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it meet? would it appear a beautiful deed—beautiful just?’

‘Truth, Lord’—she replies, still clinging to the new term—‘yet the dogs,’ the little dogs, ‘eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.’ She makes a claim upon Israel: the table is theirs, but so, too, are the dogs: ‘Their *master’s table*.’ And surely, the Lord of Israel will not ill-treat or deny mercy to the meanest of Israel’s own property! Whatever we are, are we not Thine?’

She has wrestled, and overcome. She has risen to the height of the gift; and even in her reward there is an inner prize: ‘Be it unto thee, even as thou wilt.’

3. She carries her gift away, not as something outside, but as a very portion of her own soul. Her faith must continue to operate, her will abide in touch with her Lord’s. She found, when she went home, ‘the devil gone out,’ it is true; but her daughter exhausted and ‘laid upon the bed.’ So her faith must still support her, and initiate her child into the ways of the Kingdom. How often, during the days and weeks that followed, must she have felt the tremor and the thrill of those great words—‘even as thou wilt.’ Her faith must be living, her will alert, to protect her home and keep alight on her hearth the flame of joy.

4. This, therefore, seems to be, not a mood of Jesus, but a method of God, more strikingly illustrated than usual, but still one with His whole way. The Christ who sat over against the treasury, and ‘beheld how the people cast money’ in, beholds also ‘how’ we receive. He is more concerned for our spirit in receiving, while we are more concerned for

the gift we hope to receive. When we ask, ‘Give us this day our daily bread,’ Christ does not allow us to pause there; we must proceed—‘And forgive.’ Then again, lest we should think that forgiveness comes with the asking whatever our state may be, He teaches us to say, ‘Forgive us, as we forgive.’ He that receives from Him must rise to the height of the gift, whatever may be the cost.

5. The trial varies with the value of the gift expected, and with the natural endowment of the soul. When our Lord exclaimed, ‘O woman, great is thy faith,’ He explained the whole incident. Here was faith worth teaching: it would have been spiritually criminal to send such faith away with paltry reward, or even with a great reward if it did not include faith’s own culture and employment.

Prayer means much to God; more than we know, more than we can think. ‘Prayer is, to God, worship; to us, often, it is but a servant, upon mere necessity, sent on a business.’ In this, too, the Divine Spirit humanizes Himself; ‘as a father will cause his child say over again what he even heard him say, because he delighteth to hear him speak.’

If this be, not a mood of Jesus, but a method of God, it helps us to discern the same truth in still vaster issues. If the receiving soul must be raised to the height of the gift, we can understand how forgiveness, how redemption becomes ours only ‘through his blood’ (Eph 1⁷). In forgiving, God must stand at the height of His love; in being forgiven, the sinner, too, must rise to the height of the gift. The Cross measures that height for God and for man.¹

¹ H. E. Lewis in *Women of the Bible*, 183.

‘He descended into Hell.’

BY THE REVEREND BUCHANAN BLAKE, D.D., GLASGOW.

THESE words are found in the final form of the Apostle’s Creed, and they are generally explained by the phrase, ‘He descended into the state of the dead.’ They do not appear in the oldest Roman form of the Creed, but were in use in the Aquileian Church. The early Church was concerned to maintain that, as Christ was a true man, He actually passed through all that death means. Hence, against a false docetic view of the humanity of our

Lord, there was inserted in the Creed the article, ‘He was buried.’ In the other form the phrase was, ‘He descended into Hell,’ and this was held to be another way of declaring His death and burial. In the final form of the Creed both forms of expression are used. Thus we read, ‘He was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into Hell.’ As attention is now being given to the importance of having a simple creed on which all the Churches

may unite, we would look at this particular article, 'He descended into Hell,' around which so much discussion has gathered, that so the thought underlying it may, as far as possible, be expressed in harmony with Christ's teaching.

We must first of all recall the common beliefs concerning the state of the dead, which were current at the time of Christ, and which to a large extent coloured the way in which the teaching of Jesus was set forth in the New Testament records. And then in the next place we must endeavour to understand that teaching in all its newness and purity.

There has always been a protest against the view that death was the end of the life of man, for he was believed to be immortal. It is true that there was no clear or distinct conception of the state into which the soul or spirit passed, when it left the body. Among the Jews it was regarded as being gathered to the fathers, or later as passing into Abraham's bosom. The place of sojourn was called Sheol or the Underworld by the Jews, and Hades or the world of Shades by the Greeks. In Egypt, and indeed elsewhere, it was believed that the spirit would return some day to the earthly state, and hence every care was taken of the body by preserving the expression of the face, embalming the various parts, and making suitable provision for all possible wants, when the spirit should come back. In the old pyramid texts death is not mentioned, and the indomitable assurance is expressed that the Pharaohs lived, as, for example, 'Thou livest! Raise thee up, O thou king Pepi! Thou diest not!' Everywhere, however, the state of the dead was viewed as dark and gloomy in the extreme.

In the Old Testament there is a definite shrinking from death, and a supreme dread of entering the dismal regions of Sheol. The highest joy of life was found by the true saint of God alone in fellowship with Him. He saw in death a cessation of all that he valued most, and when in trouble or sickness he prayed for deliverance or healing. Thus in Hezekiah's Psalm of thanks for restoration to health, we find him saying, 'Sheol cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down to the pit cannot hope for thy truth' (Is 38¹⁸). By three Hebrew words the state of the dead is here described. In several of the Psalms (16, 116, 118) the psalmist rejoices in the prospect of prolonged life, so that he may continue to enjoy his loved fellowship with God. He is not to die and be handed over to Sheol, but to live on and declare the works of God in the

land of the living. So precious is the life of His servant in God's sight that he is delivered from death, and sees the path of life here, with the glad sense that realizing the presence of God he has fulness of joy, and receives here and now from God's right hand those pleasures which last for evermore. Through life he will be guided by the counsel of God, and crowned with blessing all the way (Ps 73²⁴).

In the Book of Daniel and the later apocalyptic writers we find visions of a great day, when God will suddenly appear to vindicate His Name by delivering His people, destroying the wicked, and ushering in the glorious Messianic age with its millennial felicities on this earth. The hope was entertained that, as in Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones, there would be a national resurrection, when the dry bones would under the breath of God stand up an exceeding great army, and those who slept in the dust would awake and share the new glories. Speculation was rife about the state of departed spirits, and in Enoch's apocalypse they are regarded as in prison (1 P 3¹⁹). For the time fellowship between God and the departed had ceased, and there was no certainty as to the way in which it might be restored. The hope of resurrection survived, but in Christ's time there was a cleavage of opinion among the leaders, for 'the Sadducees say there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees confess both' (Ac 23⁸).

The question at issue was submitted to the judgment of Christ (Mk 12¹⁸), and He took advantage of the opportunity to throw a flood of light upon the state into which the saints of the Old Testament had passed at death. He told the Sadducees that they erred because they did not 'know the scriptures, nor the power of God.' For when God was spoken of as the God of the patriarchs He was 'the God not of the dead, but of the living.' He thus clearly taught that, instead of the saints losing their fellowship with God, which they had enjoyed only at best in a limited measure on earth, they had passed into the presence of God, where they continued all that fellowship in the highest degree. It was a mistake to think of them in gloomy Sheol. They were sitting in the kingdom of heaven as its true possessors, while those who thought themselves 'the children of the kingdom' were in the outer darkness (Mt 8¹¹).

In a more positive and direct way Christ taught men the true nature of life. To have life was to

know God, and thus increasing fellowship with Him. And this was everlasting life, for once begun it could never have an end. Hence Jesus said, 'He that believeth on me hath everlasting life' (Jn 6⁴⁷). And again, 'He that believeth on me shall never die' (11²⁰). But this was new teaching, for as yet the disciples had no conception of such a life immortal, a life that was unaffected by death, and that would only pass through death into a higher fullness.

Thus, when Christ was speaking about rising again, the reply was that this would be at the last day. Yet He had said nothing about a last day. On the contrary He had said, 'I am the resurrection and the life.' The moment of death to Him was man's last day, 'the time of his departure' (2 Ti 4⁵). But so firm was the belief in a resurrection at the last day, that there were added four times to Christ's great words about rising again in John's Gospel (6³⁹, 40, 44, 54) 'at the last day.' This was indeed alien to His teaching, and an intrusion of apocalyptic thought into the record of His teaching. With the idea of resurrection at the last day was associated that of the final judgment. But in Christ's mind the judgment day did not mean some far-off distant assize, but a judgment now going on, in which the issues of life were being faced and cleared up (Jn 12³¹).

In this distinct way Christ was teaching that 'believers do at their death immediately pass into glory.' This was clearly the meaning of the words to the penitent thief, 'To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.' For to Christ Paradise was no division of Sheol, but His Father's House (Lk 23⁴³, Jn 14²). This thought that in the moment of death the believer passes at once from earth to heaven was indeed a new thought. It was the abolishing of death, and the bringing of 'life and immortality to light' by Christ through His gospel. It was the delivering of men who all their lifetime had 'been subject to bondage through the fear of death' (2 Ti 1¹⁰, Heb 2¹⁵). The fear of Sheol, the dread of an interrupted fellowship with God, all this was now removed. Death was no longer the 'king of terrors.' The existence of a gloomy state of the dead, in which the soul had to remain waiting for its union with the body, even for a brief season, had been disclaimed by Christ, and the believer could welcome the hour of his departure from earth, in that his work here was done, and that he would be received at once into a higher service, where in more perfect

conditions he might carry on and complete his work for God.

Christ had spoken about coming again, and His words had been interpreted in the light of the current view that the Messiah would in some glorious way usher in the Kingdom. This great spectacular appearing was associated with Christ in the hope of the first generation of believers. They looked for some splendid second coming, some 'glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour.' He had meant to comfort their hearts which had been saddened by the prospect of His leaving them by telling them that He would come again. But at first they had no idea of His immediate coming. How, it was asked, could He manifest Himself to His own, and not unto the world? And He answered that He would come to them in a far higher and better way than they had ever known, so that they might know Him after the spirit, and not after the flesh. All this they had to learn as yet. The great words of St. Peter were to be used, 'Whom not having seen, ye love; and in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory' (2 Co 5¹⁵, Jn 14¹⁸, 1 P 1⁸).

Christ spoke of His absence from His disciples lasting but for a short time. 'A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again a little while, and ye shall see me. Your sorrow shall be turned into joy. I go unto the Father' (Jn 16¹⁶, 28).

But the death on the Cross was a supreme crisis, 'the hour and the power of darkness.' The shepherd had been smitten, and 'the sheep of the flock were scattered abroad.' All the hopes of the disciples were shattered. To the last they had dreamed of the kingdom being restored to Israel by their Master. To-day, they said sadly, is the third day (Ac 1⁶, Lk 24²¹). This interval of three days was the current one for a brief passing grief (Hos 6¹). Had the disciples only understood their Lord, and the interpretation He had put upon the function of the Messiah, and the way in which He was through suffering to bring in the kingdom for which they were longing, how differently it would have fared with them in this crisis! They might have welcomed His death, and realized that from what was once the cross of shame He was now ascending as from a royal throne to His Father. He would have then come to them, nay, He never would have been absent from them. But because of their wrong thoughts, and their great grief, their eyes were closed.

Thus in the experience of the disciples the sorrow of the 'little while' had to be endured. The Crucifixion occurred on Friday afternoon, and, as it was the preparation for the Feast, the body of Christ was taken down from the Cross, and hurriedly buried. Nothing more could be done by loving hands till the dawn of the first day. At the earliest opportunity the devoted women took their precious ointments to the tomb. Did they think that He was in the grave? If so, were they not seeking the living among the dead? For He was not there, ah! had never been there! But, as Mary lingers near, she sees her Risen Lord, and He speaks to her. He had appeared to her to assure her that He was not dead, that He Himself never had died, but had only left His body, when He breathed His last. Then, as St. Paul tells us, the Lord appeared to individuals, then to groups, and last of all to himself, so that the conviction became as real and as deep as any ever could be that the Lord had indeed risen, and on this as on a rock foundation the Church was founded. Again and again the Lord appeared to Stephen, and to Paul. What a supreme vision the seer of Patmos had when he was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and saw his Risen Lord, who said to him, 'I am the first and the last! I am he that liveth and was dead, and behold! I am alive for evermore.' And have we not the living presence of Christ with His Church in the words, 'Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world'? This is the faith of the Church, and from her ever living, exalted, and glorified Head she draws all her inspiration and strength for service (Ac 7⁵⁶ 23¹¹ 27²³, Rev 1¹³, Mt 28²⁰).

At the end of the forty days, filled so full as they were with the most indisputable evidence of the fact that Christ was risen, the Apostles, once so weak and so tossed about with wrong views, were now emboldened in a new strength and with clear conviction to speak in the Name of their Lord and under the mighty influence of the outpoured promised Spirit in the most public manner to inaugurate the Church on the Day of Pentecost. In accordance with the illustration used by Christ Himself the seed with its living germ had been cast into the ground, and out of what had seemed death, for the life germ could not die, there had sprung much fruit. The putting of the Lord on the Cross was not an end, but only a beginning to His power. He showed Himself the possessor of a life that death

could not touch. In the power of this endless life He ascended to His Father, and entered in once for all into the Holy of Holies, having obtained eternal redemption for us. 'After he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, he sat down on the right hand of God' (Heb 9¹² 10¹²). As the disciples recalled His words they knew their meaning in the light of their new experiences, and reading the Old Testament with glad hearts and New Testament eyes they were assured that their Lord could not be holden of death, but was exalted to His Father's side. It was not for Him any more than for His saints to enter the grave. His exaltation from the Cross was His ascension. From that moment His Spirit was being poured forth, but could not be received until minds were ready to understand and receive. Only when the disciples accepted the teaching of their Master could He bless them.

In the writings of the Apostle Paul we find the spiritual experiences, through which believers pass when they accept Christ, described as dying with Him, being buried with Him, rising again with Him, and sitting together with Him in the heavens. But he also held firmly to the truth of a real resurrection rightly viewed and understood when the departing spirit is unclothed by the flesh, and is clothed upon by our house from heaven, that 'building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens' (2 Co 5¹⁻²). While the spirit thus is clothed upon, it is not by the body which we lay in the grave, for we are told that that is not the body 'which shall be' (1 Co 15³⁷). For at death 'we look for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change the body of our lowly state that it may be fashioned like unto the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things unto himself' (Ph 3²).

In this way we would seek to free our minds from the influence of the current apocalyptic forms of thought which were current in the time of Christ, and which so often affected the statement of His teaching in the New Testament records, and prevented the reception of the new thoughts of Christ. In the same way we would seek to eliminate those speculations which were intended to explain some of the difficulties left as a legacy from Jewish apocalyptic, or Rabbinic exegesis. The result will be the omission from the Creed altogether of an imaginary descent of our Lord into Hell or the estate of the dead, and a truer appreciation of His teaching as to life and immortality.