

Pastor Russell's Sermon

CHIEF OR FIRST RESURRECTION

Pastor Russell's Address to Bible Students.

PASTOR SPEAKS IN GLASGOW.

"The Rest of the Dead Lived Not Again Until the Thousand Years Were Finished"—Explanation of Doctrine That Has Proved Puzzling to Many Believers and Unbelievers.



Glasgow, Scotland, July 28th.—Bible Students of this vicinity numbering hundreds have held a three-days' convention.

Today's session, attended by several thousand, was addressed by Pastor Russell twice. We report one of his discourses, based on Revelation xx, 5. It was announced that next Sunday he will address a similar convention in London. He said:—

The resurrection of the dead seems to be the most difficult thing in the Bible for the worldly-minded to grasp by faith. This must be because the human mind instinctively realizes the majesty of the Power and Wisdom necessary to the reproduction of the same individuality which lived and thought centuries ago, before passing into the silence of the tomb.

The Bible makes no denial of the stupendousness of the resurrection miracle—so far beyond the wildest flights of human imagination—it confesses this and calls upon us to exercise faith in the great Creator, the Omnipotent One, whose greatness we can but feebly sense and surely cannot comprehend.

Hence, the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, from its first announcement in the Scriptures, has called for the strongest faith on the part of believers and has excited the general resentment of unbelievers, who seem to find it easier to believe anything else respecting the dead.

Undoubtedly this is the reason why so many who give evidence of general intelligence accept the absurd theory that when a dog dies he is dead, but when a man dies he is more alive than ever.

These properly claim to hope for everlasting life, but not having faith enough to believe in the Divine power to perform the resurrection of the dead, they are driven to the theory of Plato. Indeed, who has not heard Plato quoted by ministers and other learned men when discussing the future life? They do not quote Jesus and the Apostles, because the explanations of Jesus and the Apostles are all to the contrary, proving that the dead are dead, and that the only hope of a future existence is by a resurrection.

Jesus' Answer to the Sadducees. Note the answer of Jesus to the Sadducees of His day, who are told, specially denied the resurrection of the dead. Jesus answered, "That the dead are [to be] raised was shown to Moses at the burning bush," when God's message was, "I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." (Mark xii, 26; Acts vii, 32.)

Jesus commented that God would not declare Himself to be their God if they were dead in the absolute sense that brutes die. Jesus' argument was that the fact that God still recognized them as persons while dead implied that their souls merely slept and will be granted a resurrection of the dead, in God's due time and in better bodies—under more favorable conditions than those under which they died.

We remember that St. Paul's letters and sermons abound in references to the dead. We call to mind his great resurrection chapter (I Corinthians xv), in which he declares that "As all die in Adam, so all shall be made alive in Christ—every man in his own order." (Verses 22, 23.) He does not say that every man is *alive*, but that they shall be made alive in the resurrection. The intermediate state he declares is a sleep, from which, by Divine arrangement through Jesus, they will all be awakened in the resurrection morning, and after the second coming of Christ.

First or Chief Resurrection—the world in general will have no share in it. Harken to Jesus' words on this subject, and note their explicitness of statement to the effect that all who participate in this First Resurrection will be the elect overcomers of this Age, and they will be the Royal Priests, or Priestly Kings, of the next Age, in which the world will be dealt with and, so far as willing, uplifted from sin and death. He says, "Blessed and holy are all they that have part in the First Resurrection; on such the Second Death hath no power; they shall be priests unto God, and unto Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."—Revelation xx, 6.

The word in this text rendered *first* signifies *chief, foremost, superior*. It will indeed be first in order of time, too; but the particular thought is that it is superior. Its superiority rests in the fact that all who share in its blessings will not only attain life, full, perfect and everlasting, but additionally they will receive life on the highest plane, being made partakers of the divine nature, by the "change" which this resurrection will bring to them.—II Peter I, 4.

The sharers of this resurrection will not only receive everlasting life, but more, they will thereby be made death-proof—immortal in the Bible sense, in which it is declared that God alone hath immortality. God has also given immortality to our Redeemer in His resurrection, and has promised the same to the elect Church, the Bride, the Lamb's Wife, in this First Resurrection. Aside from these, so far as the Bible teaches, this special kind of immortality goes to no other creatures in the Universe.

Even angels, both the holy and the fallen, possess only the ordinary immortality known as everlasting life—an immortality or deathlessness dependent upon the Divine pleasure and supported by necessary elements of Divine provision. The Church, on the contrary, sharing in this Chief Resurrection, will possess inherency of life, the same kind of immortality possessed by Jehovah Himself.

From the context it will be seen that none will participate in this Chief Resurrection except such as shall successfully pass their trial and be accounted worthy of joint-heirship with Messiah in His glorious Kingdom, for it is distinctly stated that they are to "reign with Him a thousand years."

Sharing "His Resurrection." From what we have seen it must be evident to all of us that to gain a share in this Chief Resurrection is to gain the great Prize held out before us in the Gospel Age—the Prize which our Lord referred to as the "Pearl of great price," for which a man would be well justified in selling all that he has that he might purchase it.

It will be admitted on all hands that the great Apostle Paul is represented amongst the loyal ones who sacrificed every earthly interest, aim, hope and ambition that he might attain the Kingdom blessings and joint-heirship with Christ. We are therefore deeply interested in St. Paul's words respecting his hope, his sacrifice and his anticipation of attaining a share in this better resurrection, which he styles "His Resurrection"—namely, the resurrection of Christ.

The Scriptures continually maintain the thought that Jesus is the "Head of the Church which is His Body," and that these saintly Elect constitute the members of His Body. Carrying out this figure, the whole Body, all the members, should share in the same resurrection as that experienced by the Head—the Redeemer. And to this the facts agree. More than eighteen centuries ago our Lord Jesus was raised from the dead by the Father's power.

St. Paul declares that because of His obedience in carrying out the Divine Program as our Redeemer—even unto death—"Therefore God hath highly exalted Him, and hath given Him a name [honor, station] above every name [except His own—He is excepted], that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, both of things in heaven and things on the earth." (Philippians ii, 9, 10.) To this end we must all be changed from earthly to heavenly nature, because "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom."

It seems a long time indeed between our Lord's resurrection and the resurrection of His Mystical Body, the Church class (Col. I, 18, 24), but the period is long only from our limited human standpoint—not long from the Divine standpoint, in which a thousand years are as one day. (II Peter iii, 8.) He who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, will bring us also [from the dead] by Him, and with Him, as members of His Body.

It is to this that St. Paul refers saying, I count all [earthly] things but as loss, . . . that I may win Christ [win a membership in His glorified Body—in the Kingdom class], . . . that I might know Him and the power of His resurrection [that I might experience that great power of God which in the Redeemer's case lifted Him not only out of death, but to the very highest plane of existence, the divine nature, with its glory, honor and immortality], . . . being made conformable unto His death, that I might share also in His resurrection.—Philippians iii, 7-11.

Oh, the Apostle gives us the key to his hopes; he did not hope that the Heavenly Father, who had required of Jesus a manifestation of His loyalty unto death before He would crown Him with immortality at His own right hand—he did not expect that this same God would give him a share in that great glory and honor, except as he should have the mind of Christ and should demonstrate similarly his loyalty to the extent of his ability in being conformed to Christ's death.

Master's glory if we fail to share His loyalty, His ignominy—to be dead with Him to the world, its praises, its ambitions, its rewards. "If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him." And the only way to enter into that reign of glory will be through the power of "His Resurrection"—the Chief Resurrection.

"But the Rest of the Dead." The statement of our text that the rest of the dead will not live until the thousand years of Christ's reign are finished has proven a stumbling block to many who have studied too superficially. Let us not forget that the Spirit does not reveal the deep things of God, except to those who search for Truth "as men search for silver"—patiently, persistently, delving deeply.

It is very easy for all to grasp the thought that Messiah's Kingdom is to last a thousand years, and that all who shall be alive at that time, all who shall be born during that period, will participate in the wonderful blessings and privileges which it will bring to the human family. They are ready, too, to admit the reasonableness of giving an equal opportunity to those of our race who have gone down into death with either no knowledge of Christ, as was the case for four thousand years, or with the too limited knowledge to benefit them, as has been the case during the past two thousand years, and today, only this text respecting the "rest of the dead" stands in their way. I should be glad if any such are present here today, because I know I can relieve them of their difficulty. Yes, I shall be glad if my words through the press shall reach many others who have been perplexed by this Scripture.

It is not necessary for us to set this Scripture aside, even though all Bible scholars know, or should know, that this portion of Revelation xx, 4, 5 which relates to "the rest of the dead which live not again until the thousand years are finished" is spurious—that it is not found in any of the old Greek manuscripts. It is supposed that it got into the text, not through any desire to corrupt the same and falsify the record, but that in the days when the manuscripts were copied by pen, some copyist made this memorandum on the margin of his manuscript as a helpful thought, and that other copyists, using his manuscript, supposed it to be a part of the original and incorporated it in the text.

However, the additional words are in no sense in conflict with the facts, which are these: Adam, created in his Maker's likeness, perfect, was alive in the sense that he enjoyed perfection of life and that he had a right to a life everlasting, except as he should forfeit the same by disobedience. The moment he disobeyed God's command he came under the sentence of sin, namely, death. From that moment onward he was judicially dead, even though the dying process lasted for more than nine hundred years.

Similarly, all of his posterity, from the Divine standpoint, are dead, "children of wrath." Jesus carried out this same thought in His teaching, saying, "Let the dead bury their dead." Only those who have accepted Him as their Life-giver are even reckoned considered alive, from the Divine standpoint.

And so, throughout the thousand years of Messiah's reign, "All in their graves shall come forth," "every man in his own order"; but they will still be, from the Divine standpoint, judicially dead—without the right to everlasting life. The work of the Lord Jesus, as the Great Prophet, Priest, King and Judge, and the Church with Him, will be the instruction and assistance of these for their gradual uplifting out of sin and weakness and imperfection—toward perfection—toward acceptance with God—toward everlasting life. Such as reject the assistance offered will die the Second Death. Such as avail themselves of the blessed privileges of that time will attain human perfection. But still they will not have everlasting life accorded to them. They will merely be in a good, suitable and ready condition for God to grant them everlasting life, if they shall stand His tests.

The tests for eternal life will come at the close of the Messianic reign—when the great Mediator between God and men, having accomplished His work of restitution of the race, shall deliver over everything into the hands of the Father—the hands of Justice. Everlasting life will not be given as a matter of mercy, but as a matter of justice—to those who will demonstrate their loyalty and worthiness of everlasting life. The mercy of God will be exercised in the bringing of them to this condition, where perfection in word, deed and thought will be possible.

The great temptation which will then come to all the world, through the loosening of Satan—the temporary permission of evil in the world—will demonstrate which of these resurrected from the dead God can approve and consistently grant the great gift of eternal life. All those who fall in their trial will be destroyed with Satan in the Second Death, while all who prove their loyalty will be acknowledged worthy of everlasting life.

Thus the rest of the dead, aside from those now on trial, the Church class, will not live in the full sense of Divine recognition as worthy of everlasting life, until the thousand years of Messiah's reign shall have ended.

But, beloved brethren, much as we are interested in the glorious blessings that the Messianic Kingdom shall bring to the world of mankind, the Lord wishes us to be specially interested in the glorious opportunity and privilege which He has accorded us of having fellowship with our Redeemer in the suffering of this present time, and being counted worthy to share with Him in the glory which shall follow—into which the faithful will be ushered by the power of the First Resurrection.

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