

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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## The Foundation of Christian Joy

*Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. (John 20:19–20, KJV 1900)*

*Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. (John 20:27, KJV 1900)*

I can't imagine the state of mind that prevailed in the room where the disciples gathered on the evening of Jesus' resurrection. A few of them had seen Him and told the others. Some believed and some doubted, we know at least one. After almost a week of stronger emotions than they'd likely ever experienced in their lives, they must be emotionally drained. They simply had more on their "Plates" than they could process. What do you make of it all? Is He raised? Did He really defeat death and come back to them? Then He appeared to them. It really was Him alive and standing there. It was not a spirit or an illusion. Not only did they see Him, but they heard His voice. He even showed them His hands and side, the evidence of His crucifixion.

The gospel that we preach is based on facts, on true information about events and people, in particular, one person, in real human history. It is not a fabricated fiction story. Later when Paul strives with all his reasoning and heart to regain the Galatians who heard and believed the truth that he preached, but then stumbled at the false gospel that his detractors preached, he reminded them that his gospel was literal and factually true.

O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes **Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth**, crucified among you? (Galatians 3:1; emphasis added)

Jesus was not crucified in Galatia, but the evidence of His literal crucifixion and His equally literal resurrection were both key elements in the gospel that Paul had preached to those people. In his preaching, Paul taught the literal reality of what Jesus did for our sins, and the Galatians believed it. Whatever else Paul taught them, this truth was central to his message. And so it must always be. When Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians, he wrote, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Corinthians 2:2) Yet as we read First Corinthians beginning to end, we see Paul reasoning with them about a long and varied list of errant ideas and practices that they had carelessly embraced as a

church. They were so focused on the personality of individual preachers that they had forgotten this truth. They became confused about such practical issues as diet, meat offered to idols, and how believers should live in pervasive and kind respect for each other, not take each other to a human judge and court to settle their personal differences. They had wholly discarded the matter of church discipline and boasted of their broad-minded tolerance of moral sin, rather than grieving it and separating themselves from their member who had so sinned. They had corrupted the Lord's Supper, turning it more into a collective meal than an act of worship. They were highly confused regarding spiritual gifts; Paul devoted three whole chapters out of sixteen to this topic. Some of them had denied the doctrine of the resurrection. Paul writes this confused church about each of these issues and many more. Yet the one central truth that pulled all these issues together and made sense of his whole message was the same. Paul's whole letter was not sixteen chapters about Jesus' sufferings and death. Nor should our preaching today be so. However, our preaching should always build on this truth, just as Paul's First Corinthian letter and the varied topics covered therein builds on it.

What was the disciples' reaction to Jesus' appearance and words to them? "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." How refreshing! After over a week of more confusion and stress than they could have imagined, gladness returned to their hearts. I love the image of people's faces at the moment of spontaneous joy. Surely this moment with the disciples was wholly unexpected. Long droopy faces immediately turned to overwhelming joy. When they saw Him, they were **glad**.

Whatever the issue in our lives, however distressing or depressing, refocusing our minds on our resurrected and victorious Lord restores gladness to our hearts. David recalls such a moment.

He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock,

and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. (Psalms 40:2-3)

Joyful, truly “glad” people tend to live generally in a more peaceful manner, both with themselves and with others. Few deep convictions are as pervasive in providing a foundation for kind and godly grace between believers as the Bible doctrine of the Second Coming and resurrection. Peter makes this point in his teaching on the resurrection. (2 Peter 3:11-16) We only prove that we actually believe in the resurrection and the Lord’s return by how we treat other believers. If I constantly criticize you and pick faults, real or imagined, in you, I give you no evidence that I believe in the Second Coming and our bodily resurrection. “...what manner of persons ought ye to be...?” We prove what we believe in fact by how we live and, specifically based on this and many other passages, by how we treat each other in the faith. As a young man in both my faith and in the ministry, I recall meeting a preacher from a region a couple hundred miles from my home. At our first meeting, I liked him and his family. They were friendly and seemed quite sincere and devoted to the faith. I was shocked when I heard the man preach the first time. He started with his text and was nicely building the framework for a good sermon. When he set up a particular point that he wanted to emphasize, he paused, put a scornful scowl on his face, and shouted, “Now you get this” with more hatred than love in his voice. His manner was wholly out of character with his message. Today, I have no recall whatever of his text or subject that night, but I clearly recall his unkind manner in the pulpit. Believers in Christ who truly do believe in the Second Coming and resurrection should take great care in their manner of life toward other believers. We could so easily find ourselves in the situation of this preacher. People will forget what we believed, but they will long remember how unloving and harsh we were toward other believers. I ask, my friends, is this really how you wish to be remembered?

We show gladness of heart by how we live, the way we treat the people around us—to use a Bible term—“especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:10b) We are often too inclined to isolate our beliefs from our conduct, packing each into a well wrapped and insulated package. Scripture rejects this fragmented idea of the faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. It integrates our belief with our conduct. Our minds and hearts hold to certain beliefs, and our eyes, ears, hands, feet, and, ah, yes indeed, our tongues either validate our belief or bring it into question.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples in our study passage, they had gone through more emotional trials and stresses than we can imagine. Within the last few weeks, Jesus increasingly told

them what to expect, but they simply couldn’t bring themselves to believe His words. And, when they did momentarily accept His imminent exit, they fell into ungodly bickering about which of them would be the leader of the group after He left them. (Mark 9:34; Luke 22:24) As they entered the city of Jerusalem, they were overjoyed to see the palm leaves and the crowd shouting praises to God at Jesus’ entrance into the city. They were likely bewildered and wholly unprepared so soon afterwards to see their leaders openly opposing Jesus, and eventually arresting Him and turning Him over to the Romans for trial and crucifixion. Peter’s reaction to the young woman’s notice that he was a Galilean who followed Jesus may tell us much about the other disciples, as well as about Peter. Their minds likely were overloaded with fear, questions, and doubts. Some of them, even after hearing the early reports of Jesus’ resurrection, voiced continuing doubt, “But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.” (Luke 24:21)

With so much confusion and turmoil in their minds, how can these men be described as “glad”? And here we discover the power of the lesson and the power of “Jesus and the resurrection.” (Acts 17:18) “Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord.”

In this textual setting, we also see even greater words of comfort. In the number of the disciples, we see one who, even upon hearing more than one of the disciples report that they had actually seen the resurrected Jesus and talked with Him, refused to believe their words. He has earned the cliché, “Doubting Thomas.”

“...and be not faithless, but believing.” Though Jesus was not bodily present when Thomas voiced his unbelief, He knew. When we voice our own doubts and disbelief today, never doubt; He knows. Jesus singles Thomas out from the others, shows Thomas his hands and his side, and even invites him to touch if that is what Thomas needs to remove his doubt. How differently Scripture deals with this question of doubt than the typical contemporary preacher of condemnation. Jesus knows His own, even in their moments of doubt or unbelief. Instead of warning them, “I can’t give you any assurance that you are really born again unless you believe,” Jesus confronts our unbelief with solid evidences that remove that unbelief. Based on Scripture, the Holy Spirit, not a self-appointed preacher, is the source of assurance to the child of grace in this world. If such a preacher gave you his iron-clad assurance that you were born again, it would mean absolutely nothing whatever. However, if the Holy Spirit gives you His assurance, you join the disciples who were “glad, when they saw the Lord.” You rejoice at His kind grace and at the weight of His testimony to you. Your doubts melt, replaced by joyful belief. Such, my friends, is the true gospel of the grace of God. Never settle for less.

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor