

Christ's Victory Surprised Even His Followers

"Our Lord Himself, St. Peter and St. Paul appeared to have been defeated." (De Tourville)

There was never an enterprise in the world that seemed more completely at its end than did that of Jesus Christ at the time of His crucifixion and burial. When the Lord was placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, there was not a single human being that believed He would ever rise from the dead.

All hope was gone. The disciples were dazed by the tragic events. They felt dejected, bewildered and defeated. The breakdown of the disciples was complete. They felt that they could never laugh again.

This is what Scripture says about the disciples' attitude toward Jesus just prior to His death: "They all forsook Him and fled." What remained for the disciples but to return to their homes and to their old jobs? They went with lead in their shoes. They expected ridicule. They had firmly believed that they would become first in the new kingdom and now the king was dead. Crucified!

The women on the first Christian Sabbath came not to see an empty tomb, but to embalm the body of their teacher. When they discovered the empty tomb they were amazed, surprised and overwhelmed.

They were told by two angels: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee; Saying, "The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." When the women told the disciples what had taken place "their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not."

But what happened when the disciples discovered that it was true, and that Christ had risen indeed? What a change in attitude and behaviour! Their mourning turned into joy; their feeling of defeat into a real sense of victory; their despair into hope.

Christ was risen from the dead! This great event changed everything. A small band of Christ followers went into the world with great courage. They were ready to lay down their lives for Christ's sake, knowing that death had been conquered by their Lord. Consider what the early Christians suffered for their convictions and faith in the living Lord.

Dr. H. W. Frost gives this summary of what some had to go through: "Matthew suffered martyrdom by the sword in Ethiopia. Mark died at Alexandria after being dragged through the streets of the city. Luke was hanged on an olive tree in Greece. John was put in a cauldron of boiling oil but escaped death and was banished to Patmos. Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards.

"James was beheaded at Jerusalem. James the Less was thrown from a pinnacle of the temple, and beaten to death below. Philip was hanged against a pillar in Phrygia. Bartholomew was flayed alive. Andrew was bound to a cross, whence he preached to his persecutors till he died. Thomas was run through the body at Coromandel in India. Jude was shot to death with arrows. Matthias was first stoned and afterwards beheaded. Barnabas was stoned to death by the Jews at Salonica. Paul was beheaded by Nero at Rome."

Many names have been added through the centuries to this grim list. Also today, saints of God are laying down their lives for the Lord. They are ready for this supreme sacrifice as they don't want to be more than their Lord.

Our Lord Himself had looked beyond the cross and the tomb to the triumphant resurrection. He knew that His apparent defeat would turn to victory. Shall we not in this Easter season celebrate the resurrection? Of course, you can only celebrate if you know the risen Lord personally.

O show me not my Saviour dying,
As on the cross He bled;
Nor in the tomb a captive lying,
For He has left the dead:
Then bid me not that form extended
For my Redeemer own,
Who, to the highest heavens ascended.
In glory fills, the throne.
Weep not for Him at Calvary's station;
Weep only for their sins:
View where He lay with exultation;
'Tis there our hope begins:
Yet stay not there, thy sorrow feeding,
Amid the scenes He trod
Look up, and see Him interceding
At the right hand of God.
By death He death's dark king defeated,
And overcame the grave;
Rising, the triumph He completed;
He lives, He reigns to save;
Heaven's happy myriads bow before Him;
He comes, the Judge of men;
These eyes shall see Him and adore Him;
Lord Jesus, own me then!

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