

THAT INCREDIBLE HOPE

By

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During all the public ministry of Jesus, He sought to make two things clear. First, He claimed to be the one sent from God to save the race by the sacrifice of himself, and secondly, He claimed to be the sole agent through whom man might be restored to life and given life that lasts forever. The proof of the first is given in a demonstration of the second; that is, the sign that He gave to show that He was the God-sent savior, was the fact of his being able to rise from the dead.

Scripture plainly records that Jesus arose bodily from the tomb and for forty days lived among His disciples to convince them of the reality of His restoration to life. Of late there have been a number of books, significantly by Jewish authors which distort the biblical record in order to deny the deity and the mission of Christ. Also, many so-called theologians, who claim to understand the “symbolical” meaning of the Bible, interpret the simple narrative of the scriptures in mythological manner. These pseudo-scholars accept none of the scriptures as a narration of facts that actually happened. Of course, they deny the Virgin Birth and the physical resurrection and, in so doing, deny the very core of Christ’s message and mission. Those who compile statistics usually show that from 33% to 75% of today’s clergymen do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus. This is a wide margin, but even if we take the smaller figure of 33%, one is shocked to think that practically one-third of those who are supposed to be preaching Christianity do not believe in the Christianity that Christ presented.

But if the layman is shocked to learn that many preachers do not believe in the cornerstone of the faith, the resurrection of Jesus, let him examine himself to see if he believes in what the scriptures say about resurrection. In a house-to-house survey I discovered that the majority of people who claimed church membership did not believe in a bodily resurrection. Eternal life to them meant life in a spirit world unrelated to anything we now describe as life. The expression “eternal life” has come to mean a kind of continuation of the ego without relation to a body. Instead of a hope of resurrection after one has actually suffered death, this is a hope that one will evade the whole question of death simply by not dying, but by shucking off the body and continuing in a radically different plane of life. The idea stems from a belief that man is made up of a soul plus a body, a kind of combination that is easily detachable, only temporarily hooked together in an incongruous form strictly for this earth. This concept is pagan and not based on scripture.

Biblically speaking, the physical body is essential to human life. Modern science and psychology agree with the Bible on this subject. When we speak of psychosomatic disorders, we are simply saying what the Bible says: that man’s spirit and body are intrinsically one. Augustine expressed it in these words: “For the body is not an extraneous ornament or aid but a part of man’s very nature.” In describing man’s creation, Genesis calls the entire man a living soul (Genesis 2:7). Therefore, to rescue man from death, which was Jesus’ primary purpose in dying on the cross, does not mean to rescue only a portion of him. Redemption does not mean that man is redeemed from

the body but from the body of death. We are redeemed from the curse upon the body so that the body may be immortal as God has promised. If it is man that is to live, then it becomes necessary to preserve his body or to restore it to life after death. Speaking of his power to give life, Jesus said: "And this is the will of him that sent me, that of all that of which He has given me, I should lose nothing but should raise it up at the last day" (John 6:39). Paul writes that unless there is a resurrection from the grave, the Christians that have died have "perished" (I Cor. 15:18).

"But someone will say, 'How can the dead be raised?' 'And with what manner of body do they come?'" (I Cor. 15:35). Of course, Paul's answer to this is incomplete. We do not yet understand the present mortal body and certainly we would not be able to understand an immortal one. Paul answers, "You foolish one, that which you sow is not quickened except it die; and that which you sow, you sow not the body that shall be, but a bare grain which may chance be of wheat, or some other kind; but God gives it a body even as it pleased him and to each seed a body of its own" (I Cor. 15:36–38). Paul is not suggesting that it is not a body that is raised. Rather he specifically states that it is a body even as a grain of wheat planted in the soil comes up in a body.

Nor is he suggesting that we would be foolish to anticipate a body in the resurrection. It is exactly this anticipation of gaining another body of wheat that motivates the farmer to plant wheat. What the apostle is telling us is that we are foolish if we question God's power to resurrect the body and that the resurrected body will bear connection to the present body even as the grain to the seed that was planted. The question stems from doubt and unbelief. It is said: "What if the body was cremated or perhaps buried at sea and eaten by sharks, or in some other way completely disintegrated and has become dissolved into the elements of the earth; how can God resurrect that body?" Men who think that a literal resurrection is too hard for God conclude that life after death will not be a physical life, but simply a continuation of some life element that now abides in man. In fact, so widespread is unbelief in any concrete intervention of God in the material universe that a great amount of religion of our day denies any hope of life after death. They sneer at this hope as a philosophy of "pie in the sky by and by," and insist that Christ meant to supply man with social bliss in this life. They are willfully unaware of the suffering and persecution that He said would accompany those who follow him. They reject the idea of suffering now and being rewarded later. They ignore judgment and eternity. Having abandoned the hope of a life in a new creation inhabited only by sinless people where God freely supplies every need, these unbelievers have set their ambitions on a socialist state, a state in which "society" can give man all the pleasure that he desire NOW. They seek to create an environment in which men can gratify every appetite of the present mortal body in its sinful state. This condition they seek to implement not by voluntary change of heart and personal choice, but by legislation, propaganda, force and violence, and all in the name of Christ.

Hence, there is a direct connection between unbelief and the socialist revolution. One readily sees this in the fact that leaders in demonstrations and revolutionary tactics are in fellowship with and supported by the religious leaders who deny the Biblical record and reject the resurrection as the ultimate Christian hope.

The acceleration to a socialist state, with the false assumption that the state can supply all of man's desires, is in proportion to the rise of unbelief in the resurrection. That is to say that as man rejects the hope of the resurrection to another world, he adopts

the social gospel of Marx for this present one. The farther he gets from the hope of Christ, the closer he gets to the ultimate social control promised by men.

At least part of the blame for the rejection of the Christian hope must be laid at the door of the church, which has reduced the reality of the resurrection to a “survival” of spirit. Christ challenged men to give up things—even life itself—because He will restore man’s life in a new and perfect world. Without a resurrection of the body, there isn’t much “life” to look forward to! Where there is no hope of future life, men are reluctant to suffer in this one.

The underlying problem still is man’s unbelief, and his unbelief is directed primarily against the idea of a resurrection from death and the grave. By modern man, this is judged incredible (Acts 26:8) and without it hope vanishes.

But nothing is too hard for God. Even the wheat that is planted must die before it can sprout up as a full blown stalk many times the size of the bare grain, clothed in glorious green and producing a kernel of wheat exactly like the one planted. No one questions that the wheat that comes forth from the ground is the wheat originally sown. No one thinks that a grain of wheat might sprout forth into a tomato vine.

Paul even goes further to say concerning the resurrection body: “It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.” Our present bodies grow old, wrinkled, diseased and finally die. The resurrected body is eternal. It will not corrupt nor grow old and will never die.

“It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory.” Adam and Eve having lost the deathless quality in which they were created gazed upon themselves and saw that a change had taken place. They sought to cover their dishonor with leaves. Finally, God covered it with the skin of animals typifying the fact that only by the death of Christ can our dishonor be removed.

“It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power.” How quickly we succumb to the attack of a virus, the contagion of disease and how soon the beauty fades and the years of a man’s prime recede into the past and his weakness becomes predominant physically as well as mentally. He is laid in the grave without life and without power to regain it. In the resurrection his body will be impervious to disease and death. We cannot imagine the power of such a body. We get an inkling of it in the fact that Adam lived 930 years, so powerful a specimen was he at the beginning. We get another idea from the fact that Jesus has been alive in the body for almost 2,000 years, yet John said “We shall see Him even as He is” (I John 3:2) indicating that He has not changed in that time. What other implication this word “power” has we must wait and experience.

“It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” Note that here where the term spiritual is used it modifies body. Spiritual does not mean ghostly or invisible nor less body than we now have. Whatever the meaning, Paul has made it clear that we anticipate being restored human beings through the resurrection of the body. Jesus himself is the best example of this. His resurrection was not merely a continuation of something that did not die. The body that was placed in a tomb was the body that He demonstrated before the disciples for forty days. Standing before them He said “See my hands and my feet that it is I.” He called for food that He might prove that He was a fleshly person and not an apparition or some different kind of being. And John says “And we shall be like him” (I John 3:2). The resurrected Christian shall appear in a body

clothed in immortality, clothed in glory, that glory which man lost at the first sin, a man made glorious, beautiful and immortal.

This hope is given only to the redeemed. The sinner is resurrected also, but only to stand in judgment and be condemned to “Gehenna” for the destruction of “both soul and body” (Matt. 10:28). The whole scheme of Christianity may be summed up in this, that God is seeking to rescue man from this final death, and restore him by a resurrection to a deathless and immortal man in God’s image. God reveals that He will have a whole new creation. “And not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting for our adoption, to-wit, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23).

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