



PEACE RIVER NEW CHURCH CURRENT

NEWSLETTER OF THE DAWSON CREEK CHURCH OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

APRIL 2014



CAN WE BELIEVE IN THE LORD'S RESURRECTION?

By Rev. Coleman Glenn

Jesus said, "Blessed are they who have not seen, and have believed." (John 20:29)

In the evening on Easter Sunday, the Lord appeared to most of His eleven remaining disciples. But one disciple, Thomas, was absent; and when the others told Thomas that they had seen the Lord, he declared that he would not believe unless he was able to touch the holes in the Lord's hands and side where He had been pierced. Eight days later, the Lord appeared to Thomas and gave him such an opportunity; and Thomas fell down and declared, "My Lord and my God." Jesus replied with the words quoted above: "Because you have seen Me, Thomas, you have believed; blessed are they who have not seen, and have believed." (John 20:29)

Today, almost 2,000 years from that event, we are the ones who are asked to believe without seeing, at least not with our physical eyes. Can we do that? There are some things that may seem fairly easy to believe: for example, that we ought to treat one another with respect, and even that there is an unseen force guiding the uni-

verse. But can we believe the specific and the miraculous: that the Lord Jesus Christ is God, and that He literally rose from the grave? The belief that the risen Lord is the living God is a vital one; Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have believed," and stated even more strongly, "unless you believe that I am, you shall die in your sins" (John 8:24) – a teaching affirmed in the Doctrine of the New Church (e.g. in *Arcana Coelestia* 10083). If we want to have eternal life, we have to believe in the Lord. But what if we find ourselves besieged by doubts? How can we do anything about that? Can we *force* ourselves to believe? It can seem to be a hopeless situation, but the Lord gives us hope that we *can* believe. In Scripture and in the Doctrine of the New Church, He shows us how.

The Affirmative Principle

The first thing to know, if we want to have faith, is that our starting assumptions matter. If we start with the position that we will not believe anything unless it can be *proven* to us by physical evidence, we will never believe. *Arcana Coelestia* calls this "the negative principle." If we want to believe, we need to begin with the *affirmative* principle: that even if we do not understand something yet, it is true because the Lord says so in His Word. Here's the description of these two principles from *Arcana Coelestia* 2568:

There are two principles; one of which leads to all folly and insanity, and the other to all intelligence and wisdom. The former principle is to deny all things, or to say in the heart that we cannot believe them until we are convinced by what we can apprehend, or perceive by the senses; this is the principle that leads to all folly and insanity, and is to be called the negative principle. The other principle is to affirm the things which are of doctrine from the Word, or to think and believe within ourselves that they are true because the Lord has said them: this is the principle that leads to all intelligence and wisdom, and is to be called the affirmative principle."

There are illustrations throughout the Lord's Word that demonstrate the wisdom of that affirmative principle. The sixth chapter of the Gospel of John tells us that many of Jesus's followers left Jesus after He said, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." They called this a "hard saying," and because it made no sense to them, they walked away. But the twelve disciples remained, and when Jesus asked them why, Simon Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." (John 6:68) Rather than rejecting the Lord because of sayings that they found difficult to understand, they continued to follow Him, knowing that His words brought eternal life, no matter how difficult they might be to comprehend. And later, they *did* learn something more of what it meant to eat the Lord's flesh and drink His blood – in the bread and wine of the Holy Supper, and in what those represented. Understanding came later – and they would never have come to that understanding if they did not first subscribe to that affirmative principle.

Obedience to the Word

Even when we have the affirmative principle, though, we will naturally have doubts. And the passage quoted above, *Arcana Coelestia* 2568, goes on to describe people who have doubts before they accept that affirmative principle:

There are some who are in doubt before they deny, and there are some who are in doubt before they affirm. Those who are in doubt before they deny are those who incline to a life of evil; and when this life carries them away, then to the extent that they think of the matters in question, they deny them. But those who are in doubt before they affirm are those who incline to a life of good; and when they allow themselves to be bent to this by the Lord, then to the extent that they think about those things, so far they affirm.

What this tells us is that although we might think of our doubts as a purely intellectual thing, the reality is they have much more to do with *the way we live* than we realize. We might say to ourselves, "How can I believe that Jesus Christ really rose from the dead? How can I believe that He is God, and that He has an influence on the world today?" And our first instinct might be to think that the way to deal with those doubts is simply to collect enough evidence, weigh it rationally, and come to a conclusion based on pure logic – an intellectual exercise.

The problem, though, is that people don't actually work that way. Our desires and emotions have *far* more

impact on our ability to assess data than we tend to think, and that's as true for a committed atheist as it is for a committed Christian. We might not see the connection, but whether or not we *want* the Lord to be God will have a huge impact on whether we'll accept or deny the evidence that He *is*.

What that means is that if we're experiencing doubt, the way out of that doubt is not simply going to be trying to find more evidence. The way out is to *start living as if what the Lord says is true*. That means submitting our lives completely to Him and striving to obey His commandments. And once we have done this, once we start to notice the changes in our lives that this brings about, *then* we start to see the actual truth behind what we've been learning. We'll still have some doubt, but we'll also start to see the truth more clearly.

That seems backwards, but this really is the way it works. People over the years have noticed that when the Lord gave His commandments to the children of Israel, their response was not, "All the Jehovah has spoken, we will hear and do," but, "All that Jehovah has spoken, we will *do* and *hear*" (Exodus 19:8). The *doing* comes first, and only *after* that, *because* they have obeyed, are the people truly able to hear and comprehend.

We see something similar throughout the Gospel of John; a major theme of that gospel is that only those who are in obedience to God will be able to recognize Jesus as Lord. So, for example, John 3:20-21 says, "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." It is *doing* the truth that allows us to come to the light.

And so, in addition to adopting the affirmative principle ("I will believe what the Word says because it is from God"), if we want to believe, we need to act in obedience to the Lord. This is summed up in the short book *Doctrine of Faith*:

If any one should think within himself, or say to someone else, "Who is able to have the internal acknowledgment of truth which is faith? not I"; let me tell him how he may have it: Shun evils as sins, and come to the Lord, and you will have as much of it as you desire (Faith 12).

Coming to the Lord Jesus Christ

That passage quoted above from the *Doctrine of Faith* speaks of the need to shun evils as sins if we want to come into a real sight of the truth. Our love of evil clouds our ability to see the truth. But the passage also speaks of one other vital thing: the need to "come to the

Lord.” This is the other main thing that we need if we want to have a sight of truth: we need to directly approach the Lord Jesus Christ as God, in thought and in prayer.

We might not see immediately why this is the case; and as with many of the things we’ve been talking about, we can only completely understand it once we’ve actually done it. But the general reason is this: the Lord Jesus Christ is God in human form, and when we think of Him, talk to Him, pray to Him, follow Him, and obey Him, we are drawn into a conjunction with Him in a way that is impossible if we have a vague or distant idea of God as an impersonal force. In Jesus, we see the true, human face of God.

The book *True Christian Religion* describes the vital importance of approaching the Lord specifically:

A person can only acquire by his own efforts natural faith, which is a firm belief that a thing is so because an authoritative person so declared it. He can also acquire only natural charity, which is working in someone's favour for the sake of some reward. These two contain man's self, and there is no life as yet from the Lord. Still a person by either of these prepares himself to receive the Lord. In so far as he prepares himself, so far does the Lord come in and make his natural faith spiritual, and likewise his charity, and so make both living. *These results follow when a person approaches the Lord as the God of heaven and earth.* (*True Christian Religion* 359, emphasis added)

The Gospel of Mark records a poignant example of the way this can look for a person. A man brought his son to the Lord and told the Lord that the disciples had been unable to cast out the spirit that caused the son to foam at the mouth and become rigid. The father said to the Lord, “If You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” The Lord replied, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” And “immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, ‘Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!’” (Mark 9:24). That can be our cry, our prayer: “Lord, part of me believes, but part of me doesn’t – help me to completely have faith in You!” If we make that prayer to the Lord, while seeking to obey Him, He *will* answer our prayer and give us faith. It may not be immediate, but the Lord hears and answers those prayers directed to Him.

Factual Evidence as Confirmation

As we’ve seen, there are several things necessary for us to do if we want to have faith: adopt the affirmative principle, seek to obey the Word, and approach the

Lord alone in thought and in prayer. It is only *then* that we turn to the final part of coming to belief: looking at the facts and the evidence. Here is the conclusion to *Arcana Coelestia* 2568, which we quoted a few times above:

The more those who think from the negative principle consult rational things, knowledges, and philosophical things, the more do they cast and precipitate themselves into darkness, until at last they deny all things. On the other hand, those who think from an affirmative principle can confirm themselves by whatever rational things, by whatever knowledges, and whatever philosophical things they have at command; for all these are to them confirmatory, and give them a fuller idea of the matter.

What does this mean? It means then when we look for evidence from a place of skepticism, from a belief that only physical things as real, we will find a way to use that evidence to come up with physical explanations for things. But if we have that affirmative principle, we can see how that same evidence actually points to the truth of what the Lord says in His Word.

So to return to the specific case of the Lord’s resurrection: we will never find physical proof that satisfies someone with a negative frame of mind. There will always be a natural way to explain it away. But looking from an affirmative perspective, we can see that there is a whole host of evidence *confirming* that the Lord really did rise from the dead. (By the way, although some internet commenters argue that Jesus was purely mythological, the vast majority of professional Biblical scholars, even the atheist ones, assert that Jesus actually existed, so I’m assuming that to be true in presenting the further evidence for His resurrection.) There are hundreds of eyewitness accounts at the time of people independently seeing the risen Lord. There is the empty tomb. There is the assertion from Christians throughout the centuries that they have had a meaningful relationship with Him, and that they have experience His Spirit in them. All of those things can be explained away, but they can also confirm the truth *once we have experienced it ourselves in the reality of coming to know the Lord in our hearts and our minds.* And we come to know Him by speaking to Him, by listening to Him, by obeying Him, by acting *from* Him to love others, and by loving Him. Once we have done this we turn to the worldly evidence, which only serves to confirm and expand what we already know to be true.

(Image on page one is “*He Is Risen*” by Greg Olsen)

GARAGE SALE

Bev Bourbeau and Kathy Beattie have volunteered to organize the Ladies' Group garage sale again this year. We plan to hold the sale on Saturday, April 26th, but if the weather looks bad that day, we will postpone it till the following Saturday, May 3rd. Please bring items for donation downstairs at the church and leave them on the stage for sorting if you're able to. Thank you in advance!

NEW CHURCH DAY PLANNING MEETING

Danelle Kilber has offered to organize nineteenth of June activities for this year. She would like to have a meeting soon, though, to help plan and to make sure that we meet the needs of all the children involved, particularly the older children. **If you'd be willing to come to a meeting – especially if you're a parent or grandparent of an older child – please contact Danelle or Rev. Coleman Glenn.** Thank you!

LOT SALE IN KITCHENER, ONTARIO

This may not be relevant for most readers of this newsletter, but if you are planning to move to Kitchener, Ontario, or have friends or relatives who live there, the Carmel New Church is offering lots near their church for sale. Here's their notice:

Looking to build a new home in a great Church community?

The Carmel New Church is now selling lots in the new phase of development in Caryndale. Caryndale is a well established New Church community, with the Church and Church School at the heart of the Community.

Located on the Southern side of Kitchener/Waterloo, Ontario - Caryndale offers a peaceful setting, which is convenient to Kitchener and Waterloo's abundant community and cultural offerings - as well as easy access to major transit routes towards Toronto and Detroit.

Now is your chance to take advantage of this unique opportunity to build your dream home - in a natural setting on large lots - within a vibrant New Church community, with the Church and School both a short walk away.

For further information or pricing details please contact Chalon Estates at info@chalonestates.ca or check out our website at www.chalonestates.ca

VOLUNTEER POSITIONS

We are stilling looking for volunteers to serve in two important positions beginning in June. The first position is a **volunteers coordinator**. I don't foresee this position requiring a whole lot of work – we just need someone to make sure that each month, someone is covering each of the church uses listed on the “church uses” sheet - e.g. church cleaning, mowing, etc. We have lots of willing volunteers in this congregation, but if no one's making sure all the jobs are filled, then some things fall through the cracks.

The other job is a little bit bigger, although still wouldn't need to be a huge commitment: we need a **newsletter editor**. That person wouldn't be required to write articles themselves; in fact, the “newsletter” could be trimmed down to nothing more than just a monthly calendar. But we do at least need someone to have that calendar / newsletter printed and sent out via email and post.

If you'd be willing to fill either of those positions, please get in touch with Rev. Coleman Glenn. Thank you!

THE DAWSON CREEK CHURCH OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

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Worship: Sundays at 11 a.m.

For information on services in Grande Prairie & Debolt, please contact Mrs. Lavina Scott at (780) 957-3625.

If you have news or other information for this publication, or if you have any pastoral concerns, please call the pastor, Coleman Glenn, at (250) 782-0710 or (cell) (250) 467-2313, or e-mail pastor@dawsoncreeknewchurch.ca.

CHURCH CALENDAR

APRIL 2014

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
		1	2	3	4	5
6 11 a.m. Family Service	7	8	9	10	11	12
13 PALM SUNDAY 11 a.m. Traditional Service w/ Palm Procession 4:30 p.m. Family Easter Service w/ Holy Supper (DeBolt)	14	15	16	17 7:30 p.m. Holy Supper Service	18 GOOD FRIDAY	19
20 EASTER 11 a.m. Family Easter Service (w/ flower offering)	21 EASTER MONDAY	22	23	24	25	26 Ladies' Group Garage Sale
27 11 a.m. Traditional Service 4:30 p.m. Worship and Class (Grande Prairie)	28	29	30			

Note: All events take place at the Dawson Creek Church of the New Jerusalem unless noted otherwise.