

# PLAIN PAPERS ON THE LORD'S SECOND COMING

by

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE TWO RESURRECTIONS

It may be that some of our readers will feel startled by the title of this section. Accustomed, from their earliest days, to look at this great question through the medium of Christendom's standards of doctrine and confessions of faith, the idea of two resurrections has never once entered their minds. Nevertheless Scripture does speak, in the most distinct and unequivocal terms, of a **"resurrection of life,"** and a **"resurrection of judgment"** - two resurrections, distinct in character, and distinct in time.

And not only so, but it informs us that there will be, at least, a thousand years between the two.

If men teach otherwise - if they build up systems of divinity, and set forth creeds and confessions of faith contrary to the direct and positive teaching of Holy Scripture, they must settle that with their Lord, as must all who commit themselves to their guidance. But remember, reader, it is your bounden duty and ours to hearken only to the authority of the Word of God, and to bow down, in unqualified submission, to its holy teaching. Let us, then, reverently inquire, what saith the Scripture on the subject indicated at the head of this article? May God the Spirit guide and instruct!

We shall first quote that remarkable passage in John 5:

**"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth My word and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself; and hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man. Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."** \*

Here, then, we have, indicated in the most unmistakable terms, the two resurrections.

True, they are not distinguished as to time, in this passage; but they are as to character. We have a life resurrection; and a judgment resurrection, and nothing can be more distinct than these. There is no possible ground here on which to build the theory of a general resurrection. The resurrection of believers will be eclectic; it will be on the same principle, and partake of the same character as the resurrection of our blessed and adorable Lord; it will be a resurrection from among the dead. It will be an act of divine power, founded upon accomplished redemption, whereby God will interpose on behalf of His sleeping saints, and raise them up from among the dead, leaving the rest of the dead in their graves for a thousand years (Revelation 20:5).

There is an interesting passage in Mark 9 which throws great light on this subject. The opening verses contain the record of the transfiguration; and then we read, **“As they came down from the mountain, He charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from [ek, from among] the dead should mean.”**

The disciples felt that there was something special, something entirely beyond the ordinary orthodox idea of the resurrection of the dead, and verily so there was, though they understood it not then. It lay beyond their range of vision at that moment.

Let us turn to Philippians 3, and hearken to the breathings of one who thoroughly entered into and appreciated this grand Christian doctrine, and fondly cherished this glorious and heavenly hope. **“That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death: if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection from among the dead”** [*exanastasin*] (verses 10, 11).

A moment's just reflection will suffice to convince the reader that the apostle is not speaking here of the great broad truth of **“the resurrection of the dead,”** inasmuch as everyone must rise again. But there was something specific before the heart of this dear servant of Christ, namely, *“a resurrection from among the dead”* - an eclectic resurrection - a resurrection formed on the model of Christ's resurrection. It was for this he longed continually. This was the bright and blessed hope that shone upon his soul and cheered him amid the sorrows and trials, the toils and the difficulties, the buffetings and the conflicts of his extraordinary career.

But it may be asked, “Does the apostle always use this distinguishing little word (*ek*) when speaking of resurrection?” Not always. Turn, for example, to Acts 24:15: **“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.”** Here, there is no word to indicate the Christian or heavenly side of the subject, for the simplest possible reason that the apostle was speaking to those who were utterly incapable of entering into the Christian's proper hope - far more incapable than even the disciples in Mark 9. How could he possibly unbosom himself in the presence of such men as Tertullus, Ananias, and Felix? How could he speak to them of his own specific and fondly cherished hope? No; he could only take his stand on the great broad truth of resurrection, common to all orthodox Jews. Had he spoken of a *“resurrection from among the dead,”* he could not have added the words, **“which they themselves also allow,”** for they did not *“allow”* anything of the kind.

But oh! what a contrast between this precious servant of Christ, defending himself from his accusers, in Acts 24, and baring his heart to his beloved brethren, in Philippians 3!

To the latter he can speak of the true Christian hope in the full-orbed light which the glory of Christ pours upon it. He can give utterance to the inmost thoughts, feelings, and aspirations of the great, large, loving heart, with its earnest throbbings after the life-resurrection in the which he shall be satisfied as he wakes up in the likeness of his blessed Lord.

But we must return, for a moment, to our first quotation, from John 5. It may perhaps present a difficulty to some of our readers in laying hold of the truth of the Christian's hope of resurrection, that our Lord makes use of the word "**hour**" in speaking of the two classes. "How," it is argued, "can there be a thousand years between the two resurrections, when our Lord expressly tells us that all shall occur within the limits of an hour?"

To this question we have a double reply.

In the first place, we find our Lord making use of the selfsame word, "**hour**," at verse 25, where He is speaking of the great and glorious work of quickening dead souls. "**Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.**"

Now, here we have a work which has been going on for nearly nineteen long centuries. During all that time, here spoken of as an "**hour**," the voice of Jesus, the Son of God, has been heard calling precious souls from death to life. If, therefore, in the very same discourse, our Lord used the word "**hour**" when speaking of a period which has already extended to well-nigh two thousand years, what difficulty can there be in applying the word to a period of one thousand years?

Surely, none whatever, as we judge. But even if any little difficulty yet remained it must be thoroughly met by the direct testimony of the Holy Ghost in Revelation 20, where we read, "**But the rest of the dead lived not again till the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God, and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years**" (verses 5, 6).

This settles the question absolutely and forever, for all those who are willing to be taught exclusively by Holy Scripture, as every true Christian ought to be. There will be two resurrections, the first and the second: and there will be a thousand years between the two. To the former belong all the Old Testament saints - referred to in Hebrews 12 under the title of the "**spirits of just men made perfect**" - then the Church of the firstborn ones - and finally all those who shall be put to death during "**the great tribulation**," and throughout the entire period between the rapture of the saints and the appearing of Christ in judgment upon the beast and his armies, in Revelation 19.

To the latter, on the other hand, belong all those who shall have died in their sins, from the days of Cain, in Genesis 4, down to the last apostate from millennial glory, in Revelation 20.

How solemn is all this! How real! How soul-subduing! If our Lord were to come to night what a scene would be enacted in all our cemeteries and graveyards! What tongue, what pen can portray - what heart can conceive - the grand realities of such a moment? There are thousands of tombs in which lie mingled the dust of the dead in Christ and the dust of the dead out of Christ. In many a family vault may be found the dust of both. Well, then, when the voice of the archangel is heard all the sleeping saints shall rise from their graves, leaving behind them those who have died in their sins, to remain in the darkness and silence of the tomb for a thousand years.

Yes, reader, such is the direct and simple testimony of the Word of God. True, it does not enter into any curious details. It does not furnish any food for a morbid imagination or idle curiosity. But it sets forth the solemn and weighty fact of a first and second resurrection - a resurrection of life and everlasting glory, and a resurrection of judgment and everlasting misery. There is, positively, no such thing in Scripture as a general resurrection - a common rising of all at the same time. We must abandon this idea altogether, like many others which we have received to hold, in which we have been trained from our earliest days, which have grown with our growth and strengthened with our strength, until they have become actually ingrained as a part of our very mental, moral, and religious constitution, so that to part with them is like the sundering of limb from limb, or rending the flesh from our bones.

Nevertheless it must be done if we really desire to grow in the knowledge of divine revelation. There is no greater hindrance to our getting into the thoughts of God than having our minds filled with our own thoughts, or the thoughts of men. Thus, for example, in reference to the subject of this paper, almost all of us have, at one time, held the opinion that all will rise together, both believers and unbelievers, and all stand together to be judged. Whereas, when we come to Scripture, like a little child, nothing can be simpler, nothing clearer, nothing more explicit than its teaching as to this question. Revelation 20:5 teaches us that there will be an interval of a thousand years between the resurrection of the saints and the resurrection of the wicked.

It is of no use to speak of a resurrection of spirits. Indeed it is a manifest piece of absurdity; for inasmuch as spirits cannot die they cannot be raised from the dead. Equally absurd is it to speak of a resurrection of principles. There is no such thing in Scripture. The language is as plain as plainness itself. **“The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.”** Why should anyone seek to set aside the plain force of such a passage? Why not bow to it? Why not get rid, at once, of all our old and fondly cherished notions, and receive with meekness the engrafted Word?

Reader, does it not seem plain to you that if Scripture speaks of a first resurrection, then it must follow that all will not rise together? Why should it be said, **“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection,”** if all are to rise at the same time?

In fact it seems to us impossible for any unprejudiced mind to study the New Testament and yet hold to the theory of a general resurrection. It is due to the glory of Christ, the Head, that His members should have a specific resurrection - a resurrection like His own - a resurrection from among the dead. And verily, so they shall.

**“Behold I show 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 corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (I Corinthians 15:51-58).**

**~ end of chapter 5 ~**

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