

# Our Hope of Resurrection

M. W. Bassford, 1-15-12

In our Lord's Supper lesson, we took a big-picture look at the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, what events occurred on that awe-inspiring day, and what that resurrection means to all mankind, but especially to believers. This, friends, was the idea that drove the apostles to the ends of the earth to preach the message of salvation to everyone, why they endured suffering and death in the name of their Lord. They knew for a fact that he had been raised from the dead, and that through Him, all men could find forgiveness of their sins and the hope of eternal life.

Unlike those early Christians, none of us are eyewitnesses to the resurrection. Despite the charismatic preachers who claim that they hop on up into heaven to have a chat with Jesus whenever they feel like it, no one has actually seen Him for 2000 years. However, this great distance of time should not lead us to question either the fact of the resurrection or its significance for us. We are not witnesses ourselves, but in Scripture, we have the witness of those who were.

Likewise, the Scripture teaches us that the salvation that the apostles preached was not limited to those of the apostles' time. Look at Peter's prophetic words in Acts 2:39. The promise of eternal life was for those Jews who believed on the day of Pentecost, yes, but it was also for their children, for the far-off Gentiles, and indeed for everyone whom God would call to Himself through the gospel of Christ. We too have heard the call, and we too may inherit the promise.

There are many places in the Bible that explore the meaning of this living hope, but few do a more complete job than Paul's discussion of this subject in the first part of Romans 6. There, he informs us how we can share in the resurrection of Jesus, what effects that resurrection will have on us, and finally, how it should lead us to live. These are among the most important words ever written. Let's look at them this morning, to learn about our hope of resurrection.

## United with Christ

Paul begins his analysis of the topic by explaining just how it is that men may be united with Christ in His resurrection. He starts us off with a series of three **RHETORICAL QUESTIONS**. They appear in Romans 6:1-3. Paul here writes to address a logical misconception concerning God's plan of salvation. He is concerned that the Romans might think that since God's grace glorifies Him, that they should sin more so that grace might increase and God might get more glory. Paul points out that this cannot be. Christians, the only people who enjoy the grace of God, have died to sin, and the way that they have died to sin was by being united with the death of Christ when they were baptized. Paul wants us to understand that baptism isn't just a spiritual bath. It's a commitment to a new way of life.

The apostle then proceeds to explore the subject of **BAPTISM** further. Read with me in Romans 6:4-5. As I said earlier, this is extremely important. The salvation of our souls depends on a proper understanding of this passage, so we must read it carefully and honestly. The first thing that Paul tells us here is that baptism buries us with Christ so that we share in His death. He died on the cross; we die in the waters of baptism. This idea poses tremendous problems for many of the false teachers out there. They want us to believe that we are saved when we believe in Jesus, or perhaps when we pray the sinner's prayer, and that baptism is just the confirmation of the saving work that has already occurred. Brethren, if that's true, when we baptize people, we are taking precious souls who have been born again and drowning them in the baptistery! If baptism is a death, and people are saved before they are baptized, then baptism isn't the outward sign of an inward grace. It is spiritual infanticide! Clearly, that makes no sense. God does not command us to put to death that which is new and perfect and good. Instead, the part of us that is buried with Christ in baptism is the old man of sin. Until we are baptized, that old man remains alive, and we still bear the guilt for the evil we have done.

However, just as Christ was raised from the dead, when we rise up out of the waters of baptism, we rise to walk in newness of life. The point here is not that the baptistery contains magic water, and it saves us whether we want to be saved or not. As Paul says in Romans 4, we must believe to be saved from our sins, but the moment at which that faith becomes a saving faith is when it moves us to be baptized for the forgiveness of those sins. If we have not known this washing of regeneration, our old man of sin remains alive, our new man of righteousness has not yet been born, and we have no hope of being united with Jesus in His resurrection. None of those things change without baptism.

## What Resurrection Means

From there, Paul explains what resurrection means to us. According to Him, the first thing that we gain from being united with Christ in baptism is a **SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION**. Look with me at Romans 6:6-7. This text tells us that before baptism, we are enslaved to sin. Many people believe that being a Christian is all about restrictions and not having any fun, and that people who remain apart from Christ live free lives in which they get to do whatever they want to. Friends, this illusion of freedom is one of Satan's great lies. In reality, before we obey the gospel, we aren't doing our own bidding. We are doing the devil's bidding. He manipulates us through the desires of the flesh so that we spend our days destroying other people and destroying ourselves. We are just as repugnant in God's eyes as a legbreaker working for a Mafia don is in our eyes. We are slaves of evil, and we deserve the death penalty for the evil that we do.

The only way that we can get rid of that old sinful body is to crucify it with Christ. Slavery, like marriage, lasts only until death, and once our old selves die on the cross with Jesus, we are freed from the devil to pursue a life of service to God. As Paul told us just a few verses up, the only way that we can die with Jesus is to be baptized into His death.

Similarly, baptism also promises a **PHYSICAL RESURRECTION**. Let's read about this together in Romans 6:8-10. Notice the change of tenses here. Paul says if we *have died* with Christ, present perfect tense, we *will live* with Him, future tense. The "have died" part is obvious. That refers to our baptism, which occurred in the past, but has effects that continue to the present. From the moment of our baptism onward, we are already walking in spiritual newness of life. The future life that Paul is promising in this verse, then, is not just a spiritual resurrection. It is a physical resurrection.

This is our great hope, that even though our mortal bodies will one day fail, Christ will return again and raise us all from the dead. To me, one of the great tragedies of modern religious thought is the way that it takes this hope and drives a stake through its heart. Most clergy in mainline denominations, even though they work to conceal this from the laity, do not believe that the miracles of the Bible actually occurred, and that includes the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. They will talk about the "spirit of resurrection" and all kinds of fancy religious verbiage, but in reality, they believe that Jesus was worm food two millennia ago. Is it any wonder that they accept adulterous marriage, homosexuality, and a host of other evils? If we have no faith in the coming resurrection, why bother following the Scripture at all?

### **Dying to Sin, Living to God.**

However, if the opposite is true, if we believe that we have been spiritually resurrected, and we eagerly anticipate the day when we shall enjoy the physical resurrection too, that has to change the way we live. We must live like people who are dead to sin, but alive to God. This begins with the way that we **CONSIDER OURSELVES DEAD**. Look at Romans 6:11. When we were baptized, that was nothing less than a reboot of our entire being. We are fundamentally different from the people we were before we obeyed the gospel, and we are fundamentally different from every non-Christian on the planet. We must be dead to that sinful way of life. We cannot allow ourselves to feel the pull of sin, any more than a corpse will feel a needle prick. We must fix our eyes on Jesus, and not on the things that we have left behind.

Second, we must **DENY THE REIGN OF SIN**. Paul points this out in Romans 6:12. This forces us to recognize an ugly truth about ourselves. When we sin, it's not because Satan overpowered us. It's because he smiled at us and asked us nicely, and we chose to follow him. When we live lives of sin, we give everything in our lives over to his control. When we are caught up in some particular sin, we may feel out of control, but that feeling is an illusion. We always have control. We always have the choice to reject the devil. That choice may be unpleasant and come with unpleasant consequences, but it is always up to us. Every sin in our lives is there because we want it there and allow it to flourish. We need to have the faith to say, "OK, devil, enough is enough. Out of my life. Now." If we do, he'll go.

Third, we need to **PRESENT OURSELVES TO GOD**. Paul exhorts us to do this in Romans 6:13. The first half of this verse is in line with things we've already discussed. We can't take our bodies and our lives, offer them to Satan, and say, "Here, Satan, see how much chaos you can cause with me." However, our spiritual responsibility doesn't end with avoiding the service of the devil. Instead, we must actively give ourselves over to God and to doing His bidding. If we have been raised with Christ, if we have been reborn to walk in newness of life, we need to spend our lives doing the things that reborn people do. Everywhere we go, we need to be a force for good, with our families, at work, at school, and in the church. We need to live in such a way that people can look at our lives and know we are Christians.

Sadly, many Christians struggle with this. They've been baptized, so they aren't still dead in their sins, but they aren't living like dedicated disciples of Jesus either. They don't actively give their lives over to the devil, but they aren't working for the Lord. They're caught in an in-between state, like spiritual zombies. Friends, being a Christian zombie is not a good thing to be. If we find ourselves in that position, we need to change. We need to understand the greatness of what Jesus has done for us, the transformation that He has worked in our lives, and we need to live accordingly.

If we do these things, we will be people who **LIVE UNDER GRACE**. We read this in Romans 6:14. The point that Paul is making here is subtle, but it's profound. One of the implications of his words here is that people who live under law live in the dominion of sin. This makes sense. After all, under the law, God's people were responsible for perfect law-keeping. Their lives were filled with an unending list of thou-shalt-not's. They lived in constant fear, either that they were going to sin, or because they had already sinned. Sin was the ruling force in their lives.

When our body of sin was crucified with Christ, our fear should have died with it. As Christians, we are not responsible for perfect law-keeping. Because we walk in the light of Christ, His blood cleanses us from our sins, and we will not suffer the consequences of those sins. We don't have to spend our lives terrified of the thou-shalt-nots. Instead, we are freed to focus on the thou-shalts, to live like people who have been spiritually reborn, remade in the image of Christ. Because Christ was raised, we know that if we are faithful, we will be raised too, and each day, we gladly offer ourselves to Him. We don't live for sin any longer. We live in Christ and for Christ—the life lived under grace.