

All Shall Be Made Alive

“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 Corinthians 15:17,18

ON APRIL 8, 2012, EASTER Sunday, the professed Christian world will once again commemorate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. How many, though, understand the true significance of this great event in God’s plan? How many realize that the only hope of life beyond

the grave is based upon the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of his Heavenly Father? If this be not so, then even Christians who have died—those who have “fallen asleep in Christ”—have perished, and all who die from henceforth will likewise perish forever.

If it were true that Christian believers perish in death and are not restored to life in the resurrection, there is surely no hope for unbelievers. This is what Paul clearly tells us in our theme text. The resurrection of the dead is thus seen to be a vital necessity in the divine arrangement for the rescue

of fallen man from death. This being so, our Heavenly Father, through his Word, has given us many assurances of his intention to restore the dead to life.

These assurances are found in both the Old and New Testaments, and in abundance. Addressing Felix, a Roman governor, the Apostle Paul said, “This I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”—Acts 24:14,15

While the word “resurrection” is not found in the Old Testament, we would expect from this statement by Paul to find unquestionable references to this assurance of life beyond the grave. Jesus explained that the hope of the resurrection was implied by Jehovah when speaking to Moses at the burning bush. Jesus said, “Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him.”—Luke 20:37,38

Some have mistakenly used this statement by Jesus to prove that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not really dead, but this was not Jesus’ argument. They were dead and would be quite outside of God’s interest and care except for his plan to restore them to life in the resurrection. They “live unto him” in that he will use his mighty power, in his own due time, to restore them to life. It was for this

reason that even after they had fallen asleep in death he considered himself to be their God.

THAT PROPHET

By firm implication, the teaching of the resurrection was set forth in a prophecy to Moses, when God said, “I will raise them [the Israelites] up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee.” (Deut. 18:18) The Apostle Peter applied this prophecy to Christ, following his Second Advent, in “the times of restitution of all things.” (Acts 3:19-23) That this Prophet would minister to the Israelites of Moses’ day meant that they would need to be raised from the dead. In a prayer of Moses recorded in the Psalms, he acknowledged to God his great purpose to restore the dead to life. “Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.” (Ps. 90:3) Here the word “return” is used to describe the awakening of the dead.

This word is used a number of other times in the Old Testament for the same purpose. Isaiah 35:10 reads, “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.” Jesus ransomed all mankind, and their “return” is from death. The word “return” is used again by Ezekiel to describe the awakening of the dead. The text is addressed to the Israelites, and reads, “When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate, then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate.”—Ezek. 16:55

“The LORD killeth, and maketh alive,” sang Hannah, “he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.” (I Sam. 2:6,7) This reveals her assurance, even in that ancient period of the judges, that there was to be a resurrection of the dead. Hannah believed that the Lord would not leave the people in *sheol*, the grave. There is also the comforting promise to mothers who have lost their children in death. “They shall come again from the land of the enemy,” the Lord assured, “And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.”—Jer. 31:16,17

FROM SLEEP

David wrote concerning “the sleep of death,” and some of the Old Testament promises liken the resurrection to an awakening from sleep. (Ps. 13:3) The Lord promised Daniel, “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” (Dan. 12:2) The word “many” is not used here to imply that only a part of those in death will be awakened. Rather, it is to emphasize the great number, the multitude that are dead and are to be awakened from the sleep of death.

They are “sleeping” in “the dust of the earth.” This expression is used to remind us that the ones to be awakened from death are those upon whom fell the penalty, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen. 3:19) This is in keeping with Paul’s explanation, “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”—I Cor. 15:22

The Prophet Isaiah wrote, “Thy dead men shall live, . . . Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall

cast out the dead.” (Isa. 26:19) Here we have the assurance that the awakening of the dead will bring rejoicing, for they are bidden to “awake and sing.”

PRISONERS

The Old Testament refers to the dead as being “prisoners,” held captive in death, and their awakening as a release from captivity. (Ps. 102:20; Isa. 49:9; 61:1) Job, after mentioning the death state of the young, the old, the rich, the poor, the rulers, the wicked—essentially all the varied categories into which the human race is divided—adds, “There [in death] the prisoners rest together.”—Job 3:18

In a promise to Christ and those who will be associated with him in the future work of restoring the world to life, the Father said, “That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves.” (Isa. 49:9) In verse 8 of this chapter, we are informed that the purpose in calling these prisoners forth from death is that they might “inherit the desolate heritages.” This is a reference to man’s original heritage of the earth, a heritage which was lost and which was left desolate because of original sin.

The resurrection of the dead is again likened to the release of captives in the prophecy of Ezekiel 16:53. “When I shall bring again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters, and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, then will I bring again the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them.” The expression, “thy captives,” refers to the Israelites. The phrase, “bring again,” means “to turn back or away.” The thought from this

verse is that the captives in death of the Israelites will in due time have their captivity turned away. This will be accomplished through the resurrection of the dead.

We are assured that the Gentiles as well as the Israelites will participate in that glorious future release of the prisoners of death. Using similar words to those of Ezekiel, in Jeremiah 48:47 the Lord says, “I [will] bring again the captivity of Moab in the latter days.” Of the Ammonites, we read, “I will bring again the captivity of the children of Ammon, saith the LORD.” (chap. 49:6) And the Elamites will also be released from their captivity—“It shall come to pass in the latter days, that I will bring again the captivity of Elam, saith the LORD.”—vs. 39

LEADING THE CAPTIVES

The Prophet David wrote concerning Jesus, “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them.” (Ps. 68:18) This prophecy is quoted by the Apostle Paul and applied to the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. (Eph. 4:8) In the *Marginal Translation* of Paul’s quotation, we are given the thought that Jesus, in his resurrection, became the leader from death of a “multitude of captives.”

Thus, in the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed to us as the one who leads forth all the prisoners of death from their captivity. When Martha said to Jesus that she knew Lazarus would live again in the resurrection at the “last day,” Jesus replied,

“I am the resurrection, and the life.” (John 11:23-25) Martha may well have had in mind the prophecies of the Old Testament stating that the prisoners of death would be released from their captivity in the “latter days.” Jesus simply explained that he will be the one to release or “lead forth” the captives.

This was confirmed by Jesus after his resurrection, when he said to John on the Isle of Patmos, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell [*hades*] and of death.” (Rev. 1:18) Jesus purchased these “keys” by his own death. He will use them to unlock the great prison of death and set its captives free.

THE DIVINE ORDER

When Paul wrote that “in Christ shall all be made alive,” he added, “But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are [or become] Christ’s at his coming [Greek, ‘presence’].” (I Cor. 15:23) The expression “Christ the firstfruits” includes Jesus’ true followers, those who suffer and die with him. James confirms this, writing, “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” (James 1:18) Concerning those who faithfully follow the “Lamb,” we read, “These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.”—Rev. 14:4

These “firstfruits unto God” are led forth from their captivity in death in the “first resurrection.” Concerning this, we read, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be

priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:6) The fact that the “second death” will have no power over these implies that they receive the reward of immortality. These are those who, through “patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.”—Rom. 2:7

The Scriptures also refer to a “better resurrection.” (Heb. 11:35) This reference is in the context of Paul’s mentioning of many ancient faithful ones who lived prior to the First Advent of Jesus. They “endured” (vs. 27) many severe tests. Because of their great faith, some “received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance.” (vs. 35) These seemingly opposite results of their faith were, in both cases, temporary conditions. Those who were “raised to life again” eventually died, joining those “not accepting deliverance.” In both cases, however, they had faith that “they might obtain a better resurrection.” They looked for a resurrection which would result in eternal life and perfection, something “better” than they had ever experienced before.

Comparing the reward of these Ancient Worthies in the resurrection with the reward of those who follow the Lamb in this age, Paul wrote, “God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” (vs. 40) The implication here is that these ancient faithful ones will not be raised from the dead until the resurrection of the church is complete. Additionally, the “better thing” for Jesus’ followers is that they are raised to “immortality” and to the divine nature. (I Cor. 15:53; II Pet.1:4) In all these

things, we again see the divine order of the resurrection.

JUST AND UNJUST

As quoted earlier, Paul explained to Felix that the Law and the Prophets taught that there would be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. Apparently, the Ancient Worthies had a clear indication of this and strove diligently to be worthy to participate in the resurrection of the just. Both the just and the unjust are also mentioned in God's promise to Daniel. "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some [the just] to everlasting life, and some [the unjust] to shame and everlasting contempt." Although veiled in the language of prophecy, the next verse seems to point out that there are to be two classes of the just. "They that be wise [teachers—the church, *Marginal Translation*] shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness [the Ancient Worthies] as the stars forever and ever."—Dan. 12:2,3; Matt. 13:43

The "everlasting contempt" to which the unjust are led forth from captivity is contempt that lasts to a consummation. That is, it lasts until its purpose has been accomplished. We have a more detailed reference to it in Ezekiel 16:48-54. Here the reference is to Gentiles and unjust Israelites when led forth from their captivity in death. This same prophecy shows that ultimately the "shame" will have accomplished its purpose in that these liberated captives will be brought into covenant relationship with the Lord.—vss. 60-63

Jesus also referred to the resurrection of the just and the unjust, speaking of these two classes as those who have done “good” and others who have done “evil.” (John 5:28,29) “Marvel not at this,” Jesus said, “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 [judgment, *Revised Version*].”

The distinction here is between those who receive their full reward immediately upon being awakened from the sleep of death and those who come forth to “judgment.” The former includes the faithful of all ages, and the latter the unfaithful. The faithful receive “life” on the plane of existence God has set forth in his plan to give them as a reward for their faithfulness. For the followers of Jesus—the church—it will be immortal life on the divine plane with their Lord. For the Ancient Worthies, it will be life on a lesser plane of existence.

All others will come forth to judgment or, as the Greek states it, to a “*krisis*.” Our English word “crisis” conveys a similar thought. It means that the awakened prisoners of death will be confronted with a crisis. If they wish to continue living and to be restored to complete mental and moral human perfection, they will have to accept the provisions of Divine grace through Christ and obey the laws of his kingdom. It will be a turning point for them. They will be fully enlightened concerning the issues involved. If they then choose to turn to the Lord and serve him they will live. If they willfully turn away from him they will die in what the Scriptures

describe as “the second death.”—Rev. 20:14,15;
Acts 3:23

WITH WHAT BODY?

The Apostle Paul raised an important question concerning the resurrection, and answered it. “Some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. . . . There are . . . celestial [heavenly] bodies, and bodies terrestrial [earthly]: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. . . . So also is THE resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. . . . It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body [in the resurrection], and there is a spiritual body.”—I Cor. 15:35-44

Certain important points should be noted in Paul’s reasoning. One is that, in the resurrection, the literal body that dies is not the one that is resurrected. In death, the former body returns to the dust, as stated in these words of Job, “All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.” (Job 34:15) Another point is that some in the resurrection will be given celestial or heavenly bodies, and that some will be given terrestrial or earthly bodies. The Lord is the one who determines this. “God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.” The “it” is the

“seed,” the “bare” grain that is sown in death. This is the mind, personality, character, that which becomes the identity of the individual during their time in this present life.

Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth is addressed to those who were “sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.” (I Cor. 1:2) For this reason, he stresses more particularly the “first resurrection.” It is this that he describes as “THE” resurrection. However, he reminds us that a still further part of the order of the resurrection is that there will also be those who will receive “terrestrial,” natural, earthly bodies. These will be for all the unbelieving, unjust world of mankind. When released from their captivity to death, the appropriate earthly body they are given will not be entirely unlike the one which died. Indeed, the body given to each of mankind in the resurrection will not be racked with the sicknesses, diseases, and other physical ailments that afflicted the body that went into death. The Scriptures promise that these “former things” will have “passed away.” (Rev. 21:4) Those who appreciate the opportunities of the new day in which they are awakened from the sleep of death and who grasp those opportunities of belief and obedience, will be assisted up the ladder of progress to human perfection.

THE TIME

Paul clearly sets forth the time sequence of the resurrection as it relates to those who receive celestial bodies and those who receive terrestrial bodies. “When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality,

then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"—I Cor. 15:54,55

Paul here refers to the promise, "He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces." (Isa. 25:8) He explains that the fulfillment of this wonderful promise must wait until those who are seeking the prize of immortality have all attained it, "when this mortal shall have put on immortality." Then will come the time, through the victory of Jesus as man's redeemer, for death to be swallowed up. This will be accomplished by the releasing of all the prisoners of death and their restoration to human perfection with the ability to obey God's law perfectly and live forever.

This is the great objective of the future earthly reign of Christ. "For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (I Cor. 15:25,26) Thus will be fulfilled the promise, "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."—Rev. 21:4

Let us then rejoice that Christ has been raised from the dead. Let us be confident in the scriptural promises that it is he who will lead a "multitude of captives" forth from death, even all who have died. This is the hope of every true follower of the Master, and it is our hope for the whole world of mankind. We can truly rejoice that "in Christ shall all be made alive."—I Cor. 15:22 ■