

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 31, Number 33

August 17, 2014



## Resurrection and the Lord's Return/Coming

*Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met him: but Mary sat still in the house. Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. (John 11:20–27, KJV 1900)*

We so quickly judge or criticize Biblical characters, thinking to ourselves that, had we lived in their world, we would have been more faithful than they. I think not. Martha held onto a false belief that Jesus had to be physically present to perform a miracle. "If thou hadst been here..." Think about some of your recent spiritual struggles. Perhaps the burden became so heavy that you bowed and took the matter to the Lord. However, during your prayer, you had no special sense of His presence or of a "Silver bullet" answer to your problem. And, even as the trial lingered on, depleting your spiritual energy, you tried to pray over and over. Each time the follow-up was the same. You never received a sense of peace or awareness of His presence. In the end, did you not build your expectation of the outcome more on what you felt or, in this case, didn't feel than on His Biblical promise? If you had truly sensed His presence and blessing, you'd have immediately concluded that He had answered your prayer and now came to deliver you. But absent that personal sense of His presence, you resign yourself to the trial and give up hope for deliverance. How are you different from Martha? She thought that Jesus had to be present so she could see Him, touch Him, and hear His voice, or He could do nothing for Lazarus. In our trials, we react similarly. Unless we consciously realize that deep peaceful sense of His presence, we conclude that He hasn't answered our prayer. Nowhere in Scripture does the Lord promise to make Himself known emotionally every time He is present. Considering the Biblical teaching that God wholly transcends the material universe that He created and that He is always ever present, that is, "Omnipresent," must we "Feel" His presence for Him to be present? No. "Feel" Him or not, Scripture teaches that He is present, always and intimately so.

Mormon teaching exemplifies the imbalanced reliance on what we feel or do not feel by their "Burning in the bosom" idea. We have a far better guide to gauge the Lord's presence. According to Scripture, He is always present no matter our

personal location at the moment and no matter our feeling or not feeling His presence. (Hebrews 13:5-6) So you see, we walk almost exactly in Martha's footsteps. We certainly fail to walk a higher spiritual road than she walked.

We read in this chapter that Jesus knew of Lazarus' illness, although He was a two-day distance from Bethany. He told the disciples that Lazarus was dead, but that they were now going to Bethany to raise Him. In these points, we have specific evidence in the passage that Jesus did not need to be physically present to know or to help His child in need.

*But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.* Before we come down too harshly on Martha, we should ponder these words. Her brother has been dead for four days and is in the tomb. Nothing short of a miracle from God can resurrect him, and Martha voices just such confidence in Jesus. We read other accounts of Jesus resurrecting people who had just died, but we find no other record of His raising someone who has been dead for such an extended time. We should not criticize Martha's faith in Jesus.

*Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.* Resurrection, last day; Martha has a clear and concrete understanding of final things. Occasionally, deceived, but well-meaning Christians will deny the Bible doctrine of the resurrection. However, the essential meaning of the English word cannot be twisted to agree. Note below the definition of the word from the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.

resurrection /0rɛzə'rek(ə)n/ noun & verb. ME. [ORIGIN Old French & Modern French *résurrection* from Late Latin *resurrectio*(n-), from Latin *resurrect-* pa. ppl stem of *resurgere*: see *resurge*, -ion.]

► A noun.

1 Christian Church. (Also R-) The rising of Christ from the dead. Also (chiefly hist.), a church-festival commemorating this. ME. ► b A

dramatic, pictorial, or other representation of the resurrection of Christ. ME.

J. Tait The men that condemned Christ were the first to be made aware of His resurrection.

2 Christian Church. The rising of the dead at the Last Judgement. ME.

P. Carey Mrs. Cousins believed in the resurrection of the dead.

From Job (“...yet *in my flesh* shall I see God.” Job 19:26b; emphasis added) to John (“...but we know that, when he shall appear, *we shall be like him*; for we shall see him as he is.” 1 John 3:2b; emphasis added), Scripture consistently affirms a literal, physical, bodily resurrection, not a bodiless mystical resurrection, as taught by ancient gnostics and subsequent ideas that build on a gnostic foundation instead of Scripture. Any notion of “Resurrection” that in any way falls short of accepting that the same body that died shall be resurrected and restored to life, indeed a glorified life far different from the life we now live, falls short of Biblical revelation and typically mimics the gnostic error that ignores the meaning of the word and rejects the basic teaching of Scripture.

Jesus did not in any way correct Martha’s point. He did not tell her that she had erred, as He told the Sadducees who denied the resurrection, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.” (Matthew 22:29b) Take note; Jesus never allowed error to go unchecked in His presence, so His acceptance of Martha’s stated belief strongly affirms that she believed rightly.

*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.* As comforting as Martha’s belief in the resurrection at the last day may have been to her, Jesus enlarges and enriches her faith to see His power in the here and now. Jesus adopts the timeless present tense verb, just as God did with Moses in Exodus 3, “I AM...” Take note of the number of times in John’s gospel that Jesus used this “I am” term to refer to Himself. The resurrection at the last day is not a Bible doctrine to be iced away and held in store for the future. It is a Bible truth that enriches and empowers our present faith and conduct. Jesus didn’t tell Martha, “I shall be the resurrection and the life,” but “I am....” Every sermon on the resurrection should include a strong and clear point regarding the present impact of the resurrection on life as we live it in the here and now. John makes the point in terms of personal conduct.

And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 John 3:3)

In addition to its impact on our personal conduct, the doctrine of the resurrection can eliminate or soften grief and hopelessness as we face the many trials and disappointments of life.

Comforting as the truth of resurrection at the Second Coming is, Jesus takes Martha beyond this truth. She shall shortly witness perhaps the greatest miracle that Jesus performed during His Incarnation, His time dwelling in human flesh. He shall raise her brother and restore him to her and Mary, even though he has been dead for four whole days. Why is such a lesson necessary in the gospel? It is necessary to show us in concrete terms that Jesus has power over death and the grave. If He can raise someone who has been dead for four days, He can also raise someone who has been dead for four years, or four hundred years, or four thousand years, for that matter.

What does this “I am the resurrection and the life” point mean? It means that every facet of our hope of personal resurrection relies on Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 15:20, Paul refers to Jesus’ resurrection as the “...firstfruits of them that slept.” “Firstfruits” refers to the Old Testament practice of Jewish farmers. Early in the growing season, as the very first clusters of grain or other crops would appear, the farmer would gather that cluster and offer it to God as his “Firstfruits” offering. Making this offering gave assurance that God would grant a bountiful harvest of the whole crop at harvest time. When Jesus came out of the grave, He declared for all His family to know that the kingdom of death had been conquered, not only for Himself, but for all whom He represented in His death. Our identity with Adam ensures our death; our identity with Jesus ensures our resurrection. When Jesus arose from the dead, Scripture declares—

Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. (Romans 6:9)

When He came in human flesh, virgin born, He fully subjected Himself to our humanity, including death. But when He arose from the grave, He conquered death. It was not possible for death to maintain its grip on Him. (Acts 2:24) He broke the grip of the despot death, not only for Himself, but also for you, me, and all of those for whom He died and arose.

Jesus’ point to Martha is not that He shall accomplish the resurrection, but that *He is*, personally, Himself, the resurrection and the life. Martha and Mary would have their beloved brother restored to them temporarily, though all three would eventually face the temporary obstacle of death, but Jesus’ words to Martha marked deliverance for Lazarus and for all of the Lord’s beloved children of grace. We have reason to worship Him today!

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor