

The Resurrection of the Saints

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The subject of the resurrection of the saints has been the object of wild speculation, the focal point of persistent derision, and yet remains the hope of the believing Christian.

As the title indicates, our concern in this little treatise is the bodily resurrection of the saints. By this emphasis we do not imply that there is no resurrection of the wicked. Scripture makes clear that all men shall be resurrected from the dead. "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt," Daniel 12:2. "Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth, they that have done good unto resurrection of life and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation," John 5:28,29. "And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust," Acts 24:15.

The bodies of the wicked shall be raised from their graves and through that resurrection they shall be prepared to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and subsequently to endure in their bodies everlasting wrath in hell.

Here we concentrate upon the resurrection of the saints.

THE SOUND OF THE TRUMPET

I Corinthians 15:51-53 describes the wonder of the resurrection, "Behold I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruption must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

It is significant that Scripture places emphasis on the fact that the resurrection shall be accomplished by the blowing of the trump. Consider Isaiah 18:3, "All ye inhabitants of the world and ye dwellers in the earth, see ye when he lifteth up an ensign on the mountain and when he bloweth a trump, hear ye, for so the Lord saith, I will take my rest... in the heat of harvest." Christ emphasized it in His words of Matthew 24:31, "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other." Paul adds to this that Christ shall come personally at the moment of the resurrection, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God and the dead in Christ shall rise first then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, so shall we ever be with the Lord." I Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

If we connect the blowing of the trump with its significance in Israel during the Old Testament times, we may conclude two things that bear upon the resurrection.

First, it represented a call to convocation. If we look up passages of the Old Testament which deal with the blowing of the trump we learn that it was associated with the following: announcing the crowning of a new king (I Kings 1:34), calling the people to gather at the temple for worship or feasts (Psalm 81:3), the blowing of the trumpet preceded the ark as it was carried along (Joshua 6:4), and the trumpet blast called the people to prepare for a battle (I Samuel 13:3).

In this connection we can draw an analogy between such activities in Israel and the blowing of the trumpet in the resurrection. From the passages cited above, we understand that the resurrection is directly connected with the personal return of Christ. The blowing of the trumpet heralds the coming of our King! His coming is twofold. He comes on the one hand as the Lord who will bestow judgment upon His enemies. The events immediately preceding His personal return also emphasize this: the kingdom of antichrist has fallen and utterly failed by virtue of the battle of Armageddon, Revelation 20:9, the great natural cataclysm has destroyed all that appeared precious to men, Rev. 18:9ff, and now Christ the Judge appears and He will declare, "Depart from me ye that work iniquity," Matt.

7:23. On the other hand, His presence is to gather His elect people from the ends of the earth to join Him in the holy convocation of the great marriage feast of Christ as the Lamb, Rev.19:7.

Secondly, the blowing of the trumpet represents the response of the people to make preparation for the holy convocation. In Israel this involved the washing of the body, the changing of clothing, the offering of burnt offerings and confession of sin, Exodus 30:20ff. In this connection the blowing of the trumpet symbolizes the preparation of the people of God to be made ready to stand before the King of Kings. The resurrection is part of the preparation, a making fit of the people of God, to stand in the judgment and be made ready for heavenly glory.

It is this latter idea that is foremost on the mind of Paul in the context of I Cor.15:51-53. Note with me the transition from, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" to "For this corruptible must put on incorruption and this mortal must put on immortality". Not only shall we be changed, but we must be changed, it is a divine necessity. As we walk upon this earth we are not fit for standing in the presence of our eternal King, the trumpet beckons the necessary preparation to join in the holy convocation.

Paul tells us there are two reasons that make this change necessary, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God," verse 50. Our present body is incompatible with the glory of the heavenly for now we bear the image of the earthy, but we shall bear the image of the heavenly, vs. 49. The glory of the entire kingdom of heaven is so different, Rev.21:1. This also points us to the second reason, our present body is not only earthy it is corruptible, "neither can corruption inherit incorruption" vs.50. It is described as corruption, dishonor, weakness, natural, vs.42-44. This must be changed into incorruption, glory, power, and spiritual (or physical) body, vs.42-44.

All of this is accomplished through the resurrection. For some this will be the immediate work of God upon the bodies of the saints which are in the graves or have been buried at sea or returned to the dust in many different ways. Though they have become decomposed and suffer the ravages of time, yet they shall be raised and through the resurrection be changed and made fit to dwell in the presence of our exalted Lord. It is a mystery, vs.51. For those who are alive upon the earth when Christ shall return, they shall undergo an immediate change without having to die. Their bodies shall be changed in a moment, the twinkling of an eye, vs.52. The end result will be the same, each child of God will have a perfect body fit for enjoying everlasting life to God's glory.

THE RESURRECTION BODY

Understandably, there is much difference of viewpoint concerning what the resurrection body will be like. Modernism denies the bodily resurrection altogether, they spiritualize the resurrection to mean a renewal of heavenly virtues in people. However, faithful Christians have rejected this view as contrary to the Word of God. Even among Bible believing Christians there is difference of interpretation concerning the resurrection body. Some believe that it will be a "spiritual" body not being fleshly. They make reference to Matthew 22:29-30, "like the angels in glory" and insist that the angels do not have fleshly bodies so we will not have them after the resurrection. Others correctly maintain that our resurrection bodies will be material and fleshly, but the material will be "heavenly".

Two things make this later view plain.

We are exhorted in Philippians 3:21, "Look to Jesus who shall change your vial body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body". We may learn 4 things from the resurrection of Christ. First, Christ arose bodily. Any attempt to spiritualize the resurrection of Christ ends in distortion of Scripture. Secondly, Christ arose with the same body. Hence He said, "Behold my hands and my feet, for it is I myself, handle me and see for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see I have" Luke 24:39. If Christ arose in an entirely different body, this reference to nails would be superfluous. Thirdly, Christ arose in the same body, only it was changed. He was not dependent upon earthly food, though He could eat it, Luke 24:43. He traversed through closed doors and disappeared from the eye of the beholder, Luke 24:31, 36. Fourthly, it was a body that no longer belonged to this earth, it was fit for heavenly life. In this body he ascended into heaven, Acts 1:9.

In addition to this, we learn from the context of I Cor. 15 that the planting of a seed is an example of the resurrection, the same seed undergoes a change. Hence in verse 53 we read, “this corruptible must put on (or literally, be clothed with) incorruption”. The body changes clothes, not the soul. Here too we may conclude 4 things. First, our resurrection body will be a material body of flesh, the material not being earthly, but heavenly. Secondly, we will have a human body, not like the plants, animals or angels, rather distinctly human. The distinction between the bodies on this side of the grave will apply to heaven also. Thirdly, we will have individual bodies, there are no two alike here neither will there be in heaven. There may very well be differences in age (see Isaiah 11:6ff, suckling child, weaned child, little child), sex, race, etc. Fourthly, they will be perfect and glorified, no diseases, no physical or mental immaturity or weakness, rather perfect power, glory, beauty, and strength in order that we may serve God forever.

A GLORIOUS END

“O death where is thy sting, O grave, where is thy victory... thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”, I Cor. 15:55-57.

Christ has obtained for us complete salvation. We belong to Him in body and soul and therein receive our full redemption. Now our bodies bear the ravages of death, but then they shall be made perfect for when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved, we will have a building of God eternal in the heavens, II Cor.5:1.

Through the resurrection we shall pass into everlasting life.