

IS CHRIST COMING AGAIN?

by

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE KINGDOM AND THE RESURRECTION BODY

The discussion in the foregoing chapter is not complete apart from a fuller presentation of the subject, "The Resurrection Body." Almost without exception, the auditors of a discussion of "The Return of the Lord," and even of "The Millennium" itself, are left either with no instruction at all as to the character of the resurrection bodies—the subjects of the kingdom—or with vague and uncertain suggestions concerning the same. This is not the fault of the Scriptures, but rather of students and expositors of the same.

The New Testament is fairly replete with allusions to the theme; while the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians is a veritable compendium of doctrine upon the subject. Paul imagines among his readers a Materialist who puts the questions: "**How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?**" And, in a discussion that is as full as clear, he answers both questions; they are raised by the voice of Him with whom is "**all power in heaven and earth**"; and their bodies are "**incorruptible,**" "**glorious,**" "**powerful**" and "**spiritual.**" This presentation of the subject is in perfect accord with the definition of the kingdom to which we have already given attention, and the Pauline discussion involves certain established scriptural truths.

THE KINGDOM AND ITS SUBJECTS

First—*The kingdom is not identical with Christian civilization.*

The great characteristic of Christian civilization is "**flesh and blood.**" Every subject of Christian civilization is "**flesh and blood**"; yet Paul declares that "**Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.**"

The logical conclusion is that while we have a so-called Christian civilization we have not as yet the "**kingdom of God.**" One of the most common, and one of the least excusable of mistakes, in the present-day theology, finds expression in this phrase, "**the kingdom of God.**" Men talk constantly as if the kingdom of God had come already. This is a clear mark of Modernism. It is the Modernist Brand. This speech—or word—betrayeth them. Two minutes of talk on the Kingdom determines whether one is a theological liberal. He identifies for you civilization with the Kingdom of God. But he disputes his own speech the moment he prays, as Christ taught him, "**Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.**"

It will be admitted upon intelligent reflection that Christ is not the sovereign of any city upon the face of the earth; that He is not the ruler of any village or hamlet. A study of the social and moral conditions of the cleanest rural district will confirm the claims of Scripture that up to the present moment Satan remains in power— **“the god of this world.”** Have you never thought of what Jesus said, in answer to Pilate’s question, **“Art thou the king of the Jews?”** **“My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence”** and how it comports with Paul’s claims?

The kingdom is not even made up of mortal men.

“Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God?” What does the apostle mean? What he says; and all Scripture confirms him. The superb characteristic of the kingdom of God will be the immortality of its subjects. The Scriptures plainly affirm who and what they shall be.

The resurrection saints, while sharing with Him the administration of the kingdom, will be His subjects, every one, for when **“the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout”**; in other words, when **“the King comes back again,”** **“the dead in Christ shall rise first.”** That is the hour in which **“corruption shall put on incorruption”** and the life of these risen saints will not be a mortal one, dependent upon the heartbeat— **“flesh and blood”**; but rather like that in which their Lord lived again after his resurrection from the dead—a body of **“flesh and bone”**— animated by the eternal spirit, **“a spiritual body.”**

There is a remarkable passage in Luke 20:35-36, the meaning of which lends light to this subject.

The Sadducees, who said there was no resurrection, had questioned Jesus concerning the woman who had seven husbands, **“In the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife.”** And Jesus answered, **“The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels (the exact expression is, “They are angel-like”); and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection; and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.”**

And now what is it to be angel-like? Is it to be bodiless? No! Every angel that has appeared on the earth has appeared in bodily form. They have sat at human tables, and have taken human food; they have exercised gracious missions for men in human forms. The great difference has been that they were not mortal; that their natural home was in a higher sphere. Living believers shall be changed, **“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye”** and **“the mortal shall put on immortality.”**

There is no indication either that converts, made from the Jewish people and the nations, during the millennium, under the personal reign of Christ, will be mortal men, and the very statement of Scripture,

“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint” refers to the children of the kingdom in the millennial age (read the context), when, as Gordon puts it, “Celestial flight shall alternate with terrestrial travel, and each alike shall be unwearied.”

There never was a kingdom in the realm of which rebels might not be found, and the Kingdom of God will be no exception! But in that golden era when He shall reign over a **“new earth”** the great prophet Isaiah distinctly declares, **“There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old, but the sinner, being a hundred years old, shall be accursed”** (69:20).

Even wicked and rebellious men will have their days extended in the millennium. For He must reign until He shall put **“all enemies under His feet,”** and **“the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”**

When one remembers that the subjects of this kingdom are to be immortal, we understand why Jesus could at once affirm, concerning John the Baptist, **“there is not risen a greater”** and yet declare, **“he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”**

CHRIST’S SECOND APPEARANCE

This kingdom is promised only at Christ’s second appearance. He has gone **“to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.”** When Paul was delivering his charge to Timothy to **“preach the word; be instant in season, out of season,”** he did it in the sight of God and Jesus Christ, whom, he said, should **“judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom.”**

The order and the connection are alike expressed in the apostle’s speech—the **“appearing”** first; the **“kingdom”** afterward, and **“the kingdom,”** the consequence of the **“appearing.”**

If there be an instance in Scripture where the establishment of the Kingdom of God is presented as preceding the appearance of the King we are not familiar with it. If **“the kingdom”** is to come to this world and all the blessed results promised for the millennial age are to follow its establishment, the King Himself must appear to **“set it up”**; and, only when the sceptre is in His hands will their **“beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation”**; only when the sceptre is in His hand will the **“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together”** and **“neither shall they learn war any more”**; only when the sceptre is in His hand shall **“the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying”**; **“and [men] shall build houses, and inhabit them, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them”** and the custom, now so prevalent, whereby one builds and another inhabits, shall cease.

When John contemplated these blessed results of His return, it is little wonder that he cried: **“Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!”**

THE CHANGES TO BE ACCOMPLISHED

“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 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.”

These changes involve the mightiest of mysteries. Paul does not attempt to fully explain the mystery of the resurrection. Why should he? Is God under any obligation to lay bare His last secret? The deep things belong to Him. I may not know all the processes by which a little seed sends life out of apparent death and transforms earth, air and water into green blade and bewitching flowers. The processes are God’s mystery; the product is our joy. Why not be glad that Science falters, when, scalpel in hand, it seeks to lay bare the divine secrets?

To me, God is the more glorious because some of His ways are **“past finding out”**; and if I may not know how these changes are wrought I may receive from the apostle the statement of their features, and aspire by faith to the more blessed experience of either a resurrection from the dead, by which my corruptible body shall be made incorruptible, or a victory against the grave by which my mortality shall become immortal; and these are the things involved in these changes.

They will convert the corruptible into the incorruptible. **“For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible . . . For this corruptible must put on incorruption . . . Death is swallowed up in victory.”** Therein is the promise of redemption from the grave. It is the one note of joy for the bereaved. Nothing that has ever come into the world has so scarred its face, and so sorrowed human hearts as the spade of the cemetery sexton.

The author often drives through beautiful Lakewood. In springtime, all nature breaks into beauty there. The blooming flowers are as fresh and fragrant as the season; the green sward is a landscape of God indeed; the monuments and obelisks are expressions of classic beauty, marking the resting places of the beloved dead. But he hates the cemetery, nonetheless! It has started too many tears, broken too many hearts, destroyed too many homes, dissipated too much of happiness, given rise to too great sorrow and grief; it has shown too little pity for bereaved mothers; too little concern for broken-hearted fathers; too slight a sorrow for suffering brothers and sisters. The only way that one can be happy, and yet wander in the realm where the last enemy has conquered, is to keep in mind the promise of resurrection, and anticipate the day when the provisions of this text shall be perfected and the graves of the believers shall be broken up; the day when the beauty of the trees, the fragrance of the flowers, and the music of the birds shall be exceeded a hundredfold, yea, a thousand, by the hosts of God’s redeemed, standing in triumph over the last Enemy, clad **“in white,”** having conquered corruption.

And yet this is not all, for in that hour one other, and equally wondrous change shall be accomplished:—

Believing mortals shall be made to be immortals. For is it not also written, **“This mortal shall put on immortality . . . And when this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”**

Ah, what a victory! We used to wonder at the meaning of Jesus’ words at Lazarus’ grave, **“I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die.”**

We could understand the first, **“He that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live again”**; we knew that the grave had to give up its dead; we understood perfectly that corruption was to give place to incorruption; but what did our Master mean by the phrase that **“whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die”**?

We had known people that believed in Him, while living, and yet they had died. What mystery therefore was our Master speaking? Oh, the advantage of comparing Scripture with Scripture! No mystery whatever! When He said, **“He that believeth on me though he die, yet shall he live,”** He uttered the sentence that compassed the whole condition of the deceased; but when He added, **“Whosoever, liveth and believeth on me shall never die,”** He referred not to the company of those that had gone to the grave, but to the company of those that living when He shall appear, escape the grave and change from the mortal to the immortal;—scorn, then, the claims of the last Enemy by saying, **“Oh, death, where is thy sting?”** knowing full well that this devastating power cannot do its work against the sons of God that shall shine forth in the presence of Him who hath conquered Death once for all.

THE GLORIOUS CHANGE

What a glorious change to contemplate!

What else does the man whose soul is saved need to complete the redemption except to have such a change come over his body—that temple of the Holy Ghost—as will make it an eternal habitation fit for the spirit with which God has possessed it?

The greatest trials of one’s life, the greatest annoyances, the most frightful sins possible to any of us are in consequence of the flesh, the very laws of which war against the spirit. That is what the apostle means when in the seventh chapter of Romans he writes, **“I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”**

That is the cry of every one of us!

We are tethered, as it were, to a tenement which takes on the form of our very personality; and yet has a hundred doors open to the incoming of the evil one. But when He comes, under whose hands these mighty changes shall be wrought, the bodies which sleep in the graves shall no more surely put on incorruption than shall these mortal bodies put on immortality— changed from dishonor to glory; from weakness to power; from the natural body to the spiritual; and in that hour we shall shine forth as the children of **“the kingdom.”**

We like to think of the bodies that shall be:

- With all corruption gone—incorruptible!
- With all mortality gone—immortal!
- With all weakness gone—powerful!
- With all dishonor removed—made glorious!
- With all carnal appetite destroyed—spiritual!

We shall not attempt to imagine the glory and beauty of such a body, but ask you to abide with us content in the significance of the Word of God concerning the coming Saviour, and the changed life, **“Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself”** (Philippians 3:21).

Now the Apostle Paul makes all of this an argument to lead up to a great final sentence, which contains a call to courageous service.

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren; be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not vain in the Lord.”

~ end of chapter 7 ~

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