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The Living Bird and The Lord's Resurrection and Ascension - Part 2

Introduction

The historical narrative:

One of the most horrific diseases of an ancient day was that of leprosy. When an individual contracted this, the individual had to be quarantined and if he came close to other non lepers he was to warn them of his contagious disease by shouting: "Unclean, unclean" (Lev. 13:45). There were those times when the individual would be cleansed, but before he could come back into the camp the priest would go outside the camp and carefully look on the man to see if the leprosy really was healed (Lev. 14:3). If it was determined the individual was clean, then a certain ceremony had to be performed. There were a series of steps that must be followed. They were:

- a) An unknown individual had to take two birds.
- b) One of them was killed over running water.
- c) Then the priesthood took cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop, and dipped them with the living bird in the water and the blood.
- d) Then turning to the man the priest sprinkled him with the blood.
- e) Then the living bird is let loose into the open field (Lev. 14:6-7).
- f) At this stage the individual is able to come into the camp but not allowed to be in his tent (Lev. 14:8).
- g) Seven days later the second stage of his cleansing began.
- h) The individual was to shave off all his hair from his head, his beard, and eyebrows, and wash his clothes and his flesh in water.
- i) At this point he was clean.
- j) The next day there was the third and final stage of his cleansing, that is on the eighth day, and on that day the man was to take one ewe lamb, 3/10 deals of fine flour mingled with olive oil. (Lev. 14:10)

Our consideration is not with the entire ritual but only with the little bird that flew back to its natural habitat. There are a number of truths which this brings before us.

Truths Presented

As with every foreshadowing of the Lord there are multiple lessons. The religious ritual for cleansing of the leper also carries multiple truths:

- a) The man's situation:
 - i) The first observation is that the leper was now clean, therefore, an illustration of a sinner cleansed by the sacrificial propitiating blood of the Lord, but in the religious ceremony there is given the method by which he was made officially clean before God. In this way it explains to us the "mechanics" of how we were cleansed from the defilement of sin.
 - ii) This had been a very sad, lonely, and depressing life for no matter how much this man longed to be back in the camp with loved ones, such was his state that he could do nothing. Not only could he not help himself to be clean, but he could not help anyone else, and all he touched were either lepers like himself or they became lepers. Because of his uncleanness he was beyond any human help, and unless God intervened, there was nothing but a dark future and death.
 - iii) What a picture of an unsaved person, defiled by sin and incapable of helping themselves or anyone else. Dress this man up in religious garb, he was still a leper and under the sentence of defilement for the rest of his life. As the scriptures record about an unsaved individual: "having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12).
- b) Now the man looked at himself and he was clean. Although officially he was still outside the camp of Israel, now there was a ray of hope. With hopes lifted he sent word for the priest to come and look at him and render the verdict of God.
- c) Against this background of anxiety there can be read those beautiful words: "The priest shall go forth out of the camp" (Lev. 14:3), a man who can, by God, pronounce him clean, who can provide for him the sacrifice to make him officially clean, has come into his world of defilement. What a picture of the Lord who came in to our defiling world and lived among us, the defied. The words of the hymn ring true:

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Can it be true, the things they say of you?
You walked this earth, sharing with friends you knew
All that they had, the work, the joy, the pain
That we might find the way to heaven again.

- i) When the priest “came forth” to where the man was, it automatically brings to mind the times whenever we read concerning the Saviour, as He “came forth.” He said: “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father” (Jn. 16:28). But, there was another time he came forth: “Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man!” (Jn. 19:5.) What condescending grace and infinite love, humiliated, mocked, lashed, and became the song of the drunkard. That’s how low He came. Again, the hymn writer wrote:

On such love, my soul still ponder, love so great so full, so free,
Say while lost in holy wonder, why O Lord such love to me?

- ii) However, the priest could not simply pronounce the man clean and bring him back in to the camp. That defilement was such that God could not tolerate it. It was the result of sin, and not only sin, but the results of sin must be dealt with. It was not the man’s fault he had leprosy and was defiled, it was not his fault that the effects of Adam’s sin so disfigured him, the ravages of sin must be dealt with. How? There must be a blood sacrifice. The priest coming out to the defiled and disfigured man was not sufficient. The penalty of sin is death, blood must be shed. The scriptures plainly teach: “Without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb. 9:22).
- iii) For this man to be brought back into the camp and into fellowship with those who were in the camp, it was necessary that there must be the shedding of blood for his cleansing. In the mercy of God we know that we are cleansed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- d) The other little bird with the blood upon it indicated a sacrifice offered and cleansing accomplished. It soared back into its natural habitat bearing the evidence of death. We must not think that the Lord carried His blood into Heaven. The wording in Hebrews 9:12 means He went into Heaven by virtue of His blood.
- i) Before Christ ever went back to heaven He rose from the dead. We read: "He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:4). Precious is the truth that in His rising from the dead the power of God was manifested, and that same power is manifested in our salvation. Paul prayed: "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know . . . what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe . . . which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph. 1:18-20). He was: "raised again for our justification" (Rom. 4:25).
- ii) How beautiful are the words: "And he (the priest) shall sprinkle (the blood) upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times as shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the bird loose in the open field. No more would the individual be forced by that dreadful disease to live his life shouting "unclean, unclean" (Lev. 13:45). Thank God that only He can make the vilest sinner clean, for: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 Jn. 1:7).
- iii) As the individual watched that little bird rise, it must have been with a sense of relief knowing that in God’s sight his defilement was gone, and he was clean now to be able to have fellowship with the people of God.

What If Christ Had Not Risen From The Dead?

What would have happened if Christ had not physically risen from the dead? (1 Cor. 15:14-18)

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- a) "Our preaching is vain"
- b) "Your faith is also vain"
- c) "We are false witnesses of God"
- d) "Ye are yet in your sins"
- e) "They which have fallen asleep are perished"
- f) If only in this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable
- g) It would be an incomplete salvation, in other words, no salvation at all for the Lord's resurrection of the dead provided justification (Rom. 4:25)
- h) All his claims of rising from the dead would have been fraudulent. (Matt. 16:21; 17:23; 20:19)
- i) The feast of firstfruits was a meaningless ceremony (Lev. 23:9-14)
- j) Jesus would not have been declared to be the Son of God (Rom. 1:4)
- k) There would never have been an ascension into Heaven (Acts 1:11; 1 Pet. 3:22)
- l) Christ would never have ascended above all heavens (Eph. 4:10)
- m) The angels would have told lies (Matt. 28:6; Mk. 16:6; Lk. 24:6; Acts 1:11)
- n) There would be no high priestly ministry in Heaven (Heb. 9:24), or advocate (1 Jn. 2:1-2)
- o) Satan would have been forever free to roam and seek to destroy God's work, for His works would never have been destroyed (1 Jn. 3:8)
- p) All God's purposes would have come to naught if Christ had not risen from the dead
- q) There would be no sign in Jonah (Matt. 12:39-40)
- r) The "sure mercies of David", that is the promises God made to David and Christ His "greater Son", would never be fulfilled (Acts 13:34)
- s) There would be no man to be the universal Judge for God (Acts 17:31)
- t) There would be no future resurrection of the saints (1 Thess. 4:14)

God's Beautiful Words of Consolation

Because of the work of Christ on the cross, His resurrection and ascension for those who believe, there is:

- a) "Peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1)
- b) "Access by faith into this grace wherein we stand" (Rom. 5:2)
- c) "Rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:2)
- d) "We have received the atonement" (reconciliation) (Rom. 5:11)
- e) We are made, "Alive unto God" (Rom. 6:11), thus sin's condemnation is put away.
- f) "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." (2 Tim. 2:10)
- g) "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9)

As we ponder the riches we have in our Lord, no wonder we can sing:

"HALLELUJAH, WHAT A SAVIOUR"

. . . Rowan Jennings