

Sermon for the Great Vigil of Easter

'For this purpose I was born, and for this purpose I have come into the world.'

+INJ+

The Son struggles in the darkness of hell, its bonds to overcome.

As a lamb, He took on the sin of humanity onto Himself, that He might be sacrificed for the sake of the lost; that the *least of these, the one of the ninety nine*, the prostitute, the tax collector, the plebian, the fearful, the ignorant, the despairing; that they might be found, and made whole, *for it is not the well that need a doctor, but the sick.*

Ascending the cross to do battle with the Prince of this World, the ancient Serpent, He became for us the Lion of Judah, the champion of the broken, of the deceived. Though in His nakedness and torture He seemed before our eyes to be weak, yet the hour of His glory had come; His victory was His own. And now, dear Christians, that victory is ours, for the head of the Serpent is crushed beneath the heel of Him of whom it was written *'all the world shall be your footstool.'*

But in this great struggle, in this mighty contest, the Lion, the Lord Himself, lies dead upon the cross. Now He has given up His last breath; now He has given up the Spirit, *and he descended into hell.*

He descends simply as the Son of Man; He descends as a child of Eve; for hell was not made for sacrificial lambs or conquering lions, but for those who bear sin and death; for *the devil and all his angels, for man, and the son of man.*

So as a son of man He descends.

And this is only right, for it is written in the prophet, *'the lion shall lay down with the lamb, and a little child shall lead them.'*

So the least of the children of men descends, a millstone about His neck; and yet not for any reason. He goes *of his own accord*, for *He must preach to the spirits kept in darkness*.

He must preach the Gospel to those hidden throughout the former times. He must speak of His victory. He must show them the keys of Hell which He now bears. He must proclaim to them freedom, and the end of days. He must release them from the shadows. He must lead them, as a little child, from the condemnations of hell. He must destroy the gates of Hades, for *none shall stand against him*.

He must claim the crown of empire. He must make complete the will of the Father. He must make His imperium complete, *that every knee shall bow, in the heavens, and on the earth, and beneath the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord*.

In ancient times, the Lord cursed the land of Egypt with ten plagues, and decimated their high places, in order that, as it is written, *they might know that I am the LORD*. Yet it is also written that God plundered their lands so that *the gods of the Egyptians might know that I alone am the LORD*.

Now He destroys every so-called god and idol, and proclaims their defeat in the depths of the abyss to those who had sinned in the days of Noah, that even they might know that *He is the Lord*.

The night of nights is over, and a new morning is coming upon us. A child rises from the pit. Not a child according to years, for He is also the Ancient of Days, but a child according to salvation, for He is the *firstborn among the dead*. *Firstborn*, for many shall be born following Him, of water, and the Word, for death has no grip on Him, for He has slain hell; and neither the world, for it is written, *'I have overcome the world'*; nor sin, for all sin was put to death upon the tree of the cross, shall keep him.

The child that rises is the first born among the innocent, rising that innocent we may be, having annihilated all sin in His own flesh. The child, the Son rises, and leads all the church in His train; and for the first time since the making of Adam, creation shall look upon a son of Eve, and speak with the gentile:

'I find no guilt in this man.'

+INJ+

Preached by Pastor Fields