

Sermon for Easter Monday;

Acts 10:34-43

THE BLESSINGS OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

Acts 10:34-43

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:;) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

1. This sermon Peter preached to Cornelius, the Cesarean centurion, a gentile but a believer, and to the centurion's assembled friends, Peter having been summoned by Cornelius and having responded to the call in obedience to a revelation and to the Holy Spirit's command, as related in the preceding verses of the chapter. It is an excellent sermon and bears strong testimony to Christ's resurrection. As should ever be the case

with the sermons of apostles and preachers of the Gospel, it is not only a historical record of Christ's life, death and resurrection, but portrays the power and blessing thereof. The entire sermon being easily understood without explanation - for it is itself an exposition of the article on Christ's resurrection - we will go over it but briefly.

2. First, Peter begins with the inception of the preaching of the Gospel of Christ, suggesting how it was promised in the Scriptures, being declared by the prophets, that Christ should come with a new doctrine, confirming it by miracles; also that he must suffer and die and rise from the dead, establishing thus a new kingdom; and how the promise was fulfilled. For confirmation of his words Peter appeals to his hearers, reminding them of their own knowledge that such was the promise of the Scriptures, and that the message has gone forth, not being uttered secretly, in a corner, but being proclaimed throughout all Judea; and how John the Baptist had shortly before testified he was sent as Christ's herald to prepare his way by directing and leading the people to Christ, etc.

THE GOSPEL A DOCTRINE OF PEACE.

3. Then Peter explains this new Gospel message as the doctrine of peace, the peace proclamation commanded of God; in other words, salvation and every good thing. The apostle portrays it as a comforting message, a Gospel of joy and grace, a message not accusing, threatening and terrifying with a vision of God's wrath for our sin, as did Moses with his doctrine of the Law. Peter offers to the hitherto terrified, God's favor, remission of sins and eternal life. Similarly, of old did the prophets prophesy of this Gospel, calling it the message of peace. Peter's language is borrowed from them. For instance, Zechariah prophesies (ch 9, 10), "He shall speak peace unto the nations." And Isaiah (ch 52, 7), "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!" Paul offers the same thought (Eph 2, 17), "And he came and preached peace to you that were far off, and peace to them that were nigh." A delightful message is this in which God recalls his wrath and, as Paul says (2 Cor 5, 18-20), reconciles us unto himself, having commanded the Gospel to be preached to the world for that very purpose, and the office of preaching to be called the ministry of reconciliation; and God admonishes us to be reconciled unto himself, to be his friends, that we may from him receive grace and every good thing.

4. Second: Peter declares what the Gospel message records concerning Christ: what he has wrought and the nature of his office - how he preached and worked miracles in the service, and for the relief, of all men; what thanks and reward his own people accorded

him, in that they nailed him to the cross and put him to death; that nevertheless Christ was not destroyed by the power of the world nor overcome by death, but even retained his freedom, showing himself after death and letting his voice be heard; and that he is now exalted Lord and judge over all.

THE ARTICLE OF FAITH ON THE RESURRECTION.

5. Here are comprised in a few words the entire history of the Gospel, and the articles of the Christian faith; but particularly does Peter deal with the article of the resurrection, the fact that Christ has, in his own person, completely overcome death and reigns eternal King and Lord of life. In proof of the truth of this article, the apostle adduces the fact of Christ's manifesting himself alive to his disciples, eating and drinking with them and appointing them special witnesses to these things as men to whom the doctrine had been proven, had been established by actual sight of the miracles.

6. Third: Peter states the item of chief importance in the article, the blessing resulting to us. He explains first why Christ suffered all these things, and how the Gospel was to be published and received; Christ's motive in it all was not his advantage but our good. Before we could know the truth and be blessed, it was necessary that the message be preached. God commanded the apostles, Peter says, to preach the Gospel in all the world that all men might know it; and thus the blessing is brought to men through the public office of the ministry.

7. Fourth: Our obligation concerning the message brought to us, and what it works in ourselves, is indicated in these concluding words of Peter's sermon: *"To him bear all the prophets witness, that through his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins."*

8. This verse constitutes the principal theme of the sermon. It is one of the greatest in the writings of the apostles. It contains the vital element of the Gospel message, teaching how we may appropriate its blessing, how obtain what it offers, namely, by faith; faith lays hold of what is offered us in the Gospel. The message is preached that we may receive and retain it. Through the Word the blessing is pronounced our own - it is offered to, or given, us; but by faith we receive it, make it our own, permit it to work in us.

9. This power and work in us is called by Peter "remission of sins." This is the blessing, the possession, conferred through the preaching of the doctrine of Christ, or the articles of faith, particularly the articles of the resurrection. The meaning of the new message of comfort, the new declaration of peace, is that Christ, through his resurrection, has in

himself conquered our sin and death, has turned away the wrath of God and procured grace and salvation; that he has commanded forgiveness to be preached unto us, desiring us to believe he gives it and confidently to receive it through faith.

10. Faith must be of such character as to apprehend and hold fast the truth Peter declares in this verse. It must say "in his name." That is, must ascribe to Christ alone the entire agency, merit and power responsible for remission of sins; must believe we have forgiveness, not through our own worthiness, but for Christ's sake alone; must believe that by virtue of Christ's resurrection we obtain remission of sins, every namable element not from Christ being completely excluded, and the honor given to him alone. What does the work, the ability, of all mankind amount to when it comes to accomplishing or meriting a thing of such magnitude as remission of sins and redemption from death and eternal wrath? How will it compare with the death and shed blood of the Son of God, with the power of his resurrection? How will it divide honors with him in having merit to secure remission of sin and redemption from death? The efficacy of Christ's death and blood alone God would have preached in all the world and accepted by mankind. Therein he rejects the boasting of the Jews and of all aspirers to holiness through their own works, teaching them they cannot obtain his favor through the Law, or by their own efforts. In Christ's name alone is remission of sins received, and that through faith.

11. Salvation through Christ, according to Peter, was before that time proclaimed in the Scriptures, being declared by all the prophets. This is truly strong testimony adduced by the apostle; the Jewish people certainly ought to believe their own prophets unless they wilfully are hardened and lost. Much more should we gentiles have faith in Christ's atonement, being obliged to confess that not in any wise have we done aught that such grace should be offered and given to us. We certainly ought to be honest enough to honor Christ to the extent of believing the apostles, in fact the Scriptures entire. We ought to be ashamed to doubt or question the fact of forgiveness of sins and justification before God through Christ alone, to which all Scripture testifies. If we are honest with ourselves, we must confess it the truth, or secure forgiveness of sins or be justified before God by our own works.

12. Now we have heard what is the substance, the chief doctrine, of the Scriptures, the teaching to which all portions lead; namely, to teach and confirm the article of faith: we have remission of sins for Christ's sake, through faith. We have heard that such was the faith of the fathers, the prophets and all saints, from the beginning of the world, and later was the doctrine preached by Christ himself, and also the doctrine of the apostles, who were commanded to publish it to the world. To this day the same doctrine prevails, and it will until the end be unanimously accepted by the whole Christian Church, with the

exception of our present opponents. The Christian Church has ever, as a unit, believed, confessed and contended for this article, the article maintaining that only in the name of the Lord Christ is remission of sin obtained; and in this faith its members have been justified before God and saved. Thus by such testimony is the foundation of our doctrine laid sufficiently firm; that article was with power contended for, defended and established long before our time.

13. He who inquires, who would know exactly, what the Christian Church ever holds and teaches, especially concerning the all-important article of justification before God, or the forgiveness of sins, over which there has always been contention, has it here plainly and exactly in this text. Here is the unwavering testimony of the entire Church from the beginning. It is not necessary, then, to dispute about the doctrine any more. No one can name any just reason, or have any excuse, for doubts on the subject; or reasonably wait for further determinations of investigating councils. In this text we see that the reliability of the article of faith has long ago been proven, even in ancient time, by the Church of the primitive fathers, of the prophets and the apostles. A solid foundation is established, one all men are bound to believe and maintain at the risk of their eternal salvation, whatever councils may establish, or the world advance and determine, to the contrary. Indeed, the sentence has been declared to us; we are commanded to shun every other doctrine that may be believed, taught or ordained. Paul says (Gal 1, 8): *"But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema."*

14. You see now against what the Papacy with all its adherents blusters and rages, and how they are to be regarded who refuse to hear and to tolerate the article Peter here advances and confirms by the testimony of all the prophets and of the Scriptures entire; who cease not to persecute godly and innocent ones for their acceptance of this article of faith, under the pretense of being themselves the Church and of magnifying its name to the utmost while opposing us, though at the same time their doctrine, faith and deeds openly testify against them, proclaiming their belief and teaching to be contrary to the testimony of all the prophets and of the entire Church. By no means can they be the Church who so rashly contradict Peter and the Scriptures, who even trample under foot, in his Word, Christ himself, the Head. Rather, they must be wicked devils, a miserable rabble, the worst enemies of the Christian Church; more wicked and pernicious than heathen or Turks.

15. Lastly: Peter, by way of proving conclusively to the world that this one Lord, as he names him, Jesus of Nazareth, is the true Messiah promised of old in the Scriptures, says: "To him bear all the prophets witness." The prophets plainly speak of such a person, one

to be born of David's flesh and blood, in the city of Bethlehem, who should suffer, die and rise again, accomplishing just what this Jesus has accomplished and even proven by miraculous signs. Therefore, truly the Jews and the non-Christians have no reason to doubt concerning Christ, no reason to await the coming of another.

16. Further, Peter, citing the testimony of the prophets, indicates the nature of Christ's kingdom as not external power; not temporal dominion like that of earthly lords, kings, and emperors; not dominion over countries or control of people, property and temporal concerns; but a spiritual, eternal kingdom, a kingdom in the hearts of men, an authority over, and power opposed to, sin, everlasting death and hell, a power able to redeem us from those things and bestow upon us salvation. Salvation is ours, Peter teaches, through the preaching of the Gospel, and is received by faith. Faith is the obedience every man must render unto the Lord. By faith he makes himself subject to Christ and partaker of his grace and blessings. Paul also (Rom 1, 5) uses the term "unto obedience of faith."

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