

THREE EVENTS THAT SHAPE OUR LIVES

Most of us have never heard the word “Comprachicos”...a word, according to the late Ayn Rand in her book: *The New Left*, describes “a strange and hideous nomadic association, famous in the seventeenth century, forgotten in the eighteenth, and unknown today.” She had a chapter entitled “The Comprachicos” in which she says the word “is a Spanish word that means ‘childbuyers’ who not only kidnapped and sold children but had a hideous method of turning them into side-show freaks by stunting growth, mangling features, and disfiguring their faces with iron masks. Stupefying powders which passed for magic and incisions by iron was part of their inverted orthopedics to produce a dwarfish mutant monster to entertain kings and royalty.” She quotes Victor Hugo’s writing from the nineteenth century, where he describes the Comprachicos practice in China that achieved the same thing. He wrote: “They would take a child two or three years old, place him in a porcelain vase, grotesque in shape, without cover or bottom, so the head and feet protruded. The child expanded without growing, slowly filling in the contours of the vase with his compressed flesh and twisted bones. This bottled development continued for several years. At a certain point it became irreparable. When the vase was broken the child came out in the shape of the pot, mutilated and deformed.”

I quote this to say that lives are molded and formed by outside forces. Satan, the great Comprachico, uses lies and deceit in order to form people into the world’s mold and make them disfigured, mutilated and deformed in relation to God’s purpose in creating man. On the other hand our spiritual lives are molded and formed by Spiritual events. There are three significant events that shape our lives: the cross of Christ, the resurrection of Christ and the ascension of Christ. These are three significant stages in the redemptive process and affect our spiritual growth.

THE CROSS OF CHRIST: I once heard a very popular “mega church” preacher say, not only to his congregation, but to the hundreds, perhaps thousands of people listening via radio and television, that “If Jesus had been walking down the street and suddenly dropped dead, his death still would have saved us.” In all due respect to the popular clergyman this statement was “ignorance gone to seed”. Jesus had to be crucified because “without the shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9:22) and he was the sacrificial “lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29). Arthur Custance in *The Seed of the Woman* states: “Crucifixion alone could serve God’s purposes in working out the plan of redemption, for only the cross could provide the altar upon which the Lord Jesus Christ could deliberately and under no compulsion but that of his own will, offer himself as a sacrificial lamb. Any other form of execution would have required a miracle to keep him alive long enough to make this voluntary sacrifice; whereas on the cross it was only by a miracle that he died when he did.” Crucifixion was not a Jewish method of execution but a Roman method. The method most used by the Jews in the Old Testament was stoning.

Several times the Jews sought to stone Jesus but in each instance he protected himself from their intention (John 8:59; 10:31; 11:8). Perhaps we can understand Christ’s death on the cross by noting Adam’s death, or rather Adam’s deaths. Adam not only experienced physical death when he sinned, but spiritual death as well. God had told him that in the day he ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil he would surely die, but Adam lived to be 930 years old (Gen. 5:5), however he died a spiritual death the day he disobeyed God. Spiritual death may be defined as “being cut off from the source of life” as physical death is being cut off from physical life. Adam died spiritually before he died physically. On the cross Christ died both a spiritual death and a physical death. This could not happen had he been stoned to death. When Jesus cried out “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” he was experiencing spiritual death, being cut off from the source of life. It was after this that Jesus yielded up his spirit and died physically. Jesus had said “I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative” (Jn. 10:17, 18). It is the King James Version that makes a point newer translations miss. In Acts 2:23 Jesus is said to have been “crucified and slain”, this is reversed in Acts 5:30 which states he was “slain and crucified”. Thus, Jesus died a spiritual death as well as a physical death. He was not killed by being crucified, he died *on* the cross but he did not die *because* of the cross. Neither the Jews nor the Romans “took his life” he “gave it up”. The cross means we died a spiritual death in his death and even when we experience physical death we “shall live because he lives” (Jn. 14:19). It was by his death on the cross that he rendered “powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through the fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives” (Heb. 2:14, 15). It was by the cross that he “abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (II Tim. 1:10).

How does the cross shape our lives? The Apostle Peter answers this question in these words: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (I Pet. 2:24). Further, the book of Hebrews says: “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb. 10:10). It was his sacrifice on the cross that enabled him to take “his own blood and enter the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” and thus “the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God (will) cleanse your conscience for dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:12,14). It was on the cross that “our old self was crucified with him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he that has died is freed from sin” (Rom. 6:6-8). The cross means our sins have been punished and we will not have to pay the wages of sin, which is death (Rom. 6:23). This, then, is why the cross shapes our life.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST: In Philippians 3:11 the Apostle Paul expressed his desire to know “the power of his resurrection”. It is the power of the resurrection that shapes our life as nothing else can. The sufferings of Christ on the cross

would be meaningless if there were no resurrection. Were it not for his resurrection his death would have no significance and his mission would be a failure. The cross appears in its right perspective only when it is seen in the light of the resurrection. It is important that we see the cross as a crucial event that shapes lives but unless it is connected to the resurrection it means nothing. Over sixty-two years ago British theologian George Beasley-Murray wrote in his book *Christ is Alive!*: “That which had been the central affirmation of the first disciples is now of no importance to the average Christian. It is not talked about, it is not preached on, it is not even wondered at; it is simply ignored. The effect on Christian thought of this neglect of the Resurrection of our Lord can scarcely be exaggerated. It has affected the whole gamut of theology. For the largest section of Christendom, the fitting symbol of Christianity is a crucifix; the impression is given to the world that the Savior is someone over whom we should weep. Even Protestants, in their constructions of the doctrine of the cross, have left Christ on it and presumed that his saving work finishes with his death. The cross is consequently explained in terms of a sacrifice on our behalf, a satisfaction of God’s justice, a payment of our debt, a revelation of God’s love, *and that is all*. It somehow seems to have been overlooked that the resurrection is an integral part of our Lord’s work for us, so that salvation is essentially a deliverance from a living death in sin to a new life of righteousness in God. That new life is Christ’s Resurrection Life, mediated to us by his Spirit.” The resurrection of Christ is the basis of our immortality. Christ said: “Because I live you shall live also” (Jn. 14:19 and the Apostle Paul stated: “If Christ has not been raised then those also have fallen asleep in Christ have perished” (I Cor. 15:18). Immortality, then, is based upon the resurrection not on a so called “immortal soul”. Too long the church has been dominated by Greek philosophy when it comes to the subject of immortality. In Acts 17 at Mars Hill “this new teaching” of Paul’s brings “some strange things” to the ears of the Athenian philosophers; to them the apostle was “a preacher of foreign divinities’ because he proclaimed Jesus and the resurrection.” As far as the resurrection being a significant event that shapes our lives it is still a “strange teaching” to the modern church. If the gospel teaches anything about the Christian life, it is the close connection between Christ’s resurrection and the way we live our lives. This fact is stated this way in the book of Romans: “Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, never to die again; death no longer is master over him...even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lust...but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead.” (Rom. 6:9; 11-13). In Ephesians he prays that we might know “what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. This is in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated him on His right hand in the heavenlies” (Eph. 1:19,20). Further, we are told that “If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His spirit who indwells you” (Rom 8:11). It is an awesome thing to realize that the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead dwells in our mortal bodies. The resurrection, then, has a profound influence on how we live our lives and how we conduct ourselves before the world.

THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST: Christ did not die and rise again in order to leave his people, but in order to be more accessible and present in fellowship with them than he was during his earthly life. Jesus told his apostles on the eve of his crucifixion “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (Jn. 14:18). As the cross would have been meaningless without the resurrection so the resurrection would have been meaningless without the ascension. Our redemption was not completed with the cross and resurrection. Jesus had to “enter the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, not through the blood of goats and calves but through his own blood, he entered the holy place once for all having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:11, 12). His ascension then, completes our redemption. He told the two on the road to Emmaus: “Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and enter into his glory?” (Lk. 24:26). Ascending and entering into his glory meant he did not belong to this realm any longer. Had he not ascended he would have been a spectacle here on earth in his resurrected body. The proper place for a glorified body is the heavenlies, the realm of the Spiritual, the presence of God.

By his ascension to God’s right hand, Christ was able to come to his people in the outpouring of his Spirit. Paul says that by his resurrection, Christ became a “life giving Spirit” (I Cor. 15:45). The Spirit is the means by which the risen Jesus is now present with his people, by which he continues his ministry on the earth. The three and a half years of his ministry on earth was simply preparatory to his present ministry. “We have such a high priest, who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister in the sanctuary, and in the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man” (Heb. 8:1-3). Luke stated it this way in his introduction to Acts: “The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus *began* to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). He continues to “do and teach” through his church, his body on the earth. (This then is the reason for a church to exist; to teach what Jesus taught; and to do what Jesus did while on the earth, that is bring the kingdom into world situations. Does the ascension, then, mean anything to the modern church?).

A very important fact concerning the ascension is for the most part overlooked by theologians and Bible scholars today. That is what Paul states happened when Christ ascended: after stating that God “raised him from the dead, and seated him at this right hand in the *heavenlies*” (Eph. 1:20), he states: “He raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the *heavenlies* in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6). Christ is physically in heaven, but spiritually in the earth; we are physically on earth but spiritually in heaven. This means we have full and complete access to the throne of God (Hebrews 10:19). Our role as His people is stated in II Cor 5:19, 20 “He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us, we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” The ascension of Christ gives the church the power and authority to speak for God. The King James Version says “we stand in his stead”. Instead of Christ being here physically he is here spiritually in the church, his body. It is only through the ascension that we understand the meaning of the crucifixion and resurrection.

