the innumerable multitude of His redeemed children, do you show those same people that you love them and cherish their fellowship and companionship today? Do you long to spend time with them? And do you act so that they long to spend time with you? If so, you are learning the lesson of Scripture. If not, you have the Lord's assignment to grow.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor