


## BISHOP SIMPSON

 **M**ATTHEW SIMPSON, a notable American pulpit orator and bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was born at Cadiz, O., June 20, 1811, and died at Philadelphia, Pa., June 18, 1884. He was educated at Madison (now Alleghany) College, in Meadville, Pa. After leaving college he studied and practiced medicine for a time, but in 1834 entered the Methodist ministry. From 1839 to 1848 he was President of Asbury (now De Pauw) University, and in 1852 was elected bishop. In 1873, he proceeded to Europe as delegate to the World's Evangelical Alliance at Berlin, and the sermons and addresses delivered by him abroad added greatly to his reputation as an orator, especially his sermon before the Alliance. Before returning to America he made an extended tour in the Orient. In 1859, he removed to Evanston, Ill., where he was connected with the Garrett Biblical Institute, and subsequently he resided at Philadelphia. His fame as a preacher continually grew; during the Civil War he delivered many patriotic addresses. He officiated at the funeral of Abraham Lincoln at Springfield, Ill., and while in England, in 1881, he delivered an address at Exeter Hall on the death of President Garfield. In 1878, he delivered a series of addresses at Yale University on preaching, which were published as "Lectures on Preaching" (1879). His other works embrace: "A Hundred Years of Methodism" (1879); and "Cyclopædia of Methodism" (1878).

### SERMON ON THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

DELIVERED EASTER SUNDAY, 1866

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."—1 Cor. xv, 20.

**A**LITTLE more than eighteen hundred years ago, as the light of the morning was breaking around the walls of Jerusalem, there was a guard placed about a sepulchre in a small garden near the walls of the city. They were guarding a grave. Some strange scenes had occurred on the Friday before. While a man whom they had taken from the hills of Galilee and around the little lake of Capernaum had been hanging on the cross crucified as a malefactor, strange signs appeared in the heavens, and on the earth, and in the temple.

It was rumored that he had said he would rise the third  
(344)

morning. The third morning was coming, and as the light began to break in the East, there came two women silent and sadly wending their way among the tents that were pitched all around the city of Jerusalem; they had sojourned all night in the tents, for as yet the gates of the city had not been opened. They came to see the sepulchre and were bringing spices in their hands. They loved the man who had been crucified as a malefactor, because of his goodness, his purity and his compassion. They seemed to be almost the only hearts on earth that did love him deeply, save the small circle of friends who had gathered around him. There had been curses upon his head as he hung on the cross—curses from the bystanders, curses from the soldiers, curses from the people. They cried: "Away with him; his blood be on us and on our children!" and on that morning there were none but a few feeble, obscure, heart-broken friends that dared to come near his grave.

A little more than eighteen hundred years have passed and on the anniversary of that day, the morning of the first day of the week, the first Sabbath after the full moon and the vernal equinox, at the same season, the whole world comes to visit that grave. The eyes of princes and of statesmen, the eyes of the poor and the humble in all parts of the earth are turned toward that sepulchre.

All through Europe men and women are thinking of that grave and of him who lay in it. All over western lands, from ocean to ocean, on mountain top and in valley, over broad prairies and deep ravines, the eyes and hearts of people are gathered round that grave. In the darkness of Africa, here and there, we see them stretching out their hands toward it. Along from the coasts of India and the heights of the Himalayas they have heard of that grave and are bending

ward it. The Chinese, laying aside their prejudices, have turned their eyes westward and are looking toward that sepulchre. Along the shores of the seas, over the mountain tops in the valleys, the hearts of the people have not only been gathering around the grave, but they have caught a glimpse of the rising inmate who ascended in his glory toward heaven. The song of jubilee has gone forth, and the old men are saying, "The Lord is risen from the dead." The young men and old matrons catch up the glowing theme, and the little children around our festive boards, scarcely comprehending the source of their joy, with glad hearts are now joyful, because Jesus has risen from the dead. All over the earth tidings of joy have gone forth, and as the valleys have been ringing out their praises on this bright Sabbath morning how many hearts have been singing—

"Our Jesus is gone up on high!"

Why this change? What hath produced such a wonderful difference in public feeling? The malefactor once cursed, now honored; the obscure and despised, now sought for; the rising Redeemer, not then regarded by men, now universally worshipped. What is the cause of this great change?—how brought about? The subject of this morning, taken from the associations of this day, call us to consider as briefly as we may the fact of the resurrection of Christ from the dead and some of the consequences which flow to us from that resurrection.

It is important for us to fix clearly in our mind the fact that this is one reason why such days are remembered in the annals of the church as well as in the annals of nations; for our faith rests on facts, and the mind should clearly embrace the facts that we may feel that we are standing on firm

ground. This fact of the resurrection of Christ is the foundation of the Christian system; for the Apostle says: "And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins; then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ will perish." If Christ be not risen, we shall never see the fathers and the mothers who have fallen asleep in Jesus; we shall never see the little ones which have gone up to be, as we believe, angels before the throne of God. If Christ be not raised, we are of all men the most miserable, because we are fancying future enjoyment which never can be realized; but if Christ be raised, then shall we also rise, and them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. And that our minds may rest as to the fact of Christ's resurrection, let us notice how God hath arranged the evidences to secure the knowledge of this fact clearly to man.

The first point to which our attention is invited is the fact of Christ's death. Were not this fact clearly established it would be in vain to try to prove his resurrection from the dead. Christ might have suffered for man in some obscure place; he might have laid down his life as a ransom, and yet there would have been no legal evidence of it. God allowed the wrath of man to become the instrument of praising him, in that he suffered Christ to be taken under what was then the legal process—arrested first by the great council of the Jews, and then by the authority of the Roman governor, so that the matter became a matter of public record—a legal transaction. The highest power, both of the Jewish and Roman governments, united in this fact of his arrest, his trial, and his condemnation to death.

Not only was this permitted, but the time of the occurrence was wisely arranged. It was at the feast of the Jews, the Passover, when all the Jews came up to keep the Passover.

They came not only from Egypt but from all the country through which they were scattered. Jerusalem could not hold the people that came together; they pitched their tents all around the city, on the hills and in the valleys. It was the time of full moon, when there was brightness all night, and they came together with safety and security. The multitude, then, was there to witness the scene, so that it might be attested by people from all parts of Judea and from all countries round about Judea.

Then, again, the form of the death was such as to be not a sudden one, but one of torture, passing through many hours. Had the execution been a very sudden one, as it might have been, the death would have been equally efficacious, yet it would not have been witnessed by so many; but as he hung those dreadful hours, from nine until three, the sun being darkened, what an opportunity was given to the people passing by to be impressed with the scene! The crucifixion was near the city; the crowd was there; the temple worship was in process; the strangers were there; and as one great stream passes on some festive day through the great thoroughfare of your city, so passed the stream of men, women, and children by that cross on which the Saviour hung. They wagged their heads and reviled as they passed by. The very ones whom Jesus had healed, whose fathers had been cured of leprosy or fever, whose mothers' eyes had been opened; the ones who had been raised up from beds of sickness by the touch of that Saviour, passed by and reviled, and said: "He saved others, himself he cannot save." The multitude saw him as he hung suffering on the cross.

Then, again, the circumstances attending his death were such as to invite universal attention. It was not designed that the death should be a private one; not merely a legal

transaction, a matter soon over, but a protracted and agonizing spectacle—one to be seen and known by the multitude; but, in addition, that man's attention should be drawn to something to be connected with that wonderful scene; hence God called upon the heavens and the earth, the air and the graves, and the temple itself for testimony. It is said that before the coronation of a prince in olden time in Europe—and in some kingdoms the custom is still observed—there is sent forth a herald, sometimes three days in advance, at different periods according to the custom, to issue a challenge to any one that dares to claim the kingdom to come and prove his right, and to announce that the coronation of his prince is to take place.

Methinks it was such a challenge God gave to all the powers of humanity and to all the powers of darkness. There hung suffering on the cross he who died for human woe, and as he hung God was about to crown him King of kings and Lord of lords on the morning of the third day. He sends forth his voice of challenge, and as he speaks the earth rocks to its centre; that ground, shaking and convulsing, was a call to man to witness what was about to occur.

Not only is there a voice of earth. Yonder the sun clothed himself in sackcloth for three hours, as much as to say: "There may be gloom for three days; the great source of light hath veiled himself, as in a mantle of night, for three days. As for three hours this darkness hangs, but as out of the darkness the light shines forth, so at the end of the three days shall the Sun of Righteousness shine out again, the great centre of glory, with that glory which he had with the Father from the foundation of the world." It was the herald's voice that passed through the heavens, and that spoke through all the orbs of light, "Give attention, ye created

beings, to what is to happen!" But it was not alone in the earth, which is the great centre, nor in the heavens, which is the great source of light, that the tidings were proclaimed.

Look in yonder valley. The tombs are there; the prophets have been buried there. Yon hillside is full of the resting-places of the dead; generations on generations have been buried there; friends are walking in it, and they are saying, "Yonder is a mighty judge in Israel; there is the tomb of a prophet." They were passing to and fro through that valley of death when the earthquake's tread was heard, and behold! the tombs were opened, the graves displayed the dead within, and there was a voice that seemed to call from the very depths of the graves, "Hear, O sons of men!"

What feelings must have thrilled through the hearts of those who stood by those monuments and bended over those graves, when, thrown wide open, the doors bursting, and the rocks giving way, they saw the forms of death come forth and recognized friends that once they had known. What was to occur? What could all this mean? Then the great sacrifice was offered. It was at three o'clock in the afternoon when Christ was to give up the ghost. Yonder the multitude of pious people were gathered toward the temple. The outer court was full; the doors and gates which led into the sanctuary were crowded; the lamb was before the altar; the priest in his vestments had taken the sacrificial knife; the blood was to be shed at the hour of three; the multitude were looking.

Yonder hangs a veil; it hides that inner sanctuary; there are cherubim in yonder with their wings spread over the mercy-seat; the shekinah once dwelt there; God himself in his glory was there and the people are bending to look in. No one enters into that veil save the high priest, and he, with

blood and in the midst of incense, but once a year; but it was the mercy-seat and the eye of every pious Jew was directed toward that veil, thinking of the greater glory which lay beyond it.

As the hour of three came and as the priest was taking the sacrificial knife from the altar and was about to slay the lamb, behold! an unseen hand takes hold of that veil and tears it apart from top to bottom, and has thrown open the mercy-seat, not before seen by men. The cherubim are there; the altar with its covering of blood is there; the resting-place of the ark is there; it is the holiest of holies. Methinks the priest drops the knife, the lamb goes free, for the lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world is suffering for man. The way to the holy of holies is open,—a new and a living way, which man may not close, which priest alone cannot enter; but a way is open whereby humanity, oppressed and downtrodden, from all parts of the earth, may find its way to the mercy-seat of God. There was a call to the pious worshipper by voices which seemed to say: "An end to all the sacrifices, an end to all the suffering victims, an end to all the sprinkled hyssop that is used in purification, for one has come to do the will of God on whom the burden of man had been laid."

Now here were all these calls to humanity from all parts, as if to announce the great transaction. While all this was occurring Christ was on the cross, suffering the agony of crucifixion. How deep that agony we need not attempt to tell you; it was fearful; and yet no complaint escaped his lips, no murmuring was there. He bore the sins of many in his own flesh on the tree. He heard the multitudes revile him; he saw them wag their heads; he remembered that the disciples had fled from him—one followed afar off, but the

rest had gone; and yet he complained not. Friends and kindred had all left him and he trod the wine-press alone. He drank the cup in all its bitterness and no complaint escaped from him. One left him that had never forsaken him before. "The world is gone, the disciples I have fed and taught have all fled and passed away,—all have forsaken me."

But there was no time until that moment of fearful darkness came, when all the load of guilt was upon him and for our sins he was smitten, that his spirit was crushed, and he called out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" All else might go—it were little; "Why hast *thou* forsaken me?" But it is over; the darkness is past; the load is borne; and I hear him say, "It is finished;" he bows his head and dies.

Now there is publicity for the transaction. It demanded public investigation, it received it. There was not only the mental agony united with the agony of crucifixion, but there was the voluntary giving up of his life; yet, lest there might be some suspicion, to all this was added the proof of the fact of his death. When the limbs of the others were broken and he was perceived to be dead, the soldier thrust the spear into his side and there came out of that side both water and blood.

There is a peculiarity in the sacred writings. A little incident that seems to be mentioned without care becomes the strongest possible proof, not only of the fact of Christ's death, but of the nature of his death. When that sentence was written the human frame was not understood, the circulation of the blood was not understood. Anatomists had not then, as they have now, unveiled the human system; the great science of pathology had not yet been clearly taught to man; and yet in that sentence we have almost a world of

meaning. For it is well attested now that where persons die from violent mental emotion, by what is termed a broken heart, a crushed spirit, there is always formed a watery secretion around the heart. It was not known then to the soldier who lifted up that spear and pierced the body; but so much of that water had secreted around the heart that he saw it issuing forth from the pierced side, unstained by blood, which showed that that great heart had been crushed by agony within.

When taken from the cross he was put in the sepulchre. His friends had given him up, his disciples had forsaken him; some of them saw him die; they knew that he was crucified and they abandoned him. They were returning to their former employments; but his enemies remembered he had said he would rise the third day, and they put a guard around him. The Roman soldiers were there; the king's seal was on the stone rolled over the mouth of the sepulchre; they made everything secure. Here again God ordered that we should have abundant proof of Christ's crucifixion.

He was crucified on Friday, which was to them the last day of the week, resting in the grave on our Saturday, which is their Sabbath, and then comes the first day of the week, our Sabbath morning, made our Sabbath because of Christ's resurrection from the dead. There came an humble visitant to the tomb, Mary Magdalene; she had been healed of much, forgiven much and she loved much. Mary, the mother of James, came also and beheld the scenes that occurred; but there had been strange commotions elsewhere.

Heaven had been gathering around that grave. Angels had been watching there; they had seen the Roman guard; they had seen the shining spear and the polished shield; they

had seen that Christ was held as a prisoner by the greatest powers on earth. Methinks I see the angelic host as they gathered around the throne of God and looked up into the face of Omnipotence, and if ever there was a time when there was silence in heaven for half an hour it was before the morning light of the third day dawned. I hear them say, "How long shall man triumph? How long shall human power exalt itself? How long shall the powers of darkness hold jubilee? Let us away and roll away the stone; let us away and frighten yonder Roman guard and drive them from the sepulchre."

They waited until permission was given. I see the angel coming down from the opening doors of glory; he hastens outside the walls of Jerusalem and down to the sepulchre; when they saw him coming the keepers shook, they became like dead men; he rolls away the stone and sets himself by the mouth of the sepulchre. Christ, girding himself with all the power of his divinity, rises from the grave. He leads captivity captive, tears the crown from the head of death, and makes light the darkness of the grave. Behold him as he rises just preparatory to his rising up to glory. Oh, what a moment was that! Hell was preparing for its jubilee; the powers of earth were preparing for a triumph; but as the grave yields its prey, Christ, charged with being an impostor, is proved to be the Son of God with power; it is the power of his resurrection from the dead.

There was Christ's resurrection from the dead. He became the first fruits of them that slept. But to give the amplest proofs of his resurrection he lingered on earth to be seen of men, and to be seen in such a manner as to show that he was still the Saviour Christ. In my younger days I used often to wonder why was it that Mary Magdalene came

first to the sepulchre, and the mother of James that stood there—why he should appear to them; but in later days I have said it was to show that he was the Saviour still; that the same nature was there which had made him stoop to the lowliest of the low—the power that enabled him to heal the guiltiest of the guilty; that that power, that compassion, were with him still.

Though now raised beyond death and triumphing over hell, he still had within him the Saviour's heart. Methinks I see, when Peter had run in anxiety to tell the news, Mary remained there; she could not fully comprehend it; the grave was open, the napkins were there; it was said he was not there, but he was risen. And yet, there was a darkness upon her; she could not fully conceive, it seems to me, the resurrection of the dead. She stood wondering, when she heard a voice behind her which said, "Woman, why weepest thou?" Bathed in tears as she was, she turned round and saw the man standing, and taking him to be the gardener, and supposing that he had taken the body and carried it away as not fit to lie in that tomb or be in that garden, she said: "If thou hast taken him away, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. If he must not lie in this tomb, if he cannot lie in the garden, if as a malefactor he must be cast out from man, tell me where the body is and I will take it away." It was a proof of her affection.

A voice said, "Mary, Mary." Oh, she recognized it, and her heart cried out: "Rabboni, my Lord and my God!" and then she would have thrown herself at his feet and bathed those feet again with her tears, but he said: "Touch me not, I am not ascended to my Father; go and tell the disciples and Peter that I am risen from the dead." See the compassion of the Saviour! and then that message! "Tell the disciples

and Peter." Why send a message to him? Because he cursed and swore and denied the Master. The other disciples might have said, If Christ is risen, he may receive and bless us all; but Peter is gone, hopelessly and irretrievably gone; he that forsook his Master and denied him, there is no hope for him. And yet, said Jesus, "Go and tell the disciples and Peter"—poor backslidden Peter.

Jesus knew his sorrow and anguish and almost felt the throbbings of his broken heart, and he sent a message to Peter. He may be a disciple still—may come back and be saved through the boundless love of Christ. Oh, the compassion of the Son of God! Thank God that Peter's Saviour is on the throne this morning.

Not only was he seen by these, but he met with the disciples journeying by the way and explained the Scriptures to them; and as they met in the upper room he was there. When the doors were unopened he came in their midst and said, "Peace!" breathed on them and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." Thus he met with them, and said to Thomas, "Reach hither thy fingers, and be not faithless but believing."

Then afterward he was seen by five hundred, and from the Mount of Olives, while the disciples were gathered around him, he was received up into glory. They saw him and as he went he blessed them. The last vision that ever humanity had of the Son of God ere he ascended to heaven was that of spreading out his hands in blessing. Oh, my Saviour hath thus gone up, and he dropped from those outstretched hands a blessing which falls to-day like the gentle dew all over the earth; it reaches heart after heart. It hath reached patriarchs, apostles, martyrs, fathers, and mothers and little children, and, thank God, the heavenly dew, as from those outstretched hands, is coming down on our assembly this

very morning. On this glad day blessings are dropping from the throne of God upon us from this risen Saviour. He hath ascended up on high, the gates have opened for him, and he hath gone to his throne in glory.

Let us look at a few of the results that flow to us from these facts thus sustained of his death and resurrection from the dead!

In the first place it establishes all Bible declarations. It had been predicted that he should not stay in the grave, and when he arose it put the seal to the Old Testament as the Word of God. The prophecy in him fulfilled gave glorious proof that the other parts of it should be also fulfilled as the word of an unchanging God.

Again in his resurrection we see a proof of his divine power. No man hath been raised from the dead by his own power. All died, from Adam to Moses, with the exception of Enoch and Elijah, who, because of their devotion and acknowledgment of the divine head, themselves became prophets of a coming Saviour. He rose by his own power. He conquered death itself, the grave, and the whole powers of humanity.

Jupiter is represented by an old classic writer as saying to the lesser gods that if all of them combined together and should endeavor to throw down his throne—if all power was arrayed against him—he, by his own might, would be able to overcome them all. What was fiction with the ancients becomes gloriously realized in Christ. Take all the powers of humanity—the Jewish power, the Roman power; the power of learning, of art, of public opinion; take all the powers of earth and hell, death and the grave, and combine them all against the Saviour and, without one effort, without one single apparent movement—the sleeper lies in death, his eyes are

sealed, and, as if all unconscious, for the warning had not been given before—in an instant those eyes were opened, that frame rises, the grave yields up its prey, death retires conquered, and Christ demonstrates himself to be the ruler of the whole universe. He made the earth to tremble, the sun to put on sackcloth, the very air to grow dark, the graves to open, the dead to come forth, and proclaimed himself to be the conqueror of death and hell. So we have proof of his being the Son of God with power.

In that resurrection from the dead we have a pledge of our own resurrection. Christ has become the first-fruits of them that slept. You know the figure of the first-fruits as understood by the Jews. Their religion was connected with the seasons of the year—with the harvest crops; one of their feasts was called the feast of the first-fruits, and was on this wise: When the first heads of grain began to ripen in the field and there was thus a pledge of harvest, they cut off those first ripened heads and went up to Jerusalem.

Before that the grain was not crushed, no bread was baked out of it, and nothing was done to appropriate that crop to man's use until first those ripened heads of grain were brought up to Jerusalem and presented to the Lord as a thank-offering. He was acknowledged as Lord of the harvest and they were laid up as a kind of thank-offering before God. They were the first-fruits. Then they went away to the fields and all through Judea the sickle was thrust in, the grain was reaped and gathered into sheaves, and when the harvest was secured they baked the bread for their children out of this first grain. They came up to the temple, where the first-fruits had been laid, and they held a feast of thanksgiving and shouted harvest home. The old harvest feast seems to be descended from this ancient custom.

Christ rose as the first-fruits, and there is to be a glorious resurrection. Christ came, the first man to rise in this respect, by his own power, from the grave, having snatched the crown from death, having thrown light into the grave, having himself ascended up toward glory. He goes up in the midst of the shouts of angels; the heavens open before him; yonder is the altar; there is the throne and around it stand the seraphim and the cherubim; and Christ enters the victor and sits down upon the throne, from henceforth expecting until his enemies be made his footstool. He is the first-fruits of the harvest, but the angels are to be sent out like the reapers, and by and by humanity is coming.

As Christ, the first-fruits, passed through the grave and went up to glory, so there shall come from their sleeping dust in Asia, in Africa, in Europe, and in America, from every mountain top, from the depths of the sea, from deep ravines, and from plains outspread—oh, there shall come in the time of the glorious harvest—the uprising of humanity, when all the nations, waking from their long sleep, shall rise and shall shout the harvest home! Thank God! at that time none shall be wanting.

Oh, they come, they come, from the nations of the past and from the generations yet unborn! I see the crowd gathering there. Behold the angels are waiting, and as the hosts rise from the dead they gather round the throne. Christ invites his followers to overcome and sit down with him on his throne, as he overcame and sat down with the Father on his throne. In that is the pledge of our resurrection from the dead. Can I not suffer, since Christ suffered? Can I not die, since Christ died? Let the grave be my resting-place, for Christ rested there. Is it cold? The warmth of his animation is in it. Is it lonely? He shall be beside me in all his