

THE RESURRECTION AT CHRIST'S RETURN

One of the most misunderstood topics of the Bible is the resurrection of the dead when Christ returns. Most people do not even begin to comprehend the magnitude of the events that surround this climactic event or its importance in the overall plan of God for the future of humanity. The first resurrection will undoubtedly be one of the most awesome and glorious events to ever take place.

A number of cataclysmic, earthshaking events will happen the day that Jesus returns to the earth. The following are three of these major events that directly concern the elect of God:

The resurrection of the righteous dead to immortality
The change of the living righteous to immortality
The rewarding of the righteous for diligent effort and a life of sacrifice

There is a tremendous difference between what most people believe the Bible says about the resurrection of the dead at Christ's return and what will actually take place just before and after this first resurrection of the four major resurrections of the dead spoken of in the Bible.

In this broadcast I will present some little known and understood information about the first resurrection and why it and the other major resurrections are important to you, me, and the rest of mankind.

Jesus Appears in The Sky

One of the first events on this day is the gathering of the elect of God to meet Jesus in the atmosphere above the earth. As Jesus enters the earth's atmosphere and lights up the sky with his glory, the angels will begin to collect the righteous of all ages:

Christ's return to earth will neither be secret or silent as many believe.

Jesus said these things about his coming in Matthew chapter 24, verses 29 through 51:

Beginning in verse 29, Jesus said:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt.24:29-31 KJV). See also Isa.43:5-7; Mk.13:24-27; 14:62; Rev.1:7.

The signs that precede Christ's return are awesome events that will occur in the heavens. The sun will become dark (Mk.13:24-26), the moon will not reflect sunlight to the earth, and the stars (Greek, 'aster') will be moved out of their orbits. When Jesus returns in all his glory and power, his very presence will disrupt the physical universe. See Ex.19:16-18; 24:17; Isa.13:9-13; 24:1-5; Joel 2:10-12, 30; Hag.2:6-7.

Every person alive on earth at the time of Jesus' return will be aware of the awesome events that will occur in the heavens. Most people will be terrified and fear for their lives; some will be terrified because they know that Christ is returning to destroy them, and others will be in fear because they think that the world is coming to an end. The magnitude of the events that will accompany Christ's return will be far from secret or silent; they will be awesome and terrifying.

Jesus said most people would be unaware of the true meaning of the cataclysmic even preceding his return:

Continuing in verse 38:

"For as they were in the days before the flood: eating, and drinking, merry making, and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah went into the ark, and they did not know until the flood came, and took them all away; so also will be the coming of the Son of man" (Matt.24:38-39 KJV).

In Noah's generation, people were so evil that God decided to eliminate the human race. Noah was found to be the only righteous individual in all of humanity. Jesus says that this same condition will prevail at the end of the age. Just as the people in Noah's day did not listen to the call to repentance and the warnings of God's wrath, the vast majority of people in the end of this age will not listen to God's ministers or prophets. See Gen.6:5-13.

The Righteous Disappear From Earth

Continuing in verse 40:

"At that time two will be out in the field; the one is taken away, and the one is left; two grinding at the mill, one is taken, and the other is left" (Matt.24:40-41 KJV).

Many feel verses 40 and 41 support a secret return of Jesus; however, Jesus only states that when he sends his angels to gather his elect, they will only gather the righteous; all others will be left. He said nothing about a secret coming.

A Prophecy for the Future

In verses 42 through 51 of Matthew chapter 24, there is a warning prophecy for a very specific group of people who live during the end of this age:

Beginning in verse 42:

"Watch, then, for you do not know in what hour your Lord comes" (v42).

In verse 42, Jesus gives a very specific command to watch. But what should we be watching for? Jesus is addressing this instruction to a specific group of individuals. But who are they? Verse 43 and 44 gives us the answer to these questions:

"But know this, that if the housemaster had known in what watch the thief comes, he would have watched, and not have allowed his house to be dug through. Because of this, you also be ready, for in that hour you think not, the Son of man comes" (vs.43-44). See also Rev.3:3.

It is the one who rules the house that has the responsibility for watching. The ones who have the responsibility for the care of the house of God are the spiritual leaders of God's people. (1.Tim.3:14-15; Heb.13:7;17). The things to be watched for are world events as they relate to the specific prophecies that will occur at the end of the age:

Continuing in verse 45, Jesus says:

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the Lord has set over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is the servant whom the Lord shall find so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will set him over all his substance" (vs.45-47).

Who is a wise and faithful minister at the end of the age? He is one who watches and studies current world events as they relate to Bible prophecy and reveals this understanding to those under his care at the proper time.

Continuing in verse 48, Jesus says:

"But if that evil servant should say in his heart, My Lord delays to come, and should begin to beat his fellow servants, and to eat, and to drink with the drunkards, the lord of that servant will come in a day in which he does not expect, and in an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in two, and will appoint his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vs.48-51).

Those who do not watch will not know when Jesus will return. The warning is unmistakable in its meaning: if a minister at the end of the age does not continue to fulfill his responsibility toward Christ and the elect under his care, he will lose his salvation.

Paul Writes to Thessalonica

By the time Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, the church understood that Jesus was not going to return in their generation. Paul says that the true elect of God will not be caught

unaware by the events that will culminate at the end of the age, because they will understand them:

Paul said:

"But of the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write to you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that day should overtake you as a thief. You are all the children of light, and the children of this day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1.Thes.5:1-6 KJV).

Christians and the Tribulation

Those who subscribe to the belief in a secret return of Christ, believe that Christians will be taken to heaven and spared the horrors and agony of the cataclysmic events just before his return. Others believe that Christians will be protected in some geographical place of safety on earth. But are either of these teachings true? Will there be Christians on earth during this great tribulation? Will Christians be subject to any of the terrifying events at the end of the age?

Christians Will be Hated

Many scriptures describe, with graphic detail, the time known as the great tribulation. There are also many scriptures that show the elect of God will be persecuted, betrayed by their own children and brothers in the faith, brought to trial because of their belief, made to flee for their lives, and made to suffer many other horrible injustices. The following scriptures speak of this time.

Continuing in verse Matthew chapter 24, verse 9:

"Then they will deliver you up to affliction, and will kill you; and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, and they will deliver up one another, and will hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and

will mislead many. And because lawlessness shall have been multiplied, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, that one will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the earth, for a testimony to all the nations; and then shall come the end."

During this time of trouble, many of Jesus' followers will be persecuted, killed, hated by all peoples, betrayed by their own, make foolish decisions concerning the truth, and forsake God.

Mark chapter 13, beginning in verse 10 says:

"And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all the nations. But whenever they lead you away, delivering you, do not be anxious beforehand about what you should say or think, But whatever is given to you in that hour, speak that. For you are not those speaking, but the holy spirit. And brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father the child. And children will rise up on parents, and will put them to death. And you will be hated by all on account of My name.

Jesus said that during the time just before his return there will be tremendous persecution of those who truly believe in him, truly believe what he said, and follow his teachings.

Although the good news message that Jesus brought from his Heavenly Father, promises awesome and wonderful benefits of a future containing safety, security, happiness, and prosperity under his loving care and protection, it has never been a popular message. Even when Jesus, the apostles, and the early church preached it, it was not enthusiastically received; only a few believed this awesome and wonderful truth and made it a part of their life experience.

It is not the gospel's promise of great and wonderful benefits that most people have a problem with, and it is not this promise that causes them to dislike the message and its messengers. It is the gospel's condemnation of evil behavior, its authoritative nature, and its demand that people conform to its prerequisite terms and conditions prior to being granted its wonderful benefits.

These are the things that most people cannot tolerate about the Sovereign Father's message of good news.

The good news message that Jesus brought and that the early church taught, and that is to be taught just before Christ returns, demands true belief and obedience. It demands a change in attitude and behavior. It demands that people choose good over evil, truth over lies, and righteousness over unrighteousness. It demands a change from rebellion against the Sovereign Father's laws, precepts, and principles to obedience of his ways:

Revelation chapter 6, beginning in verse 9 says this:

"And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given to every one of them; and it was said to them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled." See also Rev.12:17.

In all of these warnings, true Christians are still on earth, even up to and including the opening of the fifth seal. Notice also that they are to remain for some time after this seal is opened, so that others may also be martyred as a witness for Christ.

The Dead Rise First

On the day of the first resurrection, everyone who has obtained salvation will rise to meet Jesus as he enters the atmosphere, but all of the righteous who have died over the centuries will be resurrected first and will join him even before the righteous people who are still alive at his coming:

The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians that the dead would rise first and then those who will be alive when Christ returns:

Paul said:

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren,

concerning them which are asleep [that is, those who are dead], that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep" (1.Thes.4:13-15 KJV). See also 1.Cor.15:51-54.

"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: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1.Thes.4:16-17 KJV). See also 2.Thes.2:1-8.

The Participants in the First Resurrection

Those whom the Sovereign God has called to salvation from the time of Adam to the return of Christ are the ones who will be in the first resurrection. They are the righteous of all ages who have qualified during their lifetime to become the leaders of the world:

Hebrews chapter 11 shows that many who lived before and many who lived during the first agreement with national Israel will participate in the first resurrection and be granted eternal and immortal life. Hebrews 11 says that Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, King David and others will be in the Kingdom. But, how did all of these people who lived under these two different agreements with God qualify to enter the Kingdom of God and have eternal and immortal life? The answer is that all of these people kept the laws of God and they practiced the sacrificial system, and for this reason, the sacrifice of Jesus is retroactively applied to them:

The people mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11 who lived before the first agreement with national Israel and those who lived under the first agreement all followed the instructions of the specific agreement that God had made with them. Therefore, they were able to maintain a good relationship with him.

These individuals had faith in what God had revealed to them about his plan for their salvation; they knew that someday the Messiah would come and offer himself as a perfect sacrifice to remove and forgive their sins and give them eternal life. This is the reason that these individuals will be in the first resurrection.

The Creator God offered salvation to the people of ancient Israel; however, few responded to this call, and very few seized the opportunity to gain eternal and immortal life in the Family and Kingdom of God. Those who are called to salvation during the gospel age also have the opportunity to reign in the Kingdom of God as kings and priests along with those who answered God's call under previous agreements. See Rev.5:9-10; 20:4-6.

Although the promises of eternal life and immortality were given before and during the first agreement with Israel, it was very difficult to obtain under the terms and conditions of those agreements. This is why a second agreement with Israel was necessary and why those called to salvation after the advent of Christ and before his second coming have a different agreement. Those called to salvation under the terms and conditions of these new agreements can more easily obtain the goal of salvation.

The difficulty of gaining eternal life before and during the first agreement with national Israel may also be the reason that many of those who did qualify will hold very high positions of authority in the Kingdom of God. For example, King David will reign as king over all of Israel after the return of Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews says:

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb.11:39-40 KJV). See also v13.

These righteous individuals have not yet received their reward. They neither received their reward then nor have they received it to this day. They are

dead; they are not alive in heaven or any other place. However, these righteous individuals will receive their reward at the same time as those who died after the advent of Jesus and those who remain alive at his return. See 1.Thes.4:13-15.

The Change to Immortality

According to Jesus, those who participate in the first resurrection will escape the punishment reserved for the wicked which is the second death:

Revelation chapter 2, verse 11 says:

"He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches; He that overcomes will not be hurt of the second death" (Rev.2:11 Para.).

Revelation chapter 20, verse 23 says:

"Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power" (Rev.20:6 KJV).

Not only will these escape the second death in the Lake of Fire, but those in the first resurrection will receive immortality and will live forever as immortal beings in the Family and Kingdom of God:

To Become an Immortal

God the Father offers much more than eternal life to those he calls to salvation in this age. The angels have eternal life and are sustained by God's life-giving power, yet they can be destroyed if they disobey him. The life God offers to the elect during this gospel age of salvation is immortal life, which can never be destroyed.

The quality of life promised by the Father is comparable to that which he himself has. God is a spirit-being who inherently possesses the highest form of life: immortality on the divine plane of existence. Immortal life springs forth from itself and is not dependent on any other source to sustain it, because it is self-sustaining:

It is abundantly clear from studying the Bible that God the Father intends to share immortality with those he calls to repentance, baptism, and conversion prior to the first resurrection. It is the acquisition of immortality that allows a person to pass beyond this physical existence into the Family of God as a son of God.

If you want to know what the Bible actually says about immortal life and how to obtain it, get a copy of my book "How to Become Immortal."

Although immortality represents the highest reward that is granted for faithfulness to God, there are many more. The reward for being righteous is not to float around heaven playing harp music for eternity. God the Father and Jesus Christ have something far more spectacular in store for those who are found worthy to take part in the first resurrection.

The following list contains some of these rewards:

- Becoming an immortal spirit-being
- Becoming a son of God
- Becoming a joint-heir with Christ
- Becoming a co-ruler with Christ
- Becoming a King and a Priest
- Inheriting the Kingdom of God
- Inheriting all things

These are only a few of the awesome rewards that are promised to those the Father calls to salvation through his message of the good news.

Christ the Conquering King

When Jesus returns, he will come as a conquering king to establish the headquarters of his Father's earthly government in Jerusalem.

Revelation chapter 11, verse 15 says:

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev.11:15 KJV). See also Dan.2:44; Mic.4:1-3; 1.Cor.6:2-3; 15:24; Rev.12:5; 19:15; 20:4-6.

Revelation chapter 21, beginning in verse 4 says:

"And I saw thrones, and they [the elect of God] sat upon them, and judgment was given to them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their right hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev.20:4-6 KJV).

In these scriptures we see individuals who proclaimed the truth about Jesus and were obedient to God's word and those who will live at the end of the age and not worship the beast system. Because of their performance under extremely difficult circumstances, both groups of individuals will receive a great reward.

Major Responsibilities

Many wrongly assume that the elect will be in heaven forever; however, those in the first resurrection will rule the earth with Jesus for at least a thousand years in which time the earth will become a place of peace and prosperity. One of the first major responsibilities for those in the first resurrection is to assist in the conversion of humanity to the ways of God, because the Father and Jesus Christ want everyone to obtain salvation (1.Tim.2:4; 2. Pet.3:9). For this task, the elect of God are being trained through various trials and tests in order to grow in grace and knowledge. As a result of this training, the elect will be able to fulfill an office of king and priest; thereby, they will be able to rule and teach God's truth to those who have never heard or understood the way to salvation.

Inherit the Kingdom

Those in the first resurrection will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven as a part of their reward for diligent service.

Jesus said:

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King [Jesus] say to them on his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father [God the Father], inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt.25:31-34 KJV). See also Jms.2:5.

AFTER THE FIRST RESURRECTION

After the first resurrection, there will not be a single person left alive on earth with the spirit of God. The earth will have been almost completely destroyed by the events at the end of the age. The people of the earth will be in a state of confusion, terror, and shock; they will be wondering what has happened and how they are going to survive. Into such a world, Christ and the elect of God will return and bring peace, joy, happiness, and harmony.

THE RESURRECTIONS

Many feel that there is only one general resurrection for all of humanity after Christ's return, and that at this resurrection, all who have ever lived and died will either be given eternal life and go to heaven or be sent to eternal torment in a lake of fire. However, this popular belief concerning the resurrection of the good and the wicked cannot be verified in the scriptures. The plan of God for the resurrection of the dead is far more complex and fair than commonly believed.

God is fair, loving, merciful, and true to his promises. Because God the Father is a God of Love (1.Jn.4:8), he has designed a number of different

resurrections so that those who have not known him, may know him and have their opportunity to qualify for eternal life.

There is no doubt that each person will have an opportunity to obey God's code of righteous conduct. The only question is when will each individual have this opportunity:

The apostle Paul said:

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1.Cor.15:22-23 Para.).

After the return of Christ and the first resurrection, all the dead will be raised to life, either to have their first opportunity for salvation or to be punished for their failure to obey God. All will eventually give account to God for what they have done with the opportunity God gives them.

Four General Resurrections

In the Book of Revelation, we find the statement: "This is the first resurrection". Logic should tell us that if there is a first resurrection, there must be a second. According to the biblical record, there is not only a first, but a second, a third, and a fourth resurrection of the dead.

The Bible reveals that, at this time in the plan of God for the salvation of humanity, all people fall into one of three categories: the saved, the lost, and those who have not had an opportunity for salvation. All people represented by these categories will take part in one or more of the four general resurrections mentioned in the Bible:

1. The first resurrection at the return of Christ is for the righteous dead of all ages who were given an opportunity for salvation before the return of Christ, and because they lived a life of obedience to God and his ways, they will receive eternal and immortal life in the Kingdom of God. See Rev.20:4-6;12.

2. The second resurrection is for those of national Israel who have never even had an opportunity for salvation. See Ezk.ch.37.
3. The third resurrection is for all those who have lived and died, either having been deceived by Satan's religions or never having heard of God's way of life. These two groups of people have never had an opportunity for salvation; they are the rest of the dead mentioned in Revelation 20, verse 5 and verse 13.
4. The fourth resurrection is to the second death for the incorrigible wicked who intentionally disobey and reject God and refuse to obey his way of life. See Rev.20:14-15; 21:8; Dan.12:2.

SUMMARY

The Bible reveals the great love and fairness of God toward humanity through each of these four general resurrections of the dead.

In his infinite wisdom, the Eternal God has carefully designed his plan for humanity so that every person will be given an opportunity to have eternal life. (See the entire 18th chapter of Ezekiel). The vast majority of people who have lived throughout history have died without ever hearing or understanding God's plan.

The comforting truth is that the majority of humanity, past and present, are neither saved nor lost. They simply have not yet been given an opportunity for salvation.

God the Father has provided a way for each individual to be forgiven of their sins through the sacrifice of his son, Jesus Christ. However, to reap the rewards of obedience, people must avail themselves of this sacrifice by repenting of their evil and live according to the Law of God. If there is no repentance and no sustained effort to live according to God's ways, God will not grant eternal life, instead, he will destroy the wicked person with fire:

The apostle Paul said, "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom.6:23). Death is not life in another form or in another place. Death is the absence of life.

However a person does not have to experience the second death in the lake of Fire if they will heed God's advise as recorded by the prophet Isaiah:

God said through the prophet Isaiah:

"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you be willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land:" (Isa.1:18-19 KJV).

The Father's call to salvation is very clear. He will reward obedience and forgive sin. He is patient and merciful and he will not cause the irrevocable termination of a human life unless there is no hope of redemption, because God the Father will not allow the incorrigibly wicked to have eternal life and become a disruptive force to happiness and joy in the Family of God. He will terminate the life of that wicked individual forever.

God is righteous and will not live with evil, which is repulsive to him. In order for there to be harmony, unity, and eternal happiness in the Kingdom of God, only righteousness can be allowed to exist. The choices for each individual are clear: either one conforms to that which produces happiness and joy or a person will cease to exist.

I see that my time is up, but if you want to know more about the four major resurrection recorded the Bible or the other subjects that I have briefly touched on in this in this broadcast, Write to me at the at the address given in the following announcement. Until next time this is Bud Cocherell for Bible research .org.

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