

## *The Two Resurrections*

Opening Hymn: #285—The Lord Is Risen

Rev. 20:6 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.

The word “resurrection” appears 40 times in the Bible, and only in the New Testament. In spite of the fact that the word is not in the Old Testament, some of the Jews believed in a resurrection and some did not:

Acts 23:8 The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

When Paul preached to the people of Athens on Mars’ Hill, he lost his audience when he referred to the resurrection

Acts 17:31,32 [God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

I watched Bill Moyers’ panel of experts discuss some of the important events in Genesis. Most of them express shock and amazement at God’s behavior in these early chapters. Not one suggested that a resurrection from the dead of Abel, Adam, Eve, and those who perished in the flood helps us understand how God could allow these things to happen and still be a loving and benevolent God.

To every Christian there should be no uncertainty about the doctrine of the resurrection. In fact we are told it is a fundamental doctrine:

Heb. 6:1,2 [Jerusalem Bible] Let us leave behind us then all the elementary teaching about Christ and concentrate on its completion, without going over the **fundamental doctrines** again: the turning away from dead actions and toward faith in God; the teaching about baptisms and the laying on of hands; the teaching about the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

### **The First Resurrection**

Although “the resurrection of the dead” may be a fundamental doctrine, many do not understand that the Bible actually talks about **two** resurrections. We began by reading Rev. 20:6 which uses the phrase “**first** resurrection.” There is also this text:

1 Thess. 4:16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ **shall rise first**.

The “dead in Christ” are the ones who receive the benefits of the first resurrection. These are those who have consecrated their “all” to God and faithfully carry out their covenant of sacrifice even unto death.

When they are resurrected, they receive spiritual bodies. Paul describes this in that marvelous resurrection chapter, 1 Cor. 15:

1 Cor. 15:42–44 [NIV] So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a **natural** body, it is raised a **spiritual** body.

The Bible calls these true Christians by many different names: the Church, the Bride, Jewels, Wheat, and other names. The past 2000 years has seen the selection of those who will be a part of this group. Those whose eyes have been opened to appreciate the truth should never doubt the great privilege God has given to those He has called:

Romans 8:16,17 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we **are** the children of God: and if children, then heirs—heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ—if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

Paul seemed amazed that anyone could stop believing in a resurrection from the dead. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he tried to show that the reality of Christ’s resurrection proves that others will also be resurrected:

1 Cor. 15:12...23 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? [Because] if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen (*Paul shows he does not believe Christ had an immortal soul!*)  
<sup>17</sup>And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. <sup>20</sup>But now **is** Christ risen from the dead. Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. As in Adam **all** die, even so in Christ shall **all** be made alive. Every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his *parousia*.

Paul here says that it is at the time of Christ’s *parousia* or presence, that the resurrection of the dead begins. That beginning is called the “first resurrection.” Of course saying “first resurrection” necessarily implies a “second resurrection.” Who receives that? Answer: Everyone who does not experience the “first resurrection” because this text also says that **ALL** shall be made alive.

## The Second Resurrection

When Paul was brought before Felix, he said this about what he believed:

Acts 24:15 There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

This is another way to say that he believed in two resurrections. The resurrection of the Church is the same as the resurrection of the “just.” Unfortunately many Christians think that’s all there is. But they are wrong. Even the wicked Sodomites will be resurrected. Here’s what Ezekiel said long after Sodom had been destroyed:

Ezekiel 16:55 When . . . Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate . . . then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate.

It was Jesus who taught that there would be two resurrections: the good and the not so good.

John 5:28,29 [Rotherham] There cometh an hour in which **all** in the tombs shall hearken unto his voice and come forth—They who the good things have done unto a resurrection of life; but they who the corrupt things have practised, unto a resurrection of judgment.

Perhaps one of the reasons our Christian friends don't talk much about a resurrection from the dead is that too many of them believe that people are not really dead. They only appear to die. If they are not dead, they can't be resurrected from the dead. This idea is absolutely contrary to everything taught in the Bible. It is essentially what Satan, God's adversary, told Eve: "You will NOT surely die!"

Yet we cannot ignore the words of John 5. We read it from the Rotherham translation. If we had read from the King James, it would have said that those who have done evil things would have a resurrection of "damnation." Other translators say "to be condemned." The New English Bible says, "Will rise to hear their doom." This leads to the fantastic theory that what one does in this life seals one's doom and that although one's soul continues living somewhere after death, it is reunited with a body in the resurrection just long enough for a sentence of condemnation to be pronounced, after which the soul returns to where it was. Clearly this is one doctrine the churches would not like to see examined too closely.

Our understanding of Christ's Kingdom and its work answers every question. The "resurrection of judgment" is a time of teaching, of training in righteousness.

Isaiah 26:9 **When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.**

And let us not forget Acts 17:31 previously quoted: "[God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world **in righteousness.**" The world's great judgment day is not a time when mankind "rises to hear its doom." It is a time of instruction and great blessing.

### **The Great Multitude**

The scriptures say the Church receives spiritual bodies in the first resurrection, and the world of mankind receives earthly bodies in the general resurrection. What do they say about the Great Multitude (or Great Company)? The expression occurs in just two places in the King James Bible:

Rev. 7:9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a **great multitude**, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.

Rev. 19:6 And I heard as it were the voice of a **great multitude**, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Bro. Russell said this was a secondary spiritual class who began their walk of consecration, but did not carry it out with enough faithfulness to receive the reward of the Church. Although he never changed his mind about this, Judge Rutherford had a different idea. Today the JWs believe that the Great Multitude is an earthly class and that it is simply another name for the whole world of mankind. One JW said to me, "I have never quite understood how Pastor Russell thought God would reward failure." Perhaps he had

never examined how Bro. Russell got this doctrine from the scriptures. Consider Paul's description of how different Christians "build" upon a foundation:

1 Cor. 3:11–15 [Jerusalem Bible] The foundation: nobody can lay any other than the one which has already been laid, that is Jesus Christ. On this foundation you can build in gold, silver, and jewels, or in wood, grass and straw. But whatever the material, the work of each builder is going to be clearly revealed when the day comes. That day will begin with fire and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If his structure stands up to it, he will get his wages. If it is burned down, he will be the loser, and **though he is saved himself**, it will be as one who has gone through fire.

Clearly this passage describes two different kinds of builders. Although both start their work upon the same foundation, the result is quite different. The one who builds a superior faith structure receives his reward. The other one loses much, although he himself is saved. Someone in this category is described two chapters later:

1 Cor. 5:5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Who are these people? Clearly they are Christians. Paul says that they built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Today about one-third of the world claims to be Christian, which means two-thirds are non-Christian. The term Great Multitude cannot describe the world of mankind because most of them know nothing about God and have no relationship to Him. The Great Multitude is associated with the 144,000 (Rev. 7) and also the marriage of the Lamb and his Bride (Rev. 19). The Greek words translated "Great Multitude" also appear in the first verse of Revelation 19 and there we learn they are "in heaven":

Rev. 19:1 [Rotherham] After these things I heard as it were a loud voice of a great multitude **in heaven...**

It is instructive to remember the special status of the priests and Levites in typical Israel. There was just one high-priest. He had four sons (under-priests). All five belonged to the tribe of Levi which consisted of thousands of others. There was one unique characteristic of the Levites. They had NO inheritance in the land as did the other eleven tribes. (Num. 18:20–24) Note also what God says about Levites who went astray. He does not cut them off or destroy them:

Ezek. 44:10,11 And the Levites that are gone away far from me, when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; they shall even bear their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having charge at the gates of the house, and ministering to the house.

Making the Great Multitude an earthly class serves the theology of the today's Watch Tower organization in two ways: 1) the vast majority of the JWs prefer to live on earth anyway; 2) it provides a plausible explanation to what happens to those who join this organization today, a number that vastly exceeds 144,000.

I once heard someone say the “Great Multitude” had to be an earthly class because of the phrase “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” [Rev. 7:17—referring to the Great Multitude]. It is also found in Rev. 21:4 where it clearly applies to the world of mankind. But eradicating sorrow has always been an objective of God’s plan. If He “wipes tears away” from the eyes of all mankind He certainly will do the same for the Great Multitude as well. In Rev. 7 we read that the Great Multitude “are before the throne of God and **serve him** day and night in his temple.” (vs. 15) We never read that the world of mankind stands before the throne of God where they serve Him. And of course we never read that the world of mankind is “in heaven.”

## Second Death

Remember the words of Rev. 20:6, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the **second** death hath no power.” There are not just two resurrections, there are two deaths as well. The first is Adamic death which we all die now; the second is, well, second death. This doctrine too is questioned by some, especially those who believe in universal salvation.

1 Tim. 2:4 [God] will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

John 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

According to those who believe in universal salvation, if God wants all men to be saved, they will be saved. But God wanting something should not be understood as wanting it to the point of interfering with man’s free will. Unlike the lower animals, humans were created with the ability to **choose** good or evil. That means we can choose **NOT** to be saved:

Acts 3:22,23 Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, **shall be destroyed** from among the people.

Jer. 31:29,30 In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children’s teeth are set on edge. **But every one shall die for his own iniquity**: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.

In the kingdom mankind will be instructed in righteousness. They are getting plenty of instruction in UNrighteousness now. Once they truly know good and evil, they will be tested in the “little season” that follows the work of the kingdom. That those who **choose** unrighteousness will be destroyed is made very clear:

Rev. 20:9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, . . . and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

What happens to the world of mankind in the kingdom also happens to those who pass from death unto life by consecrating their life to God during this Gospel Age. Although we generally do not talk about it, those who turn their back on God after giving up their right to life in the kingdom, will die the second death from which there is no redemption:

Heb. 6:4,6 For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, . . . if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

Heb. 10:26 If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.

1 John 5:16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

Even the apostle Paul did not consider that he had guaranteed salvation. Notice his words:

1 Cor. 9:27 I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a **castaway**.

This Greek word translated “castaway” appears eight times in the Bible. Here’s another example:

Heb. 6:8 That which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

Paul did not believe in universal salvation, and neither do I.

We also have an illustration of those who go into the second death in the arrangements of typical Israel. Two of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, died because they did not do what they were supposed to do. (See Lev. 10:2) More than that, their family line died with them:

Numbers 3:4 Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD, when they offered strange fire before the LORD, in the wilderness of Sinai, **and they had no children**.

Of course Nadab and Abihu did not die the second death. That was impossible prior to Gospel Age. But they do illustrate those who do die and are eternally cut off.

## Summary

So in our study of the scriptures we have seen that a resurrection from the dead is a fundamental doctrine. In fact, it is primarily a New Testament doctrine since the word itself is not found in the Old Testament. The scriptures talk about two resurrections: the first is a resurrection to spiritual life received by the church and the great multitude; the second, or general resurrection, is to earthly life for everyone else in the kingdom.

Just as there are two resurrections, there are also two deaths: the first, or Adamic death, and second death. Those who pass from death unto life whether now during the Gospel Age or in the future during the kingdom, will either gain everlasting life or, if unfaithful, will die the second death. From this death there will never be a resurrection.

Heb. 10:38,39 (NIV) But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

“The doctrine of the resurrection appears to have been thought of much more consequence among the primitive Christians than it is now. How is this? The apostles were continually insisting on it, and exciting the followers of God to diligence, obedience, and cheerfulness through it. And their successors in the present day seldom mention it! So apostles preached, and so primitive Christians believed; so we preach, and so our hearers believe. There is not a doctrine in the Gospel on which more stress is laid; and there is not a doctrine in the present system of preaching which is treated with more neglect!” *Adam Clarke, endnote #3, 1 Cor. 15*

Closing Hymn: #327—We Shall Reign

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