



“I SHALL KNOW HIM BY THE NAIL PRINTS IN HIS HANDS”

Please read St. John 20 verses 19-31

In this portion of scripture we read of one of a number of appearances of our Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection. In this instance He appeared to His Disciples and pronounced peace upon them. He then proceeded to show them His wounded hands and side and pronounced His peace a second time. Then we are told He breathed on them saying, “Receive ye the Holy Spirit” (verse 22). Now remember the Holy Spirit was not given in His fulness until Pentecost and perhaps the definite article here can be confusing. Jesus simply said here, “Receive Holy Spirit” for the task to which He commissioned them i.e. to go out into the world and proclaim His gospel – which they readily obeyed.

The next statement can also be confusing when He said, “whose soever sins ye remit they are remitted” etc. (verse 23). No-one can forgive sins but God alone. What Jesus implied here was pointing souls to Himself: and when hearts and lives are surrendered to Him, then their sins are forgiven and blotted out. The risen and glorified body of our Saviour still bears the wounds of Calvary – reminding us of His once and for all sacrifice of His precious life, and blood-shedding for all our sins – and those of every generation.

The wounded hands of our Lord Jesus bring to us first of all forgiveness. The Word of God says clearly, “Without the shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb. 9 verse 22), and the blood of Jesus cleanses us and goes on cleansing us from all sin (1 John 1 verse 7).

Secondly the wounded hands of Jesus bring reconciliation. Our Lord’s sacrifice bridges the gap and estrangement between man and God and then between man and fellow man.

Thirdly the wounds of Christ bring peace. No-one can know the peace of God without knowing peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5 verse 1). It is this three-fold message that Jesus commissioned His disciples to proclaim to all mankind, and that same message has been committed to all of His followers in every generation right down to the present time.

Continuing the story, the main attention is focused on one disciple, who on account of this incident has come to be known as “doubting Thomas”.

Thomas was absent when Jesus appeared to the others, and when later informed by them that the Lord had risen and appeared to them, he indignantly asserted that, short of seeing the nail prints and placing his fingers in them, and his hand into His wounded side, he would not believe.

A week later Jesus appeared again to the disciples in a similar fashion and Thomas was there on this occasion. Jesus immediately singled him out and invited him to do what he had stipulated. Thomas then believed because he saw the outward evidence; but Jesus said, “blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (verse 29).

I believe this part of the narrative has an important message for us in these days. There are many sceptics in the world to-day, and many others just like Thomas who cannot receive our simple gospel truth at first hand. Like Thomas they must have some outward and tangible evidence of the faith we possess and hope to communicate.

Let me ask therefore – does your life bear “the print of the nails” and your witness also? Does your conduct at work and in all relationships likewise bear the nail prints?

This can also be seen in various ways: in self-sacrifice for the welfare of others in “going the extra mile” (Matthew 5 verse 41); standing firm in the face of undeserved suffering or persecution which all we Christians must face up to (2 Tim. 3 verse 12); putting others before ourselves whatever the cost; and above all, putting Jesus foremost.

These are just a few means whereby our lives can be like the life of Jesus, who calls us to a life of submission from which there is no escape, a life of sacrifice from which there is no exception, and a life of service from which there is no exit. Only thus can we play our part in building up the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The last verse of our reading states that all of these things were written that all may believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and have life i.e. eternal life in Him; and in his first epistle, John similarly states that all of these things are written that all may believe and know for certain that they have eternal life (1 John 5 verse 13). That chapter also states: “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5 verse 12). In closing, may I say to anyone who has not yet submitted their life to the Lord Jesus, please earnestly consider the seriousness of the verse I have quoted above; because the days of grace are fast running out and time is short, and so I say to you lovingly and passionately in the words of the prophet Isaiah, “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him, while He is near” (Isaiah 55 verse 6).

Amen.