

Life from the Dead

“I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how 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 Corinthians*
15:3,4

The Bible from beginning to end holds out a doctrine that is found nowhere else: that a future life for the dead will come through a resurrection. All the divinely inspired writers expressed their confidence in a Redeemer. They further declared that “in the morning,” when God calls mankind from the tomb, they will come forth, and the wicked shall no longer hold

rulership over the earth. The psalmist tells us, “Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning.” (Ps. 49:14) The “morning” will bring dominion to the righteous but will also release all from the power of the grave. The prophets also taught the resurrection of the dead, and the writers of the New Testament based all their hopes of a future life and blessing upon it.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And 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.”—I Cor. 15:16-18

Our Lord’s Resurrection

Paul spoke of the power of God in regard to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead: “What is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.” (Eph. 1:19,20) Jesus himself foretold his own death and subsequent resurrection to his disciples, saying that he “must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”—Matt. 16:21

The resurrection of Jesus Christ was more than an awakening from the sleep of death. It was his exaltation to the highest plane of life in the entire universe—the divine. Jesus’s resurrected position has been described as: “Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And [God] hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.”—Eph. 1:21-23; Col. 1:18

While we cannot comprehend the power involved in such a mighty act as this, we can and should rejoice in the many assurances in the Bible that this same power that raised Jesus from the dead stands pledged to help us in our every time of need. This power of God is provided to us in proportion to our faithfulness in laying down our lives as joint sacrificers with Jesus. It is to this important thought that Paul refers, when he says, “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” (Phil. 3:8) He then adds, “That I may know him [Jesus], 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.”—vss. 10,11

The mighty power of God gives us the necessary strength to lay down our lives if we yield ourselves up daily as living sacrifices to him. (Rom. 12:1) The Lord does not use his power to force his people in the doing of his will. If they show a willingness to sacrifice, he provides the opportunity and the necessary strength to endure the trials that the refining work of his acceptance may entail. The Apostle Peter expressed the proper sequence of thought concerning this matter. He wrote, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”—I Pet. 5:6,7

Paul’s Discourse

Paul gives us a complete discourse on the subject of the resurrection in his letter to the brethren at

Corinth in I Corinthians 15:12-28. First, he proves that faith in a resurrection is part of Christian doctrine, without which the entire fabric of Christian belief would be worthless. (vss. 12-19) Secondly, having proved the doctrine, he shows that our Lord's resurrection is God's guarantee of a resurrection to the entire human race, for which Christ died. (vs. 20) He goes on to prove this fact and its reasonableness by saying, "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead." (I Cor. 15:21) By the man Adam came death to the whole human family, so by the man Christ Jesus the resurrection blessing is made available to all.

It is important to note that although a full resurrection to perfection is made available to all the human creation, it does not follow that all will obtain the blessing of everlasting life that will be offered under the administration of Christ's kingdom of truth and righteousness. Everlasting life is only for those who successfully pass a testing and trial period to prove their worthiness under the kingdom's righteous conditions. All who put their faith and trust in Christ, and who develop a heart character like his, will be "made alive." They will receive everlasting human life. This is what is meant by the apostle's words: "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (vs. 22) All who successfully pass the tests of character and obedience to divine law following their awakening from death will receive the fullness of this promise.

That Which Excelleth

As quoted earlier, Paul wrote that he counted "all things but loss" that he might know the power

of Jesus's resurrection. He undoubtedly had in mind the power of the Heavenly Father which is available to his people as they are laying down their lives in sacrifice with Jesus, and also God's further use of that power on behalf of the church in the "first resurrection."—Rev. 20:6

All of the present advantages of health, comfort, prestige, or worldly joy will be nothing when compared to spiritual glory. We should, as Paul did, consider all else of little value as we think about what has been promised to all who have been called to such a high honor. However, such honor can be ours only if we have fellowship in the sufferings of Christ now. As the apostle said: "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ." (Phil. 3:7) If faithful, we will experience the mighty power of God to raise us from the dead in the first resurrection and exalt us to his own right hand with Christ. (Rev. 3:21) Thus, the faithful church's future inheritance will be one of glory, "the glory that excelleth."—II Cor. 3:10

Light Affliction

Writing on this subject, Paul tells us, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." (II Cor. 4:17,18) Here the apostle is showing us that only those who have fully given themselves to God will understand and appreciate this heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. Speaking of what Jesus provides for us, Paul further

stated: “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”—Rom. 3:25,26

The Apostle Paul shows us that there will be an order to be followed with regard to the resurrection. After saying that “all” will be given the opportunity to be “made alive,” he states this: “But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits.” (I Cor. 15:23) The firstfruits class, the faithful members of Christ’s symbolic body, will be first in order and in rank. (I Cor. 12:12,27) If faithful in being associated with Christ by sacrificing during this present life, they will be part of the “firstfruits” class. “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.”—Rom. 6:3-5

The call to be of the firstfruits class began centuries ago when our Lord Jesus—the head of the church—arose from death. Indeed, he was the “first,” and highest in rank of the firstfruits. Since, then, a “little flock” of believers has shared, by faith, in the Redeemer’s sacrifice. These have consecrated, or dedicated, themselves to the Lord and become joint-heirs with Christ. Of these, Paul wrote, “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs

with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”—Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29

Comforted by God

Those striving to be of the firstfruits class have been motivated to this course of action by the many precious promises of God. “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.” (Rom. 6:8,9) This is a further example of the mighty power of the Heavenly Father. This power concerning the resurrection of our Lord Jesus fortifies us against every assault of the Adversary. It replaces fear with courage, and it gives renewed strength to the weary. At the same time, however, God’s power does not isolate us from our necessary trials and experiences, nor spare us from suffering for righteousness’ sake. (I Pet. 4:12-16) Rather, it helps us to wait on the Lord and to patiently endure unto the end.—Matt. 24:13

This is indeed the blessed hope and inheritance of all of the people of God who desire to continue to walk in the footsteps of our dear Lord Jesus. These were sealed by the “holy Spirit of promise,” which by God’s Word and providence bears witness that they are “accepted in the beloved.” (Eph. 1:13,6) Let us treasure these promises: “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness

with our spirit, that we are the children of God.”
“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”—Rom. 8:14-16; I John 3:2

The raising from the dead of the firstfruits, the Christ class head and body, is but the first phase of fulfilling the promise of a future life for mankind by means of the resurrection of the dead. The divine promise is that “there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.” (Acts 24:15) Christ shall “put down all rule and authority and power” to teach righteousness, truth, and love to all people. “For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”—I Cor. 15:24-26

A Standing Up Again—Recovery

In the Bible, the word “resurrection” is found only in the New Testament. It is a translation of the Greek word *anastasis*, which means a “standing up again,” “recovery,” a “raising up.” Other Greek words are used when referring to the temporary awakening of those who had been miraculously awakened from death, but who afterward died again. This was the case with the raising of Lazarus and others where neither the Greek word *anastasis*, nor its English equivalent “resurrection,” is used. See John 12:1.

The “ransom for all” given by our Lord secured the opportunity of a full resurrection [*anastasis*] for all. (I Tim. 2:5,6) To define resurrection as only signifying a reawakening to a brief life only to die again would be to limit God’s power as well as his

plan for the human race. The true meaning of the word contains the thought of full restoration of all that was lost. Mankind lost human perfection and has been on a downward spiral which has led to moral decay, sickness, sorrow, and ultimately death. Our Lord Jesus died to recover all that was lost, and the promise of a resurrection is therefore the promise of the restoration of what was lost and then redeemed.—Luke 19:10

To appreciate the full force of the word *anastasis*, which points to restoration or rising up, we must remember how far man has fallen. Full restoration, which has been secured for mankind by their Redeemer, will be a full and complete recovery of all that was lost. Certainly, life was lost, but along with that was all the accompanying degradation—mental, moral, and physical—culminating in utter dissolution, that is, death. Through the willing sacrifice and subsequent resurrection of the world's Savior, our Lord Jesus, a full raising up to the grand heights of perfection and to the image and likeness of God will be enjoyed by all the willing and obedient of the human family under the righteous administration of the Christ class, head and body, during the Messianic kingdom.

Return to Perfection

The thousand-year kingdom of Christ is to be the resurrection day for the world of mankind. (Rev. 20:4,6) However, mankind will not be forced to attain the grand mental and moral perfection made available to all in Christ. When the dead rise from the grave, they will have to cooperate and participate in matters pertaining to their own

resurrection to perfection. In the grave, there has been no opportunity to do this. As the Scriptures tell us, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” “For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?”—Eccles. 9:10; Ps. 6:5

We read in John 5:28,29, “An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his [Jesus’] voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.” (*English Standard Version*) What a blessed confirmation, that all in their graves shall be awakened in the resurrection of the dead. There will be two classes who will be awakened, and under different conditions. As we have already pointed out, those fully consecrated ones who are faithful unto death, will come forth from death to a perfect, heavenly life. They will receive the divine nature over which death will no longer have any power or control.—Rev. 2:10; II Pet. 1:4

The remainder of mankind will be awakened to a judgment, or trial period, during which they will have an opportunity for a full raising up and recovery from sin and death. They must conform to the instructions of that thousand-year judgment day. They will have the best conditions in which to learn of the Heavenly Father through the guidance of the Christ, head and body. The prophet has written, “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. ... Then the eyes of the blind shall be

opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. ... And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; ... 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. 35:1,5,8,10

This wonderful passage of scripture reveals how the earth is to be brought to the perfection that God had designed for it. The earth will once again become a cheerful home and a beautiful paradise for mankind. Messiah’s kingdom will not only uplift humanity but will also bring blessings of perfection to the earth. God has foreseen all the necessities of his plan and will make ample provision for all the needs of his human creation. He has promised to deliver mankind from Satan’s power and his blinding influence.—Rev. 20:1-3

The blessings of Christ’s kingdom will ultimately open the eyes of the blind, both physically and symbolically. All ignorance, prejudice, and superstitions will be removed. All shall come to an accurate knowledge of the Truth concerning the divine character and attributes, and especially God’s love. As a consequence, the true knowledge of the Lord shall fill the whole earth “as the waters cover the sea.” (Isa. 11:9) Not only will the people’s bodies be made whole, but also their minds and hearts will be similarly freed from the bondage of sin. This is the ultimate goal and great work of the Messianic kingdom. With the kingdom established, blessings of peace, joy, and life will begin to flow to all people. We rejoice that God has a plan for the entire world, which includes an end to all of the things which have

separated mankind from his love. “They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.”—Heb. 8:11

John the Revelator viewed these conditions in vision and said: “I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”—Rev. 21:1-5

Mankind will once again have dominion over the earth and will be able to live in peace and joy forever. All will have fully learned the lessons based on the words of Jesus, who said, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. ... Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”—Mark 12:30,31

Love is the principal grace that mankind will have to learn and put into practice. “Love is the fulfilling” of God’s law. (Rom. 13:10) All who desire to live on a perfect earth forever will have to attain to this love. This mark of character, which the law

of God places as the condition for life, is that of perfect love. Ultimately this law must govern all of God's intelligent creatures who will obtain everlasting life. When man is completely restored to the image of God, every person will love him, his beloved Son, and the entire brotherhood of mankind.

At the time of Lazarus' death, Jesus sought to comfort his grieving sister Martha. "Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, 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 never die." (John 11:23-26) With anticipation, we look forward to that time when these heartfelt words will have their complete fulfillment in every person throughout the entire earth. ■

Victory

*My tired eyes look up to Thee
And then the vision which I see,
Sustains, upholds and comforts me
Along this narrow way.*

*Lord, I would always see Thy face
Wilt grant me then sufficient grace—
As onward thru this barren waste
I tread my weary way—*

*I would not lay my armor down
'Til I receive the victor's crown,
Then with the noise of battle o'er
I'll view my Savior evermore.*

—Poems of the Way