

The Reality of Resurrection

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From Death into Life

Why does the doctrine of the resurrection give so much hope to the Christian?

To answer this question I want to discuss both the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and the resurrection of Christians. This was one of the significant phases in the life of Christ. We recognize that the life of the Lord Jesus Christ as set forth in the Scriptures has several distinct aspects: He was born of a virgin; while He was in His active ministry He worked miracles that astonished the onlookers; He died on Calvary's cross for the sins of the whole world, especially for those who believe in Him; He rose from the dead, leaving an empty grave; He was seen by His disciples after the resurrection off and on for forty days; He ascended into heaven in full view of them; He is there in the presence of God, interceding on our behalf; and this same Jesus shall so return in like manner as He went.

This is what we have in mind when we talk about Jesus Christ. The very central part of this, is the resurrection and that resurrection from the dead is real. There is another life possible after this life - not this life over again, not a second living like we did the first time, but life of a different dimension.

Perhaps this is the most incredible idea that can come to a person. How well we can understand Job's question, "If a man dies, will he live again?" And yet that is what the gospel of Jesus Christ says. The people of His day and time could not understand it either. Early in His ministry the Lord Jesus said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). Then we read, "Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?" (John 2:20). John then explains, writing as he did after the fact of Jesus' bodily resurrection, "But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said" (John 2:21-22). So, right at the beginning of His ministry He told them that He would be raised from the dead.

Later, but still early in His ministry, He spoke of the resurrection of all mankind, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:25-29). He was preparing the people for the idea that there would be a resurrection of the dead.

God not only, for the sake of Jesus Christ, forgives the sins of those who believe in Him, but God will also, through the Lord Jesus Christ, raise the dead, not only eventually in the world to come but now, in this world, it is possible to live in the newness of life.

As we look at the resurrection of Jesus Christ we will see that *in* Him the believer is raised, *by* Him the believer is raised, and *through* Him the believer is raised into the newness of life. Christ Jesus did not remove death, He overcame death; He triumphed over it. Death is still here and it is real, but it has lost its sting. You remember how Paul expressed it: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?" These are the familiar words in I Thessalonians 4:13-18. Hear them again, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus

will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive, and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Through all the ages and all over the world, Christians have had this truth in mind, and in all languages where the gospel is preached and understood they have repeated the wonderful promise the Lord Jesus gave to His disciples when He said to them in John 14:1-3, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." It is to be feared that some of us repeat these words as if they were poetry. They are beautiful - just as beautiful as any poetry we will ever read - but they are also real. At Eastertime we are all reminded that Christ arose and we all realize that was wonderful and amazing; but at all seasons of the year we need to remember that believers, too, will be raised.

Please note that in the resurrection it is the whole man who will be raised. Paul said, in writing to the Thessalonians, "I pray God your whole spirit, soul and body be preserved" (5:23). While it is significantly true that our bodies shall be raised, it is also true that our spirits and souls will be raised into the newness of life. This was the great ambition of Paul, that he might know the power of Christ's resurrection. It is important that we grasp the idea that the will of God leads the believer to be crucified with Christ that he might also be raised with Him. Thus we find in John 12:24 these familiar words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." The Lord spoke these words just after He had said, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified." And He tells about falling into the ground and dying that He might bear fruit. "He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:25). Apparently what He is saying here is that this life is real and death following this life is real, but there is another, a better life after death. Something of this truth can be seen even in the natural world. A grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies and out of it comes the plant, the stalk of wheat that grows and bears seed. Think of it in the case of any seed that is planted in the ground: a bean plant will grow from the bean seed. The plant does not look like the seed that was put into the ground, but it does come from the seed. You remember what happens to caterpillars: they become cocoons, then they emerge as butterflies. All of this is used in the Scripture to indicate to us that something else is coming - a new life is possible in Christ Jesus after the believer dies to this world.

Yes, we do move from death into life.

The Comfort of the Resurrection

Can you see how God's faithfulness to His promises can be a comfort to the believer?

The Bible deals with the issues of life and death and actually discusses conditions which involve living and dying. There is nothing more fundamental, more elemental, than what the Bible discusses about man. In the Bible we read that God created the world and made man in His own image. As we read the Bible and look around about us we get the impression very clearly that God keeps, sustains, and maintains the world by His own power. If we think of the world as being an expression of energy, it is Almighty God

who controls the power that is in this world. We also learn from the Bible that God judges the world; He is a righteous Being and He judges the world in His own righteousness. Then we realize the very sobering fact that God will destroy the world that He has made.

Jeremiah learned a great lesson when he went down to the house of the potter and watched him at his wheel making vessels out of the potter's clay: when the potter had formed a vessel that did not please him, he crushed it and put the clay back and made another vessel out of it. This experience of Jeremiah made him understand more clearly God's sovereign control in this world. God will destroy the world that He made. But then we see a marvelous truth - God saves the world by His own grace. This world that was doomed to destruction will, by His grace, be reconstructed. It is clear to us, then, that God rules the world in His own sovereignty.

As we study the Bible it becomes clear to us that God is over all. Now, the Bible account shows that the creation, that which God made, does not always obey Him. Then we see this sobering truth: those who disobey, the sinful ones, shall be destroyed. But there is the gospel, the Good News: Man can be saved! "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him [shall] not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). It is true that if a man believes not he is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. But it is also marvelously true that whosoever believeth in Him shall never perish but have everlasting life.

The practical problem that is faced is this: if destruction is universal and all men are condemned to death because they are sinners, how can I be delivered? This is what is it pictured for us in the Bible. There are various ways in which it is set forth, some more clearly than others. The account in Genesis, for instance, presents how man multiplied: there were Adam's children and they had children, and generation after generation multiplied until the earth was filled with them. But sin was rampant and sin grew worse until God, in judgment, sent the Flood. Although God had made man in His own image and put him in this world, He also sent the Flood as a judgment upon the earth to destroy all mankind. But there were those who were saved. God knew how to deliver the godly out of this judgment, this condemnation, and Noah and his family became the progenitors of the world as we have it now.

So we have Adam's descendants being destroyed by the Flood and yet out of the Flood, saved in the ark, came Noah, the father of the new generation.

Therefore, salvation has three phases. It begins with a person being physically alive but in sin and incurring the judgment of God; this living person has the sentence of physical death within himself and when his earthly life ends, death will take over and his earthly body will be destroyed; but out of Physical death will come deliverance into living in Christ. This is sometimes indicated, as we shall see when we study it again, in nature and in all of nature leading up to death. Out from death comes the spirit. When we think of nature we have to add death, then we add the spirit.

Think of those three names - nature, death, and spirit - across a page in front of you. On the left-hand side of the page is the word "nature" - natural, human. In the center of the page put "death" - destruction. On the right side put "spirit" - the children of God - the Spirit of God - eternal life. All of this is brought to our minds in various ways, but clearly in Romans 5:12-21 and 6:1-19.

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (for until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offense, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one [that one would be Adam], many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto

many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as by the offence of one [that would be Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [that would be Jesus Christ] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. [There is brought to mind the contrast of what happened in Adam and what happened in Christ Jesus.] Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul goes on to say:

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh. . . .

The rest of chapter 6 and chapter 7 find Paul's thoughts going back and forth over just one thing: that your old man - the human nature - was doomed to death, but the new man - the spiritual nature that is in Christ Jesus - is actually raised to everlasting life, "planted together in the likeness of His death" - that we might be raised with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. This is what we have in mind when we think of the simple truth as set forth in the Bible. There was the first creation which ends in death and there is the new creation that goes on to eternal life. For this we thank Almighty God.

Resurrection to the New Life of the Spirit

Are you aware that you cannot get into anything better unless you are willing to get out of where you are?

"Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and

all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25-27). These words were spoken by the Lord Jesus to the two disciples walking home from Jerusalem to Emmaus on the day that His body was reported gone from the tomb. Early in the morning the disciples had gone to the tomb and found it empty. All day long there undoubtedly had been excitement. Who knows how many different persons had tried to understand or explain what had happened, and now as the evening hour draws near these two disciples are on their way home, walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus, when this stranger comes along and walks with them. When asked why they are so downhearted they tell Him it is because of the things about Jesus Christ. Then He spoke these words; He reminded them what was taught in the Scriptures; what was promised. They may well have walked for an hour or more on their journey while He expounded on the Scriptures.

Now, He had just been raised from the dead and He was present there in person. What do you suppose He talked about? Do you think He talked about His resurrection? We are told He talked about the things concerning Himself. What things? Things that were written in the Old Testament. Not the fact that His body had been raised from the dead and brought back to life again. He was right there in person, but that was not the thing He was talking about. I am going to suggest to you that He was talking to them about the significance of His resurrection - that there is life after death, and what that means. During the time He was talking to them they did not recognize Him; apparently that was not necessary. They were not looking at the person so much; they were looking at the Scripture. Afterwards they said, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way and opened the Scriptures to us?"

Later He met the disciples in the upper room and the first thing He did was to convince them that He was literally and physically alive. We don't know how long that took; it would not be very long. He asked them to touch Him and when they yet believed not for joy He asked them, "Have you any food?" And they brought Him a piece of broiled fish and honeycomb and He took it and ate before them. "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:44-45).

I suspect He talked to them for several hours about what was in the Bible. Many times since I first read this I have gone back to the writing of Moses in the Old Testament, trying to understand what He talked about. It certainly was not that He was alive - He had shown them He was alive. He showed them that in a few minutes without talking about the Scriptures at all; He asked them to put their hands on Him and handle Him "and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." And He asked them for food and He ate. That was a public, actual, literal, physical demonstration.

Now, what portion or portions of Scripture did He expound to them? How did He open their understanding? Do you suppose that now with the resurrection a reality He could complete His message about eternal life that He had been talking about to them? We are going to look at one aspect of the Old Testament and it will be helpful if we take it as a parable. The children of Israel developed in the course of four hundred years in the land of Egypt. They came there a large family of about seventy persons and now there were hundreds of thousands of them - a large company of people who were counted as foreigners, aliens, and treated as slaves. This is Israel in Egypt. Notice that that same group of people was brought out of Egypt across the desert into the Promised Land, thereby demonstrating a great representation, a great revelation of the will of God. Something like that is to happen in the spiritual world. So the question is: What can we understand about Israel in Egypt? Let me point out these things to you: Egypt was not their home - Canaan was their home. Egypt was not the promised land. There

was no promise that in Egypt the Hebrews would be blessed. Never were they promised that in Egypt each man would be sitting under his own fig tree, that each man would be free to worship and to serve God and have his own possessions. In Egypt they owned nothing and they did what others told them to do; there was no chance in Egypt for each Hebrew to have his own dealing with God. There was no peace for the people, no rest or quietness among the people, and no power. They were slaves. There was no joy in Egypt; Israel was in distress. All of this is a type of the soul in the natural world. The believer is in distress in this world; the Christian will have tribulation. This is not his home; here in this world he has no promise. This is very important.

What can we understand about Israel in the land of Canaan? That was their home, their promised land that was to be given to them of God. In Canaan the Hebrew people would be blessed; there each man would sit under his own fig tree and each would be free to serve his God - to come to Him personally. All of the great words of triumph are in Canaan - peace, rest, quietness, power, victory, and joy. All of this is a type of the soul in the spiritual world. The believer who belongs to God is blessed in the Lord. In the Lord he is at home for he has the promises of God. This, again, is very important and our preaching and teaching should emphasize that in Christ Jesus the believer is blessed.

In that other world of the spirit the Christian is at home and he freely does the will of God and he has the blessing of God. The believer does pass from living in the natural to living in the spiritual - a process through which the Lord brings the believer. There is a further truth: the believer is led through this process and must respond in obedience; the soul hears the call of God and responds by turning to God.

The truth of the matter is that the soul must let go of the things of this world, give in so far as God is concerned, and turn from idols to worship the living and the true God. The soul will then receive God's promises.

This is implied in the resurrection from the dead.