

A REFRESHING STUDY ON THE RESURRECTION

by
E. W. Bullinger

Scripture shuts us up to the blessed hope of being reunited in resurrection. That is why the death of believers is so often called "sleep"; and dying is called "falling asleep"; because of the assured hope of awakening in resurrection. It's language is, "David fell on sleep" (Acts 13:36), not David's body, or David's soul. "Stephen ... fell asleep" (Acts 7:60). "Lazarus sleepeth" (John 11:11), which is explained, when the Lord afterward speaks "plainly", as meaning "Lazarus is dead" (v. 14).

Now, when the Holy Spirit uses one thing to describe or explain another, He does not choose the opposite word or expression. If He speaks of night, He does not use the word light. If He speaks of daylight, He does not use the word night. He does not put "sweet for bitter, and bitter for sweet" (Isa. 5:20). He uses adultery to illustrate Idolatry; He does not use virtue. And so, if He uses the word "sleep" of death, it is because sleep illustrates to us what the condition of death is like. If Tradition be the truth, He ought to have used the word awake, or wakefulness. But the Lord first uses a Figure, and says "Lazarus sleepeth"; and afterwards, when He speaks "plainly" He says "Lazarus is dead". Why? Because sleep expresses and describes the condition of the "unclothed" state.

In normal sleep, there is no consciousness. For the Lord, therefore, to have used this word "sleep" to represent the very opposite condition of conscious wakefulness, would have been indeed to mislead us. But all His words are perfect; and are used for the purpose of teaching us, and not for leading us astray.

So effectually has Satan's lie, "thou shalt not surely die", succeeded and accomplished its purpose that, though the Lord Jesus said "I will come again and receive you unto Myself", Christendom says, with one voice, "No! Lord. Thou needest not come for me: I will die and come to Thee". Thus the blessed hope of resurrection and the coming of the Lord have been well nigh blotted out from the belief of the Churches; and the promise of the Lord been made of none effect by the ravages of Tradition.

In Phil. 2:27, we read that Epaphraditus "was sick nigh unto death; but God had mercy on him"..So that it was mercy to preserve Epaphraditus from death. This could hardly be called "mercy" if death were the "gate of glory", according to popular tradition.

In 2 Cor. 1:10-11, it was deliverance of no ordinary kind when Paul himself was "delivered from so great a death" which called for corresponding greatness of thanksgiving for God's answer to their prayers on his behalf. Moreover, he trusted that God would still deliver him. It is clear from 2 Cor. 5:4 that Paul did not wish for death; for he distinctly says "not for that he would be unclothed, but clothed upon (i.e. in resurrection and "change") that mortality might be swallowed up of LIFE"; not of death. This is what he was so "earnestly desiring" (v.2)

Hezekiah also had reason to praise God for delivering him from "the king of terrors". It was "mercy" shown to Epaphraditus; it was "a gift" to Paul; it was "love" to Hezekiah. He says (Isa. 38:17- 19): "For the grave (Heb. sheol) cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: They

that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day."

On the other hand the death of Moses was permitted, for it was his punishment; therefore, there was no deliverance for him though he sought it (Deut. 1:37; 3:23,27; 4:21,22; 31:2). Surely it could have been no punishment if death is not death; but, as is universally held, the gate of paradise!

In 1 Thes. 4:15, we read: "This we say unto you by the Word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain shall not precede them which are asleep."

To agree with Tradition this ought to have been written, "shall not precede them which are already with the Lord". But this would have made nonsense; and there is nothing of that in the Word of God.

While we may draw our own inferences from what the Scriptures state, we shall all agree that it is highly important that we should clothe these views in Scriptural terms, and that we should ask and answer how far it is that these popular sayings have practically, at any rate until recent years, blotted out the hope of resurrection, the hope of the Lord's coming again to fulfill His promise, to receive us to Himself. You remember how the apostle speaks to some in the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians, who say that there is "no resurrection of the dead"; and in writing to Timothy he refers to Hymenaeus & Philetus, who had led some away from the faith by saying that "the resurrection is past already".

The greatest comfort which the greatest Comforter that the world ever knew had to give to a sister who had been bereaved of a beloved brother was, "Thy brother shall rise again." All hope is bound up with this great subject: and, if our Theology has no place in it for this great hope, then the sooner we change it the better; for remember that this subject is one of revelation.

We are expressly enjoined by the Lord Himself: "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice" (John 5:28). These are the Lord's own words, and they tell us where His Voice will be heard; and, that is not in heaven, not in Paradise, or in any so-called "intermediate state", but in "the GRAVES". With this agrees Dan. 12:2, which tells us that those who "awake" in resurrection will be those "that sleep in the dust of the earth"; from which man was "taken" (Gen. 2:7; 3:23), and to which he must return (Gen. 3:19; Eccl. 12:7).

Psalms 146:4 declares of man, "His breath goes forth, He returneth to his earth; In that very day his thoughts perish." The passage says nothing about the "body". It is whatever has done the thinking. the "body" does not think. The "body", apart from the spirit, has no thoughts. Whatever has had the "thoughts" has them no more; and this is "man".

There is Eccl. 9:5, which declares that "The living know that they shall die; But the dead know not anything". It does not say dead bodies know not anything, but "the dead", i.e. dead people, who are set in contrast with the "living". As one of these "living", David says, by the Holy Spirit (Psa. 146:2; 104:33): "While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being". There would be no praising the Lord after he had ceased to "have any being". Why? Because "princes" and the "son of man" are helpless (Psa. 146:3,4). They return to their earth; and when they die, their "thoughts perish": and they "know not anything".

This is what God says about death. He explains it to us Himself. We need not therefore ask any man what it is. And if we did, his answer would be valueless, inasmuch as it is absolutely impossible for him to know anything of death, i.e. the death-state, beyond what God has told us in the Scriptures.