

THE LORD'S MISSION TO TEACH ABOUT ETERNAL LIFE

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The Lord came into the world to teach people about heaven. He came at a time when people no longer knew about God. They understood nothing of what had been written in the Word. They had no knowledge of heaven, or of any life after death. They supposed that when a person died he either ceased entirely to exist or that he would remain asleep until some far distant time when the Lord would bring him to life again in this world. Of another world, a spiritual world, into which a person comes immediately after the death of the body, they had no idea.

Yet the Lord created people for this spiritual world. Eternal happiness in heaven cannot be attained without preparation on earth. For this reason the Lord formed the natural world and gave people material bodies so that they might live here for a time, and build in that body a dwelling place for the soul that may endure forever. The kind of dwelling place that we build here on earth determines the kind of life and the degree of happiness we can know in the other world. And for this reason it is of the utmost importance that people should know about the other world, and that they should live for the sake of the other world, for the sake of a place in the kingdom of heaven, where alone the Lord can bless them with everlasting happiness and use.

So, it was to teach people about heaven, and how they must live to come into heaven after death, that the Lord came on earth. People could not see into the other world, so the Lord had to appear to them in a natural body, like that of another man. And yet, He had to perform miracles that no ordinary man could possibly do, so that they might realize that He was more than a man. He had to tell them about heaven by means of parables—stories about the things of this world in which, however, they might see a deeper meaning.

After He had gathered disciples about Him and taught them as much as possible in this way, He had to lay aside that body by which He had come on earth and ascend again to His throne above the heavens. As He had been born like another man, so, in appearance, He had to die like another man. And then it was necessary that His disciples should see that He was still living, that death was not the end—that He was still the same Lord whom they had come to know and love on earth. By this alone they could come to understand that there is another world, where the Lord reigns as King and God over all—another world into which all people come after the death of the body, and continue to live.

Nothing the Lord could say would make them realize this truth. They had to see it for themselves. They had to learn it from what He did, as well as from what He said. Otherwise they would not understand. And this is the reason why the Lord permitted Himself to be put to death on the cross—permitted His disciples to see Him die, apparently as all men die—permitted them to see His body laid in the tomb, as is done with all who pass away at death. And then it was necessary that He should show Himself to them, alive and well, that they might speak to Him and hear His voice, and feel Him, and know that it was indeed the Lord Himself, the same one whom they had thought was dead. Then they could begin to understand all that He had told them about the other world.

It was very hard for them to believe these things. They were so different from anything they had imagined before. And for this reason the Lord had to appear to them, not once but many times, and not only to one or two people, but to all the disciples. The Word tells us of nine different occasions on which the Lord showed Himself to His followers after His resurrection. He was seen five times on that first Easter Day, and four times later, over a period of several weeks, so that slowly every doubt might be dissipated and they might be fully assured that this wonderful thing had indeed come to pass. These appearances are described in Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, and John 20 and 21.

The Lord's final appearance to His disciples was on the Mount of Olives, at the village of Bethany. There, after He had spoken to them, they all saw the Lord ascend up into heaven. After this He was seen on earth no more, but now the disciples knew that He was indeed alive. They realized that He had come to teach them about the other world, and they went forth to teach in His name and so began the Christian Church.

We are told all of this in the Word so that we also might know that the Lord is risen, and that He came on earth to tell us about heaven. Then we can begin to understand the things He taught and realize what He wishes us to do so that we may be prepared to enter into His Kingdom when we pass out of this world—to dwell among the angels and to fulfill an eternal use there, by which He may give us the blessing of heavenly happiness and peace.