

Death Destroyed, Life Restored

*“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.”*
—Revelation 21:4,5

AT THIS TIME OF YEAR THE minds of millions throughout the world are turned toward the theme of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. To these, the commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus does, to some extent, present a brief relief from the daily offerings of chaos, destruction, and death in the news, which shows the world in a state of darkness and hopelessness.

Today, it is estimated that about 150,000 people die worldwide each day. Many of these deaths are simply the result of the fact that all of mankind are members of a sin-cursed and dying race. (Rom. 5:12; I Cor. 15:22) However, we also have those tragic deaths resulting from war, revolution, accident, crime, drugs, and other specific evils of

the past and present. It is indeed a nighttime of sorrow and weeping, but we have the blessed assurance of God's Word that "joy cometh in the morning." (Ps. 30:5) That blessed morning of joy is to be ushered in by the rising of "the Sun of righteousness," who, "with healing in his wings," will heal the people of their diseases, physical and otherwise, and give peace, health, and life forevermore.—Mal. 4:2

In spite of the chaos and death with which we are surrounded and plagued, we have the assurances of God's Word that he will intervene in human affairs and do for the people what they cannot do for themselves. This means that the hope held out in the Bible for the world of mankind is as bright as the promises of God. These promises assure us not only that sickness and death will be destroyed, as well as all the other evils which now afflict the human race, but also that those who are asleep in death are to be awakened, that they also may participate in the joys of that new day—that morning of joy which is to follow the present dark night of sorrow.

The question arises in the minds of many as to God's ability to fulfill all the wonderful promises which he has caused to be recorded in his Word. It may seem an oversimplification of the matter, but to us it is obvious that the one who created life is abundantly able to restore life. Furthermore, to assure us of this the Lord has given numerous instances in the Bible in which he has, through his servants, used his life-giving power to awaken the dead to life. These instances we may consider as tokens of the divine purpose on behalf of all humans who are asleep in death. Some of these instances

took place during Old Testament times, and others in the days of Jesus, and in connection with his ministry; while later the Apostle Peter raised a Christian sister from the sleep of death.

THE WIDOW'S SON

The Prophet Elijah awakened the son of a widow from the dead and thus demonstrated the power of the Creator to restore life. The record states that Elijah “stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the LORD, O LORD my God, let this child’s life come into him again. And the LORD listened to the voice of Elijah. And the life of the child came into him again, and he revived. And Elijah took the child and brought him down from the upper chamber into the house and delivered him to his mother. And Elijah said, See, your son lives.” —I Kings 17:21-23, *English Standard Version*

The use of the word “soul,” which appears in the *King James Version* and other translations of this account, does not substantiate the false notion that humans have within them something intangible called a soul, which escapes when the body dies. The word soul in this instance is used, as often in the Bible, simply to denote life, as noted in the translation quoted. This boy’s life had departed from him, and through the ministry of Elijah, and by the power of God, his life returned.

The important consideration in this account is that we have in it an example of the restoring power of God as it will yet manifest itself throughout all the earth, and on behalf of all who have fallen asleep in death—whether in war, by disease, in youth, or in old age. Moses revealed the plan of

God in this matter when, in a prayer, he said of God, "Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men."—Ps. 90:3

THE SHUNAMMITE'S SON AWAKENED

The story of the Shunammite woman, and of her son who died, possibly as a result of sunstroke, is well-known to Bible readers. (II Kings 4:18-20) When the son died the mother summoned Elisha, who restored him to life. The account reads: "When Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto the LORD. And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. And he called Gehazi [his servant], and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground, and took up her son, and went out."—vss. 32-37

There is an ancient saying, oft repeated, "While there's life, there's hope." This limitation does not apply to God, however, for according to his promises, and according to the evidences furnished in his Word, there is hope for all who have died. It is true that the time had not yet come in the days of Elijah and Elisha for the general restoration of the dead. That still remains to be accomplished during

what the Apostle Peter described as the “times of restitution of all things.” (Acts 3:20,21) Those two boys restored to life by God’s ancient prophets went back into death again in later years, but this will not be so in the coming time of restoration. Then it will be God’s purpose that all who have died be raised from the dead and given the opportunity to live forever.—John 5:28,29; Rom. 5:18,19

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Through the ministry of Jesus others were awakened from the sleep of death. We quote the account of the young man in the city of Nain who was restored to life: “Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier [coffin]: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.”—Luke 7:12-15

Then there was the case of the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue. She had died, “and all wept, and bewailed her,” but Jesus said, “Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit [Greek: breath] came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat. And her parents were astonished: but he charged them that they should tell no man what was done.”—Luke 8:52-56

LAZARUS ALSO

We also have the classic case of Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary. This little family of Bethany were special friends of Jesus. Lazarus became seriously ill at a time when Jesus was conducting his ministry in the area where John the Baptist had been baptizing, some distance from Bethany. (John 10:40) The sisters sent messengers to Jesus to tell him of their brother's illness, but Jesus did nothing about it for a number of days. He then explained to his disciples, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby."—John 11:4

Jesus knew, of course, that Lazarus would succumb to his sickness and would fall asleep in death. When Lazarus did die, Jesus said to his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." (vs. 11) The disciples failed to comprehend the meaning of Jesus' statement, thinking he meant that Lazarus was simply resting quietly in sleep; then he said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him."—vss. 14,15

Lazarus was indeed dead, and in referring to it Jesus used sleep as a symbol of death. From sleep there is an awakening, and Jesus knew that the whole dead world of mankind would be awakened from the sleep of death in God's due time. The Master returned to Bethany, and to the home of Martha and Mary. When Martha saw him she said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." (John 11:21,22)

This was Martha's way of indicating her belief that Jesus would have been able to heal her brother had he arrived sooner, but more than this, it showed her belief that Jesus was able now to restore him to life.

This Jesus intended to do. He said to Martha, "Thy brother shall rise again," to which she replied, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." (vss. 23,24) Martha had been a student of Jesus' teachings, and doubtless also of the Old Testament scriptures in which is set forth the hope of the resurrection. She believed in the promised awakening from the sleep of death which was to be brought about by divine power in the final period of God's great plan of redemption and restoration through Christ, referred to in the prophecies as "the last day." (Isa. 2:2; 25:6-9) Actually this "day" is a thousand years in length, and will see the whole dead world of mankind restored to life. —II Pet. 3:8; Rev. 20:4,6

Jesus replied to Martha, "I am the resurrection, and the life." (John 11:25) That is, Jesus was the one who in the time of resurrection would be used by the Heavenly Father to restore life. Jesus gave his own human life as a ransom for Adam and his race, and by virtue of this he has been given the authority and the power to awaken all who are asleep in death. (I Tim. 2:5,6; Matt. 28:18) He awakened Lazarus from the sleep of death at that time as a demonstration of what would be accomplished in the final age of God's plan for all who sleep in death. Lazarus had been dead for several days and his flesh had begun to decompose. His awakening was a vivid example of the fact that so far as divine power is concerned it makes no

difference whether one has been dead for a few moments, for four days, or for thousands of years; the life-giving power of him who is “the resurrection and the life” will prevail for their restoration.

CHRIST THE FIRSTFRUITS

Thus far we have noted a number of instances mentioned in the Bible pertaining to the awakening of certain ones from the sleep of death. These were not resurrected in the fullest sense of the word, but merely restored to partial life temporarily. While these instances impress us with the fact of divine power capable of raising the dead, it is not until the resurrection of Jesus that we have the first instance of a full, complete, and eternal resurrection from the dead.

In Jesus’ resurrection we have what the Apostle Paul refers to as the “firstfruits” of the resurrection. Paul wrote, “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.” To this Paul adds, “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.” (I Cor. 15:20-22) That is, all will be given the opportunity, based on obedience, for a full and complete restoration to perfect human life.

When Jesus was raised from the dead he was highly exalted to a heavenly home and to the divine nature. Paul refers to this in Ephesians 4:8. “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” This verse refers to Psalms 68:18, which reads: “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led in procession a body of captives.” (*Rotherham Emphasized Bible*)

This “body of captives” are the so-called “after-fruits” of the resurrection, as it is likened to the release of prisoners—in this case, the prisoners of death. What a multitude of captives this is!

They will be preceded by the footstep followers of Jesus, who are described in the Scriptures as being the “firstfruits” class because they will be associated with Jesus in the blessing of the remainder of the world of mankind. James wrote concerning these: “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) The Revelator speaks of them as coming forth in “the first resurrection,” and that they shall live and reign with Christ a thousand years. (Rev. 20:4,6) These, then, are the first led forth from the prison of death by Jesus. They, like him, are exalted to a heavenly home, and to glory and honor and immortality.—Rom. 2:7

PRINCES IN THE EARTH

Another group of death’s captives to be led forth by Jesus in the resurrection are those referred to in Psalm 45:16 as the faithful ancient fathers. These are to be made “princes in all the earth.” In the 11th chapter of Hebrews the apostle mentions many of these by name and tells of their faithfulness under trial. He explains that they endured suffering in the Lord’s cause in order “that they might obtain a better resurrection.”—Heb. 11:35

These, we are informed, received the assurance that because of their great faith they were pleasing to God, which means that they proved worthy of a “better resurrection.” This will be an instantaneous

raising to perfection of human life, and as perfect humans these will be the visible earthly representatives of the divine Christ in the Messianic kingdom. (Heb. 11:39,40) The Prophet Isaiah informs us that at that time Jacob shall again see his children, and that his face shall no more wax pale with old age.—Isa. 29:22,23

Still another group of death's captives to be led forth to freedom and life by the great restorer of life will be what the Revelator describes as a "great multitude." Concerning these we read, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them."—Rev. 7:9,14,15

It should be noted that this great multitude class will not sit with the Lord "on" the throne, as will the firstfruits, Jesus' faithful footstep followers, but will be "before" the throne, and will serve God day and night in his temple. We do not know just what the nature of their service will be in the Messianic kingdom, but whatever it might be, there is first of all the necessity of their being raised from the dead.

THE GENERAL RESURRECTION

The final group of death's captives to be led forth from the tomb will be that large body of the remainder of all mankind who have ever lived. This group includes those who have died in unbelief, in partial belief, the criminals, the proud and selfish, the children, and those millions upon

millions who have died without an understanding of the basic fundamentals of the Bible's teachings. It will include those too who, though claiming belief in Jesus, have mostly paid lip service to that belief, but have been unwilling in this life to give themselves fully to God, nor to sacrifice.

The *Revised Standard Version* and many other translations state that these shall come forth from death "to the resurrection of judgment." (John 5:29) This means that when this group of death's captives are liberated from the sleep of death they will be brought to judgment, or trial, as the thought is in the Greek text, for in the plan of God, the Messianic kingdom and the promised Judgment Day of a thousand years run concurrently. It will be that "day" spoken of by the Apostle Paul when the Lord will judge the world in righteousness.—Acts 17:31

Isaiah 26:9 declares that when the judgments of the Lord are abroad in the earth the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness. The psalmist spoke of this as the Lord judging the people with his truth. What a happy time that will be: "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the LORD: ... for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth."—Ps. 96:11-13

THE RANSOMED RETURN

Jesus gave himself a "ransom" for all mankind. (I Tim. 2:5,6) It is this that makes possible his leading forth the captives of death. Isaiah wrote

concerning the happy time when the world of mankind is brought back from their captivity. He said, “The ransomed of the LORD shall return, ... with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”—Isa. 35:10

The Hebrew word *sheol* in the Old Testament, and its Greek companion *hades* in the New Testament, are used in the Bible to denote the great prison, the sleep of death, into which all mankind pass when they die. In Revelation 1:18 Jesus speaks of his having been dead—having died, that is, for the sins of the world—and that now he is alive, and has the “keys of hell [*hades*] and of death.” Here again is the thought of the dead being released from captivity, for Jesus in due time uses those keys to unlock and swing wide open the gates of captivity to awaken and free the prisoners of death.

When all have been released, and those worthy of everlasting life have demonstrated their loyalty to the divine principles of righteousness, and have been restored to full human perfection, then it will be true that “there shall be no more death,” as noted in our opening Scripture. The “former things [shall] have passed away,” and the last of death’s captives will have been released and restored to their full liberty as earthly sons of God.—Rev. 21:4-7

This is the full meaning of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who was the firstfruits of them that slept in death. While in 2025 the world is still in chaos and darkness, the glad new day of liberation of mankind from death is drawing closer, yea, as the signs of the times indicate, is very near. Let us rejoice in this glorious prospect! ■