

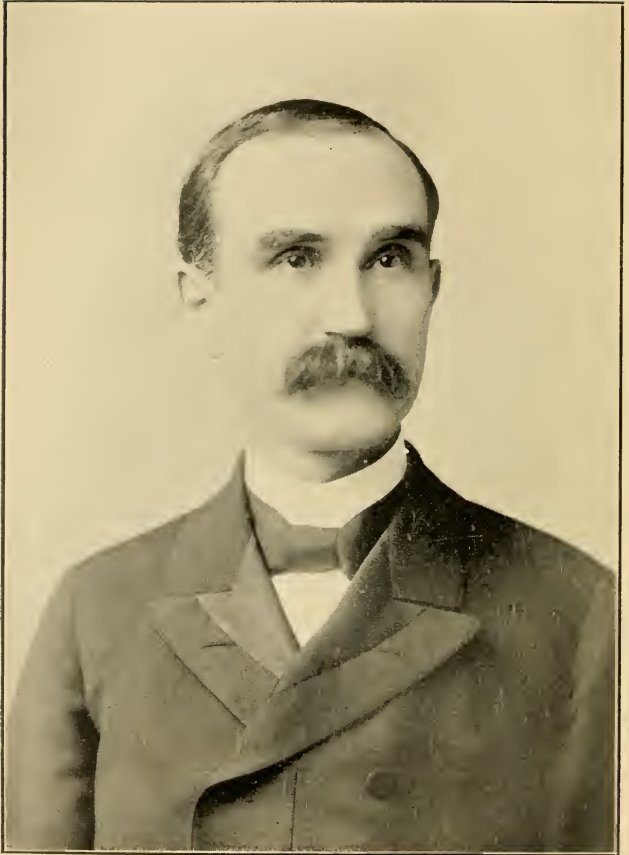
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THE NECESSITY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

BY REV. J. F. CANNON, D. D.,

Pastor of the Grand Avenue Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, Mo.

“Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.”—
ACTS ii. 24.

THE disciples of Jesus Christ had no expectation that he would rise from the dead. The sepulchre in which his dead body was entombed had closed upon their hopes. Those loving women who visited the sepulchre on the morning of the first day of the week went with their spices to embalm a dead body, not to meet a living one. The two who journeyed together to Emmaus said, “We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.” (Luke xxiv. 21.) Such *had* been their hope, but it had been turned into despair. Without exception they were incredulous when the glad news of the resurrection was first announced to them. The words of the messengers “seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.” (Luke xxiv. 11.) The idea of the resurrection was strange to them, and even alarming. Slowly, jealously, almost reluctantly, they yielded to the evidence. But when the fact was accepted it became the chief inspiration of their lives. It was the corner-stone of their faith. Their supreme business, henceforth, was to proclaim, and bear witness to it.

Peter was here preaching on the day of Pentecost to

an excited and astonished multitude in Jerusalem. The subject of his sermon was a crucified and risen Messiah. He reminded his hearers of the spotless character of Jesus of Nazareth, and of the pure, benevolent life which he had lived among them. He boldly charged them with the crime of having, wantonly and with wicked hands, taken his life. Then he affirmed that this Jesus had been raised from the dead: "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses." (Vs. 32.) He, and more than five hundred others whom he could summon, were ready to testify to the fact, and seal their testimony with their blood. It is significant that none who heard him ventured to impugn the testimony. The Sanhedrin were doing their utmost to crush this new movement in its inception, yet they did not undertake to refute the assertion that Christ had risen. The fact of his resurrection was proclaimed loudly and persistently in the very midst of Jerusalem itself; yet there is absolutely no cotemporary denial of it, except the clumsy story which the sentinels at the tomb were bribed to tell, that while they slept the disciples came and stole away the body. Had there been any more valid rebutting evidence within their reach, we may be sure these busy enemies of the gospel would have gathered and made use of it. But so far as history shows there was not a man of them who dared to take issue with the apostles as to the great fact which they alleged.

But Peter was not content to rest the resurrection of Christ upon the testimony of human witnesses, conclusive and overwhelming as that was. He had learned something from the example of the Master himself. When Christ showed himself alive to his disciples after his passion he was not content to show them his wounded hands and side; to speak to them by name in his old

familiar tones, and, by such means, to relieve their doubts and establish their faith. He wished to have their faith founded, not simply on the testimony of their bodily senses, but on that which is the only proper foundation of religious faith, *the word of God*. Hence, "beginning at Moses and all the prophets he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke xxiv. 27.) He showed them how, in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, it behoved the Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead on the third day. Peter followed this example. Choosing a passage from the Old Testament Scriptures, he showed his hearers that its only possible fulfilment was in the resurrection of the Messiah. David had prophesied in one of his psalms, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hades, neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption." This word, in its full meaning, could not have been spoken of the psalmist himself, for it was not fulfilled in his experience. His body did see corruption. The sepulchre containing his dust was still among them. But it was fulfilled, literally and completely, in the experience of Jesus of Nazareth, who was the son of David according to the flesh, and his promised successor on the throne. His body was not allowed to see corruption, as his empty sepulchre conclusively proved.

In like manner, as the same apostle teaches in one of his epistles, the Holy Spirit, through all the prophets, had "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ *and the glory that should follow*." (1 Peter i. 11.) Through a multitude of prophecies and types the great event was foreshadowed. Deny the resurrection of Christ, and the Old Testament is a sealed book. Admit it, and every page becomes luminous with meaning. What the head is to the body, what the flower is to the plant, or the

fruit to the tree, such is the fact of the resurrection to the body of revealed truth. It is the crown and consummation of all God's revelations to men. He who "died for our sins according to the Scriptures," as Paul says, "rose again the third day *according to the Scriptures.*" (1 Cor. xv. 4.) It was not possible, then, that he should be holden of death, because "the Scripture cannot be broken."

But in the words of our text the apostle seems to take a bolder position still, viz., *that, from the very nature of the case, the resurrection of Christ was inevitable and necessary.* Not only was there abundant historical proof that he had risen, and numerous scriptural predictions that he would rise, but, in view of the circumstances of the case, and on account of the principles involved, there was an absolute necessity that he should rise. "It was not possible that he should be holden of it." That such an one as he was should be held under the power of death was a simple impossibility.

First, there was a *moral* impossibility in the case. To appreciate this, consider what manner of man he was. Peter here speaks of him as "a man approved of God"; that is, he was divinely attested and sealed as one commissioned of God. Not only so, he was one upon whom the eye of God rested with unqualified approval. "He knew no sin." He distinctly claimed that he had no consciousness of sin. He said, "I do always those things that please the Father"; "the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me." (John xiv. 30.) To his enemies he said, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" (John viii. 46.) And his whole life was consistent with this high claim. No wrong was ever discovered in him, either by the intimacy of his friends or the malignity of his foes. The judge who condemned

him said, "I find no fault in him." The apostate who betrayed him confessed, "I have betrayed the innocent blood." The centurion who superintended his execution said, "Certainly this was a righteous man." (Luke xxiii. 47.) Nor has the searching scrutiny of later times discovered aught to change this verdict. So far as I know, the man has yet to be found who, after a careful study of the facts of his life, has dared to stand up before an intelligent public and charge Jesus Christ with any moral obliquity. By common consent he is acknowledged to have been a man without sin. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Yet, upon the testimony of suborned witnesses, he was condemned and crucified as a malefactor. For the first time since the world began was an innocent, sinless man brought under the power of death. Never before had death taken such prey in his toils. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, David, and Daniel died, and their bodies saw corruption. But they were sinners, all of them, and hence the legitimate prey of death; for "the wages of sin is death." Here, however, was one who had done no sin; in whom nothing worthy of death was found by God or men. Was it possible for death to hold such an one? Not if righteousness reigns. If death may reign where sin has not reigned; if death may invade the realm of innocence and claim as his own one who belongs to that realm, then the cause of God and righteousness is a losing cause. If there be a just and almighty God upon the throne of the universe, and if Jesus Christ were such an one as he is here represented, and as he is generally acknowledged to have been, then there was a divine necessity that he should rise. We do not forget the uniformity and inviolability of natural law, but we remember likewise the awful supremacy of *moral* law. We

admit that the forces of nature are mighty ; but we insist that the forces of righteousness are mightier. These are the forces which were appealed to, and which fought for his deliverance. What boots it to say that the alleged event was exceptional, a revolt from the established order of things, and therefore incredible? Our answer is, the man was exceptional. Never was there another like him among the sons of men. Find another man who is "without sin" ; let him be "crucified, dead, and buried," and we promise you another resurrection ; for, if might be on the side of right in God's universe, it is not possible for a righteous man to be holden of death.

Again, there was not only a moral necessity that Christ should rise, there was also a *natural* necessity in the case, a necessity "planted in the nature of things." To appreciate this we must remember that he claimed to be something more than a sinless man. He claimed to be, and was proven to be, in a sense peculiar to himself, the Son of God, "his only begotten Son," possessed of a divine nature and a divine life. Simon Peter had been led to know and acknowledge him in this character. In response to the question, "Whom say ye that I am?" he had made the noble and accepted answer, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matt. xvi. 16.)

The charge preferred against him before the Jewish high priest was that he called himself the Son of God, thus making himself God. And when the high priest adjured him to tell them if he was the Christ, the Son of God, he gave an affirmative answer. Upon that they adjudged him worthy of death, because he had spoken blasphemy. (Matt. xxvi. 63-66.) It was a stupendous claim for one in the form of man, but every part of his life was in harmony with the claim. It was a divine

life. He showed a wisdom which was more than human. "Never man spake like this man," was the testimony of his cotemporaries, and is the confession of the thinking world to-day. He exercised a compassion and love which were divine. His purity was divinely stainless. He wielded a power which was the power of God. The winds and the waves obeyed him; devils, and death itself, were subject to his word. If he was not divine, pray tell us wherein he lacked of being divine? What attribute of God did he fail to exhibit?

Such being his nature, and his relation to God the Father, his life was not the created, dependent life of a creature. He says, "As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." (John v. 26.) "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." (John i. 4.) Again, he says, "I am the resurrection, and the life." (John xi. 25.) "I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John xiv. 6.) He is the Prince of life; the author, the source of life; as Schaff says, the "life of every life."

Now, remembering all this, let us go to the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and what do we see? The eternal Son of God, the Prince of life, held in the embrace of death! That he should have condescended to that condition is the marvelous mystery of grace; that he should be kept in it is an impossible thought. Death must yield his mighty prey. A grain of sand may be held passive and submissive in the bosom of the earth; but not so a living grain of wheat. It must and will spring up in a new and higher life. In the city of Hanover, Germany, there is said to be an old graveyard in which is the tomb of a woman who belonged to an ancient and noble family. It is covered with massive blocks of stone, which are fastened together with heavy iron

clamps. On one of the stones these words are carved: "This grave, bought for all time, must never be opened." But years ago a little seed found lodgment in the crevice between the stones. It took root and grew, until now a splendid tree waves its branches over the tomb. And as the roots have grown, and the trunk enlarged, heedless of the carved admonition, the great stones have been lifted, and the iron clamps broken asunder. Such is the power of life, even of the created life that is wrapped up in a little seed. What wonder, then, that he who had "life in himself," who was "the resurrection, and the life," should burst the bands of death, and triumph over the grave? Men rolled a stone to the door of the sepulchre, and sealed it, and set armed sentinels to guard it. But how vain their efforts were! As well might they have tried to seal up the morning in the womb of night, and prevent its dawn; or to lock up the spring in the embrace of winter, and forbid the flowers to bloom and the trees to bud. It was not possible for him to be holden of death.

Then, my brethren, "we have not followed cunningly-devised fables" when we have built our hopes on him "who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." "The Lord is risen indeed." His resurrection is not a myth, but a fact. A fact attested as no other fact in ancient history has been attested. A fact foreshadowed by numerous prophecies and types in the Old Testament Scriptures. A fact to be expected as the inevitable and necessary outcome of the eternal principles which were involved. Let us be glad and rejoice in it. It tells us of an accepted sacrifice, a completed redemption, a purchased inheritance of life and glory. It is the pledge of our own resurrection. The risen Christ is the firstfruits of them

that sleep. "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." (Romans viii. 11.)

Yes, if his Spirit dwell in us, the text becomes true of us, as of him. It is not possible for death to hold us. We must rise. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." (1 Peter i. 3, 4.)