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THE RESURRECTION AS INCREDIBLE  
OR INEVITABLE

A SERMON  
BY THE  
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## The Resurrection as Incredible or Inevitable

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*“Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?”—Acts 26:8.*

*Whom God hath raised up having loosed the pains of death because it was not possible he should be holden of it.—Acts 2:24.*

On Easter Day the air we breathe is so surcharged with hope that it is easily possible to build lofty structures reaching seemingly into the sky. Though these edifices may have the appearance of houses of many mansions in the light of common day, they will vanish like the baseless fabric of a dream.

Cautious souls will be on their guard today lest in the emotions excited by the return of Easter they may infer too much. But if there is danger in relying overconfidently on our hopes there may be even greater danger in trusting altogether to our fears. An English aviator flying with a companion from Paris to London was caught in a fog over the Channel. Keeping their course by dead reckoning, they saw at last an outline dead ahead. The pilot shouted back: “Dover Cliffs! We’ll soon be there.” But his companion, a man of more experience, whose judgment was supposedly of greater value than his own, answered: “Ah no; that’s only a cloud bank. We have lost our course.” The pilot, relying on his friend’s skill, swung away to the right, and a few hours later they were picked up at the point of perishing in the North Sea. Hope would have landed them in an hour in London, but fear plunged them into the ocean. To mistake clouds for cliffs is as dangerous as to mistake cliffs for clouds. May we all be so divinely directed as to escape both dangers.

“Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?” Paul asked the question of King Agrippa, implying without any contradiction on the king’s part that according to Agrippa’s way of thinking a resurrection of the dead was palpably incredible. There are intelligent persons today who share the king’s conviction. To them a resurrection is flatly inconceivable because they believe that an endless life is impossible. Endlessness is a meaningless term as applied to any form of existence of which we know anything. They think. We talk freely of everlasting hills, of imperishable boulders, but it is a commonplace of the schools that the hills are corroding and will at last slip into the valleys; and the boulders, however gigantic, are doomed to turn to dust.

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But though the mountains and the rocks perish, the atoms of which they are composed do not. The persistence of the atom perplexes the oldtime materialist who is satisfied to think of matter as so elemental as to require no explanation. To the new knowledge, whatever may be the philosophy of its possessor, matter may be only a form of electricity, like the light in the mazda lamp and the heat in the radiator and the motive energy of the trolley car. That such an energy, capable of playing so many rôles and tricks, is imperishable, is not incredible. So far is it from it that the indestructibility of matter is the A. B. C. of the modern scientific primer.

Immortality is, of course, a different thing from imperishability. Conscious life as we know it exists only when the material substance called the brain is intact. Though the brain is so small that it suggests a folded handkerchief shut into an oblong box, hardly large enough to hold the voluminous silk handkerchief of our grandfathers, man's whole destiny may be hidden in its convolutions,—so some are bold enough to assert. "The time was, when the brains were out, the man would die," Shakespeare says disparagingly of a supposed ghost. But long before that time, to all intents and purposes, the man may be actually dead. A blow from a falling beam causes consciousness to be interrupted and suspended. The intercommunicating connections between memory, perception and speech are broken. A horseman comes riding down the street. An acquaintance on the corner says, "There goes the greatest living psychological scholar." His horse stumbles, he is thrown from the saddle, and when taken up he mumbles a few disjointed sentences. A minute clot of blood may absorb into itself the scientific lore that would fill a library.

"The disintegration of the brain must be the complete annihilation of consciousness and the extinguishing of all hope of the survival of personality," the materialists assert. This troubled men long ago, of the highest intellectual penetration. Plato and Socrates discussed it. They wondered whether the relation of the soul to the body is that of music to the harp or of the harper to the harp. When you destroy the harp, you have destroyed its music forever. But you have not necessarily interfered with the harper. He may be able to find another instrument and to make music on it, sweeter than before. The brain is the instrument with which man thinks, but it is not the thinker. Man is the harper and not the music of the harp. The brain may be only the medium by which thought is transmitted as the wire is the medium which transmits your telegram. Destroy the wire, and your thought may still be transmitted by wireless. It is no longer

possible to believe that the brain is an organ that secretes thought "as the liver secretes bile," or the discussion would be ended in favor of the negative.

But our psychologists consider it probable that the brain is the product of thought. That it is shaped and fashioned by an Invisible Tenant, as a house might be by some invisible occupant, like the old Duke of Portland who wished not to be seen even by his servants, and whose presence was detected only by changes he had made in the furniture of the rooms through which he had passed.

"Life, like a dome of many colored glass,  
Stains the white radiance of eternity,  
'Till death shatters it in fragments."

Death may break down walls and let the full flood of light in upon the Occupant under the dome, who will then see even as also he is seen. Man is not body or brain. Man is mind—soul.

But permanency, persistency, continuity of atoms and energy, do not necessarily imply identity of any kind. Fire may not destroy material substances when your house burns down; it may only transform them so completely that while they still exist as gases, the house has been annihilated. Death may not destroy the atoms of which our bodies are composed, but it may transform and decompose them, and they may recombine merely as an influence enriching the world like other gaslike substances, though personality is annihilated. The survival of consciousness, of individuality, in possession of memory, by which a man recognizes himself as the individual who passed through earthly experiences, is the gist of the matter.

This is not only not incredible; it is made probable by hints and suggestions even in those evidences of mortality, as we are accustomed to call them, that impress the soul with a sense of the inadequacy, the futility, the worthlessness of life. Shutting up man to threescore and ten years, he becomes the one and only instance of which we know anything in the universe, of a misfit. We find plenty of round pegs in square holes, and square pegs in round holes, in politics, in the professions, in art and in commerce, but we never find anything of the kind in nature.

Every creature below man is perfect—in possession of all its powers and possibilities almost from the hour of birth. There are no wants that are unmet, there are no longings that are unsatisfied. But between man's powers and possibilities there is such an absurd lack of adaptation if Death

writes "Finis" to the volume, that it becomes incredible.

They launched a superdreadnought awhile ago at Newport News, said to be the largest ever built in a bay that lacks but little of being land-locked. In a few months this gigantic structure was fitted with engines of 40,000 horsepower, more or less, with bunkers capable of carrying a supply of coal sufficient for weeks or months and a cold storage plant adequate for the food supply of a regiment. What if the outlet to the sea were not only almost but altogether closed? Is it credible that an intellect capable of designing, constructing and controlling such a ship could make the colossal error of building it for a half hour's run in either direction?

"What a piece of work is man; how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty! In form and moving, how express and admirable! In action, how like an angel! In apprehension, how like a god!" Was this marvel built for a land-locked sea—for a voyage of a few hours or days? Man has forty faculties, it is said, that are never developed on earth. A thousand years might be given to each. Tennyson wanted an aeon for music, another for painting, another for science, and many more for poetry.

Man has plans that cannot be executed, aspirations that are never satisfied, affections that are never gratified. Will He who has the intellect to create such a creature put him to permanent intellectual, moral and spiritual confusion? "I will not believe," says Sir Oliver Lodge, "that it is given to man to have thoughts nobler or loftier than the real truth of things." "A belief in immortality is the outcome of all nature's processes and methods." "All I have hoped or willed or dreamed of good shall exist, not its semblance but itself." Is it credible that Peter, Paul, Augustin, Luther, Newton, Knox, Wesley, Washington, Lincoln, Brooks and Moody, and those who helped to make this church what it is and may yet be—disembarked after life's brief voyage on the shores of nothingness? Is it not infinitely more credible that they met their Pilot face to face when they had crossed the bar ready to guide them in safety over the ocean of eternity into their desired haven?

All the paths by which we approach this stupendous subject, that in personal importance makes the turmoil of the street and the battlefield and all struggles for supremacy in the market-place and the Council Chamber seem like the games and sports of the nursery over which adults smile, comparing them with what they call the realities of life—run up to God. "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you"—that matter and force should persist that consciousness should continue? These would have been in-



teresting questions to Paul, as interesting as to Plato. But Paul goes straight to the heart of the matter: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?"

"I believe in the immortality of the soul as a supreme act of faith in the reasonableness of God's work," says Professor Fiske. So reasonable are all God's works that no reliance on them is ever betrayed. Whoever puts his foot on the "altar stairs that slope through darkness up to God" will find that, if there are a few steps lying in the gloom, the light soon begins to steal downward upon them. Designing men have built stairways, broad and smooth and seemingly solid, upon which many an Amy Robsart, hurrying at the call of love, has plunged into the bottomless abyss. But the steps God has cut in the solid rock of Reason, Conscience and the Nature of Things will lead all who hasten at his call into unshaken truth and unending life.

"Thou wilt not leave us in the dust,  
Thou madest man, he knows not why,  
He thinks he was not made to die,  
And Thou hast made him, Thou art just."

Mendelief, the famous chemist, forming a table of elements, saw that his list was incomplete, needing three to perfect it. "I believe," he said, "these will yet be found and that they will have certain properties," which he specified. One was discovered in Scandinavia, another in the Pyrennes, and the last in the mines of Germany. Does God care more for completed chemical tables than for completed humanity? "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you" that the three elements lacking to man's completeness—Holiness, Happiness and Eternal Life—should all be found as God has promised—in Christ? Of this God hath given assurance in that He hath raised Him from the dead. In Him are fulfilled all humanities, hopes and anticipations. "Ye are complete in Him." To all who know that He who was dead is alive—in the world and in the church and in the receptive soul—their resurrection is as inevitable as His.

While the thought of God made the resurrection of the dead not incredible but probable, it was the thought of Christ that made the resurrection inevitable. It was not possible that a life such as his should be held down in the grave except for an interval of a few days.

Christ is still for all who know him as Paul did, even though in an incomparably inferior degree, the assurance of immortality. The background of probability and possibility created by reason, investigation and inference are only



a reflecting surface against which we may "see the Christ stand." Such a surface may serve also as a sounding board echoing across the centuries the voice whose clear tones ring with unspeakable hope in our ears today, "I am he that liveth and was dead and behold I am alive forever more."

He who speaks from the other side of the grave is the Christ John saw in the city whose gates are pearl and whose streets are gold; the Christ who spoke seven times from the cross and was carried from Calvary by Joseph of Arimathea and his helpers and laid lovingly away in the sepulchre hewn out of the rock in Joseph's garden; the Christ whose parables, precepts and example have so often stimulated us and shamed us; the Christ who comforted his disciples and through them us, "Let not your hearts be troubled." As we listen to his voice we hear as an undertone the beat of wings as our fears like foul birds take their swift flight out of our hearts; and we see the glowing faces of majestic hopes as they come marching triumphantly into the places made vacant. "As Jesus died" so shall we descend into the darkness of the grave; but we shall not stay there long. "As Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." We shall rise as Jesus rose to share his life in eternity.

Let this and every Easter Day be bright with flowers and songs, and jubilant with praise; but brighter and more glorious still with glad communion with the ever-living Christ who gives us with himself that life which cannot be holden of death and the assurance of an eternity in which we shall have time to ripen all the fruit whose seed faith has sown, and to become like him whose hand has thrown open the gates of new life to all who have joined their destiny with his.



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