

Jesus and the Resurrection

“Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things. Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel.”
—II Timothy 2:7,8

WHO IS JESUS, AND WHAT part does he have in God’s plan and purpose as it has to do with mankind? Today Jesus is the ostensible head over 2.4 billion humans, or more than 30% of the world’s population. His professed followers are not a united body of people, with tens of thousands of different denom-

inations. Yet these groups, each in its own way, and to varying degrees, do homage to Jesus or at the least honor him “with their lips.”—Matt. 15:8,9

In addition to Jesus’ professed followers, there are billions of others who know about him. Many of these are able to quote some of his sayings, especially parts of his Sermon on the Mount. Indeed, there probably is not a name that is more universally known. The widely variant opinions concerning Jesus, as represented in the thousands of divided groups which confess his name, speak loudly of the

many misunderstandings and differences of thought which exist concerning him.

How, then, shall we find out about Jesus? Shall we consult the viewpoints of the myriad sectarian groups which bear his name? This would be an endless task; and fruitless also, as well as confusing. We think the better way is to go to the fountain of information found in the Bible to obtain the truths concerning Jesus. One of these great sources of information is the Apostle Paul.

Paul was a Hebrew, and well-schooled in the religious beliefs of his people. He knew that the God of Israel, through his holy prophets, had promised to send one who would redeem the people from their sins, and deliver them from the oppressive hand of death. He knew from the testimony of the Scriptures that to accomplish this purpose of redemption it was necessary for the Redeemer to die. No doubt Paul had many times read that revealing statement recorded by the Prophet Isaiah: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." (Isa. 53:5) Upon careful consideration, Paul came to understand this prophecy as pointing to Jesus.

Here we have expressed a great truth of God's plan which has come to be misunderstood by a majority of the professed followers of Jesus. It is the doctrine of atonement, and the fact that Jesus could bear the sins of the whole world of mankind, as suggested in the foregoing words of Isaiah. Professed Christians who no longer believe this claim that it is a bloody teaching, hence repulsive, and not worthy of acceptance by reasoning minds.

It is odd that anyone should take such a view of Jesus' sacrificial work on behalf of mankind. Today we laud those who are willing to give their lives to save others, proclaiming them as heroes. It is just this that Jesus did, but on a far grander scale. Paul wrote concerning this: "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."—Rom. 5:7,8

Thus we are informed that God's love was manifested toward his dying human creatures by the death of Jesus. This too is a well-established fact of Scripture. John 3:16 reads, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The greatest of all God's gifts is his beloved Son, who in turn willingly gave himself in death that ultimately mankind might have an opportunity to enjoy everlasting life.

THE FATHER AND THE SON

There is no need for any misunderstanding concerning the relationship between the Creator and his beloved Son, Christ Jesus. The Apostle Paul wrote, "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." (I Cor. 8:6) Here Paul makes a sharp distinction between the Father and the Son, and, at the same time, emphasizes that the blessings the Father desires to provide his human creation are available only through the Son.

The Scriptures present Jesus as “the beginning of the creation of God.” (Rev. 3:14) Paul wrote concerning Jesus: “We have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.”—Col. 1:14-17

In this comprehensive statement concerning the origin of Jesus, Paul takes us into an area of Truth quite beyond the ability of our finite minds to comprehend. He informs us that Jesus was the “firstborn of every creature,” and that he was “the image of the invisible God.” He explains further that by Jesus all things were created, in heaven and earth, visible and invisible. This implies, though our minds cannot fully grasp it, that there was a time when God was alone, and that Jesus was his first and only direct creation.

This throws light on God’s statement as recorded in Genesis 1:26: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” This is evidently the great God of the universe talking to his Son, “the firstborn of every creature,” who himself had been created in the image of God, even as his Father specified the first man should be created. Thus in a small way we are taken behind the scenes, so to speak, and given a very limited glimpse of creation’s architect and builder at work.

The created things, Paul says, include the “visible” and the “invisible.” There are the angels, for example.

These are real creatures, but the human eye cannot see them, because they are spirit beings, invisible to human sight. It is evident also that Jesus, before he came to earth and became a human being, was the most exalted of all intelligent invisible creations. It was this mighty invisible spirit being who humbled himself and became a man in order that he might give his humanity in death to accomplish redemption for the sin-cursed and dying race.

GOD'S SON MADE FLESH

In the outworking of his loving plan to rescue the world from sin and death, the Creator arranged the miraculous transfer of “the firstborn” from the “invisible” to the “visible,” by being born of a human mother. Thus, as John testifies, God’s Son “was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”—John 1:14

As to the purpose of this, the Apostle Paul testifies, “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” (Heb. 2:9) How could one man “taste death” for “every man?” The Scriptures reveal that this was because death had come upon all through the one man Adam. Paul states it simply: “Just as all men die by virtue of their descent from Adam, so all such as are in union with Christ will be made to live again.”—I Cor. 15:22, *Williams New Testament*

The question might arise as to why any member of the human race who was willing to do so could not have died for the world even as Jesus did? Why

was it necessary for Jesus to humble himself and become a human in order to redeem mankind from death? The simple answer to this question is that every member of the human race is under condemnation to death, and “none ... can by any means redeem his brother.” (Ps. 49:7) The man Jesus, however, was free from Adamic condemnation, and by virtue of the miraculous manner in which he became flesh, he was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Heb. 7:26) Jesus therefore had a perfect, uncondemned human life to give in sacrifice for the perfect life of Adam, which was forfeited when he sinned. The Scriptures use the word ransom in this connection and tell us that Jesus gave himself “a ransom for all.” (I Tim. 2:3-6) The word “ransom” is defined in the original Greek text as denoting “what is given in exchange for another as the price of his redemption.”—*Thayer’s Greek Definitions*

THE RESURRECTION HOPE

Another important truth concerning Jesus which Paul understood was that after giving his life in sacrifice for the redemption of the world from sin and death, he was raised from the dead by the power of his Heavenly Father. (Gal. 1:1; I Pet. 1:18-21) Many religious philosophies, Christian and non-Christian alike, claim that life continues after death and that those who “seem” to die are more alive than when they were living. The Scriptures, however, emphasize the reality of death, and are consistent in their testimony. The Creator warned our first parents that if they disobeyed his law they would “surely die.” (Gen. 2:17) Four thousand years

later the Apostle Paul wrote, “The wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23) Solomon wrote, “The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing.”—Eccles. 9:5

The Bible holds out a hope of life beyond the grave, but bases this hope upon the promises of the Creator to restore the dead to life, not upon the mistaken thought that there is no death. The religion of the Bible is the only one in the world that teaches a true and complete concept of the resurrection of the dead, for it is essentially the only source of understanding which acknowledges the reality of death.

In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul wrote, “Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.” (I Cor. 15:20) From this short scripture we learn three specific things about the apostle’s understanding. First, Jesus died; second, he was raised from the dead; and third, he was the “firstfruits” of all others who “slept” in death. Paul wrote further to this effect in the next verse: “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.”—vs. 21

The hope of the resurrection of the dead was not something that Paul had acquired only when he became a Christian. This was a hope which was held by all Israelites who knew and believed the promises of God as set forth in the Old Testament. In testifying before Felix, a Roman governor, and referring to the charges brought against him by some of his countrymen, 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

It is clear from this that the hope of the resurrection of the dead had been set forth in the Old Testament. However, the word resurrection does not appear in the Old Testament, God’s promises of the restoration of the dead to life being set forth there by other terminology. The righteous man Job said, “If a man die, shall he live again?” Then, answering his own question and speaking prophetically, he added, “All the days of my appointed time will I wait [in death], till my change [from death to life] come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.—Job 14:14,15

Here Job refers to himself as the work of God’s hands. This is true of all mankind. As Paul explained in his sermon on Mars’ hill, we are all “the offspring of God.” (Acts 17:29) Our first parents were created in God’s image, and had the ability to obey the Creator’s law. They disobeyed and brought upon themselves the penalty of death. However, this does not mean that God has lost interest in his human creatures. As Job explains, he still has a “desire,” or love, for them, because they are the work of his hands.

GOD’S LOVING PURPOSE

It was this deep interest in his wayward human creatures that motivated the Creator to send his Son into the world to redeem them from death. Because of this loving provision, Job, and the entire

human race, will be awakened from the sleep of death. Poetically, Job speaks of this as responding to the voice of God: "Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee." It is the voice of God's authority and power, as it will be exercised through his resurrected and highly exalted Son, that will restore the dead to life.—John 5:28,29, *Revised Version*

Moses, in addition to being Israel's emancipator and lawgiver, was also one of God's outstanding prophets. In a prayer to the Creator recorded by the psalmist, he expressed his hope of the resurrection. We quote: "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men."—Ps. 90:1-3

It was after he had disobeyed divine law that the Creator "turnest man" to destruction. He said to Adam, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."—Gen. 3:17-19

Here the infliction of the penalty of death is likened to a returning to the dust of the ground. Moses said that those turned to destruction will, in due time, be returned from death. Through the Prophet Daniel the Lord gives us further assurance of this, declaring that those who "sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." (Dan. 12:2) Thus the hope is held out that

those who came under condemnation to death through Adam are to be released from that condemnation and awakened from the sleep of death.

The Lord used the Prophet Isaiah also to set forth the assurance of the resurrection. He wrote, “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 expression, “ransomed of the Lord,” includes all mankind. It is used, evidently, to remind us that the dead are to return to life because they have been ransomed by the atoning blood of Jesus, who gave himself a “ransom for all.”—I Tim. 2:6

It should be noted that joy will abound when the dead return to life. They return with “songs and everlasting joy,” and “sorrow and sighing” will be no more. Thus the resurrection of the dead is seen to be a blessed hope of life beyond the grave. Both the just and the unjust will be restored. The just will have appropriate rewards meted out to them, but the unjust will be enlightened and given an opportunity to believe, reform and gain perfect human life.

The hope of the resurrection includes the young as well as the old. This is brought to our attention in Jeremiah 31:15-17. Here we are told of a mother in Israel who was weeping over the death of her children. The prophecy reads: “Thus saith the LORD; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall

be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.”

DEATH—AN ENEMY

In this prophecy death is described as an enemy. Indeed, it is man’s greatest enemy. When it strikes down its victims there is always “lamentation, and bitter weeping.” However, these victims will not remain in the land of the enemy, which is the land of death. “They shall come again to their own border.” Just as there is the land of death, so there is the land of life. Here the resurrection of the dead is described symbolically as crossing over the border, back into the land of the living. What a bright hope this gives us for all children who have died, and the same will be true of all mankind who have died and are also now in “the land of the enemy.”

The Old Testament also speaks of the state of death as being a prison, and the resurrection of the dead is referred to as “the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” (Isa. 61:1) These prisoners of death are likened to “captives,” and their restoration to life as being released from captivity. This language is used in Ezekiel 16:53-55, where God speaks to the Israelites, assuring them, as well as the Sodomites and the Samaritans, that they will all be released from their captivity in death and be restored to their former estate of life.

We quote: “When I bring back their captives, the captives of Sodom and her daughters, and the captives of Samaria and her daughters, then I will also bring back the captives of your captivity. ... When

your sisters, Sodom and her daughters, return to their former state, and Samaria and her daughters return to their former state, then you and your daughters will return to your former state.”—*New King James Version*

Using this same viewpoint of death, the Lord assures us of still others who will be released from their captivity in death. “It shall come to pass in the latter days: I will bring back the captives of Elam, says the LORD.” (Jer. 49:39, *NKJV*) “I will bring back the captives of Moab in the latter days, says the LORD.” (Jer. 48:47, *NKJV*) “Afterward I will bring back the captives of the people of Ammon, says the LORD.” (Jer. 49:6, *NKJV*) Thus the Elamites, the Moabites, and the Ammonites are all to be brought back from their captivity in death. From these specific references to the people of various ancient nations, we are given the assurance that God’s resurrection plan encompasses all mankind.

David wrote prophetically concerning Jesus, “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive.” (Ps. 68:18) This prophecy is quoted by the Apostle Paul, who applies it to Jesus, saying, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives.” (Eph. 4:8, *English Standard Version*) What a “host of captives” there are to be released from their captivity in death! As we have noted, the Scriptures make special reference to many of these—the Israelites, the Ammonites, the Elamites, the Moabites, the Sodomites and the Samaritans. Jesus said that all in the grave would be called forth from death. This includes all of death’s captives, beginning with righteous Abel and all who have died in the past; also those who are dying today; and all who will die tomorrow.

HOPE BEYOND THE GRAVE

It was this comforting hope of life beyond the grave, made sure by the death and resurrection of Jesus, that Paul and the other apostles presented to the people nearly two thousand years ago. In Paul's day, even as now, there were difficult aspects of the resurrection teachings which he found necessary to explain. To the church at Corinth he wrote, "Some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?" (I Cor. 15:35) In his answer to this question Paul explained that in the resurrection some would have "celestial," or spiritual bodies, while others would have "terrestrial," or natural, human bodies.—vss. 40-44

According to the Bible, it is the faithful footstep followers of Jesus who are to receive spiritual bodies. These are "partakers of the heavenly calling." (Heb. 3:1) When Paul wrote that all would be made alive through Christ, he added, "Every man in his own order." (I Cor. 15:23) The Bible reveals that the "order" of the resurrection is that those who receive spiritual bodies are to be resurrected first. This is referred to in the Bible as the "first resurrection," and we are informed that those who participate in the first resurrection will live and reign with Christ "a thousand years."—Rev. 20:4,6

Through Christ's earthly reign, a righteous world government will replace the imperfect and failing institutions of today, which are out of harmony with God and his principles of righteousness. (II Pet. 3:10,13; Rev. 21:1-5) Paul wrote that the last enemy to be destroyed as the rulership of Christ progresses is "death." (I Cor. 15:26) This will require the awakening from the dead all who have died. This

period of Christ's kingdom during which these things will be accomplished is described elsewhere by the Apostle Peter as the "times of restitution [Greek: restoration] of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."—Acts 3:20,21

It is those who will be restored to life during the reign of Christ that are to have human bodies. They will be as they were before; knowing their friends, and known by them. Through this mighty project the Creator will reveal himself to mankind, and they will then learn of his wisdom, justice, love, and power, which combine to make known his glory. "The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."—Isa. 40:5 ■