

The Resurrection of the Dead

When we come together to consider the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, we show his death in breaking bread and drinking wine “until he come”. At this time therefore, we also consider the coming of Messiah, and the things that will pertain to that epoch of human history. We memorialize not only the death of our Redeemer, but his resurrection also, as it is written:

“[he] was delivered for our offences, and *was raised again* for our justification” (Rom. 4:25)

And again:

“if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more being reconciled, we shall be saved *by his life*” (Rom. 5:10).

1 Corinthians chapter 15 is a chapter devoted to things concerning resurrection, and it again speaks of the importance of Messiah’s being lifted up in glory:

“If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Cor. 15:17-18).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ then, is fundamental, and part of the foundation of our faith. Our Master has gone before as a forerunner to prepare the way, and we shall surely follow, and partake of the victory against Sin that he has accomplished. As we read again in 1 Corinthians chapter 15:

“... in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterwards they that are Christ’s at his coming” (1 Cor. 15:22-23).

When we consider the resurrection of our Master therefore, we consider the very basis of our own salvation – a resurrection at the time of his coming. This was the hope of the Apostle Paul, who desired that he “may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; if by any means I might *attain unto the resurrection of the dead*” (Phil. 3:10-11). The context of this chapter of Philippians is most instructive. Here, the Apostle demonstrates how that after the flesh, he could enjoy the praise and glory of men. Yet he forsook all for Christ’s sake, that he might “attain unto the resurrection of the dead”. He counted the things enumerated in that chapter “as dung, that I may win Christ” (Phil. 3:8). Even so, we must “lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and ... run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). Those things that can hinder our journey towards the coming kingdom must be jettisoned, as being mere dung – even if they appear respectable and desirous by fellow man.

A BETTER RESURRECTION

Hebrews chapter 11 catalogues men and women of vision:

“who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and other were tortured, not accepting deliverance; ***that they might obtain a better resurrection ...***” (Heb. 11:33-35).

Here was the guiding vision that enabled them to endure and overcome such afflictions: “that they might obtain a better resurrection”. But what is a “better” resurrection? Our Master taught that there are two resurrections, characterized by what the end result will be:

“... 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***” (Jno. 5:28-29).

Of the two, the “resurrection of life” is clearly “better”. Whatever happens, for those counted responsible to judgment, a resurrection is an absolute guarantee. No matter how much a nominal brother falls away, being enticed by the cares of this life, it is still a certainty that he will be raised. What is questionable however, is which resurrection he shall attain to: a resurrection to life, or a resurrection to damnation. And that is dependent upon faith.

The hope of true believers is a resurrection of life. This was the hope of Mary, expressed at the death of her brother Lazarus: “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day” (Jno. 11:24), to which our Lord replied: “***I am the resurrection and the life***: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall not die in the Aion. Believest thou this?” (Jno. 11:26).

EQUAL TO ANGELS

By contrast to the firm conviction of Mary, in the ecclesia at Corinth, there were those who taught, “there is no resurrection of the dead”. This was the position of the Sadducees who approached Jesus as recorded in Matthew chapter 22. Here, they approached Messiah claiming “that there is no resurrection”, and posing a scenario to the Master, to show their point. A childless brother died, and subsequently married the wives of his seven brothers in succession. The question they posed was this: “Therefore in the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven? For they all had her” (Mat. 22:24-28). Our Lord’s response was masterly, deftly turning things back at them:

“Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as

the Angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Mat. 22:29-32).

This gives us an interesting insight into the resurrection of life: those so raised will be as the Angels of God. Luke provides more information:

“They that shall be counted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection of the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: *for they are equal unto the angels*; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection” (Luke 20:35-36).

Being raised from the dead then, is like a new birth (as we shall consider shortly), with those who experience it being “the children of the resurrection.” But what is of particular interest is the statement that these children shall be “*equal unto the angels*”. Being currently made “a little lower than the angels” (Psa. 8:5), they shall be elevated in status and nature, to become equal to them.

The Old Testament equivalent to this expression is contained in Zechariah chapter 3:

“Thus saith Yahweh of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, *and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by*” (Zech. 3:7).

“these that stand by” are the Angels, and so to be given to walk among them implies an equality to them. Truly, the Sadducees did not understand their Bibles, nor the power of God.

GLORY OF THE RESURRECTION

Another Old Testament passage which specifically teaches the resurrection is Daniel chapter 12. Again, it describes a two fold rising:

“Many of them that dwell in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

But the passage continues to describe the glory of those who are granted everlasting life:

“and they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Dan. 12:2-3).

This is drawn upon by the inspired Apostle, in describing the degrees of resurrectional glory:

“... there is one *glory of the sun*, and another glory of the moon, and another *glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory*. So also is the resurrection of the dead ...” (1 Cor. 15:41-42)

Those who are the children of glory then, shall shine with the effulgence of Divine glory; as our Master put it: “then shall the righteous *shine forth as the sun* in the kingdom of their Father” (Mat. 13:43).

THE CERTAINTY OF OUR HOPE

There resurrection to life is a certainty for those who abide in the love of Christ. There is nothing worse than hearing of brethren and sisters being terrified of dying because they fear that they have not been ‘good enough,’ or ‘worthy’ and that they might be cast away at the judgment. The Scriptures state that: “it is of faith that is might be by Grace; to the end *that the promise might be sure to all the seed ...*” (Rom. 3:16). The fact of God’s Grace being extended to us through faith is something that is ordained in order for the promise to be “made sure”, that is, not to be uncertain, or doubtful. Some translations render it “guaranteed”. Occasionally, those of the Churches ridicule us for having an uncertain hope: i.e. that we do not know whether we will be approved at the judgment seat or not. Indeed, we ourselves can look towards the judgment seat with vexation and uncertainty as to whether or not we will be admitted to the Kingdom. The Bible, on the other hand, speaks of our hope of Grace as being definite and certain:

“... the *full assurance* of hope ...” (Heb. 6:11).

“... which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, *both sure and steadfast ...*” (Heb. 6:19).

If we trust in the Word of God, and believe that He is able to perform that which he has promised, then we are hoping in a thing that will become a definite reality. Our hope of having a place in God’s kingdom is a “full assurance” being “sure and steadfast”, not an uncertain possibility that might or might not take place. Of what use is an anchor if it is not sure and steadfast? Even so, our faith should be “an anchor of the soul”.

TWO WAYS

Our Master likened a person’s walk in life to traversing down a particular path, either broad or narrow:

“enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, *which leadeth unto life*, and few there be that find it” (Mat. 7:13-14).

Notice, which destination is ultimately reached depends solely upon what path is being followed. The narrow path does not lead to more than one place, to both destruction and life, depending upon the exertions of those who walk along it. The

way of life leads only to life, and therefore if we are walking along that Way, arriving at the correct destination is guaranteed!

In the case of Noah, who “prepared an ark to the saving of his house” (Heb. 11:7), entering into the Ark was his guarantee of salvation. Just so long as he remained in the ark, his salvation from the flood of waters was guaranteed!

The Master exhorts us to “seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock, for ***it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom***” (Luke 12:32). The fact of the kingdom being given is something that enables us to “fear not”, and not cower in doubt and uncertainty. It is the Father’s “good pleasure” to give us the kingdom, and so we must trust in faith that it will indeed be given to us.

The Apostle Paul speaks of the love of Christ as something that is definite and unchanging:

“who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:35, 38-39).

The only thing that can separate us from the love of God is if we deny Him, and turn back to fulfilling our own lusts and desires. If we choose to leave the narrow way, and walk down the broad way which is more interesting to the flesh. “Every man is tempted, when ***he is drawn away*** of his own lust, and enticed” (Jas. 1:14). If we choose to be drawn away by our lusts, that is the only thing which can jeopardize our standing before God. So long as we stay in the antitypical Ark and remain in the Way of Life, our salvation is absolute, and “guaranteed”. As we already cited, truly we have “a ***strong consolation***, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, ***both sure and steadfast***” (Heb. 6:18-19).

We come then, each Sunday, to consider the basis of our redemption through Christ Jesus. The promise is given to those who “look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” that he “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body...” (Phil. 3:21). We must therefore lay hold upon the stabilizing Hope set before us, and hold onto it with all diligence, lest we drift away and be lost. For if we do so, our hope is “sure and steadfast”, as we shall be raised by He who is the Resurrection and the Life, to share immortal glory with him throughout the ages to come.

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