

LIFE AND BEYOND

By

Curtis Dickinson

Fast on the heels of the fading popularity of ESP experiences come the new fad of “life after death” experiences, complete with clinical records and supported by the best hack writers of TV. If all of these so-called out-of-body experiences are genuine, it seems strange that people have not been having them all down through the centuries, then suddenly, here in the later part of the twentieth and early part of the twenty-first century, they’re becoming very commonplace. Whatever there is to these testimonies, they certainly fall far short of THE testimony, the resurrection of Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus is unique and stands in contrast to all the other claims of life after death in at least three ways. First, it was predicted. David sang out, “My flesh shall also dwell in safety for thou will not leave my soul to sheol neither will thou suffer your holy one to see corruption” (Psa. 16:7–10). The Apostle Peter affirmed that this was a prophecy of the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:25–28).

Jesus predicted His own resurrection on numerous occasions. Speaking of the temple of His body, He said, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:10–12). He said, “I lay down my life, that I may take it again” (John 10:17). He said of His resurrection that it was the one great sign to be given to that generation, and that He would come forth out of the earth after being buried for three days.

The Bible gives a record of seven different resurrections, but it is only the resurrection of Jesus that is predicted and described beforehand. In contrast to modern day claims of returning to life after death, in all the Biblical accounts, not a single one of those resurrected had anything to say about an experience of any kind during the time they were dead.

Christ’s resurrection was different also in that it clearly gave a demonstration of the meaning of resurrection. The apostle Paul wrote that God’s own purpose was given us in Christ before times eternal “but has now been manifested by the appearing of our savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (II Tim. 1:9–10). For centuries men had puzzled over the problem of immortality. Now, immortality is brought to light by the gospel of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus to a life that is unending is a clear demonstration of the meaning of immortality.

“For if the dead are not raised, neither has Christ been raised: and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain: you are yet in your sins. Then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most pitiable. But now has Christ been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of them that are asleep” (I Cor. 15:16–20). Christ, being the first-fruits, is a sample of all the rest of the fruit which will be harvested on the last day. Since Christ was raised, it means all who are in Christ will be raised. Note verse 18, that if there is no resurrection then there is nothing for those who have already died. This is in direct contradiction to the modern testimonies of so-called life-after-death experiences.

Paul uses the simplest basic logic, that Christ came back from the grave bodily, and therefore, so will all those who are saved by Him. The apostle John also depends upon this demonstration of Christ and argues upon the basis of the same inspired logic when he writes, “We know that, if He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him” (I John 3:2). **The only kind of life-after-death promised in God’s word is life by a resurrection from the dead!**

The third and most significant characteristic of the resurrection of Jesus is that it was followed by glorification. Not only did Jesus return to life after death, but His experience went far beyond a return to mortal life to a glorification that is beyond anything ever before experienced or even known.

The transfiguration of Jesus gave a preview of such glory to Peter, James and John. On this occasion they saw Jesus transfigured before them with a brilliance which was beyond their description and which the apostle Peter described later on as His “majestic glory.” When the apostle Paul was confronted with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he described the glory of Jesus as “above the brightness of the sun” (Acts 22:13). He later described Jesus as “King of kings, Lord of lords who only has immortality dwelling in light unapproachable” (I Tim. 6:15–16).

When Christ humbled Himself to come to earth, He accepted the role of a servant, was despised and rejected, bitterly hated by His peers, and finally suffered the shameful death of a criminal. But today His glory far exceeds His former shame. No longer is He the humble carpenter but He is now Almighty King with such glory that angels bow before Him!

But what is the nature of this glory? What is there about this glory that we, also, will share and for which we prepare even now? Without doubt, it will be glorious to be relieved of all the infirmities which we must endure in this world. While we will be given immortal bodies, glorious like that of Christ, yet the glory of Christ is not limited to that which pertains to the mere physical appearance. The glory of Jesus, it seems to me, is in His holiness. The angels sing, “Worthy is the Lamb that has been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and light, and honor, and glory and blessing” (Rev. 5:12). Jesus is glorified by the angels as a lamb, the Lamb that was without spot and blemish in order to accomplish God’s purpose. “Holy, holy, holy” is the way they describe Him.

In the beginning God said, “Let us make man in our own image.” In the end, this same purpose will finally prevail, that God will have a race of men who are in His image, mankind that is holy. “You shall be holy for I am holy.”

This is the mage, the model: holiness! Therefore, the ultimate aim of resurrection is a resurrection to the holy image of God. When John wrote, “We shall be like Him,” he must have had in mind the image of holiness for he said in the next verse, “And everyone that has this hope set on him purifies himself even as he is pure” (I John 3:3).

Ah, there’s the catch! If one hopes to attain God’s great ideal of creation, to be in His holy image, he must desire that holiness now.

If you want life, it must be the life that God gives. He does not offer a variety, but only one—in His image. This is the inexorable purpose of God, that we should be like Him whose most obvious characteristic is His holiness. To hope for a resurrection without any desire for the kind of life God offers in a resurrection is a contradiction and what James calls double-minded. The philosophy so common in the church today is that

since nobody is perfect, there's no reason to get very excited about trying to attain any degree of holiness. Such a careless attitude indicates a lack of understanding of the hope of resurrection. **That which a person hopes to be will determine his actions in becoming.** If a man should say, "I know that someday I will be pure and holy, and this is my ambition; but in the meantime I really enjoy the impurities and all that sin that is allowed," we would say that he is either lying or that he is a fool. Yet if people of the world understood the resurrection and should look at us in the church, what would they think? Do they see in professing Christians today true evidence of hope of attaining the glorious resurrection and especially the glory of holiness?

The kind of life after death that is being exploited today on the newsstands and the TV talk shows has nothing to do with glory and holiness. This is one of the evidences that it is false. The life after death which God offers is a life that is perfect in God's image in that new creation of which Peter says, "We look for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness" (II Peter 3:13).

That which compels the Christian toward his goal is the hope of attaining and not the fear of the fire which will devour the unbeliever. If there is fear, it is the horrible fear of missing the whole purpose. What if men should be saved only on the basis of the fear of hell? Suppose they have no real longing to be holy, to be like God, but come to Jesus, confess His name and obey commandments only because they fear being cast into the lake of fire. Then suddenly at the resurrection, they are thrust into the dazzling light of truth where all is revealed, where all is pure, all is holy, not an ounce of greed or a second of lust is allowed. But alas, that isn't what they wanted. They only wanted to escape the fire. They would be miserably out of place! "Strive to enter in by the narrow door: for many I say unto you shall seek to enter in and shall not be able" (Luke 13:24). Attaining the hope is not just a matter of arriving at a certain place but a matter of becoming a person suited to that place. It is not a simple business of just "inviting Jesus in" as they say, but a striving to be like Jesus.

Before His glorification, Jesus said that first there must be suffering and rejection by the world (Luke 17:25). The same order prevail for all who are "joint heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified with Him" (Rom. 8:17). Paul wrote, "For our light affliction, which is for the moment, works for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory (II Cor. 4:17). The weight of woes of the world bear heavily on the one striving to live Godly. The enemies of the Lord persist in making the way as difficult as they possibly can.

But there is great joy in knowing that one is following Christ with glory awaiting. The athlete must work and suffer in perfecting his body for the race. Yet there is joy in knowing that he is preparing for the contest even though he cannot be sure he will win.

The Christian finds joy in the preparation for he is fulfilling the Creator's purpose and has assurance of winning the race and eternal glory. We are part of a worried and anxious generation which is almost sick to death of the things happening in the world. It is a dying world with disease, violence, and war, symptoms of the unholiness that has prevailed ever since Adam turned his back on the image of God. There is only one hope, the hope of resurrection to the new creation where all shall enjoy the glory of the holy image of God.

Do we really want to attain such a high standard of holiness? Is it worth the price? Is the eternal weight of glory worth the light afflictions of the present? By faith, we

answer, Yes. By following Jesus, we can lose only that which in the judgment will be lost anyway. Risk it now and lay hold on that which is life eternal. “For your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, shall be manifested then shall you also with Him be manifested in glory” (Col. 3:4).

“And the God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that you have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, establish, strengthen you. To Him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (I Peter 5:10–11).

.....
Copyright © Curtis Dickinson. Formatted and Posted by Ken Fortier Ministries.
Permission is hereby granted by Mrs. Regina Dickinson to reproduce and distribute
Curtis’ articles to as many as possible. This statement is to remain attached to this article
for permission to be valid. Vol. XIX, Number 4.
.....