

Man's Resurrection Hope

***“Now is Christ
risen from the
dead, and become
the firstfruits of
them that slept.”***
—I Corinthians 15:20

SUNDAY, MARCH 31, WILL

be observed this year by millions as Easter, in commemoration of the day on which the resurrection of Jesus is thought to have occurred.

The modern English term “Easter” originates from the Old English word “Eastre” or “Eostre,” which developed prior to the 10th century a.d. It originally referred to the name of the Anglo-Saxon goddess Eostre, to whom homage was given in the spring, about the time of the Jewish celebration of the Passover.

The word Easter is found in the King James translation of the New Testament only once, in Acts 12:4, and is translated from the Greek word *pascha*, meaning Passover. King Herod had killed the Apostle James, the brother of John, with the sword. Seeing that this pleased the Jews, he also

laid hold on Peter. "When he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter [that is, after the Passover] to bring him forth to the people." It is clear that Easter is a poor translation in this text, to which virtually all Bible scholars agree. That being the case, there is no properly translated occurrence of the term Easter anywhere in the Bible.

There is no suggestion in the Bible that Christians should especially celebrate Christ's resurrection from the grave, the observance of his death being the only such commandment given by Jesus to those who consider themselves to be his followers. Nonetheless there is no event which rejoices the hearts of God's people more than does his only begotten Son's triumphant resurrection from the grave. The fact of his resurrection assures his receiving glory and power and honor in the presence of his loving Heavenly Father. It also betokens the acceptance by the Heavenly Father of the sacrifice of Jesus' life on behalf of the world of mankind, and is the basis of their own hope of a future resurrection.

MAN'S DESIRE TO LIVE

The hope of some form of life beyond the short span of present earthly existence is entertained by most of mankind, no matter where located, no matter what their culture may be. The thought of death is abhorrent to man, and alien to his very being. This is so because death is not a natural consequence of man's existence. Man was not born to die, but to live! Adam and all his children, had they

been obedient to the loving guidance of the Heavenly Father, could have lived forever on this glorious planet Earth.

This desire and hope of an existence beyond death takes various forms. To many claiming faith in Christ, it is related to the belief that man possesses within himself an undying entity called a soul which at death, in the case of those who have lived acceptably good lives, passes into the presence of God, there to be united with a suitable body. In the case of those whose lives have been evil as measured by certain criteria, it is believed that the soul passes into a hell, or purgatory, as the case may be, for punishment, or purification.

MAN IS A SOUL

The Scriptures, however, do not support such an understanding. The Bible makes it clear that the soul, rather than being a mysterious something contained within the body, is the sentient, or living, being itself. It is composed of the union of the body and the breath of life: "The LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul [sentient being]." (Gen. 2:7) In other words, man is a soul; he does not possess a soul. Additionally, far from being undying, man is indeed mortal. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezek. 18:20) How self-evident is this simple truth! All have been born into more or less of the sinful condition inherited from Father Adam and, as a result, all have died. None have escaped the great enemy of death.

Many cultures and religions throughout the world believe in their own form of immortality.

Some have expressed the thought of going to a proverbial “happy hunting ground,” or some other place of eternal bliss, to which the soul supposedly passes at death, there to enjoy forever a bountiful supply of the necessities of a happy life. With others, this thought of immortality is embraced in the concept of transmigration or reincarnation, wherein the soul, in an indefinite succession of lives and deaths, passes from one form of living creature to another—hopefully upward. These, and many other forms of belief in the inherent immortality of man, are implicit in most of the religions of the world, and arise from the unacceptability in the minds of many human beings of the finality of death.

SATAN’S LIE

It is most interesting that the great enemy of God, Satan, used this inborn desire in man to live when he tempted our first parents in the Garden of Eden through the use of the serpent. He blatantly contradicted God’s clear instructions and lied to Eve, when he told her, “Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen. 3:4) Our first parents had much less reason to believe Satan than God. God was their Creator—Satan was not. God had provided their perfect garden home—Satan had not. God gave them the animals and plant life to enjoy and have dominion over—Satan did not. God provided everything needed for their physical sustenance and well-being—Satan had provided them nothing. Yet, when Satan spoke through the serpent, they had such a strong desire to continue living under such wonderful conditions, they perhaps reasoned that their loving God would never think of causing their

life to cease. Thus, Satan tempted them along the very lines of their greatest desire—to live.

What a lie it was! Immediately, our first parents began to experience the dire consequences of their disobedience, which ultimately resulted in death, not continuance of life, as Satan had promised. The experience of our first parents was only the beginning of the legacy of this lie. Satan has used it throughout history in culture after culture, religion after religion, to this very day, to instill in man's mind the thought of his inherent immortality. We understand that, just as it was a lie in the Garden of Eden, it is still a lie today. Man is not immortal—he continues to die.

The belief in the inherent immortality of man is also partially born of the faintly hinted, but imperfectly understood, promises that God made in olden times to his faithful servants and prophets. Man, as we have noted, was formed from the dust of the earth, and invested with the breath of life, thus becoming a soul, or sentient [living] being. When he sinned by disobeying God's instruction, he was condemned to return to the dust. (Gen. 3:19) It was at this time that the Creator gave the first faint suggestion that man could, at some future time, look for some escape from that condition. God said that he would put enmity between the seed of the serpent, who had induced the disobedience, and the seed of the woman who had yielded to Satan's temptation to question the Creator's wisdom and commandments.—vs. 15

The hope of a resurrection, again related to a future seed, and again but dimly indicated, was to be seen, in retrospect, in the promise that God

later made to Abraham that in his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. (chap. 22:18) Since by Abraham's day untold numbers of mankind had already gone down into the dust, the promise to bless all mankind would necessitate their being brought forth from their graves to receive the promised blessing.

A MYSTERY

For some four thousand years of man's history, the identity of this seed was a mystery. However, following the death on Calvary of Jesus, and his subsequent resurrection by the mighty power of God, the power and influence of the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles at Pentecost. The mystery of this seed then began to be understood by the Early Church. That seed which was to bless all the families of the earth was Christ. "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."—Gal. 3:16

This Jesus was the one in whom centered all the hopes of the world, although ever so vaguely understood, for escape from death, and for a future life. He provided that hope for all mankind by laying down his own life in sacrifice. Man had sinned, and incurred the just penalty of death. Jesus, by laying down his own perfect life as man's Redeemer, secured man's release from the death penalty. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for . . . all have sinned. . . . By one man's [Adam's] disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one [Jesus] shall many be made righteous."—Rom. 5:12,19

A RANSOM FOR ALL

Throughout the New Testament God's boundless grace toward sinful, dying man is amplified. In I Timothy 2:3-6, the Apostle Paul says: "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." The "all men" of whom Paul here speaks is fallen humanity. They must first be brought forth from the tomb—resurrected from the dead—if they are to be brought to a "knowledge of the truth" that Christ died for their sins in order that they might have an opportunity to gain everlasting life on earth.

Indeed, Jesus gave his perfect, human life on behalf of sinful man. The Apostle Paul, in his sermon on Mars' hill, tells us that God "hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." (Acts 17:31) The "day" that the apostle calls to our attention is that thousand-year judgment day which is also mentioned by the Apostle Peter, when the world of mankind, brought forth from their graves, will be on trial for life here on earth. (II Pet. 3:7,8) Peter speaks of this same period of time as "the times of restitution," when that greater Prophet, the antitypical Moses, Christ and his glorified bride, will be mediating the New Covenant for the purpose of blessing with everlasting life all the obedient of mankind.—Acts 3:20-25

Paul makes it clear that these wonderful promises of an opportunity for life are sure. It is God, he says, who has set aside this future thousand-year judgment day for the blessing of mankind. It is God who sent his son Jesus to purchase Adam and his race, and gain the opportunity to be the restorer of sinful man by the sacrifice of his own perfect human life. It is this same God who demonstrated the certainty of this entire blessed arrangement by raising his son, Jesus our Savior, from the dead, so that in “due time” he might carry out to completion his Heavenly Father’s glorious plan of salvation, as the righteous judge during earth’s coming kingdom.

JESUS, THE REDEEMER

It is Jesus who gave his life as man’s Redeemer, and in his kingdom he will be their Judge, Restorer, and Everlasting Father. He is the “seed” of promise—the seed of blessing. Paul reveals a further facet of the “seed” mystery. He points out that those who have given themselves wholly to Christ as his followers are also a part of the promised seed of blessing: “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. . . . And if ye be Christ’s [belong to Christ], then are ye [also] Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Gal. 3:27,29) These are they who have humbly but joyfully accepted the Lord’s gracious invitation to deny themselves, following him in his sacrificial footsteps in this life, and into glory and honor and immortality in the heavens beyond the veil. They shall live and reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4), for the purpose of resurrecting

mankind from death to glorious, happy everlasting life right here on man's original beautiful home—planet Earth.

This is the simple, but lovely, story of God's grace toward mankind through Christ Jesus. This is the glorious hope that is guaranteed to the world of mankind through the sacrificial death, and the resurrection from the grave, of our loving Lord and Savior. It is this grand plan of salvation for man concerning which so few have more than the vaguest conception. Although the Bible clearly promises a heavenly reward for that faithful "little flock" of consecrated, sacrificing followers of the Lord Jesus, and as clearly teaches that the hope for the rest of the world of mankind is an opportunity "in righteousness" to gain everlasting life here on earth through a resurrection, this Scriptural truth of the resurrection is generally viewed with much skepticism.

RESURRECTION QUESTIONED

Even in the days of the apostles the teaching of the resurrection of the dead was questioned. When pleading his case before King Agrippa, Paul, almost in amazement, asked him, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8) It was a point of contention between the leading Jewish sects of the day. "For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both."—chap. 23:8

The resurrection of the dead through Christ, the Savior, was the heart and soul of the message of the Early Church, yet it was their preaching of this

wonderful hope that constantly brought persecution upon them. Immediately after Pentecost, when Peter spoke to the Jews of “the times of restitution” which God had promised beforetime through his prophets, he was talking about the resurrection of the dead. His hearers so understood his message, for we read, “As they [Peter and John] spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.” Peter and John were then seized, taken before the high priest, threatened and released.—Acts 4:1-21

Among the Early Church also there were those who questioned the resurrection of Jesus. Paul vigorously combated this false notion. He told them that “Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” (I Cor. 15:3,4) This, Paul says, had all been prophesied long before, and recorded in the Scriptures. Not only so, Paul argues, but after Jesus’ resurrection “he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.” (vss. 5-8) Now, in view of all this, Paul asks, “How say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?”—vs. 12

Paul then shows how important a matter this is. “If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is

Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.” (I Cor. 15:13,14) Then Paul gives voice to that stirring affirmation of his faith: “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming [during his presence].”—vss. 20-23

IS THERE ROOM?

To many who do not know God’s wise and loving plans and purposes, as they view present conditions in the world, the prospect of a resurrection to life on earth may hold little appeal. Indeed, it might even be rather frightening. Take the single problem of space, for instance. Already, much of the earth seems overcrowded, especially in certain countries and in the large cities of the world. How would all the resurrected billions be accommodated? The problem becomes more serious each passing year as earth’s population continues to expand.

The ever-increasing challenge of population growth is now recognized as being one of the most urgent problems of today’s world by those who concern themselves with such matters. The current population of the world is just over seven billion, having increased by one billion in only twelve years. Although estimates vary, most predict that world population will increase to nine billion by about the year 2050. In a study done by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

(FAO) in 2008, it was determined the total amount of arable land in the world—land suitable for growing crops—was about 5.3 million square miles, and shrinking. Based on the world's current population, this is the equivalent of about three-quarters of one square mile (.75) per person. By 2050, with the projected increase in population, but decreasing arable land, the ratio could perhaps shrink to only one-half of one square mile (.50) per person. With these trends, the question is being asked: can the earth continue to support these billions?

Current world population and its expected growth is only one problem seen by some when contemplating the idea of a resurrection. If all who have died will be brought back to life here on earth in a resurrection, what might the earth's population be? Here again, estimates vary widely. On the high end, some have calculated that up to 100-120 billion people have lived on earth. On the low end, others say that number is more like 30-40 billion. Even in this most conservative estimate, however, is a total which is five times earth's current population. Whatever the number might be, if all these additional billions are brought forth from the tomb to join the living, how will they be housed, clothed, and fed?

A POLLUTED WORLD

One may further ask: who could wish to be resurrected to life in a polluted world? In the mental climate of thoughtlessness and selfishness that generally prevails today, population and pollution go hand in hand. As the one increases, so does the other. Our beautiful skies, the lovely earth, our

glorious lakes and rivers—all are being increasingly poisoned, threatening man's very existence. It has come to the point where some authorities have given up hope of ever eliminating the problem, and seemingly would be content if it could merely be restrained within tolerable limits. Although valiant efforts, with even measurable success, have been made in countries such as the United States and a few others, most of the world continues to see increases in pollution of all kinds, with little apparent action being taken to reverse this horrible course.

Despite the reality of increasing pollution of the earth, for decades world leaders have, at least in word, accorded high priority to this problem. They have said time and again that pollution would be addressed vigorously as to its abatement. In the view of some, the matter has reached the point where its solution is being spoken of as a “now or never” proposition. In other words, if progress toward a solution is not soon discovered, the fate of civilization is in jeopardy. Indeed, increasing pollution has at last become recognized, and is prompting some countries and governments to action, but it has not been nearly enough.

CONTINUING STRIFE

Troubles assail today's world from many other directions as well. Our mind turns to such things as: never-ending strife and wars between nations; acts of terrorism; increasing crime; disregard for law and order bordering on anarchy in some parts of the earth; accelerated use of drugs by young and old; corruption in high places of government and even

religion; growing indifference and insensitivity to dishonesty and immorality. What right-thinking person, it might be asked, could wish to be resurrected to such an environment?

Such, however, fail to appreciate the character of the Heavenly Father. They do not know of his wonderful plans and purposes on behalf of man. Surely, one who could create and set in order the entire universe; who by his own power created man, and placed him on this beautiful planet; who sent his only begotten Son to be man's Redeemer—surely, at the very culmination of his ages-long plan for the blessing of mankind, such a one would not blunder in his calculations. Surely he would not, at the very brink of establishing a righteous kingdom, be lacking in power and wisdom to bring his promises to fruition.

NO FAILURES IN GOD'S PLAN

The Heavenly Father makes no mistakes. His loving plans and purposes flow grandly on. He who created man, and man's home, will indeed bring him forth from the dust of the earth in the times of restitution, as he has promised. He will know how to cleanse the skies, the earth, the rivers and lakes, and restore them to their original purity and beauty, even as he will do with fallen man himself.

Likewise, there will not be too many people, for "the wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing. . . . Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an

hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. . . . And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”—Isa. 35:1,2,5,6,10

Christ’s righteous rulership will soon rid the world of strife, wars, terrorism, crime, lawlessness, corruption, dishonesty, immorality, and all the other troubles assailing mankind today. Though it is now almost two thousand years since our Lord Jesus gave his life for mankind, the resurrection promise remains sure. It is awaiting the completion of the seed class, the footstep followers of Jesus, who are even now filling up “that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.” (Col. 1:24) With joy we repeat the words, “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.” (I Cor. 15:20) We believe the little flock is almost complete, and that the time of blessing is close at hand. What a privilege is ours, to join with the great Apostle Paul in sounding forth the present call of the church and the message of the coming resurrection and blessing of all the families of the earth. ■