

THE HOPE AND ITS STRONG FOUNDATIONS

When the Lord appointed this breaking of bread, it was that we might be strengthened in the faith of him during his necessary absence. Though there is a sense in which the Gentile proverb is true that, “absence makes the heart grow fonder,” there is a sense in which it works the other way. The absent friend is liable to become the forgotten friend because of the other principle affirmable of frail human nature, “out of sight, out of mind.” Jesus, who “*knew what was in man*,” knew our need for help in the essential matter of “*keeping in memory*” the things delivered to his brethren concerning himself. Therefore, he said,

“Do this in remembrance of me.”

Therefore, also Peter, to whom the Lord pre-eminently confided the work of feeding the flock, in writing says,

“I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.”

The reviving of our memories in relation to the things of Christ is the process of edification or building-up. To revive this memory is to strengthen faith, for faith is the conviction of these things. Whatever strengthens conviction strengthens faith, and faith is the power by which we triumph in our conflict with the weights and the sins which do so easily beset us, within and without. Now, it must be the experience of every properly developed and exercised mind, that nothing tends more powerfully to the preservation of our conviction of the facts testified of Christ, than this weekly act of breaking bread in remembrance of him as appointed. This conviction is in this act nourished within us in a variety of ways. Sometimes one point strikes us forcibly, sometimes another. Take one suggested by words which are pronounced in the breaking of bread almost every time we perform the act—I mean the words of Paul:

“I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread,” etc.

How often we have heard these words without being impressed with them with all the power with which they are calculated to impress when properly estimated. Let us ponder them a moment. Here is one who says “*I have received of the Lord*,” not “I believe that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread,”—not “I am persuaded by testimony of the apostles, —not “thus it is written in the law or in the prophets,” but—

“I have received of the Lord.”

Now who speaks thus? Who wrote these words to the Corinthians? There are no two opinions on the answer to this question. Jew and Gentile, unbeliever and disciple, friend and foe, are united here. Paul wrote the words. There is no room for doubt. Realise the simple process by which the fact is demonstrated and universally received. The epistle to the Corinthians exists in many languages. It has done so from the beginning of the Christian era. Ancient MSS. in different tongues, belonging to various countries, are extant at the present day, containing it, not to speak of the thousand or more modern copies, and all these copies give us these words,

“I have received of the Lord.”

How came these words to be there? They could only get into all the copies (ancient and modern, in different countries, among rival religious bodies) through being in the first copies circulated with Paul’s consent among the first assemblies of believers in the first century. Additions or mutilations would have been detected in the hands of the first holders, and would at all events have led to diversity and discrepancy in subsequent copies made in different parts, from different copies—the true and the corrupted. There has been nothing of the sort. The epistle is now as it was in the beginning, and therefore the words read in our hearing this morning, are in their English form, the words written by Paul 1,800 years ago. I

will not dwell on the point, but it is important to realise the fact. It is morally equivalent to having Paul personally in our midst, and declaring to us, by word of mouth, this morning, that he had received of the Lord the thing delivered to us.

The next obvious matter of reflection is whether Paul spoke the truth when he said he had received them from the Lord. It is well to remember that this is far from being the only place where Paul affirms the direct reception from God, of the things he taught. You will recollect what he says to the Galatians:

"I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Also to the Corinthians:

"Am I not an apostle? . . . Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?"

And again:

"Last of all he was seen of me also."

Did Paul speak truly when he wrote these words, as all the world allows and is obliged to allow that he did? The unbeliever, who by the way, is not generally a person who has given a very thorough attention to the facts of the case, says, "no doubt Paul thought he was speaking truly." Well this is a great admission. It is something to know that in dealing with the statements of the apostle Paul, you are dealing with the statements of a man to whom the enemy dare not impute untruth. The whole life of Paul is the guarantee of this. It was a life of self-sacrifice and drawback from beginning to end, because of his testimony for Christ; a life ending in prison and death, for declaring the truth of the matters in question. Now it is a universal rule that no man acts the part of a hypocrite, and palms off an invented story, except for personal advantage in some shape or other. It is unheard of that a man should persevere with an imposture that had no promise of advantage in it, and that, as a matter of fact, brought loss of all things. Consequently, the way is not open for the suggestion that Paul was a wilful deceiver. There is only one other view of his case by which the force of it can be plausibly evaded, and that is the view of those who say he was an honest madman—under the power of hallucination, —a man who thought he had received things of the Lord, and that he had seen Christ, but who had done nothing of the sort in reality. For this last entrenchment of deceit the enemy is bound to fly when the facts of the case, like a storming party, come on to the attack. For what are the facts? Why, that the occurrences upon which Paul's convictions on the subject were founded, were of a nature to preclude the possibility of hallucination. It was a public occurrence before witnesses in the light of day. As Paul said to Agrippa, who was acquainted with the surroundings of the case in the beginning:

"This thing was not done in a corner."

"For the king knoweth of these things, before whom I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him."

What was the nature of these things to which Paul thus alludes? All the world knows or might know. Paul was engaged in a public errand against the Christians of Damascus under official authority, and attended by a retinue of officials. That which happened on the way to change his course happened not at night, but in the full blaze of the noonday sun: not in solitude, but in the company of all his attendants; not to himself only, but to all who were with him. The blinding light, "*above the brightness of the sun,*" was seen by all, and felled all to the earth; the voice which informed Paul of the cause and meaning of the light was heard by all, though not heard in its intelligent articulation, because a voice in Hebrew; and the effect was not limited to a change of Paul's mind but sealed also his eyes with blindness, and unfitted him to continue his journey, except with the help of those who were with him, and who led him by the hand to Damascus. To talk of "hallucination" in the presence of these attested facts, is to be guilty of a mere perverse resistance of truth under the pretence of wisdom. If these things

were hallucination, to what circumstance of experience of real life may we not apply the word? Our eating and our drinking, our thinking and our talking, our staying at home and our travelling, all we hear and all we see, in heaven above and earth beneath, have no better claim to be received as facts than the appearance of Christ to Paul on his way to Damascus. The only difference is that the incident in question happened only once, while the others are always happening, and if this is to be made the ground of objection, then must we refuse to believe in the battle of Waterloo, because it happened only once; or in our own birth because we were born only once!

No, no: Paul's case is invincible. An honest man needs no stronger foundation for his faith. As he hears the words, "*I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you,*" he sees before him in comforting vision, the panoramic display of Paul's whole history, bringing with it all its incidents, the conviction of the truth of what Peter said,

"We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

But though the said honest man needs no stronger foundation for his faith, he has got it. Although there were no case and no evidence but that of Paul, there would be enough to convince us of the resurrection of the Lord; but we do not depend upon him exclusively. Paul is not alone. Paul was not the first to declare the Lord's resurrection. There were thousands busy before he appeared upon the scene. It was the enterprise and success of these earlier witnesses that inspired his persecuting zeal. Who were they? The disciples of the Lord—unlettered fishermen of Galilee, who "*with great power gave witness of the Lord's resurrection*". What did they get for their testimony? Spoliation, imprisonment, and death. Therefore their testimony is the testimony of honest men. On that grounds did they put forth their testimony? Personal "experience."

"We have eaten and drunk with him since he rose from the dead."

"We are his witnesses."

"We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard."

How came thousands to believe their testimony?

"The Lord worked with them, confirming their words with signs following."

We do not even depend upon them. The Lord himself is proof. He is before us in the record of his life and sayings. That life could not be invented by illiterate men, or by literate men either, for the matter of that, for it is entirely out of the line of human conception. And such a life cannot be explained except on the principle that Jesus was the Son of God. And we do not depend upon it: we have a Jewish nation in the world, and Jewish Scriptures. The history and the nature of both properly estimated, will also lead to the same conclusion, that—

"God, having at sundry times and divers manners, spoken in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days (of Judah's commonwealth) spoken by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things."

These things being so, behold on how strong a foundation our hopes rest. Christ having risen from the dead, Christ now lives: and Christ now living is our watchful shepherd now only waits the appointed time to manifest himself to all whom the Father hath given him, not only in this generation but in the generations of the past, whose harvest to his life-sowing will shortly be garnered with every circumstance of glory and joy. Wherefore,

"Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

Taken from: - "Seasons of Comfort" Vol. 1 Pages 422-426 By Bro. Robert Roberts

