

Enforcing Emancipation

‘Deacon Roberts was leaving the morning service on Sunday morning. At the door, the pastor reached out and shook Robert’s hand. “By the way, Deacon, you need to join the army of the Lord”. “I’m already in the army of the Lord, Pastor”. “Then why do I see you only at Christmas and Easter?” Deacon Roberts whispered back, “I’m in the secret service”.

What? The secret service? Do churches have secret services? And if so, whom do they protect? I wish I had a secret service! Frankly, as much as I would like to give a Christian brother the benefit of the doubt, I just don’t believe Deacon Roberts. If all he can manage to go to the “trouble” of worshipping God is two times a year, then he certainly isn’t much of a deacon, let alone even a Christian at all! No, I don’t believe him at all. But doubting and unbelief is an epidemic among people. Not least of which were the disciples.

Mark’s Gospel in some versions records the Risen Lord Jesus actually rebuking the disciples for not believing that He had risen from the dead. The other Gospels do not record this stern and stinging rebuke of the Lord to His disciples for their lack of faith. However, the tone of this record is very much in keeping with the tone which comes through in the recording of the Apostle

John of the visions of Christ Jesus in the opening chapters of Revelation. In this last chapter of Mark, the ancient manuscripts vary. Several very early manuscripts include this extended exchange in verse 14. These additional six or so sentences in English, depending on the translation, are not found in many other later manuscripts. I would imagine that perhaps some found the focus on the disciples' unbelief and excuses too strong, reflecting too poorly on them, and so, perhaps, some saw fit to edit those sentences out to cast the disciples in a less unflattering light.

Regardless of the reasons why, I think those sentences are instructive and accurately represent the mindset of the disciples in the first several days after the Lord's resurrection. Only in John's Gospel do we read of the very strong doubt of one particular disciple, Thomas. The other two Gospels make only general statements that "some doubted". So you see, the amount of detail each writer felt led to include, varies. And this is all part of Holy Spirit's purpose, and is by no means mere accident. The extended verse 14 in Mark sheds much light on the obstinance of the disciples in their initial unbelief in the seemingly impossible resurrection of Lord Jesus. When confronted by the Lord's rebuke, just like Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden, they tried to deflect some of the blame from themselves by giving excuses. Still obtuse as to the true, cosmic purpose of His resurrection, some even had the gall to try to convince Him in His resurrected state to set up His kingdom on earth, now. Does not this sound exactly

like something the “sons of thunder”, James and John, would have said? First they claim that because the current age is still under satan, God’s truth and power are prevented from conquering evil spirits. Therefore, now, especially since Lord Jesus is now resurrected from the dead, now, now is the best time for the Lord to establish His Kingdom by revealing His justice, now! Well, they were wrong on several points. Christ Jesus answered them, telling them that the current age is no longer under satan, saying, “The period of years of satan’s power has been *fulfilled*”. It’s obvious that the disciples still do not realize the power and authority that has been delegated to them. In fact, they won’t realize it until the Day of Pentecost, and even then, not fully yet.

For everything changed on Good Friday. It seemed that evil had triumphed. But on Sunday morning, that illusion was exploded. The problem was that not all the disciples believed it. John was the first, but only later did the rest of them believe what they were being told, until they each saw with their own eyes. Thomas, absolutely, was not alone in his doubt. He was just the one whose story was the most compelling, what with the Lord’s unforgettable response to him, and represents all the others who had also doubted, even to the present day! For it was Sunday morning that sealed the total defeat of the devil and his plans. A truly new age had dawned. The authority that the devil had stolen from Adam in the Garden had now been gloriously wrested back by the God-Man Jesus, to be restored to each and every man and

woman who will believe and live their lives in the service of the Army of the Lord.

Let's take a few minutes now to recall exactly what our Lord went through and accomplished in these mere four days, as we listen to Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah", with lyrics rewritten and sung by Kelley Mooney. If you are familiar with this great Pascha song, please feel free to sing along.

["Hallelujah" (Easter Version) video]

Recall the disciples' truly lame excuse for their faithless unbelief in Lord Jesus' resurrection. They said, in extended verse 14: "This age of lawlessness and unbelief is under satan, who does not permit God's truth and power to conquer the evil spirits". Well, in their defense, what they said, in the first part, was true. The operative word being "was". Since Lord Jesus has resurrected and broken asunder all of satan's authority, and restoring it back to mankind who will follow the Lord Christ, it was no longer true in the least. But the devil, the father of lies, does his best to fill the earth with smoke and mirrors, lies and deception. He's no longer in charge, not in the least, but he's constantly spinning myths and fables that assert he is. And people believe them. They have for thousands of years. Most tragically, most of us who believe in Christ Jesus also are hoodwinked by the devil and believe his fabrications, to varying degrees, and thus we self-limit our own use of the Lord's delegated authority to us.

The entire creation rejoiced when Christ Jesus burst forth

silently from the tomb in rays of glorious light. Why? Because the entire creation, us too, has been released from the devil's control. We've been emancipated. Everyone has, but how many actually believe God and believe it? Our emancipation has not only been proclaimed but effected on the cross. Sins wiped out and forgiven on the cross. Death wiped out and eternal life bequeathed to all who give their earthly lives to Christ Jesus Who paid for those lives on that same cross. It's high time that we enforce the emancipation. It's the law of God. We're called by Him to enforce it. Though we didn't read it this morning, we know what our Lord commands in verse 15 of Mark 16, for He said it in the other Gospels as well: "Go into all the world and preach the Good News to everyone. Anyone who believes and is baptized will be saved". He goes on: "These miraculous signs will accompany those who believe: They will cast out demons in My name, and they will speak in new languages". The very thing the unbelieving disciples said could not be done, Lord Jesus says will be done!

We are Christian soldiers, marching as to war. Fighting to enforce the law, the emancipation of all. Speaking the truth of the Gospel, which is all truth about everything, against the mountains of lies pouring forth like a flood from people all around us, the media, the schools, the government. God has laid down the law. The believers must enforce it, or others will never see what's true. Let this concluding video reinforce in our minds what we fight for!

["We Are Here" video]

