

The unabridged writings of Fred Morris, Manna Publications

The Meaning of...

THE RESURRECTION

To the reader: Keep your Bible beside you to read the references given. Invite a friend to study with you. You will be blessed.

All Christians look forward to life in Heaven after they leave Earth. Jesus was resurrected in a new body and we will experience the same glorious resurrection.

A WORLD OF DEATH AND DECAY

We live in a dying world. Every living creature faces death. Every man and woman faces death. When God created man with a will to choose, He made it possible for man to choose death as an alternative to life. Death was the end result of not obeying God's command. Adam and Eve chose not to obey God. They chose death, physical and spiritual death. Now all people die, because they all inherited Adam's sin (Rom 3:23)..

No sooner are we born, than our bodies begin to die. As new cells are born and grow, old cells die and the body discards them. So we live in dying bodies in a dying community. Friends who are with us today are gone tomorrow. Every living thing goes through the same cycle of birth, growth, death and decay.

This body is only one part of our being. It is like the house we live in. Paul thought of it as a tent. Our spirit-life is much more than flesh and blood. Man's spirit will survive the death of the body and live to face God. The Bible tells us, "the spirit returns to God who gave it" (Eccl 12:7). "So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).

Death will attack and destroy this body, but it cannot touch the spirit that lives within.

The physical world is also under attack. Forces which can only be evil cause sickness and decay. Destruction goes on apace and often close to home. Even the most beautiful places on earth seem to be under attack by fire, flood or earthquake. Surely this is not what God planned for His creation.

GOD ALONE HAS IMMORTAL LIFE

We do not understand spirit-life that goes on forever. Immortal life belongs to God alone (1 Tim 6:16). God is the source of all life, both physical and spiritual (Rom 4:17), so death is the result of being cut off from God. Dying is a process which Adam began. Now every human being participates in the dying process (Rom 6:23). We are all sinners and our sin separates us from the life of God (Isa 59:2).

Death is a power that has overtaken and dominates the life of every person, not just something that happens along the way or at the end.

Because our sin cuts us off from God, our spirits are dead. This is a state (dead in spirit) many people live in all their lives. While our body lives, our spirit is dead toward God. God says we are lost to the blessings of eternal life in His Kingdom.

Jesus said faith in God's promise will change this. He will make the spirits of all who believe 'alive in Christ.' Jesus said faith in God's promise will bring everlasting life to our spirits (John 5:24). So God's word to all men and women is "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

God will give eternal life to your spirit and you will live with Him forever. This is what we mean by 'life after death.'

SATAN AND HIS FOLLOWERS

Satan was once an angel in heaven, but he was proud and 'lifted up' in his heart. He wanted to be equal to God and set on God's throne. Pride made Satan rebel against God. Pride is sin and God cannot look on sin.

God cannot keep company with sinners, so Satan was thrown out of heaven. Many angels followed Satan into sin and they were thrown out of heaven with him. We do not know when this happened.

Fallen angels still follow Satan. The angel spirits who follow him are called evil spirits or demons. They are Satan's messengers and he keeps them busy carrying out his wicked plans. Bible writers tell of evil spirits coming to earth to trouble men and women. In Bible times, they seem to have been 'a part of the landscape' as we say. They still are, yet they always obey authority taken over them in the name of Jesus (1 Sam 16:14-16; Acts 19:12).

SATAN CAME TO TAKE UP RESIDENCE

Satan watched God create the heavens and the earth. He saw Adam and Eve worship the true God and he was jealous. Satan wanted the man and the woman to worship him. He is very crafty and he thought of a way to deceive the woman.

Satan did not crash onto the earth like a meteor from space. He slipped into God's creation quietly and unnoticed. He disguised himself as a serpent and he spoke soft words to Eve. He tempted her to disobey God's command and he offered her wisdom and independence, things we all strive to attain in this life.

The woman listened to Satan's lies and she believed them. She took fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil which God has commanded her and her husband not to eat. She ate the forbidden fruit. Then she took the fruit to Adam and he ate it. At once they knew they had broken God's command.

That day Adam and Eve were changed from the inside out. The evil spirit (Satan) took up residence in their hearts. The heart is that part of us that controls everything we think and say and do. God said, "Out of the heart come the issues of life" (Prov 4:23). With Satan in control of man's heart, nothing good could come out of it (Rom 2:10-12). God declared man's heart "deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jer 17:9).

Nothing was the same for Adam and Eve! They stood naked before God and each other. For the first time they felt shame. Shame comes from a guilty heart. All Adam's sons and daughters and their children and all mankind inherited their fallen nature. Our conscience feels guilt when we do wrong.

Because Adam and Eve disobeyed God, Satan was able to establish a foothold. From this foothold, he was able to build his kingdom on this earth. His kingdom is a kingdom of darkness, misery and death. Jesus said, "He was a murderer from the beginning...there is no truth in him" (John 8:44).

All these evil things came upon mankind because of Adam's sin. God said, "All have sinned and falls short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). The author of moral evil took up residence in man's heart. Now men and women without God's help cannot resist Satan's temptations. .

TALK ABOUT 1. Who is Satan? **2.** Where did Satan come from? **3.** Did God explain the origin of evil? **4.** Did Adam know there was another world of evil spirits? **5.** How did evil come into the garden in Eden? **6.** What happened when Satan tempted Adam and Eve (Gen 3:6)? **7.** What did God do to separate the evil from the good (Gen 3:22-24)? **8.** Could Adam and even have repented of their sin? **9.** What did God say about man's heart (Jer 17:9)?

GOD DID NOT EXPLAIN EVIL

God did not explain the origin of evil. God created a perfect world, but evil was out there beyond the physical universe. Evil is not physical but moral. It is not in trees or rocks or in the storm. These are not evil in themselves.

Satan found a way to plant moral evil in the heart of man. And sinful man spoiled God's perfect creation. From that day Satan, the perpetrator of evil, has acted as 'prince' with men and women as his subjects.

Jesus called Satan "the prince of this world" (Jon 12:31). He and the evil spirits he commands haunt our world and trouble its citizens. Without God's power to help them, men and women cannot resist Satan and his tempting.

When Adam sinned, he dragged all creation down into death with him (Rom 8:22). In some way that we do not understand, God allowed death and destruction to become significant consequences of man's sin. Now they are a constant in our lives. Even so, God is Almighty. He can turn a bad situation to our good (Rom 8:28).

God controls the inevitable consequence of sin. But in this present age, He allows Satan to use them as weapons against civilization. And, more particularly, Satan uses these weapons against the Christian Church. Satan uses death and destruction as weapons of fear. He uses them to sow seeds of doubt in our hearts. When death or destruction come our way, we doubt the goodness and care of God. We wonder if God is still on His throne or if Satan is getting the upper hand.

A friend often asked me, "Is Christianity winning? Will Christians be the majority?" I had to assure him they would remain only a remnant in the earth, but that God gives those who love Him victory over Satan and evil.

GOD MADE A WAY

Satan might have claimed victory, except God planned something better! In the midst of the great tragedy of Adam's sin, God promised to defeat Satan and build a new world where there would be no death or destruction (Rev 21:4).

I use the word 'build' because the Bible uses it (Heb 11:10). God builds His Kingdom by adding one person to it at a time, like a bricklayer laying bricks.

Jesus told Nicodemus, a leader in Israel, "No one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3). God adds each born-again spirit to His building. Peter told those who believed, "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). And Paul spoke of this 'house' as "God's Temple" (1 Cor 3:16).

God gives His people victory over Satan and temptation. Paul, writing to Christians said, "We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angles nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:37-39).

TALK ABOUT 1. How did evil come to the new creation? **2.** What happened to spoil the beautiful world God had created? **3.** What promise did God give Adam and Eve (and us, Gen 3:15)? **4.** Who came to save men and women from their sins (Gal 3:16; Luke 19:10)? **5.** What is "the Kingdom of God?" Who is building it? **6.** What did Jesus say to Nicodemus (John 3:3)? **7.** Have you been born again by the Spirit of God?

GOD'S PROMISE TO THE WORLD

God cursed Satan and said, "I will put enmity between your offspring (all who worship Satan) and hers (Eve's); He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel" (Gen 3:15). In the ensuing conflict, the woman's offspring or 'seed' would be represented in one person, Jesus Christ the Son of God (Gal 3:16). God promised to send His Son Jesus Christ, to crush Satan's head and destroy his power over men and women. The promise looked forward to Christ's sinless life and death on the cross where He destroyed Satan's power (1 Cor 15:54-55; Heb 2:14-15).

The promise also looked forward to a new world which Jesus Christ came to establish. He called it “the Kingdom of God” (Mark 1:15). In God’s Kingdom “there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of this has passed away” (Rev 21:4).

DEATH IS NOT THE END

From the moment Adam and Eve sinned, the man and the woman were cut off from God. Adam’s spirit and Eve’s spirit ‘died’ because their spirit-life was cut off from the life of God. Their bodies would also die, for God had said, “dust you are and to dust you will return” (Gen 3:19).

Jesus taught that the spirit of man lives on after death. His parable of the rich man and the beggar (Luke 16:19-31) points us to a great truth: God rewards righteous lives and judgment falls on those who reject Him (John 3:36). God takes the spirits of the righteous dead to heaven (Eccl 12:7). There they are comforted and at peace.

The thief on a cross next to Christ’s cross asked, “Jesus, remember me when You come into Your Kingdom” (Luke 23:42).

Jesus replied to this thief who repented, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with Me in paradise.” The word paradise comes from a Persian word meaning ‘a sheltered garden.’ Kings met their friends in beautiful gardens.

Christians believe heaven will be like a sheltered garden. Christ will be our companion there. We will walk and talk with Him in paradise as Adam talked with God in the garden in Eden (Gen 3:8).

All who believe wait for His coming. Jesus promised, “I will come back and take you to be with Me, that you may be where I am” (John 14:3).

Paul spoke of a place before heaven – an intermediate state – “which is far better,” but not the final glory of heaven. He said, “I desire to depart (this life) and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in this body” (Phil 1:23-24).

Heaven will be very wonderful! Paul wrote, “No eye has seen, No ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those that love Him” (1 Cor 2:9).

TALK ABOUT 1. What does the Bible say about heaven (1 Cor 2:9)? **2.** What did Jesus say about Hell (Luke 16:24)? **3.** What did Jesus say to the man on the cross who repented of his sins (Luke 23:43)? **4.** God calls all men and women to repent.

WE CAN KNOW GOD

God created men and women rational beings, who could reason and plan and create, persons like Himself (Gen 1:27). He did this so that He could walk and talk with them (Gen 3:8). Because God gave each of us a spirit, we are able to know God as a personal friend. We can have a relationship with Him because we have His Spirit living in us (Eph 1:13-14).

God is holy, but we are sinners. Our sin separates us from God. Sin must be dealt with and put away before we can have a relationship with God.

Because Jesus Christ died on the cross, God can forgive us and cleanse us from all sin. God said, “if we confess our sins, He (God) is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Now God says to all men and women, “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow...” (Isa 1:18). God wants us to think about our sins and how they offend Him. He wants us to think about the eternal destiny of our spirits. Where will you spend eternity? Best of all, God wants to be your friend and to fellowship with you every minute of the day.

Speaking to Adam and Eve God said, “the woman’s seed will crush the Serpent’s head.” The man and woman went out from God’s presence with a promise and a choice. They could believe God’s promise and worship the Lord God, or they could trust in their own wisdom. This choice was made more difficult because Satan already had a foothold in their lives (Eph 4:27).

We do not know if Adam and Even believed God's promise. Their names are not in the list of faithful men of old which begins with Noah (Heb 11:7). We are told that men of faith lived before Noah, but that sin and evil got so bad that "God was grieved that He had made man on th earth" (Gen 6:6).

God was pleased to start a new civilization with righteous Noah as its head. After the flood, God made covenant with Noah and his family (Gen 9:8-9).

A PLACE FOR DEPARTED SPIRITS

Old Testament writers recognized that God ruled over the realm of departed spirits. Satan has no control over man's spirit once it leaves his body. And the spirits of those who have died do not live on in the place where they died, nor do they return to the earth. Every spirit returns to God who gave the person spirit-life (Eccl 12:7).

The unseen world of the spirit puzzled Old Testament writers. In speaking of it they used the Hebrew word "Sheol" (Greek "Hades"). They thought of it as a place where departed spirits had a dull, inactive existence (Eccl 9:10). Our modern translations often use "the grave" in place of Sheol (Num 16:30).

The Jews thought of Sheol as a place where the spirits of all people, both righteous and unrighteous, go at death.

We know that God reigns over all, both the living and the dead. Jesus said, "I hold the keys of death and Hades (Hell)" (Rev 1:18). He also said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me..." (Matt 28:18).

Satan may be busy, using death and destruction to put fear into our hearts, but he does not have the last word. God who created us and loves us dearly controls our day and knows all about us. Jesus asked, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life" (Matt 6:27)? The eternal destiny of our spirits in His hands? Yet He has given man the choice. We can choose eternal life or eternal death for our spirits.

Moses said to the people, "I call heaven and earth to witness against you that I have set before you life and death...Now choose life...love the Lord your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him. For the Lord is your life..." (Deut 30:19-20). Should we not give the Lord God all our worship and our love? This is what He commands us to do (Deut 6:5).

Elijah faced people who worshipped the idol Baal. They knew God was greater than idols, but they did not follow Him with all their hearts. Elijah challenged them with the words, "If the Lord is God, follow Him; if Baal is God, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). The people were shamed and did not reply.

TALK ABOUT 1. What is the greatest choice God gives to a person (Deut 30:19-20)? **2.** Where do the spirits of people go when they die (Eccl 12:7)? **3.** Why do some people worship the spirits of their ancestors? **4.** Do evil spirits live in trees or rocks?

GOD HAS NO PLACE FOR DEAD BODIES

Some men go to a lot of trouble a pay large sums of money to prepare a place for their body after they die. The Pharaohs of Egypt instructed that their body be embalmed. This practice of embalming preserved the dead body. Some bodies remain to this day as mummies. The Pharaohs built elaborate tombs for their bodies. Their families gathered their possessions and buried them with the dead body, thinking these things would be needed in the dead person's 'after life.'

The Greeks cremated dead bodies. The Hebrews buried their dead the same day or the next day after the person died, because dead bodies decayed quickly in the hot climate of Palestine.

In Bible times men of wealth cut tombs in the rocky cliffs. The tomb was made secure by a heavy stone rolled across the mouth or entrance (Mark 16:3-4). Joseph and Nicodemus took Jesus' body and laid it in a new tomb.

God made no command about disposing a dead body. He said that the dead body would soon turn to dust (Gen 3:19), according to His command.

Solomon knew this. He said: "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." (Eccl 12:7).

Jesus told the Pharisees, "He (God) is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Mark 12:24-27). God spoke to Moses about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who had died long before. He implied that He was still caring for their spirits and, in the resurrection, their new bodies would rise from the dust (Dan 12:2).

A GENERAL RESURRECTION

God created Adam a spiritual being. He breathed into Adam's body "the breath of life" (Gen 2:7). Adam had a physical body and an immortal spirit that would live forever. No other creature in all God's marvelous creation has an immortal spirit that cannot be destroyed by death.

Zechariah the prophet said, "The Lord...forms the spirit of man" (Zech 12:1).

Every person has conscious life or spirit given to him or her by God. His or her spirit will live forever. Jesus said, "If a man keeps these sayings of mine, he (the man's spirit) shall never see death." The believer's body will die, but that person's spirit will live with Christ forever. Death will have no claim over that spirit. The born-again spirit will pass through death or "cross over from death to life" to become a spirit made perfect (John 5:24; Heb 12:23), a spirit restored to the image of the immortal God.

GOD'S THRONE OF MERCY

God's throne is in heaven (Gen 28:17). Many Old Testament writers had glimpses of God's throne (Ezek 1:4-28). God was not far off and out of reach. He dwelled with all those who had faith. Where God was there was comfort and peace. Heaven promised "No more death or crying or pain" (Rev 21:4).

Deep in the Jewish mind was the hope of a new heaven and a new earth (Isa 65:17-25; Heb 11:10). God promised a life of blessing through His prophets (Isa 13:10-13; Joel 2:1-2).

The Jews might have seen the coming Kingdom of God as a paradise on earth, but that is not what God promised. Jesus spoke often of the Kingdom of God, but never as a physical kingdom or on this earth. He told Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world..." (John 18:36). It is a place where every born-again spirit will enjoy full fellowship with its Creator-God (1 Cor 13:12).

THE RIVER OF LIFE

We, too, can share in the joy of the resurrection. The Bible says, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells" (Psa 46:4).

This is a picture of heaven, a place of life and joy and blessing. Rivers provide water essential to life. Many ancient cities had rivers flowing through them - Babylon had the river Euphrates, Damascus had the Abana and Pharpar (2 Kings 5:12), and Thebes in Egypt was built on the Nile River. But the city of Jerusalem had no river to give life to its citizens and surroundings. The people of Israel thought of a river as something very special.

God is the author and giver of life. The River of Life flows from the throne of God. It is a mighty river and men and women of all nations may come to it, drink deeply and have everlasting life. God gives all men and women a special invitation to do this. He calls to all, "Come! Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life" (Rev 22:17).

The River of Life never runs dry, and it is God's free gift to men and women. When they come to it and 'drink,' their thirst is satisfied. They are filled and refreshed.

Drinking from the River of life has the same meaning as receiving Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour. All men and women are sinners. Our sins make us thirst for something better. Our reckless lives call for healing. The River of life heals our dry and barren souls.

On the last great day of the Feast, Jesus Christ stood up before the crowds and said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me....streams of water will flow from within him. By this He meant the Spirit..." (John 7:37-38).

Those who drink of the living water receive the Holy Spirit. They are born again into God's family and citizens of God's city (Heb 11:10). The city is not a place but a spiritual community.

Jesus told the woman at the well, "Everyone who drinks the water of this well (Jacob's well) will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14). This is a picture of the River of Life springing up in the believer's heart.

TALK ABOUT 1. What is the River of Life? **2.** Where does it come from (Rev 22:1)? **3.** Who may drink of its waters (Rev 22:7)? **4.** Jesus said those who drink of the water of life will never be thirsty again (John 4:14)? What did He mean?

THE HOLY SPIRIT BRINGS LIFE

The River is the same as the filling of the Holy Spirit. This River of Life and its blessings spring up in the heart of the believer and overflow to others. Its flow is not limited by drought or stopped by and human frailty. It keeps on springing up - a never-ending supply - causing us to rejoice in His blessings and praise Him for His goodness.

The River of Life springs up inside. It flows out and ripples along to find its way again into the sea of God's great love. It offers life in abundance to all it touches along the way. It offers eternal life. The Scriptures promise, "He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who lives in you" (Rom 8:11). The Spirit of God knows every person who is touched by the river, whether they accept its life-giving properties or not.

The River flows on with joyous abandon, ever with life-giving purpose. It is a picture of God's great love seeking and saving the lost and dying (Luke 19:10).

Jesus told His disciples (and us) "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. He who believes in Me...will be saved..." (Mark 16:15-16). And he or she will enjoy forever the River of Life and its abundance.

THEY PUT THE BODY OF LAZARUS IN A TOMB

The family prepared the body of Lazarus for burial and laid it in a rocky tomb (John 11:17). Jerusalem was less than two miles from Bethany and many had come from the city to comfort the sisters Mary and Martha and to mourn with them. Perhaps Lazarus was well known in Jerusalem.

Jesus loved Lazarus and his sisters very much and He often stayed in their home at Bethany. At this time, He had crossed the Jordan to avoid the hostile crowds in Jerusalem. He was in that place where John the Baptist had preached repentance (John 10:40).

At this place John had testified about the Messiah, the Son of the living God. John had seen the heavens opened. He had seen the Holy Spirit come upon Jesus Christ "like a dove" (Matt 3:16). And the Father's voice proclaimed from Heaven, "This is My Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17).

"I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE"

The SOS went out from Mary and Martha: "Lord, the one you love is sick!" (John 11:1-2). Jesus got this message while He was on the other side of the Jordan, but he did not hurry to go back to Bethany. He stayed on for two more days. He said to His disciples, "This sickness will not end in death...It is for God's glory, so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (John 11:4).

After two days, Jesus said to his disciples. "Let us go back to Judea." They were alarmed and objected: "But Rabbi, a short while ago the Jews tried to stone You, and yet You are going back there?"

All that the disciples could see ahead of them was danger and the hostile crowds who wanted to kill their Master. They did not understand Christ words: "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? A man who walks by day will not stumble..." (John 11:9).

He was assuring them. He was doing His Father's work at that very moment, while it was day. The LIGHT is here now, He told them. It is during the day that men do their work. The night will come later. Jesus was assuring these frightened disciples that the Jews could not stone Him in the 'daytime' of His ministry.

JESUS KNEW LAZARUS WAS DEAD

Jesus had said to His disciples, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." Jesus knew Lazarus had died.

Even as he spoke Mary and Martha were mourning their brother's death. Jesus was sad, too, but He knew exactly what He had to do.

The disciples thought, 'If Lazarus is asleep, that should help him get better?' Jesus gently corrected their mistake: He said, "Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I was glad I was not there, so that you may believe" (John 11:14). "The purpose of this illness is not death," Jesus said, "but for the glory of God. I, the Son of God, will receive glory from this..." (John 11:4 TLB).

All Christ's miracles were performed, "so that men might believe." His delay in going to Mary and Martha would help the disciples see the spiritual truth of the resurrection of the body. They could not see beyond the physical. They must believe that Jesus Christ had the power to raise dead bodies - to bring spirit and body together again.

We, too, must see the spiritual reality of the resurrection.

TALK ABOUT 1. Who was Lazarus? **2.** Why did Martha call Jesus? **3.** Did Martha believe Jesus could heal her sick brother, even raise him from the dead? **4.** Why did Jesus perform miracles (John 11:14,41)? **5.** Jesus said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life" What did He mean? **6.** What comfort could these friends give to Mary and Martha?

THOMAS WAS SLOW TO BELIEVE

Some of the other disciples may have grasped the meaning of Jesus' words, but not Thomas. He replied, "Let us also go and die (be stoned) with Him (Christ)" (John 11:16).

Thomas was willing to die with Jesus but he could not see that God was in control of the events in Jesus' life of the calendar of His ministry. Thomas did not understand that Jesus, the Son of God, was who He said He was - God incarnate. No harm could come to Him or them until God's hour. God the Father was keeping them by His power (John 17:12).

There was no way to hurry back to Bethany. They had to walk for two days. Can you imagine the disciples' thoughts during those forty eight hours? Going back to Judea? To face angry mobs and flying stones?

Mary and Martha probably thought Jesus had not listened to their cry for help! They thought Jesus was not coming. They thought if He did come it would come too late! They believed Jesus had to be there that very minute to help them.

JESUS WENT TO BETHANY

"Jesus is coming!" The word spread quickly. Martha ran out of the house to meet him, but Mary stayed behind with the mourners.

"Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus, it is not too late for you!

Those words must have warmed the Savior's heart. Martha, what are you saying? Are you suggesting that I ask for your brother to come back to life?

"Your brother will rise again," Jesus told Martha (John 11:23). "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Do you believe in Me, Martha?

But Martha was thinking about what might have happened: "Lord, if you had been here. Jesus directed her to the future..."Your brother will rise..." He said.

"Yes, Lord," she answered, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God..." Martha's confession held the answer. Jesus was the Messiah...God Almighty!

THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Was resurrection of the dead a new idea? Not to Martha. Not to anyone who knew the Hebrew Scriptures. God's word is plain for all to read. Indeed every man's spirit will be resurrected, "some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan 12:2). Spirits who have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus will receive new resurrection bodies "at the last day" (11:24; 1 Thess 4:16-18).

Down through the centuries, Jews believed the body 'slept' in death. They knew the spirit of a man lived on after his or her body died.

Jesus wept as he went to the tomb where Lazarus had been buried. It was a tomb cut from the rock. A heavy stone lay across the entrance to the tomb.

"Take away the stone," Jesus commanded. Men began to roll away the heavy stone that covered the entrance to the tomb.

"But, Lord," Martha objected, "by now the smell will be terrible, for he has been dead four days" (11:39 TLB).

Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me....you always hear Me...I said this...that they may believe that You sent me." He called with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" Spirit of Lazarus, come back! The body of Lazarus rose up and came out, "his hands and feet wrapped...and a cloth around his face" (John 11:43-44).

"Take off the grave clothes," Jesus said to those who stood by, "and let him go."

Eager hands grabbed at the linen strips that bound the man's body and eager lips kissed his face.

EVERY PERSON WILL BE RAISED

Martha knew her dead brother's body would be resurrected at the General Resurrection. She said to Jesus: "I know he (the body of Lazarus) will rise again in the resurrection at the last day..." (John 11:24).

Jesus replied, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live..." (John 11:25). He said that He Himself, and a relationship with Him, was the resurrection and the life for all who believed, even at that very moment (John 17:3).

Jesus answered Martha, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" All those standing near would see life overcome death. Martha would 'see' much more than the physical event. She would understand the power of God in a new way.

TALK ABOUT 1. Lazarus died and was buried __ True __ False? **2.** Did Jesus bring Lazarus' spirit back into his body? Who did? **3.** Was resurrection of the body a new idea to Martha? Why not?

A LIVING HOPE

Peter called the believer's faith in Christ and the resurrection of the body "a living hope" (1 Peter 1:3).

When God says to us, "All your sins are forgiven," it is very wonderful. God receives those who repent into His family. And He gives us an inheritance. Have you ever received an inheritance? You can! God will give you a glorious inheritance. And it is marked especially for you!

That is the great hope that the gospel of Jesus Christ gives to all who trust in Him. That is the "good news" that Jesus brought to all mankind (Mark 1:15; 1 John 2:2).

Believers are told to 'come boldly' and claim their inheritance. We can enjoy that inheritance now while we live on this earth and later in heaven where we will be with our Lord forever.

Peter said, "Christ, in His great mercy, has given us new birth into a living hope...and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - reserved in heaven for you..." (1 Peter 1:3-5).

The hope of living a holy life becomes very real and entirely possible. I am talking about an inward, personal holiness.

You say, "Wait a minute! You don't mean being holy here and now, do you?"

Yes, I do. Before the fall, Adam was righteous and holy. He walked and talked with God. This righteousness was part of God's 'image' put upon man and woman at creation.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

Christians at Corinth asked Paul about the resurrection of the body. Paul answered, "I tell you a mystery:

- we will not all sleep (in death)
- but we will all be changed
- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye
- for the trumpet will sound
- the dead (bodies) will be raised
- and we will be changed - mortal to immortal."

In Jesus day Pharisees believed in a general resurrection. They tested Jesus with questions about the resurrection. He answered them, "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven" (Matt 22:30).

The Christians at Corinth asked Paul, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?"

Paul answered their question in his letter to the Corinthian church (1 Cor 15:35).

Early Christians were concerned about their loved ones who has "fallen asleep" (1 Thess 4:13). Some among them were saying that Jesus had already come again for His people. They feared they had been left behind.

Paul assured them that Jesus had not come again to gather God's people. That no one would miss His Second Coming. And he described for us what this would be like (1 Thess 4:15-18). He used a seed to teach the believers a tremendous truth. Paul said, "When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be. What you sow does not come to life unless it dies" (1 Cor 15:36-37). The body that was ours, in Adam, will be forever changed.

When a seed is buried in the earth, a wonderful change comes over it. The seed's body dies and a new form (body) rises out of the earth. It is of the same kind, but different. A hard yellow corn seed comes up a soft green shoot (body).

"God gives it a body, as he has determined" (1 Cor 15:38).

- "men have one kind of flesh
- animals have another kind of flesh
- birds and fish have another."

"There are also heavenly bodies" - stars, sun, moon - which differ in their brightness. God made them and he knows each one. But man surpasses them all because he is spirit. In this he is like God. In nature, God has given different bodies, but none of them have a spirit. Nothing in nature can respond to God. God is spirit and by his God-given spirit a man can know his Creator.

Now we know only a little. When we get to heaven we will know, even as we are known by God (1 Cor 13:12).

TALK ABOUT 1. Did the Pharisees believe in a general resurrection of the dead? **2.** Paul wrote to Christians about the resurrection of the body (1 Cor 15)? **3.** How did Paul describe the 'body' that will be raised at the resurrection (1 Cor 15:42-49)?

A PICTURE OF HEAVEN

The writer of Scripture gave us a beautiful picture of heaven. He thought of the Old Covenant and the giving of the Law on Mt Sinai (Ex 20:18-19). Then he thought of the New

Covenant of mercy and grace. He wrote to all believers, "You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven. You have come to...the spirits of righteous men made perfect..." (Heb 12:22-23).

The apostle John had a glimpse of the new city (heaven) in a vision. He heard a voice say, "Now the dwelling of God is with men...He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things is passed away" (Rev 21:3-4).

Physical death invades our bodies now. But physical death was "swallowed up" in Christ's victory when He rose from the grave. When the work of the body - to clothe the spirit for a season - is over, the body 'sleeps in death' until the resurrection.

THE FIRES OF HELL

Almost as often as He spoke of heaven, Jesus spoke of hell. He said hell was a place of everlasting torment (Luke 16:24; Matt 5:22). He told a parable about the rich man and Lazarus, a beggar (Luke 16:19-31).

God knows every life and every deed. The rich man lived for himself; his spirit went to hell. The beggar died and the angels carried his spirit to heaven - Jesus said "to Abraham's side." The beggar's spirit was comforted and blessed.

The spirit of the rich man was in torment and begged for mercy, but it was too late. Jesus said, "A great chasm has been fixed" between heaven and hell, so that no spirit can cross over from one to the other (Luke 16:26).

JESUS CHRIST, THE FIRSTFRUITS

Only a sovereign God, who created mankind, can raise dead bodies or put their dust together again. And He will do this at the General Resurrection on that last day. Then every spirit that ever lived will be matched with its own resurrection body. Old, broken bodies will be made new in a transformation greater and more amazing than any ever known in the history of mankind.

Jesus rose as the "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20). Of all those who lived by faith, He was the first to rise from the grave with a resurrection body. God called him the "first fruits." The first of the harvest. His resurrection was the guarantee that all those who live by faith will rise and join Him "at the last day."

At the last trumpet, Christ will call to all spirits. Each will spring up again - in the twinkling of an eye - in a new body. And He will have all the glory, forever and forever.

The bodies of believers sleep in death now, but they will be recreated into his perfect image (1 Thes 4:13-18). And those resurrected saints will cast their crowns before Him and say, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power..." (Rev 4:11).

He shed His blood to be "the resurrection and the life" to become the Savior of all who believe. When he cried out, "It is finished" graves opened and saints came forth to celebrate. Praise God, we can celebrate our resurrection now, because His resurrection was a guarantee of our own.

Sleep and resurrection speak of the body. No spirit sleeps. "This day," Jesus told the criminal on the cross, "you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The thief's body would be thrown into the dump outside the city, but his spirit would go to heaven.

So Paul compared the body we have now with the new one we will have in the resurrection:

- a perishing body is raised a permanent one
- a body with no honor "is raised in glory"
- the natural (physical) body "is raised a spiritual body" (15:42-44).
- the "dust of the earth" becomes the glory of heaven (Matt 13:43).

"So it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being,' the last Adam a life-giving spirit" (15:39).

THE NATURAL (PHYSICAL) CAME FIRST

"The spiritual did not come first, but the natural and after that the spiritual" (1 Cor 15:46). Again we see God's order, sowing must come before harvest. God began with the natural (Adam). Then he moved on to the spiritual man (Christ). He will never go back to the natural. The resurrection of the body will be the final victory over death.

"The first man was of the dust...earthly man." In every way, we are like Adam. "We have borne the likeness of the earthly man" (1 Cor 15:49). "The second man (was) from heaven...so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven (Christ).

Christians are being made like Christ now. But, in the resurrection, their bodies will be the same as our Lord's "glorious body" (Phil 3:21). For "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God..."(1 Cor 15:50).

DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY

"Then the saying will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1 Cor 15:50-53).

When Paul thought of this final victory - of death being cast into the lake of fire - he could not hold back his praise: "Thanks be to God!" he exclaimed. "He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 15:57).

Victory is never won by us. Victory is always given by God. He gives it as we live "in Christ". The Bible tells us how to do this.

Christians have His resurrection life abiding in them now:

- showing forth his power to make our spirits like His
- moving through us to draw others to Himself

CHRIST'S RESURRECTED BODY

Down through the ages, many have raised questions about Christ's resurrected body. Was it flesh or spirit?

It must have been His real body, for it bore the marks of His crucifixion. Yet it was a spiritual body. Jesus demonstrated this many times before He went back to heaven.

- 1.** Mary, who knew Jesus well, did not recognize Him. She thought He was the gardener. She would have held His feet, but He said to her, "Do not hold on to Me, for I have not yet returned to the Father...."(John 20:10-17).
 - 2.** On the road to Emmaus, the disciples did not know Him and, at the table He took bread, gave thanks and broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, and He disappeared from their sight" (Luke 24:13:32).
 - 3.** In the Upper Room, the doors were locked but that did not stop Him from entering. The first time, Thomas was not there. He said, "Unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." Then Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then He said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:24-29).
 - 4.** At Nazareth, He walked right through the crowd and was not visible to them (Luke 4:30).
 - 5.** He appeared on the beach with fish roasting on the coals and invited the disciples to join Him for breakfast.
- g. He ascended to heaven from the Mt of Olives while they all watched.

EACH PERSON WILL GIVE ACCOUNT

Paul felt burdened by a body of flesh, too easily given to sin (Rom 7:21-25). But he gave thanks because he knew God was working in his life. He accepted the things that happened to him as part of God's refining work, constantly dying and always being quickened again (2 Cor 4:1,14). Paul said, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in my body, I live by faith in the Son of God..." Gal 2:20).

The words “we shall be changed” refer to a process that begins when we trust Christ as our Savior and Lord. The Holy Spirit begins then to make this change. We “grow in grace and a knowledge of our Lord Jesus” and be come more like Him (2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:11).

Some believers change more in this life and some less. Some yield to the Holy Spirit’s work in their lives, other rebel against or “quench” His work (Eph 3:30).

Paul did not see the final change as death only, but as an advent into a glorious new life. For him this would be followed by a “better life” but not the final glory of heaven (Phil 1:23).

At the final muster, each person will give an account “of deeds done while in this body” (Rom 14:12). Each person will give account to the Master (Luke 19:11-24). And the Master will give His servants rewards. For the servant that builds with “wood, hay and straw,” there will be little or nothing to show (1 Cor 3:12). He himself will be saved, but “he will suffer loss” (1 Cor 3:15).

REWARDS FOR SERVICE

John heard a voice in heaven say, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord....they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them” (Rev 14:13). Those who “died in the Lord” are not martyrs only, but faithful servants who were saved by the blood of Jesus. They gave their lives for their faith.

Some are privileged to be martyrs, but all are called to be overcomers. God has promised them a crown, a symbol of authority to rule with Him (Rev 2:26; 3:21).

Jesus said to His disciples, “I confer on you a kingdom, just s my Father conferred one on Me, so that you may eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:29-30).

They lived in the kingdom of the spirit and had its blessings upon them. They were trusted to carry the message of Christ’s Kingdom to others. They had the great privilege of using the gospel to open the Kingdom to all who would receive the King (John 20:23).

In Christ Kingdom in heaven, they would have added responsibilities. They would reign with him over the nations (2 Tim 2:12; Matt 19:28). The intent of these promises is to show the glory and honor that will be given to the believer in heaven, a reward for the insults and disgrace they suffered on earth for Christ’s sake.

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