

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

Volume 26, Number 20

December 12, 2010



## What is the Truth of the Gospel? Believed on in the World

*And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. (1 Timothy 3:16)*

From that first lie told to evade the obvious fact of Jesus' literal, physical, bodily resurrection, unbelievers have worked tirelessly, but all to no avail, to deny the facts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Today, even in our high-tech world, Christians find the same comfort—and rely on the same evidence of Jesus' resurrection that compelled the first disciples to believe. In a world where other religions worship at the occupied tomb of their founders, Christianity sounds a distinctly different note by worshipping at an empty tomb. It is difficult to reject the compelling evidence of an empty tomb. It is doubly hard to reject the eye-witness testimony of over five hundred people, all saying the same thing about the facts.

A foundational truth of the faith that Paul affirms in this simple term, "...believed on in the world..." challenges us to look at the difficulty of such a belief. Consider this example from Old Testament prophecy. Isaiah 52:14-15 describes Jesus in prophecy as He was scourged, beaten, and crucified. His physical appearance was so brutally disfigured that He barely appeared as a man. Was this a prophecy of the Messiah, the Jews' long awaited Savior? How could He turn such a scene into victory? We see shame and defeat. We see unbelievable suffering, but this scene, if isolated from the "Rest of the story," leaves us confused and frightened. Isaiah anticipated this very reaction. Notice the first verse in Isaiah 53.

*Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? (Isaiah 53:1, KJV 1900)*

If we are reading a prophecy of the victorious Messiah, of God Incarnate, this is not the scene we would have anticipated. Most of Isaiah 53 continues to describe an unlikely, suffering Messiah. Only at the end of the chapter do we see Him in victory. How do we bring the two images of Messiah together? How do we reconcile such contradictory images? Old Testament Jewish scholars wrestled with this question and gave up. Many of them simply concluded that God must have given prophecy of two Messiahs, one the suffering, rejected, bleeding, dying Messiah, and the other, the regal, victorious Messiah. A two-Messiah idea, however, must fail. Even a reasonable reading of

these Old Testament prophecies clearly indicates that both prophecies deal with only one Messiah, one who would fulfill both prophetic images. Old Testament Jews simply could not get their minds around such an idea. They didn't believe it.

Despite this scholarly debate among rabbis, many Jews who heard these words read in their synagogues fully believed them and looked forward to His coming. Remember the old man in the temple, Simeon, who spent much time in the temple, "...waiting for the consolation of Israel..." a term referring to the coming of the Messiah. God revealed to him that he would see Messiah before his death. (Luke 2:25-32) The same God who prepared him for the coming Messiah directed him to Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus entering the temple. No, Jesus did not have a perpetual halo of light around his head. To the ordinary eye, He looked just like any other infant in his parent's arms. Simeon's prayer of praise to God as he took the infant in his arms is among the most beautiful and noble praise we read in all of Scripture. We find few passages that equal it till we get to Revelation and look into heaven itself, hearing those redeemed saints who have died and entered there singing their praises.

Unbelievers have concocted one fantasy after another for centuries to avoid the truth that Paul here affirms. Common to every tenet in the three couplets of our study verse is the unifying central truth of both literal Incarnation, of God becoming a real, physical, human, and of His dying, His burial, and of His resurrection. Form decades in the twentieth century, unbelievers loudly trumpeted the "Swoon Theory." According to this theory, Jesus didn't really die on the cross. He fainted or fell into a coma on the cross, but the cold air of the stone tomb revived Him, so His disciples fabricated that He had died and arisen from the dead. Thinking Christians methodically appealed to the evidence set forth in Scripture, and slowly dismantled this false theory. Who rolled away the stone from the face of the tomb, a rock that typically weighed over two thousand pounds? Question after question reduced the "Swoon Theory" to the ridiculous false notion that it was. A few years ago, Christian apologist, Dr. William Lane Craig, debated an atheist professor at the University of Irvine, California. This professor wholly fabricated that it

was possible that Mary gave birth to twins in Bethlehem. According to this fabrication, one of the twins quietly retired from public view for over thirty years, and the other grew into adulthood and claimed to be the Messiah. The public twin died on the cross. Three days later the non-public twin bruised his body to give a faint appearance of trauma, and walked into Jerusalem, claiming to be the resurrected Jesus. This professor never gave one shred of evidence. How could he? There is none. His whole argument was based on the fact that, occasionally even with all of our modern safeguards, twins are born in hospitals and get mixed up in the nursery.

Shortly after Jesus' resurrection, Thomas joined those old scholars. He also couldn't believe that the Jesus whom he had followed for over three years, the Jesus whom the Jews had tried and scourged, whom the Romans had crucified, and whom two fringe disciples had quietly buried three or more days earlier, could possibly be the One whom the disciples were excitedly praising as the resurrected Christ. Could it possibly be? Thomas would need more evidence than he could muster up at that moment.

The incredible truth that Paul teaches in our study verse stands up tall and visible. It walks right through and passed all those unbelievers and their false theories. It stands up and proclaims that Jesus really did die, and that He just as truly arose from the dead. One disciple after another saw Him and talked with Him, not once or twice, but many times over a period of forty days. Not only did people in and around Jerusalem see Him during this time, but He also appeared to many disciples in Galilee. Another theory that opposes this truth claims that the disciples merely imagined seeing Him. However, they never explained how large numbers of people saw Him and heard Him say the same things, all at the same time. They have no explanation for multitudes having the same delusion at the same time.

The old Gadsby's Hymnal, published in England in the early nineteenth century, includes a hymn that echoes much of this incredible truth, a testimony to Paul's "...believed on in the world.." from almost two thousand years later.

The Lord that made both heaven and earth,  
And was himself made man,  
Lay in the womb, before his birth,  
Contracted to a span.

Behold, from what beginnings small  
Our great salvation rose;  
The strength of God is owned by all;  
But who his weakness knows?

Let not the strong the weak despise;  
Their faith, though small, is true;  
Though low they seem in others' eyes,  
Their Saviour seemed so too.

Nor meanly of the tempted think;  
For O what tongue can tell  
How low the Lord of life must sink,  
Before he vanquished hell?

As in the days of flesh he grew  
In wisdom, stature, grace,  
So in the soul that's born anew,  
He keeps a gradual pace.

No less almighty at his birth,  
Than on his throne supreme;  
His shoulders held up heaven and earth,  
When Mary held up him.

When Christian hymnology left these words out of its contemporary hymns, it lost a regal touch of its heavenly luster. Churches need to sing such sentiments and leave off the superficial "Dipsy-Doodle" hymns that fail to offer such praise to God at the throne of worship.

Yes, he was believed on in the world. Despite the scorn, the scoffing, the ridicule of an unbelieving world, and despite the envy of a superficial religious world that would like the glory, but not the cross, people still believe on Him and worship Him. They join old Simeon, Enoch, Abraham, and David in the chorus of worship. Such worship cannot grow out of family tradition, out of habit. It only grows in the fertile and well plowed soil of a broken heart, fearful, yet loving, but wholly intent on worshipping that One who alone is worthy to be worshipped. No one is capable of such worship who does not believe on Him—a heart truly "Given up" to worship Him and Him alone.

Why invest the time to write on this institution that many professing Christians in our day view as outmoded, obsolete, out of touch, and irrelevant? Why think about "church" at all for that matter? Just "Do your thing" and worship any way you wish. This attitude has never succeeded—ever. People rise to noble, Biblical worship only as they gather in a community of like-minded believers—Did you notice the word, "believers," "...believed on in the world...".

No, we do not worship the church, but we worship in the church, a gathered body of people who embrace the truth of these profoundly simple—and profoundly life changing—words that Paul wrote in our study passage. In an amazing and wonderful sense, heaven, despite all we may not know about it, shall consist of praise to Him for His love and redemption. Why not let the praise begin now—in His church, in worship His way, simple, and unpretentious, all focused on Him alone. If we expect to focus our worship on Him alone in heaven, why not let it begin below, here and now?

Let's worship Him together. Let heaven hear, and let angels marvel and desire to look into what prompts such worship. (1 Peter 1:12) See you in church!

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
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Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor