

THINGS WHICH CANNOT BE SHAKEN -THE LIVING CHRIST.

By F. M. Perry

God once spoke to the Children of Israel from the top of Mount Sinai and when He did, Heb. 12:26 tells us, "His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, 'Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.'" And then the writer of Hebrews goes on to explain, "And this expression, 'Yet once more,' denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire."

Through these words God tells us that He will shake and remove all those things which are made which can be shaken, and only those things will remain for eternity which cannot be shaken. The things which cannot be shaken, then, are the things on which our hope of eternal salvation depend. In this life on earth there are before us both, the things which can be shaken (which are only temporary), and the things which cannot be shaken (which are eternal). Among all these things, then, if we wish to be saved with the eternal salvation which God offers us, we must seize upon and cling to the things which cannot be shaken.

As we Look around us at the world, we see that many things are being shaken and are crumbling even today. Many of the institutions of this world are crumbling. The great empires of past history have already vanished from the earth. Land nations are constantly falling today. Populations are exploding, customs are changing. Change seems to be the order of the day. Some of the changes, from time to time, may be for the better. But we are dismayed by much of the change. There seems to be a great decay in morals. There seems to be a larger number of people drifting aimlessly, seeking change just for the sake of change. Many

advocate the violent overthrow of the present institutions of the world.

We note that this earth on which we live is subject to earthquakes, tidal waves, volcanic eruptions, tornadoes, hurricanes, and floods. Many people, have their very existence shaken by these things regularly. Communities and buildings and lives that have been thought secure and lasting are shaken to their very foundations. Men suffer sickness, accident, loss of job and income. Parents, friends, and relatives are soon taken from us in this earthly life.

People need to know that there are things within our lives which cannot be shaken, basic things, important things. Many people do not realize that they are eternal beings created by an eternal God. Many people are not properly oriented in their environment, which is an eternal environment. People need to know that there are things which cannot be shaken, and that these unshakeable things are the most important things in our lives. Understanding the unshakeable things gives us a perspective on which to base the decisions of our lives.

Four things in our lives which cannot be shaken are:

The Living God.
The Living Christ.
The Living Word.
The Living Church.

These are four basic, unshakeable things, the knowledge of which comprise the GOSPEL, the Good News for a lost and dying world. "Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity," observed a writer in the Psalms. Let us turn from the vain striving based on the mere thoughts of men, to the unshakeable things.

The last time I spoke to you I spoke about the Living God, the most basic of all unshakeable things. Today let us explore a subject like unto it, The Living Christ, the Living Son of God. First let us examine the FACT of the Living Christ. Then let us look into the ACTIVITY of the Living Christ.

That Jesus, the man, lived and died some two thousand years ago, practically no one will deny. It is an established, historical fact in the minds of almost everyone who has ever heard of Jesus that He actually lived on earth and died. But there are many who deny that Jesus was raised from the dead. Since the term "The Living Christ" predicates the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, let us spend a few moments considering the FACT of His resurrection.

First, all four writers of the New Testament who wrote about the life of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) record the fact of his resurrection. All four plainly declare that He died and was buried, and all four, with equal definitiveness and clarity, testify that He was raised from the dead on the third day and manifested Himself alive to His disciples. And after the resurrection of Jesus, after His disciples had seen him alive, there was a great change in that little band of followers. Just after the death of Jesus they had been dismayed and scattered. They had felt lost and were ready to drift back to their old pursuits and vocations. But, somehow, suddenly, these men obtained a new courage, a courage with which not only to preach their message, but with which to face persecution, suffering and even death itself. How did they suddenly gain that courage? They themselves explain the change within themselves. They had come in contact with the risen and Living Christ.

The FACT that Christ rose from the dead is the foundation truth upon which the entire Christian faith is based. Paul said, in Romans 6:9, "Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. It must surely be apparent that there could be no Christianity without a Living Christ at its center.

A gospel of a dead Jesus would be no gospel at all. It would be a hopeless, farcical thing, unworthy of the notice of men. It would only make a mockery of man's condition and need. It is the glory of our faith that it has as its center the triumphant, Living Christ.

If Christ were not risen and alive we would not be meeting here today. Had it been possible for the enemies of Jesus to prove that Jesus was still

dead on that day of Pentecost when His church was established, Christianity would have died at birth. It could not have survived such a blow. And if it could be proved, even today, that the story of the empty tomb is a lie, Christianity would receive its death-blow, even at this late hour.

Christianity without the Living Christ is an utter impossibility. Take the Living Christ away and what is left? Someone might say, "there is still the perfect life and example, and the matchless teaching of the Man, Jesus." But would this be true? In His teaching, Jesus repeatedly predicted His resurrection from the dead. For instance, Matthew 16:21 says, "From that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day." Now, if Jesus is not risen and alive, He was either a deceiver or was Himself deceived. To be forced to admit either of these would be fatal to Christianity. For instance, if Jesus were a deceiver, who led men to expect His resurrection when he knew Himself that such a thing was utterly impossible, where is His alleged perfection? One single act of deception would shatter His perfect life. Can we have a deceiver as our example? On the other hand, if Jesus were Himself deceived into thinking that He would rise again when such an event could not possibly happen, who shall say that He was not also deceived about the whole of His mission?

But our Lord Jesus was too wise to be deceived, and too good to be a deceiver. He neither made mistakes nor told lies. You cannot take away the Living Christ without tearing the heart out of Christianity. Paul uses this same argument in the 15th chapter of First Corinthians when he wrote to some who said, "There is no resurrection of the dead." Paul goes into the dismal details of the consequences if those who deny the resurrection were right. He declares:

- (1) If there is no resurrection the apostles are instantly proved liars, because they claimed to have seen Jesus alive after Calvary.
- (2) If there is no resurrection those who have believed in Christ for

salvation, on grounds of His victory over sin and death, have believed in vain and are still in their sins.

(3) If there is no resurrection all who have ever died hoping, because Christ was raised, that they too shall rise to a fuller life, have perished miserably and eternally.

It is an awful picture that Paul paints. He finally exclaims, "If in this life only we have hope, we are of all men most pitiable."

But then the apostle Paul raises his eyes and sees things as they truly are, and he cries, "But now is Christ risen and become the first-fruits of them that slept." (Please read 1 Corinthians 15:1-20).

The FACT of the Living Christ lies at the center of the Christian faith because:

(1) It is the basis of the faith, in that it proves the divinity of the Lord Jesus and gives value to His sacrifice.

(2) It is the proof of our justification, in that it marks the completion of the redemptive work of God. It is the resurrection which sets the divine seal on our redemption. Romans 8:11 says, "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you."

Of what use can a dead Jesus be to one? If all that one knows about Him was that, after living an exemplary life He was killed and His body taken to corrupt in a rock tomb, one may be able to think of Him in terms of pity, or respect, or even admiration. But that is all. You may enter a powerful abiding fellowship with Him only when you become convinced that He is as alive and active for your salvation at this moment as you are conscious of living yourself. Therefore, with Peter we say, (1st Peter 1:3) "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." The FACT of a

Living Christ begets a Living hope for us.

Let us now consider something of the ACTIVITY of the Living Christ. Let us consider three ACTIVITIES:

- (1) The Living Christ is working “with” His people in His church.
- (2) The Living Christ is working “in” His people in their hearts.
- (3) The Living Christ is working “for” His people in heaven.

We must note that the ACTIVITY of the Living Christ is related to His people: “with,” “in,” and “for” His people.

First, thinking of Christ's work “with” His people, let us notice that Christ is indeed active. He was not raised to His Father's side to rest Himself. He ascended to continue His activity until the time comes when all His foes shall have been brought to submission. Luke commences the book of Acts in a significant manner. In the first chapter of Acts Luke refers to the former treatise which he wrote "about all that Jesus began to do and teach". These words imply that in the former book, which we call the book of Luke, he recorded the beginnings of the Lord's activities, and in the next book, Acts, he recorded the continuation of that activity. In the first book that Luke wrote, Jesus died and was raised. In the second book Jesus ascended to heaven and was glorified, still living and certainly active in the church through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to read the book of Acts without coming face to face with the Living and Active Christ!

We meet the Christ on every page and in every chapter of the book of Acts. As we read of the trials and triumphs of the early church, we do not receive the impression that here are men and women sustained by sweet and hallowed memories of a now-departed Master. No. We become convinced that these people were in close contact with a personal, living, and energizing Christ, a Christ who is still working. Rather than call this book the Acts of the Apostles, we might better call it the Acts of the Living Christ, or the Acts of His Living Holy Spirit.

We do not always realize that the Living Christ is working “with” His people today. Sometimes we think that we are commissioned to carry on the Lord's work in His absence; that perhaps, we are to complete the work which He started on earth, but which He left when He ascended on high. If we think this way, it is a serious mistake. It is a mistake if, when a congregation of Christ's church makes an assessment of its resources, it leaves out the Living and Active Christ from its calculations. Christ is alive and even now steadily and persistently toils with us, and in us, toward the ultimate fulfillment of God's purpose in this world.

We live in constant contact with material things. It is hard for us to conceive of beings existing but unseen and unheard. We say that "seeing is believing" and very often we live by it. If you neither saw me nor heard my voice you would soon forget my existence. Unfortunately, it seems to be true, that because we neither see His form, nor hear His voice as did His disciples during His earthly life, we forget, for all practical purposes, that Jesus rose again, and is alive and present today, at this very moment. Jesus said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20). There is no life more sweet or more powerful than that which is lived in conscious fellowship with the Living Christ.

In past history the church has lived only as Christ has lived in her. And the church only lives now and will live in the future only as Christ lives in her. Christ has kept, and is keeping, His promise, (John 14:18), "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." It is a FACT, Christ is working with us in the church today.

Not only is Christ working with us, He is working “in” us, living in our hearts, “in” our inner spiritual parts.

Secular history records an incident of the 2nd century when the Emperor Trajan visited a certain middle eastern city. He had one of the leaders of the church in that city called before his tribunal. The reason was that this Christian had been so respected and loved by his fellow Christians that they had surnamed him 'Theophorus, which means “bearer of God.” Naturally this had inflamed the man's enemies. And in the pagan ears of

Emperor Trajan it sounded strange indeed. So when he appeared before the Emperor, he was asked why he was called Theophorus. He was asked if he possessed an evil spirit that resulted in his being called by that name. On receiving a negative answer, Trajan then asked him for an explanation. The man said he was called Theophorus (bearer of God) because he had taken into his heart Jesus Christ as his Lord. Trajan was amazed at this and asked the Christian if he really believed that he had in his heart the one who was put to death under Pontius Pilate many years before. The man answered, "Thou sayest it. For it is written, 'I will dwell in them and walk among them.'"

This took place 18 centuries ago, but still today the mark of a person's sonship with God is his having in his heart the Living Christ as his Lord.

Paul said in Galatians 2:29f, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And all down through the ages that has been accepted as the truest description of the Christian life. After all, Christianity is not just another religion. It is not just a philosophy of life. Nor is it merely a code of morals. It is something infinitely above these. It is life itself, which commences and is sustained when Christ indwells the heart. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." That is Christianity. It does not mean that our hearts are filled with tender memories of Jesus, as the memory of a departed mother lives on in the hearts of her children. That word "dwell" means "to settle and to make an abiding place" there -- as contrasted with a temporary sojourn. Christ should be permanently housed in our hearts by faith. We are not to give Him a doubtful or disputed footing in our hearts. He must come in and claim His own and become Master. We must give Him full control. He must make our hearts His permanent abiding place. And He will only do this when we become submissive to Him. He says in John 14:23: "If any man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." The effect of this coming is that the Living Christ becomes the center of all our thinking and all our actions. We want to be able to say with Paul, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me." (Gal. 2:20).

Now, a brief word on the third aspect of the Living Christ's activity: The Living Christ, active in heaven.

In Hebrews 7:25, we read, "Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing that He is always living to make intercession for them." And in Hebrews 9:24, we read, "Christ entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." And again in Romans 8:34, we read, "It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, Who is even at the right hand of God, Who also maketh intercession for us."

It is clear from these passages that a special function of the Living Christ in heaven is that of intercession – of mediation for His people. We have already remarked that, instead of easing His activity when He ascended into heaven, He rather took up another phase of activity. The cross and the empty tomb bear witness to the completion of His redemptive work. But His activity as a mediator was only commenced with his ascension into heaven. His intercession does not take the form of offering further sacrifice. The sacrifice was done once and for all when He offered Himself on the cross. His present work consists of the continual representation of His people on the grounds of His finished work.

It is interesting to note that the writer of Hebrews 1:3 says that Christ, after He had offered Himself and purged our sins thereby, "sat down" on the right hand of the Majesty on High, as if to say, the atoning work of Christ is ended. He made His offering. Then He "sat down." This completed His redemptive work.

But other writers of the Bible speak of Christ as "standing" in the presence of God for us. John tells us in Revelation 5:6 that he saw a Lamb standing in the midst of the throne. That Lamb was Christ. Standing is the posture of activity. And even now Christ is standing in the presence of God for us, pleading our cause, on the grounds of His perfect life and His perfect sacrifice.

As we study about Christ in God's word, we often make the point that we should gain a historical background of the period, time and place in

which Jesus lived as a man on earth. This is good for us to do. But we must also look further than this. When we peer into first century history to find Christ we only find a Christ who lived 1900 years ago. If we want evidence of Christ alive today we must look elsewhere. We cannot find the Living among the dead. We must look for evidence of His activity in the life of the church today and in the life of the individual believer. Christ is here. He never left His people as orphans. He has fulfilled His promise to come to us. It is not so much a matter to be historically demonstrated, but more importantly a matter that should be a present day experience.

There is a need today for the church to lay greater stress on the FACT that Christ is the Living Christ. He is a vital, living force in the lives of many Christian men and women the world over. And His influence will wax stronger and stronger. When contact is made between spiritually dead humanity and the Living Christ, new life can spring, up. It is life which is pure and noble because it has as its source the One who said, "Fear not; I am the First and the Last; and the Living One, and I became dead; and behold, I am alive unto the ages of ages. "

To all mankind the Living Christ says, "Come unto Me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My load is light." (Matt. 11:28).

To the christian He says, Come to Me and repent and pray that your sins may be forgiven, and "I am with you always, even to the end of the age." To the non-christian He says, Come to Me and believe, repent, confess My name, and be baptized. And I will be with you too, "always, even to the end of the age."

If you are not a christian, you can become one today.

(This sermon was delivered by F. M. Perry to the Church of Christ, Anchor Point, Alaska, in 1987.)