

The First Resurrection.

REV. 20:4-6.

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John is the prophet of the new dispensation and the book of Revelation is the prophecy. Our Lord did not come as a prophet in the sense of having it for his peculiar office to declare things to come, and the few prophetic glimpses we catch in the gospel are incidental.

We observe the same fact with reference to the apostles, and in Acts and the Epistles there is a reserve in the allusions to future things and the language is vague and general.

The fulness of the New Testament prophecy in detail and general outline was left for the last book, where records and revelations have their consummation.

This is also a book of peculiar prophecy, viz: apocalyptic. Simple prophecy refers to the future as disclosed by man. Apocalyptic prophecy refers to the future as disclosed by God. In one the utterance of the prophet is prominent, in the other the revelation of God is prominent. In this book the divine side of the prophecy is manifest. The unveiling of the book of divine purpose by a divine hand—"The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave unto him." The human instrument is lost in the grandeur which he was to disclose. We see him wrapt away amidst the wonders and transcendent vision, and his voice is like one speaking from behind a veil, or lost in the clouds.

The subject of the Bible is the kingdom of God in the world. This kingdom embraces the entire history of the human race, and the book of Revelation is a prophecy of the progress of the kingdom from apostolic times to the end of the world. The Acts of the Apostles is a history of early Christianity. Revelations is a history of the fortunes and struggles of Christianity through the centuries. As such it is difficult of interpretation and much as yet remains unfilled, but it is in process of fulfillment. Its language is symbolic and must be so interpreted, and the passage which I am interpreting came from the section that deals with final things in the highest-wrought imagery. In John's vision he sees (1) an angel, perhaps Christ, having the key of the abyss and a chain so large that he could not carry it in but put it on his hand. He laid hold on Satan, bound him with the chain, cast him in the abyss and locked and sealed the door for 1000 years. (2) He saw thrones and they that sat upon them, and he saw the souls of martyrs reigning with Christ. He remarks that this is the first resurrection. This very difficult passage is capable of being interpreted in either of two ways, viz: literally or figuratively, and there are arguments in favor of either, though neither seems to be free from objection.

1. The literal interpretation.

According to this view Jesus comes before the millennium and the dead Christians are raised from the graves and glorified and reign with Christ 1000 years. This is the literal resurrection and literal reign of the dead saints, and constitutes the millennium. This view also holds that living Christians will be translated when Christ appears. Perhaps this was the prevailing belief of the early Christians and is strenuously contended for by Dr. J. R. Graves in the Seven Dispensations, who concludes a chapter thus: "I have proved by the Word of God, by the best scholarship of this age, and consensus of the best scholarship.

"1. That the first resurrection which will be of all the saints only, will be a literal resurrection, and pre-millennial.

"2. The second coming of Christ . . . will be in connection with the first resurrection." (Page 45)

Some questions which must be answered before this position is clear are:

- (1) What will be the state of the earth during the personal reign of Christ and the saints?
- (2) How will the risen saints and living Christians be associated together?
- (3) Will these be the only inhabitants on the earth?
- (4) Or will all others be wicked?
- (5) Or being righteous, will they not die?
- (6) Or if they die, will there be three resurrections?

One of the righteous before the millennium, one of the righteous after the millennium, and one of the wicked? Until these questions are satisfactorily answered, many will find it inadmissible to accept this passage as teaching the actual resurrection of the bodies of the dead.

2. The figurative interpretation.

The millennium means a reign of righteousness in which Satan being bound, man is free from his misleadings and truth has full sway in the earth. As a result believers are wonderfully multiplied until they hold the offices, make laws and actually rule the world. Christianity will gain supremacy and Christians become so zealous that the world will feel like the ancient apostles and martyrs had returned to the earth. The spirit of their fearless testimony will be exemplified in the lives of living believers. This revival of bold, effective preaching will be so distinct that it may be called a resurrection. This is a spiritual resurrection which is a sign of the millennium. The order is first, millennium; second, little season; third, second coming when the

dead are raised and living Christians are translated and all judged. The reasons why I accept the figurative meaning are:

1st. It is in harmony with the correct interpretation of the book as a whole. This is a book of symbols and is not to be understood literally. Such an understanding involves absurdities, e. g. Rome is called Egypt, Sodom and Babylon. Those who look for the actual resurrection of martyrs at the dawn of the millennium, are like the Jews who expected Elijah to come personally and knew him not when he came mystically in John the Baptist (Math. 17: 10-15).

2d. It is in harmony with a careful exegesis of this passage. Notice that John does not say that he saw the bodies of the dead martyrs, but the souls, and he does not say "lived again," but lived and reigned with Christ. It is Christ and these redeemed ones who occupy the thrones. In this fourth verse there is no mention of a resurrection. This is the sense. . . . "This is the first resurrection," refers to the fourth verse and not to the "living again of the rest of the dead." This, then, viz: the triumphant manifestation of the divine power, multiplying the number of believers, elevating the tone of Christianity, inspiring the disciples with martyr-like zeal, until the martyrs may be said to live in the servants of Christ, is the first resurrection. The first resurrection will occur in the latter days of the church militant, when under the influences of the Holy Spirit the spirit of the martyr will appear again the servants of Christ.

"The rest of the dead lived not again until the 1000 years should be finished," equals, says Dr. Strong, "The spirit of persecution and unbelief shall be, as it were, laid to sleep." The violent persecuting foes of Christianity are represented as not having lived until the 1,000 years are past, because in this period no bitter enemies of Christianity will reappear. It will be as if evil men and all their forces were in their graves.

3rd. It harmonizes with the teaching of Scripture in general. It is an axiom of exegesis that Scripture must be explained by Scripture, or one part understood in the light of the whole book. Therefore, if there should be a passage that was capable of two interpretations and one contradicted the whole tenor of the Bible on that subject, this position would have to be abandoned. The other Scriptures contain nothing which widely separates the resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. On the contrary, they teach that when Christ comes, there will be a resurrection of the good and bad, and then the general judgment. "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Dan. 12: 2.) "There shall be a resurrection both of the just and the unjust." (Acts 24: 15.) "Marvel not at this! for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs 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 the judgment." (John 5: 28f) "For we must all be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ; that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (2 Cor. 5: 10.) "The day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. . . . But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise." (2 Pet. 3: 7-10.) "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged out of the things that were written in the books, according to their works," etc. (Rev. 20: 11ff)

Thus Daniel, Jesus, Paul, Peter and John speak of the resurrection of the just and the unjust as simultaneous, and hence there can be no literal first resurrection 1000 years before the resurrection of the unjust. Other passages are Matthew 12: 41; 2nd Thes. 1: 6-10; Matthew 16: 17 and 25: 31-33. We insist that this obscure part of a very figurative book should not be so interpreted as a dozen other passages. But as death, judgment and the coming of Christ are of two kinds, viz: the first spiritual and the second literal, so with the resurrection; and this is clearly shown in this chapter. Here he is speaking of the spiritual resurrection, but in verse 13 he is describing the outward and literal resurrection. "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in there." This transition from the spiritual to the literal has a parallel in the words of our Saviour in John 5: 25, where he says: "Verily, verily I say unto you, the hour cometh and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." This passage refers to conversion, and the origin of the new spiritual life is represented as a resurrection of the dead. Compare this with verse 28, where Christ speaks of the literal resurrection, "Marvel not at this! for the hour cometh in which all that are in their tombs shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; they that have done ill, unto the resurrection of judgment." There can be no doubt that Jesus passes almost imperceptibly from a spiritual to a literal resurrection, and this is what we claim John does in the 20th of Revelations.

Furthermore, the expressions concerning Christ's coming to destroy Jerusalem (Matt. 16: 28) are much stronger than this passage, and yet no one interprets them literally and claims that Christ came in person when Jerusalem was destroyed. Once more, the unknown writer to the Hebrews says, "So also, having been once offered to bear the sins of many, shall appear a second time, apart from sin, to them that wait for him, unto salvation." (Hebrews 9: 23) Observe here the coming of Christ to judge the world is expressly called the "second time," but if he comes at the beginning of the millennium, and the dead saints are literally raised, then his coming to judge the world at the end of the millennium will be third time. Hence, the pre-millennium view must be wrong and the "first resurrection" only spiritual.

Just here, to recapitulate, we have shown that there are insuperable objections to believing in a literal resurrection of the dead believers at the beginning of the millennium. We have also shown that there would be a wonderful religious awakening when the servants of Christ would show such zeal as it will seem that the martyrs have come to earth. This position has been established by proving that it was in harmony with the correct interpretation of this passage, this book and the Bible as a whole.—Ex.

About Judging Others.

At the first blush it seems impossible to obey the command with which the passage for the day opens. How can we refrain from passing our judgments upon others? In our daily intercourse with men we can no more avoid making our mental estimate of them than we can avoid thinking. We watch the passing crowd and like a series of moving pictures they make their impressions upon us. We meet men in the social circle or in the business world and intuitively we form certain opinions of them. A man's voice, his dress, his manner, his treatment of us, and a multitude of little things, are all data upon which we make up our minds as to his standing and character. And this is not wrong. A knowledge of human nature and the ability to estimate aright the quality and character of those whom we have to do is essential to our own safety and a valuable asset in our mental furnishing.

It is evidently not this that the great Teacher has in mind when He forbids the judging of others. Here, as everywhere in His Sermon on the Mount, He is more anxious about the state of the heart and the spirit in which all our judgments are passed than the mere externals. He is thinking of the harsh, bitter and censorious judgments which men too often pass upon their fellows. He is thinking of that unloving spirit that always sees the worst rather than the best side of things. He is thinking of those who have an eagle eye for the defect and the weakness, but are blind to the better qualities in their fellow men. He has in mind that too numerous class that can discount every act and trace it to the most unworthy nature and seek to build up a reputation for virtue by their fierce denunciations of others.

There are those who think they have a mission to reform others, and to them the message is that the work of reformation should begin at home. We must see to it that our own hands are clean before we begin upon others, and that the beam is cast out of our own eye before we cast the tiny speck out of our brother's eye.

The man who knows himself and is most conscious of his weaknesses and failures will be least likely to indulge in harsh and uncharitable condemnation of others. If none but those who are themselves without sin were to cast stones at others the demand for stones would be very small.

A great universal law of life is stated when it is said, "With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." All our actions have the quality of returning back to us either with bane or blessing. The world is, after all, not so unfair in its treatment of us and we get back what we give. The man who meets his fellows with a sunny loving heart will receive kindness in return, while the man whose heart is morbid and who, vulture like, is always nosing about for carrion, need not be surprised that men estimate him at his true worth.

Jesus came to a world that was everywhere blighted by sin. He saw in the men and women of his day the image of God blurred and dimmed. But he never lost hope of man and sought for that something which, in even the most degraded, responds to the divine touch. The publicans and sinners were drawn to him by an influence which they could not have explained and this because although he was the All-pure, he had sympathy for those who were not pure, and saw even in degraded men and women the possibility of higher things. The only class that called forth the words of scathing denunciation from the lips of the gentle Saviour was those who prided themselves in their superior sanctity and unctuously thanked God that they were not as other men.

All the relations of life would be sweetened, the friction would be reduced, and weak and struggling ones would be helped, if we were more ready to help than to criticize