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Pastor Russell's Sermon

THE VERY FIRST RESURRECTION

Distinction Between Jesus' Raising Up and All Others.

EASTER SUNDAY'S MEANING

Pastor Russell Shows Scripturally the Difference Between Awakening of the Dead and Resurrection of the Dead. Several Were Awakened Before Jesus, but He Was the First Resurrected—The Church's Resurrection—The Subsequent Resurrection of the World.



St. Louis, Mo., March 23.—Pastor Russell spoke twice here today. We report his address on the Resurrection, from the text, "He should be the first that should rise from the dead."—Acts 26:23.

With startling clearness the speaker pointed out that his text meant nothing less than it said; namely, that the resurrection of Jesus was the very first resurrection—that no one had previously been raised from the dead. He led his hearers back to Eden and let them hear the Divine words respecting the penalty for sin—"Dying, thou shalt die." He gave them the further formula of Jehovah's curse, or sentence, in the words addressed to Adam after he had been cast out of Eden: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it thou wast taken; for dust thou art; and unto dust shalt thou return."—Genesis 3:17-19.

The Pastor showed that this dying process operated in Father Adam for nine hundred and thirty years before his action was completed; that Adam's children, the human family, never were in the same perfection as Adam—in the image of God—that they were born on a lower plane, and were fallen at the time of birth. He quoted from the Psalms: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalm 51:5.) This, he said, agreed exactly with the New Testament statement, "Death passed upon all men because all are sinners"; and again, "There is none righteous [perfect], no, not one"—all "come short of the glory of God."—Romans 5:12; 3:12, 23.

Next, the Pastor pointed out the meaning of the word *resurrection*, which in the Greek is *anastasis*. It means, he said, not merely an awakening from the sleep of death, but a raising up again. The word again signifies a raising to a former standard—the one from which they fell—the image and likeness of God, which none of Adam's children have fully possessed, because he lost it. While Jesus was of Adam's stock, through His mother, His life and perfection came to Him from His prehuman state; and hence He was perfect, a Son of God, "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."

"Not Possible For Him to Be Holden." St. Peter declares that it was not possible for Jesus to be *holden of death*. (Acts 2:24.) No cause of death was found in Him. He delighted to do the Heavenly Father's will. It was the Father's will that Jesus should demonstrate His loyalty and obedience unto death, "even the death of the cross." But this did not interfere with the original promise of life everlasting to the obedient. Hence it was not possible for Jesus to remain under the power of death, as it is not possible for God to change His great purpose or to violate His agreement. Hence the Apostle says that God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day.

Jesus was perfect on the spirit plane, before He humbled Himself to exchange the spirit nature for the human, to become man's Redeemer. He never forfeited His right to life. He merely laid it down in loyalty to the Father's will. Since He was unfallen, His resurrection would mean His resurrection in perfection. But it was not God's will that He should come back to perfection in human nature. He had already used that nature for the purpose intended. He was brought fully back from the power of death to the very highest plane of spirit being; namely, the Divine nature.

Contrast this resurrection, or bringing back to perfection from death, with the experiences that occurred in any awakenings of the sleepers preceding. Jairus' daughter was a member of the fallen race, imperfect; and the awakening of her and bringing her back to what she was before did not resurrect, or bring her again to the condition of perfection in which Eve was before sin had deteriorated the race. Consider from the same standpoint, the widow of Nain's son and his awakening, the awakening of Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, and the awakening of the dead mentioned in the Old Testament.

To have resurrected any of these sleeping ones would have meant much more than was accomplished in them. It would have meant to bring them up to full perfection in the image of God as it was possessed by Father Adam. As it was, the awakened ones merely had a few more years in the present

started the query. How could those atoms of matter be re-collected for the resurrection of that body?

St. Paul answers the query, saying, "Thou sowest not that body which shall be." (1 Corinthians 15:37.) He declares that in the resurrection God will give some a spirit body and others a human body. We are not questioning the Divine Power to do anything, but merely calling attention to the fact that what the Bible says on this subject is thoroughly in harmony with reason, and that our neglect of the Bible testimony got us into confusion—charging absurdities to the Word of God.

Christ's Soul Not Left in Sheol.

St. Paul's teaching is that the resurrection for the world in general consists of a re-awakening from the sleep of death, in a body similar to the one which died; and that when thus awakened, each member of the race shall have a full opportunity of being raised again to the image of God, in which our race was created, from which we all fell through Adam, and a return to which has been provided for us through the death of Jesus. The time set apart for this work is a thousand years—Messiah's Millennial Reign.

St. Paul speaks of a better resurrection coming to the Ancient Worthies, who proved their loyalty to God. (Hebrews 11:35.) Their reward will be that instead of being awakened in an imperfect condition, to rise gradually with the rest of the world, they will be awakened in a perfect condition. Another class that will not share with the world in the gradual resurrection is the Church—not the nominal church of mere professors, but the real Church of Christ—those who walk in the footsteps of Jesus to the best of their ability. This class had its beginning at Pentecost.

There, through the merit of Christ's sacrifice, God began the acceptance of the Elect to be the Bride of Christ, joint-heir in His Messianic Kingdom. Their special blessing begins by their being begotten of the Holy Spirit constituting their start as spirit beings. Thenceforth their portion is to become dead to all earthly things and alive to all Heavenly hopes, ambitions, etc.

As their change of nature began when they received the Holy Spirit, it will be completed in the First Resurrection, when they will be given perfect spirit bodies. St. Paul says, speaking of this class, "We shall all be changed; for 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.' (1 Corinthians 15:51, 50.) This is the glorious hope set before us in the Gospel. Opportunity to gain a part in this First Resurrection is limited to this Gospel Age. Only faithful followers of Jesus have any promise of a share in it.—Revelation 20:4.

Unbelief Stagnates Some.

All familiar with their Bible know well that the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead is one of its fundamentals. But their faith stagnates at the thought of the Resurrection of the Dead, and this leads them to deny the entire matter. They do not tell us that they do not believe in the Resurrection of the Dead; but when people appear to die they are really more alive than they were before. Unwilling to admit that the really dead could be brought back to life, they claim that death is a transition from a lower form of life to a higher one.

After one takes this position, the whole Bible becomes twisted. Whenever we deny the death penalty we deny the Bible, whether we wish to do so or not. The Bible does not say that the soul that sinneth shall experience transition, but "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezekiel 18:4, 20.) The Bible does not say that the wages of sin is transition, but "The wages of sin is death." (Romans 6:23.) God did not say to Father Adam and Mother Eve, because of your disobedience you shall experience transition, but "Ye shall surely DIE." Whoever would be loyal to the Bible must face this question, if he repudiates the Bible position he gets more and more into darkness.

Those who say that death is not death, must logically ask themselves, Where do those go who seem to die, but really become more alive? Then come in human speculations; for the Bible declares that the dead are dead Jesus said, "No man hath ascended into Heaven." (John 3:13.) St. Peter said that David the Prophet had not ascended to Heaven.—Acts 2:34.

The Scriptures declare that the dead are asleep waiting for the morning of the resurrection. The preaching of the Apostles in substance was that there is no hope of future life except by a resurrection of the dead; and that there could be no resurrection had not Christ's death made possible the resurrection hope for mankind.—1 Corinthians 15:12-22.

God Able to Raise the Dead.

Whoever realizes God's Power as manifested in the creation should have no doubt whatever of His Power to resurrect the dead being, or soul. God is so high and His Power so much greater than ours that we cannot comprehend Him, or understand the methods of His operations. They are so much beyond us that we call them miracles, though surely they are in no sense difficult for the Almighty One. Each member of Adam's race has his own personality, and so great is our God that He knows all these. We may be sure that He has promised no more than He can perform—the resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.—Acts 24:14, 15.

Jesus is God's great Representative and Agent in the bestowment of all the blessings He has for mankind. The Divine Power will operate through Jesus, first for awakening the sleepers, and afterwards for bringing to perfection all the willing and obedient. Only the wilfully disobedient will suffer extinction in the Second Death.

life, and then fell asleep in death again, to await the glorious Day of Messiah's Kingdom, in which Adam's race will not only be awakened, but be given every opportunity of gradually rising to full perfection.

The First (Chief) Resurrection.

Further along in his discourse the Pastor demonstrated that the Church of this Gospel Age is everywhere separate and distinct from all others of mankind; they are neither Gentiles nor Jews. He made clear, however, that he did not refer to the 400,000,000 professed Christians or to any particular sect, or denomination, as the Church of Christ. He gave Scriptures in proof of his contention that the Church of Christ is composed of all saintly believers in Jesus, seeking to walk in His footsteps—not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. He called attention to the fact that no denomination could claim a monopoly of this saintly class, and that none could claim to be free from tares.

In the Pastor's opinion, apparently, the vast majority of the 400,000,000 of professed Christians are merely tares or worse. He cited numerous Scriptures to the effect that the heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, are a "little flock," a "Royal Priesthood," a "holy nation," a "peculiar people," who "show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light."

The Pastor then declared that the True Church is to be found in all the different denominations, and some of them outside all denominational fences. He showed that the denominational fences are contrary to the Bible. After making clear who constitute "the Church of the First-born whose names are written in Heaven," the Pastor declared that these are to have a share with Jesus in His Resurrection. He quoted St. Paul's words, "That I might know Him and the power of His resurrection, being made conformable unto His death."—Philippians 3:10.

The Pastor seemed to give the thought that in the Divine Purpose a foreordained number of the Church class must suffer with Christ before the Millennium could begin. Their sufferings would not be vicarious, as were Jesus' sufferings, nor necessary to the redemption of the world, as were His; but the sufferings would be necessary in order to demonstrate their loyalty to God and to righteousness—to prove them worthy of the high honor of joint-heirship with Jesus, and sharers with Him in His Kingdom.

The Church's suffering with Jesus, the Pastor said, is their dying to earthly conditions and ambitions, as He did. All who thus die with Jesus, willingly sacrificing earthly hopes, aims, ambitions, are counted as sharing in "His death." Such are assured in the Scriptures that they will also in God's due time share in "His Resurrection."

"His Resurrection" was not only the First Resurrection, but also the chief, the best, resurrection—to the very highest plane of spirit perfection—the Divine nature. Hence the promise to the Church to share in His Resurrection means that His faithful followers will experience a similarly glorious resurrection to a higher nature, the Divine—with its glory, honor and immortality. This Jesus also avers, saying, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the First Resurrection. * * * They shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years."—Revelation 20:6.

Easter and the Passover.

The Pastor says that the word *EASTER* occurs once in our Common Version Bible and is a mistranslation—it should be *Passover*. Easter was a festival honoring the heathen goddess of Spring. The name was transferred to the Passover celebration of the early Church in honor of the Lord's resurrection. Doubtless the attempt was to divert the heathen toward Christianity, keeping the festival, but altering its significance. Whatever the word meant then, it stands now to the Christian as the synonym for the glorious resurrection of the world's Redeemer from death and the human nature to glory, honor, immortality, the Divine nature.

So, said the Pastor, the resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee of the resurrection of "the Church, which is His Body." It also assures us of the world's resurrection—that an opportunity through Messiah's Kingdom is to come to all mankind, to be recovered from the tomb and from all their imperfections—mental, moral and physical. Only the willingly, intelligently disobedient will ultimately die the Second Death, which St. Peter describes as perishing like natural brute beasts.

Resurrection of the Soul.

Many Bible students have failed to note that the Bible nowhere speaks of the resurrection of the *body*. Their error has given color to the arguments of agnostics and others who point out the unreasonableness of such a proposition. Thus the Resurrection doctrine is made to appear absurd, whereas the Bible presentation is most logical.

According to Science, our bodies are continually sloughing off materials and through food replacing these; so that a complete change is effected every seven years; and thus a person fifty years old has had practically seven different bodies. The argument is that the molecules of matter constituting the body are not the *man*; that any other atoms would serve the purpose just as well, if his identity was preserved.

Many are familiar with the story of the apple tree whose roots penetrated a coffin and fed upon the corpse so completely that the root, when dug up, resembled the human shape. The apples were shipped in various directions and eaten by many people. Some apples were eaten by hogs which were killed, shipped and eaten. Thus the substance of the corpse passed into many bodies in many places. This

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