

Following the Risen Christ - Spurgeon

FOLLOWING THE RISEN CHRIST

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"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on thing. on the earth."-Colossians 3:1, 2.

THE resurrection of our divine Lord from the dead is the corner-stone of Christian doctrine. Perhaps I might more accurately call it the key-stone of the arch of Christianity, for if that fact could be disproved the whole fabric of the gospel would fall to the ground. If Jesus Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; ye are yet in your sins. If Christ be not risen, then they which have fallen asleep in Christ have perished, and we ourselves, in missing so glorious a hope as that of resurrection, are of all men the most miserable.

Because of the great importance of his resurrection, our Lord was pleased to give many infallible proofs of it, by appearing again and again in the midst of his followers. It would be interesting to search out how many times he appeared; I think we have mention of some sixteen manifestations. He showed himself openly before his disciples, and did eat and drink with them. They touched his hands and his side, and heard his voice, and knew that it was the same Jesus that was crucified. He was not content with giving evidence to the ears and to the eyes, but even to the sense of touch he proved the reality of his resurrection. These appearances were very varied. Sometimes he gave an interview to one alone, either to a man, as to Cephas, or to a woman, as to Magdalen. He conversed with two of his followers as they went to Emmaus, and with the company of the apostles by the sea. We find him at one moment amongst the eleven when the doors were shut for fear of the Jews, and at another time in the midst of an assembly of more than five hundred brethren, who years after were most of them living witnesses to the fact. They could not all have been deceived. It is not possible that any historical fact could have been placed upon a better basis of credibility than the resurrection of our Lord from the dead. This is put beyond all dispute and question, and of purpose is it so done, because it is essential to the whole Christian system.

For this same cause the resurrection of Christ is commemorated frequently. There is no ordinance in Scripture of any one Lord's-day in the year being set apart to commemorate the rising of Christ from the dead, for this reason, that every Lord's-day is the memorial of our Lord's resurrection. Wake up any Lord's-day you please, whether in the depth of winter, or in the warmth of summer, and you may sing

*"To day he rose and left the dead,
And Satan's empire fell;
To day the saints his triumph spread,
And all his wonders tell."*

To set apart an Easter Sunday for special memory of the resurrection is a human device, for which there is no Scriptural command, but to make every Lord's-day an Easter Sunday is due to him who rose early on the first day of the week. We gather together on the first rather than upon the seventh day of the week, because redemption is even a greater work than creation, and more worthy of commemoration, and because the rest which followed creation is far outdone by that which ensues upon the completion of redemption. Like the apostles, we meet on the first day of the week, and hope that Jesus may stand in our midst, and say, "**Peace be unto you.**" Our Lord has lifted the Sabbath from the old and rusted hinges whereon the law had placed it long before, and set it on the new golden hinges which his love has fashioned. He hath placed our rest-day, not at the end of a week of toil, but at the beginning of the rest which remaineth for the people of God. Every first day of the week we should meditate upon the rising of our Lord, and seek to enter into fellowship with him in his risen life.

Never let us forget that all who are in him rose from the dead in his rising. Next in importance to the fact of the resurrection is the doctrine of the federal headship of Christ, and the unity of all his people with him. It is because we are in Christ that we become partakers of everything that Christ did,-we are circumcised with him, dead with him, buried with him, risen with him, because we cannot be separated from him. We are members of his body, and not a bone of him can be broken. Because that union is most intimate, continuous, and indissoluble, therefore all that concerns him concerns us, and as he rose so all his people have arisen in him.

They are risen in two ways.

First, representatively. All the elect rose in Christ in the day when he quitted the tomb. He was justified, or declared to be clear of all liabilities on account of our sins, by being set free from the prison-house of the tomb. There was no reason for detaining him in the sepulcher, for he had discharged the debts of his people by dying 'unto sin once.' He was our hostage and our representative, and when he came forth from his bonds we came forth in him. We have endured the sentence of the law in our Substitute, we have lain in its prison, and even died under its death-warrant, and now we are no longer under its curse.

"Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God." (Ro 6:8, 9, 10)

Next to this representative resurrection comes **our spiritual resurrection**, which is ours as soon as we are led by faith to believe in Jesus Christ. Then it may be said of us,

"And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins." (Ep 2:1)

The resurrection blessing is to be perfected by-and-by at the appearing of our Lord and Savior, for then our bodies shall rise again, if we fall asleep before his coming. He redeemed our manhood in its entirety, spirit, soul, and body, and he will not be content until the resurrection which has passed upon our spirit shall pass upon our body too. These dry bones shall live; together with his dead body they shall rise.

*"When he arose ascending high,
He showed our feet the way;
Up to the Lord our flesh shall fly
At the great rising day."*

Then shall we know in the perfection of our resurrection beauty that we are indeed completely risen in Christ, and **"as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive."**

This morning we shall only speak of our fellowship with Christ in his resurrection as to our own spiritual resurrection. Do not misunderstand me as if I thought the resurrection to be only spiritual, for a literal rising from the dead is yet to come; but our text speaks of spiritual resurrection, and I shall therefore endeavor to set it before you.

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I. First, then, Let Us Consider Our Spiritual Rising With Christ:

"If ye then be risen with Christ."

Though the words look like a supposition they are not meant to be so. The apostle casts no doubt, and raises no question, but merely puts it thus for argument's sake. It might just as well be read, **"Since ye then are risen in Christ."** The "if" is used logically, not theologically: by way of argument, and not by way of doubt. All who believe in Christ are risen with Christ. Let us meditate on this truth.

For, first, we were **"dead in trespasses and sins,"** but having believed in Christ we have been quickened by the Holy Ghost, and we are dead no longer. There we lay in the tomb, ready to become corrupt; yea, some of us were corrupt, the marks of the worm of sin were upon our character, and the foul stench of actual sin arose from us. More or less according to the length of time in which we abode in that death, and according to the circumstances with which we were surrounded, death wrought in us corruption. We lay in our death quite unable to raise ourselves there from; ours were eyes that could not see, and ears that could not hear; a heart that could not love; and a withered hand that could not be stretched out to give the touch of faith. We were even as they that go down into the pit, as those that have been long dead: only in this we were in a worse plight than those actually dead, for we were responsible for all our omissions and inabilities. We were as guilty as if we had power, for the loss of moral power is not the loss of moral responsibility: we were, therefore, in a state of spiritual death of the most fearful kind. The Holy Spirit visited us and made us live. We remember the first sensation of life, some of us-how it seemed to tingle in our soul's veins with pain sharp and bitter; just as drowning persons when life is coming back to them suffer great pain; so did we. Conviction was wrought in us and confession of sin, a dread of judgment to come and a sense of present condemnation; but these were tokens of life, and that life gradually deepened and opened up until the eye was opened-we could see Christ, the hand ceased to be withered, and we stretched it out and touched his garment's hem; the feet began to move in the way of obedience, and the heart felt the sweet glow of love within. Then the eyes, not content with seeing, fell to weeping; and afterwards, when the tears were wiped away, they flashed and sparkled with delight. Oh, my brethren, believers in Jesus, you are not spiritually dead any longer; on Christ you have believed, and that grand act proves that you are no more dead. You have been quickened by God according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenlies. Now, beloved, you are new creatures, the produce of a second birth, begotten again in Christ Jesus unto newness of life. Christ is your life; such a life as you never knew before, nor could have known apart from him. If ye then be risen with Christ ye walk in newness of life, while the world abideth in

death.

Let us advance another step: we are risen with Christ, and therefore there has been wrought in us a wonderful change. When the dead shall rise they will not appear as they now are. The buried seed rises from the ground, but not as a seed, for it puts forth green leaf, and bud, and stem, and gradually develops expanding flower and fruit, and even so we wear a new form, for we are renewed after the image of him that created us in righteousness and holiness.

I ask you to consider the change which the Spirit of God has wrought in the believer: a wonderful change indeed! Before regeneration our soul was as our body will be when it dies; and we read that "it is sown in corruption." There was corruption in our mind and it was working irresistibly towards every evil and offensive thing. In many the corruption did not appear upon the surface, but it worked within; in others it was conspicuous and fearful to look upon. How great the change! For now the power of corruption within us is broken, the new life has overcome it, for it is a living and incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever. Corruption is upon the old nature, but it cannot touch the new, which is our true and real self. Is it not a great thing to be purged of the filthiness which would have ultimately brought us down to Tophet where the fire unquenchable burns, and the worm undying feeds upon the corrupt?

Our old state was further like that which comes upon the body at death; because it was a state of dishonor. You know how the apostle saith of the body, "It is sown in dishonor;" and certainly no corpse weareth such dishonor as that which rests upon a man who is dead in trespasses and sins. Why, of all things in the world that deserve shame and contempt, a sinful man is certainly the most so. He despises his Creator, he neglects his Savior, he chooses evil instead of good, and puts the light from him because his deeds are evil, and therefore he prefers the darkness. In the judgment of all pure spirits a sinful man is a dishonorable man. But oh how changed is man when the grace of God works within him, for then he is honorable. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." (1Jn 3:1) What an honor is this! Heaven itself contains not a more honorable being than a renewed man. Well may we cry with David, "What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (He 2:6, Ps 8:4) But when we see man, in the person of Jesus, made to have dominion over all the works of God's hands, and know that Jesus hath made us kings and priests unto God, we are filled with amazement that God should so exalt us. The Lord himself has said, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee." "Unto you therefore which believe he is an honor," for so the original text may run. A precious Christ makes us precious: such honor have all the saints.

When a body is buried, we are told by the apostle again that it is "sown in weakness." The poor dead frame cannot lay itself down in its last bed, friendly hands must place it there; even so we were utter weakness towards all good. When we were the captives of sin we could do nothing good, even as our Lord said, "Without me ye can do nothing." (Jn 15:5) We were incapable of even a good thought apart from him. But "when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Ro 5:6); and now we know him and the power of his resurrection. God hath given us the spirit of power and of love; is it not written, "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name?" (Jn 1:12)

What an amazing power is this! Now we "taste of the powers of the world to come," and we are "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." Faith girds us with a divine power, for "all things are possible to him that believeth," and each believer can exclaim, without boasting,

"I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me." (Php 4:13)

Is not this a marvellous change which the spiritual resurrection has wrought upon us? Is it not a glorious thing, that God's strength should be perfect in our weakness?

The great change mainly concerns another point. It is said of the body, **'It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.'** (1Cor 15:44) Aforetime we were natural men and discerned not the things that be of the Spirit of God. We minded earthly things and were moved by carnal lustings after the things which are seen; but now through divine grace a spirit has been created in us which feeds on spiritual bread, lives for spiritual objects, is swayed by spiritual motives and rejoices in spiritual truth. This change from the natural to the spiritual is such as only God himself could have wrought, and yet we have experienced it. To God be the glory. So that by virtue of our rising in Christ we have received life and have become the subjects of a wondrous change, - **"old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."** (2Co 5:17)

In consequence of our receiving this life and undergoing this change the things of the world and sin become a tomb to us.

To a dead man a sepulcher is as good a dwelling as he can want. You may call it his bedchamber, if you will; for he lies within it as unconscious as if he were in slumber. But the moment the dead man lives, he will not endure such a bedchamber; he calls it a dreary vault, a loathsome dungeon, an unbearable charnel (Ed note: charnel is a building in which bodies or bones are deposited), and he must leave it at once. So when you and I were natural men, and had no spiritual life, the things of this life contented us; but it

is far otherwise now. A merely outward religion was all that we desired; a dead form suited a dead soul. Judaism pleased those who were under its yoke, in the very beginning of the gospel; new moons and holy days and traditional ordinances, and fasting and feasting were great things with those who forgot their resurrection with Christ. All those things make pretty furniture for a dead man's chamber; but when the eternal life enters the soul these outward ordinances are flung off, the living man rends off his grave clothes, tears away his cerements (Ed note: cerement: a shroud for the dead), and demands such garments as are suitable for life. So the apostle in the chapter before our text tells us to let no man spoil us by the traditions of men and the inventions of a dead ritualism, for these things are not the portion of renewed and spiritual men.

So, too, all merely carnal objects become as a grave to us, whether they be sinful pleasures or selfish gains. For the dead man the shroud, the coffin, and the vault are suitable enough; but make the corpse alive again, and he cannot rest in the coffin; he makes desperate struggles to break it up. See how by main force he dashes up the lid, rends off his bandages, and leaps from the bier (**Ed note:** bier: stand on which a corpse or coffin is placed). So the man renewed by grace cannot abide sin, it is a coffin to him: he cannot bear evil pleasures, they are as a shroud; he cries for liberty. When resurrection comes the man uplifts the hillock (**Ed note:** hillock: small hill or mound) above his grave, and scatters monument and head-stone, if these are raised above him. Some souls are buried under a mass of self-righteousness, like wealthy men on whom shrines of marble have been heaped; but all these the believer shakes off, he must have them away, he cannot bear these dead works. He cannot live otherwise than by faith; all other life is death to him. He must get out of his former state; for as a tomb is not a fit place for a living man, so when we are quickened by grace the things of sin, and self, and carnal sense become dreary catacombs to us, wherein our soul feels buried, and out of which we must arise. How can we that are raised out of the death of sin live any longer therein?

And, now, beloved, we are at this time wholly raised from the dead in a spiritual sense. Let us think of this, for our Lord did not have his head quickened while his feet remained in the sepulcher; but he rose a perfect and entire man, alive throughout. Even so have we been renewed in every part. We have received, though it be but in its infancy, a perfect spiritual life: we are perfect in Christ Jesus. In our inner man our eye is opened, our ear is awakened, our hand is active, our foot is nimble: our every faculty is there, though as yet immature, and needing development, and having the old dead nature to contend with.

Moreover, and best of all, we are so raised that we shall die no more. Oh, tell me no more the dreary tale that a man who has received the divine life may yet lose grace and perish. With our Bibles in our hands we know better. "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him," (Ro 6:9) and therefore he that hath received Christ's life in him shall never die. Hath he not said, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die"? (Jn 11:25) This life which he has given us shall be in us "a well of water, springing up unto everlasting life." (Jn 4:14) He has himself said, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." (Jn 10:28) On the day of our quickening we bid farewell to spiritual death, and to the sepulcher wherein we slept under sin's dominion. Farewell, thou deadly love of sin; we have done with thee! Farewell, dead world, corrupt world; we have done with thee! Christ has raised us. Christ has given us eternal life. We forsake for ever the dreary abodes of death, and seek the heavenly places. Our Jesus lives, and because he lives we shall live also, world without end.

Thus I have tried to work out the metaphor of resurrection, by which our spiritual renewal is so well set forth.

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II. We are urged by the apostle to use the life which we have received, and so, secondly, Let Us Exercise The New Life In Suitable Pursuits.

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above."

Let your actions be agreeable to your new life.

First, then, let us leave the sepulcher (Ed note: sepulcher: a burial tomb). If we are quickened, our first act should be to leave the region of death. Let us quit the vault of a merely outward religion, and let us worship God in spirit and in truth. Let us have done with priestcraft, and all the black business of spiritual undertaking, and let the dead bury their dead; we will have none of it. Let us have done with outward forms, and rites, and ceremonies, which are not of Christ's ordaining, and let us know nothing save Christ crucified; for that which is not of the living Lord is a mere piece of funeral pomp, fit for the cemeteries of formalists, whose whole religion is a shoveling in of dust on coffin-lids. "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust."

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh." (John 3:6)

Let us also quit the vault of carnal enjoyments, wherein men seek to satisfy themselves with provision for the flesh (Ro 13:14) Let us not live by the sight of the eye, nor by the hearing of the ear. Let us not live for the amassing of wealth, or the gaining of fame, for these ought to be as dead things to the man who is risen in Christ. Let us not live for the world which we see, nor after the fashion of men to whom this life is everything. Let us live as those that have come out of the world, and who, though they are in

it, are no more of it. Let us be unmindful of the country from whence we came out, and leave it, as Abraham did, as though there were no such country, henceforth dwelling with our God, sojourners with him, seeking "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (He 11:10) As Jesus Christ left behind him all the abodes of death, let us do the same.

And, then, let us hasten to forget every evil, even as our Lord hastened to leave the tomb. How little a time, after all, did he sojourn among the dead. He must needs lie in the heart of the earth three days, but he made them as short as possible, so that it is difficult to make out the three days at all. They were there, for there were fragments of each period, but surely never were three days so short as Jesus made them. He cut them short in righteousness, and being loosed from the pains of death, he rose early, at the very break of day. At the first instant that it was possible for him to get away from the sepulcher consistently with the Scriptures he left the napkin and the grave-clothes, and stood in the garden, waiting to salute his disciples. So let it be with us: there should be no lingering, no loitering, no hankering after the world, no clinging to its vanities, no making provision for the flesh. Up in the morning early, oh ye who are spiritually quickened! Up in the morning early, from your ease, your carnal pleasure, your love of wealth and self, and away out from the dark vault into a congenial sphere of action:

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above."

To pursue the analogy: when our Lord had left the tomb thus early he spent a season on earth among his disciples, and we are to pass the time of our sojourning here on earth, as his was passed, in holy service. Our Lord reckoned that he was on the move from earth as soon as he rose. If you remember, he said, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father." (Jn 20:17) He did not say, "I shall ascend," as though he looked at it as a future thing; but he said, "I ascend," as if it were so quickly to be done that it was already doing. Forty days he stayed, for he had forty days' work to do; but he looked upon himself as already going up into heaven. He had done with the world, he had done with the grave, and now he said, "I ascend to my Father, and your Father." We also have our forty days to tarry here; the period may be longer or shorter as the providence of God ordains, but it will soon be over, and the time of our departure will come. Let us spend our risen life on earth as Jesus spent his, - in a greater seclusion from the world and in greater nearness to heaven than ever. Our Lord occupied himself much in testimony, manifesting himself, as we have already seen, in divers ways, to his friends and followers. Let us also manifest the fruits of our risen life, and bear testimony to the power of God. Let all men see that you are risen. So live that there can be no more doubt about your spiritual resurrection than there was about Christ's literal resurrection. Do not publish to the world your own virtues that you may be honored among them; yet "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Which is in heaven." Put your possession of the new life beyond question, so that when you have gone home your friends and acquaintances may say- "He was a living child of God, for we felt the power of his life; he was a changed man, for we saw the renewing." Jesus spent his risen life also in comforting his saints. He said, "Peace be unto you." He spoke to one and another -to the Manes, to poor Peter who denied him, and to all the assembled company, cheering them and preparing them for their future career. He spent those forty days in setting everything in order in his kingdom, arranging as to what should be when he should be taken up, and leaving his last commission to his followers that they should "go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15) Beloved, let us also spend the time of our sojourning here in the fear of God, worshipping him, serving him, glorifying him, endeavoring to set everything in order for the extension of our Master's kingdom, for the comforting of his saints, for the accomplishment of his sacred purposes.

But now I have led you up so far, I want to go further and rise higher. May the Lord help us. Let our minds ascend to heaven in Christ. Even while our bodies are here we are to be drawn upward with Christ; attracted to him, so that we can say,

"He hath raised, us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." (Ep 2:6)

Our text saith, "Seek those things which are above where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God"; what is this but rising to heavenly pursuits? Jesus has gone up; let us go up with him. As to these bodies, we cannot as yet ascend, for they are not fit to inherit the kingdom of God; yet let our thoughts and hearts mount up and build a happy rest on high. Let not a stray thought alone ascend like one lone bird which sings and mounts the sky; but let our whole mind, soul, spirit, heart, arise as when doves fly as a cloud. Let us be practical, too, and in very deed seek the things that are above: seek them because we feel we need them; seek them because we greatly prize them; seek them because we hope to gain them; for a man will not heartily seek for that which he hath no hope of obtaining. The things which are above which we are even now to seek are such as these; let us seek heavenly communion, for we are no more numbered with the congregation of the dead, but we have fellowship in Christ's resurrection, and with all the risen ones.

"Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ," and "our conversation is in heaven."

(1Jn 1:3)

Let us seek to walk with the living God, and to know the fellowship of the Spirit.

Let us seek heavenly graces; for "every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." (Jas 1:17) Let us seek more faith, more love, more patience, more zeal: let us labor after greater charity, greater brotherly kindness, greater humbleness of spirit. Let us labor after likeness to Christ, that he may be the firstborn among many brethren. Seek to bear the image of the heavenly, and to wear those jewels which adorn heavenly spirits.

Seek also heavenly objects. Aim at the glory of God in everything. You have to labor and toil in this world, for you are yet in the body; take care to use worldly things to God's glory. Exercise your privileges and fulfill your duties as men, and as Englishmen, as before God, not minding the judgment of men. Wherein you mingle with the sons of men, take heed that you descend not to their level, nor act from their motives. You are not to seek your own selfish ends, or the aggrandizement of a party, but to promote the general good, and the interests of truth, righteousness, peace, and purity. Sanctify everything by the love of God and your neighbor. Seek no party ends, but things which are pure, and honest, and of good report. Descend not to the falsehood, the trickery, the policy which are from beneath; but honestly, sincerely, righteously, ever seek to live as those who are alive from the dead.

"Seek those things which are above," that is, heavenly joys. Oh seek to know on earth the peace of heaven, the rest of heaven, the victory of heaven, the service of heaven, the communion of heaven, the holiness of heaven: you may have foretastes of all these; seek after them. Seek, in a word, to be preparing for the heaven which Christ is preparing for you. You are soon to dwell above; robe yourselves for the great festival. Your treasure is above, let your hearts be with it. All that you are to possess in eternity is above, where Christ is; rise, then, and enjoy it. Let hope anticipate the joys which are reserved, and so let us begin our heaven here below. If ye then be risen with Christ, live according to your risen nature, for your life is hid with Christ in God.

What a magnet to draw us towards heaven should this fact be, that **Christ sitteth at God's right hand**. Where should the wife's thoughts be when her husband is away but with the absent and beloved one? You know, brethren, it is not otherwise with us: the objects of our affection are always followed by our thoughts. Let Jesus, then, be as a great loadstone (**Ed note:** lodestone: a naturally occurring rock consisting of nearly pure magnetite & thus naturally magnetic), drawing our meditations and affections towards himself. He is sitting, for his work is done; as it is written, "This man, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down at the right hand of God." Let us rise and rest with him. He is sitting on a throne. Observe his majesty, delight in his power, and trust in his dominion. He is sitting at the right hand of God in the place of honor and favor. This is a proof that we are beloved and favored of God, for our representative has the choicest place, at God's right hand. Let your hearts ascend and enjoy that love and favor with him. Take wing, my thoughts, and fly away to Jesus. My soul, hast thou not often said, "Woe's me that I dwell in Meshach, and tabernacle in the tents of Kedar: oh that I had wings like a dove, that I might flee away and be at rest"? Now, then, my soul, here are wings for thee. Jesus draws thee upward. Thou hast a right to be where Jesus is, for thou art married to him; therefore let thy thoughts abide with him, rest in him, delight in him, rejoice in him, and yet again rejoice. The sacred ladder is before us; let us climb it until by faith we sit in the heavenlies with him. May the Spirit of God bless these words to you.

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III. Thirdly, inasmuch as we are risen with Christ, LET THE NEW LIFE DELIGHT ITSELF IN SUITABLE OBJECTS.

This brings in the second verse: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." "Set your affection." These words do not quite express the meaning, though they are as near it as any one clause could well come. We might render it thus: "Have a relish for things above"; or, "study industriously things above"; or, "set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth." That which is proper enough for a dead man is quite unsuitable for a risen one. Objects of desire which might suit us when we were sinners are not legitimate nor worthy objects for us when we are made saints. As we are quickened we must exercise life, and as we have ascended we must love higher things than those of earth.

What are these "things above" which we should set our affection upon? I ask you now to lift your eyes above you clouds and this lower firmament to the residence of God. What see you there?

First, there is God himself. Make him the subject of your thoughts, your desires, your emotions, your love.

"Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he will give thee the desires of thine heart."

"My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him."

Call him

"God my exceeding joy."

Let nothing come between you and your heavenly Father. What is all the world if you have not God, and when you once have God, what matters it though all the world be gone? God is all things, and when thou canst say "God is mine," thou art richer than Croesus. O to say,

"Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee."

O to love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength: that is what the law required, it is what the gospel enables us to render.

What see I next? I see Jesus, who is God, but yet is truly man. Need I press upon you, beloved, to set your love upon the Well

beloved? Has he not won your heart, and doth he not hold it now as under a mighty spell? I know you love him. Fix your mind on him then. Often meditate upon his divine person, his perfect work, his mediatorial glory, his second coming, his glorious reign, his love for you, your own security in him, your union with him. Oh let these sweet thoughts possess your breasts, fill your mouths, and influence your lives. Let the morning break with thoughts of Christ, and let your last thought at night be sweetened with his presence. Set your affection upon him who has set his affection upon you.

But what next do I see above? I see the new Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all. I see the church of Christ triumphant in heaven, with which the church militant is one. We do not often enough realize the fact that we are come unto the general assembly and church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. Love all the saints, but do not forget the saints above. Have fellowship with them, for we make but one communion. Remember those

*"Who once were mourning here below,
And wet their couch with tears,
Who wrestled hard, as we do now,
With sins, and doubts, and fears."*

Speak with the braves who have won their crowns, the heroes who have fought a good fight, and now rest from their labors, waving the palm. Let your hearts be often among the perfected, with whom you are to spend eternity. And what else is there above that our hearts should love but heaven itself? It is the place of holiness; let us so love it that we begin to be holy here. It is the place of rest; let us so delight in it that by faith we enter into that rest. O my brethren, you have vast estates which you have never seen; and methinks if I had an estate on earth which was soon to be mine I should wish to take a peep over the hedge now and then. If I could not take possession, I should like to see what I had in reversion. I would make an excuse to pass that way and say to any who were with me, "That estate is going to be mine before long." In your present poverty console yourselves with the many mansions. In your sickness delight much in the land where the inhabitants shall no more say, "I am sick." In the midst of depression of spirit comfort your heart with the prospect of unmixed felicity.

*"No more fatigue, no more distress,
Nor sin nor death shall reach the place;
No groans to mingle with the songs
Which warble from immortal tongues."*

What! Are you fettered to earth? Can you not project yourself into the future? The stream of death is narrow; cannot your imagination and your faith leap over the brook to stand on the hither shore awhile and cry, "Allis mine, and mine for ever. Where Jesus is there shall I be; where Jesus sits there shall I rest;

*'Far from a world of grief and sin,
With God eternally shut in'?"*

"Set your affection on things above." Oh to get away at this present time from these dull cares which like a fog envelope us! Even we that are Christ's servants, and live in his court, at times feel weary, and droop as if his service were hard. He never means it to be a bondage, and it is our fault if we make it so. Martha's service is due, but she is not called to be cumbered with much serving; that is her own arrangement: let us serve abundantly, and yet sit with Mary at the Master's feet. You who are in business, and mix with the world by the necessity of your callings, must find it difficult to keep quite clear of the down-dragging influences of this poor world; it will hamper you if it can. You are like a bird, which is always in danger when it alights on the earth. There are lime, twigs, and traps, and nets, and guns, and a poor bird is never safe except upon the wing and up aloft. Yet birds must come down to feed, and they do well to gather their meal in haste, and take to their wings again. When we come down among men we must speedily be up again. When you have to mix with the world, and see its sin and evil, yet take heed that you do not light on the ground without your Father: and then, as soon as ever you have picked up your barley, rise again, away, away, for this is not your rest. You are like Noah's dove flying over the waste of waters, there is no rest for the sole of your feet but on the ark with Jesus. On this resurrection-day fence out the world, let us chase away the wild boar of the wood, and let the vines bloom, and the tender grapes give forth their good smell, and let the Beloved come and walk in the garden of our souls, while we delight ourselves in him and in his heavenly gifts. Let us not carry our burden of things below on this holy day, but let us keep it as a Sabbath unto the Lord. On the Sabbath we are no more to work with our minds than with our hands. Cares and anxieties of an earthly kind defile the day of sacred rest. The essence of Sabbath-breaking lies in worry, and murmuring, and unbelief, with which too many are filled. Put these away, beloved, for we are risen with Christ, and it is not meet that we should wander among the tombs. Nay, rather let us sing unto the Lord a new song, and praise him with our whole soul. (Ed note: all bolding & coloring added)