

July - September 2022

The Link

NORTH ROAD CHAPEL

BIDEFORD

I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE

(Taken from two sermons, preached 30-Mar-1986 and 07-Jan-1990)

“Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him: but Mary sat still in the house. Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto Him, Yea, Lord: I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.”
(John 11:20-27)

Verse 20 rather conveys the idea that someone was on the lookout, ever keeping an eye in the Jordan direction, and to report if thirteen men were seen approaching. Sure enough on the fifth day after the death of Lazarus, in the distance, Jesus and His twelve disciples came into view. As soon as the bereaved sister Martha was informed, she was off to meet the Lord; but Mary, the other sibling, sat still in the house. In this their differences in temperament and disposition are brought out: Martha is active, busy, demonstrative, and instantly stirred into action; whereas Mary is quiet, contemplative, pensive, and sits passively.

As regards this family in Bethany, most preachers and commentators give Mary the limelight; but the picture of Mary tends to become exaggerated at the expense of Martha. The virtues of Mary are set out on that previous occasion when the Lord visited their home (cf Luke 10:38-42), when Martha was cumbered about much serving, whilst Mary sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But here in John 11, it is Martha who shines most brightly. There may be a time to sit, indeed there is; but

there is also a time to stir. Martha was no sitter. The Lord was at hand, so out she went to meet Him. Martha heard that glorious declaration which Christ made concerning Himself in verses 25-26; but Mary, pensively sitting, never heard this. Matthew Henry says: "In the day of affliction Mary's contemplative, reserved temperament proved a snare to her; it made her less able to grapple with grief, and disposed her to melancholy".

It is true to say that nothing brings a person's natural disposition and characteristics to light, so much as affliction and sorrow. Another commentator wrote: "If we would know how much grace there is in a believer, then we must see that believer in trouble". For sure, seasons of adversity are times when the relative advantages or disadvantages of one's temperament should be carefully considered, and improved upon. Mary, allowing herself to be ruled by her natural inclinations, lost out on this occasion. The Scripture says: "*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven*" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). A time to sit, yes! But not to be always sitting, even though that might be one's first reaction.

"*Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*" (John 11:21). Here, a strange mixture of emotions can be detected. This is not unusual in times of bereavement. With an honest impulsiveness characteristic of this woman, she brings it out; it was uppermost in her mind and she did not hold it back: "*Lord, if...*" Is not this typical? Have we not all heard it? Perhaps we ourselves have been guilty of it. "If only we had acted quicker", "if only we had called in a consultant", "if only the operation had been done privately" – if, if, if! And trouble is exacerbated by the imagination of 'what might have been'. What good does it do? None at all! One's own lifespan, and the lifespans of loved ones, will run their course; no drugs, medical skill or nursing care can prolong that time. No! And neither can 'accident' or 'misfortune' cut it short. Man's days are appointed on the earth (cf Job 7:1, 14:5). God has fixed the day of every birth and the day of every

death – and they cannot be altered. “*My times are in Thy hand*” (Psalm 31:15) – there can be no ‘ifs’ here.

“*But I know, that even now, whatsoever Thou wilt ask of God, God will give it Thee*” (John 11:22). Although a measure of impulsiveness was evidenced in the previous verse, yet underneath it all, Martha’s faith is immediately discernible. “*I know*”, she says. She had a strong confidence in her Lord, although at the time there was much obscurity, and human emotions were running understandably high. “*Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again*” (John 11:23). These are the first words that the Lord spake – up until this point Martha had done all the talking. Now with remarkable clarity He makes this terse statement: “*Thy brother shall rise again*”. He does not say when or how.

“*Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*” (John 11:24). Here is revealed something more of the faith and knowledge that this godly woman possessed. As a pious Jewess, she knew the Old Testament Scriptures, and as a true friend of the Lord Jesus she doubtless had benefited tremendously from His teaching, and was indeed a sincere believer. Her “*I know*” again in this verse is sure indication of a God-given faith. Martha did not say “I hope it will be alright at the last” – that is the language of unbelief. Martha knew. Was this presumption? Of course, it was not. God had said it in His Word. Martha believed it. That is faith. The hope of resurrection and eternal glorification was no vague idea, it was an absolute certainty with her: “I know this”, she says. But in her understanding, it was all a matter for the distant future, “*the last day*”. In all probability the Lord’s statement to her, “*thy brother shall rise again*”, had taken her thoughts back to that profound Old Testament Scripture on the theme of resurrection: “*For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God*” (Job 19:25-26). This would be the greatest light she had, at that time when the New Testament, with full revelation, was

not yet compiled. Perhaps there was a tone of disappointment in Martha's voice: she had a sure and certain hope – indeed she had, there was no doubt in her mind about that – but it was such a long way off.

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). “Martha! It is not so much with future events that you need to be concerned; rather it is Me, now, in the present”. Christ reveals to this woman that He is not just a spiritual teacher, He is Himself **the Resurrection**. There would be no reality in the Old Testament Scriptures, the promises there concerning ‘seeing God at the last’ would be vain, apart from **Christ**; for He is the Divine Author of resurrection, both spiritual and physical. He is the root, the spring, and the fountain of all life. Christ is the first cause, and the procurer of man’s resurrection; He is the conqueror of death; He is the Redeemer and the Saviour of the body, as well as the soul. Whatever life exists, whether physical, spiritual or eternal, it is all because of Him. All that are spiritually quickened from their ‘dead-in-sins’ condition are quickened by Christ. All that have spiritual life, have it by virtue of Christ and His work. All who will, at the last, be raised incorruptible and enter Heaven in glorified bodies to live eternally in the presence of God, will be raised thence by the power of Christ. For He is the Resurrection and He is the Life. That spiritual, everlasting life, which the believer has, is nothing less than His life. It is the resurrection life of the Mediator imparted unto them.

This is high doctrine, yet gloriously true, that faith unites the believer to the very Fountain of all life. Even physical death can only hold the body for a short time, and for that brief period the soul is consciously with Christ in a state of wondrous felicity. The body sleeps but temporarily in the grave, and is not held permanently in the bondage of corruption. As surely as Christ the Head could not be held in the grave, neither can His members. His bodily resurrection ensures their bodily resurrection,

and His eternal glorification and everlasting life is theirs also, through sovereign grace.

“And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?” (John 11:26). How this Word of Christ tells of the indestructibility of faith! It has an ever-living and never-dying character. *“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power”* (Revelation 20:6). Those who have known the first spiritual resurrection (being raised from a fallen position of ‘death in trespasses and sins’, and have received new life in Christ Jesus, being born again of His Holy Spirit), will never die. Theirs is an everlasting life, which cannot come into condemnation, for they have passed from death unto life (cf John 5:24).

To this amazing declaration, Christ immediately added demonstration. *“Where have ye laid him”*, He asks (John 11:34). They guide Him to the grave. *“It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it”* (v. 38). Against their misgivings, He orders its removal, while lifting up His eyes in a brief word of prayer. Then, the obstacle having been taken away, *“He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth”* (v. 43). Immediately, without any delay, *“he that was dead came forth”* (v. 44).

Consider another, earlier instance recorded in Mark chapter five. Jairus, a man of high rank in Jewish circles, came to the Saviour deeply distressed. His 12-year-old daughter was gravely ill, and indeed while the distraught father took his errand to the Lord, the child passed away. Nevertheless, the Scriptures tell: *“Jesus went with him ... And He cometh to the house ... and entereth in where the damsel was lying”* (Mark 5:24, 38, 40). Yes – she was gone – death had seized her. Too late! But was it? *“And He took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. And straightway the damsel arose, and walked; for she was of the age of twelve years. And they were astonished with a great astonishment”* (Mark 5:41-42).

Come again to Luke's Gospel, when the Lord "*went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and much people. Now when He came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And He came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And He said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And He delivered him to his mother*" (Luke 7:11-15).

"I am the Resurrection" – not figurative language, not idle words, not meaningless phraseology, but a demonstrated reality, with assurance that towers into the heavens. The word of omnipotence goes forth to a corpse already corrupting: "Lazarus come forth!", to a child of twelve: "talitha cumi!", to a young man being carried to the grave: "arise!" – and in every case there was life restored. How? Because He who gave the command is 'the Resurrection'. No power on earth or in Hell can stop the communication of life by Him, when He deems to impart it.

On the accursed tree at Calvary the blessed Saviour laid down His **own** life. By wicked hands He was crucified and slain. It was done to pay the penalty of sin; to make satisfaction to God for the transgression of His people; the Lord laid upon Him the iniquity of us all. In that dreadful hour, "mid rending rocks and darkening skies, my Saviour bows His head and dies". His lifeless body was taken down and buried, the grave sealed and guarded. The appointed morn arrives – will He still lie amongst the dead? Upon the cross men taunted Him with their words: "*He saved others; Himself He cannot save*" (Mark 15:31); in life He raised others, but now is dead Himself, surely without remedy? But scorn and scepticism, seals and security were all alike in vain; for He who lay in death is Himself 'the Resurrection'. The vaunted powers of death and the grave have no claim upon Him – indeed, He submitted Himself unto them only in order to demonstrate His supremacy over them. Hear His

subsequent words to John the beloved apostle: *“I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death”* (Revelation 1:18). Let glad hallelujahs ascend into the courts of our God, for Christ is the Resurrection, He is the Life, He is:

“...Lord of battles, God of armies,
He hath gained the victory!
He who on the cross did suffer,
He who from the grave arose,
He has vanquished sin and Satan;
He by death has spoiled His foes.” (Wordsworth)

“Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die”, said Christ to Martha. *“Believest thou this?”* It is a question that re-echoes to the present time, and demands an answer. If there be readers of these words for whom these matters are mere theory, who know this incident as Bible history, but not the reality and power of its message, then you are among the spiritually dead! Physically alive maybe, but as dead spiritually as was the mortal body of Lazarus. What is more, you are being carried along by the passage of time to your ‘burial’ in an eternal Hell. Oh, if such be your case, may He who is ‘the Resurrection’ touch the bier upon which you are being borne, and ‘say unto thee, arise!’

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live” (John 5:24-25). That sinner who hears the life-giving voice of the Son of God **shall live**. It is not bodily resurrection in view in John 5:25, but spiritual; it is regeneration, new birth, the implanting within of a new life. The life that is imparted is the very life of Christ: He takes possession; He indwells. This is why the Saviour could say: *“whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die”*. Those who are truly born again cannot die – for He who is ‘the

Resurrection and the Life' is in them, and they in Him (cf 1 John 4:13); they share His life; they are flesh of His flesh, bone of His bone, born of His Spirit, partakers of His nature. "*Verily, verily*", says the Saviour, "*he that heareth My word, and believeth ... hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life*" (John 5:24). And so it must be, for Christ has already received and endured the sentence of death in the stead of His people; the transaction is made; therefore the believing sinner passes out of 'death' and into 'life', and that eternally.

Let the order be carefully noted, for there is a perfection in the doctrine of Holy Scripture. Christ calls Himself 'the Resurrection and the Life', because in the spiritual experience the Saviour proves to be 'resurrection' first, and 'life' thereafter. The sinner is dead in his sins, and separated from God, in the grave of guilt, dwelling 'among the tombs', in the dungeon of spiritual death. His first need is therefore to be brought out of that dreadful place and state. It is Christ as 'the Resurrection' who alone can effect this. It is His animating power which first quickens the dead soul and causes lifeless ears to hear His call of 'arise' and to heed it, and 'come forth'. And having been thus raised, life everlasting is bestowed. "*The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God*" – this is resurrection; "*and they that hear shall live*" – this is life.

This message must also include the other aspect of resurrection truth, namely the physical or bodily resurrection – for this will be accomplished in every human being who ever has, or ever will yet live. It will be effected by Him who is 'the Resurrection', and by virtue of His power: "*Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation*" (John 5:28-29). Phenomenal as such a prospect may seem, it is an absolute certainty. Then let anyone, who harbours doubt concerning that great coming day of bodily resurrection, or the company among whom they shall ultimately be numbered, "[call] *upon the name of*

the Lord; O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul”, for “*gracious is the Lord, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful*”, and He will “**[deliver] my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling**” (Psalm 116:4-5, 8).

W. H. Molland (1920 – 2012)

How many hearts have thrilled on hearing these words uttered when the beloved form of a child or a parent, a brother or a sister, has been carried to the grave: “*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die*” (John 11:25-26)! The Saviour taught by these declarations that none really **live**, except those who believe in Him; and that none really **die**, except those who do **not** believe. To breathe, to move, to feel pain or pleasure – that is not to live; to know God, to love Him, to be like Him – **that** is to live indeed. To lie for a while in the tomb while the spirit rests above – that is not to die; to be cast into the lake of fire – **that** is to die. Do we believe this? Then are we happy indeed, if we can say with Martha, “*I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world*” (v. 27). If we really believe this, we live now the only happy life that can be enjoyed on earth; if we believe this, we shall never die, but only fall asleep in Jesus. Many on their dying beds, when they have been asked whether Jesus was precious, have replied: “never so precious as now.” But it is not only on our own dying beds that we may hope to feel Him precious. When we see the eyes we loved closed in death, then we feel that we owe all the peace we shall henceforth enjoy to Him in whom the dear departed sleeps securely; then we feel, “were it not for Jesus, I should have no hopes of seeing my friend, my brother, again; nor any assurance that he is happy while absent from me. But now, when I lie down, I think, his spirit needs no rest; and when I rise up, I think, while I have been resting, his spirit has been uniting with the angels, ‘who all night long unwearied sing, The praises of their heavenly King’.”

F. L. Mortimer (1802 – 1878)

A GRAVESIDE HYMN

Thou hast stood here, Lord Jesus,
Beside the still cold grave;
And proved Thy deep compassion,
And mighty power to save.
Thy tears of tender pity,
Thine agonising groan,
Teach how for us Thou feelest,
Now seated on Thy throne.

Thou hast lain here, Lord Jesus,
Thyself the victim then;
The Lord of life and glory,
Once slain for wretched men.
From sin and condemnation
When none but Thou could'st save,
Thy love than death was stronger,
And deeper than the grave.

Thou hast been here, Lord Jesus,
But Thou art here no more,
The terror and the darkness,
The night of death are o'er.
Great Captain of Salvation,
Thy triumphs now we sing:
Oh grave, where is thy victory?
Oh death, where is thy sting?

We wait for Thine appearing,
We weep but we rejoice;
In all our depths of sorrow,
We still can hear Thy voice:
“I am the resurrection;
I live who once was slain;
Fear not, thy friend and brother
Shall rise with Me and reign”.

J. G. Deck (1807-1884)

MEDITATIONS AMONG THE TOMBS

Having viewed the abode of my deceased fellow-creatures ... I longed to see the place where our Lord lay. And, O! what a marvellous spectacle was once exhibited in [that] memorable sepulchre! He, 'who clothes Himself with light as with a garment and walks upon the wings of the wind' (cf Psalm 104:2-3) was pleased to wear the habiliments of mortality and dwelt among the prostrate dead. Who can repeat the wondrous truth too often? Who can dwell upon the transporting theme too long? He, who sits enthroned in glory and diffuses bliss among all the heavenly hosts, He was once a pale ... corpse, and pressed this little spot.

O death! How great was thy triumph in that hour! Never did thy gloomy realms contain such a prisoner before. Prisoner, did I say? No; He was more than conqueror. He arose, far more mightily than Samson, from a transient slumber; broke down the gates, and demolished the strong-holds of those dark dominions. And this, O mortals, this is your only consolation and security. Jesus has trod the dreadful path, and smoothed it for your passage. Jesus, sleeping in the chambers of the tomb, has brightened the dismal mansion, and left an inviting odour in those beds of dust. The dying Jesus (never let the comfortable truth depart from your minds!) the dying Jesus is your sure protection, your unquestionable passport, through the territories of the grave. Believe in Him, and they shall prove a 'highway to Zion'; shall transmit you safe to paradise. Believe in Him, and you shall be no losers, but unspeakable gainers, by your dissolution. For hear what the oracle of heaven says upon this important point: "*whosoever ... believeth in Me shall never die*" (cf John 11:26). What sublime and emphatical language is this! This much, at least, it must import: the nature of that last change shall be surprisingly altered for the better. It shall no longer be inflicted as a punishment, but rather vouchsafed as a blessing. To such persons, it shall come attended with such a train of benefits, as will render it a kind

of happy impropriety to call it 'dying'. Dying? No, 'tis then they truly begin to live. Their exit is the end of their frailty, and their entrance upon perfection. Their last groan is the prelude to life and immortality.

O ye timorous fools, that are terrified at the sound of the passing bell; that turn pale at the sight of an opened grave; can scarce behold a coffin without a shuddering horror; ye that are in bondage to the great tyrant, and tremble at the shaking of his iron rod; cry mightily to the Father of your spirits for faith in His dear Son. Faith will free you from your slavery. Faith will embolden you to tread on this fiercest of serpents. Old Simeon, clasping the child Jesus in the arms of his flesh, and the glorious Mediator in the arms of his faith, departs with tranquillity and peace. That bitter persecutor Saul, having won Christ, being found in Christ, longs to be dismissed from cumbrous clay, and kindles into rapture at the prospect of dissolution (cf Philippians 1:23, 2 Timothy 4:7-8). I see another of Immanuel's followers, trusting in his Saviour, leaning upon his Beloved, go down into the silent shades with composure and alacrity (cf 2 Peter 1:14). In this powerful name, an innumerable company of sinful creatures have set up their banners; and 'overcome through the blood of the Lamb'. Authorised by the Captain of thy salvation, thou also mayst set thy feet upon the neck of this king of terrors. Furnished with this antidote, thou also mayst play around the hole of the asp, and put thy undaunted hand on this cockatrice-den (cf Isaiah 11:8). Thou mayst feel the viper fastening to thy mortal part, and fear no evil: thou shalt one day shake it off by a joyful resurrection, and suffer no harm (cf Acts 28:5).

Resurrection! That cheering word eases my mind of an anxious thought, and solves a most momentous question. I was going to ask, "wherefore do all the corpses lie here, in this abject condition? Is this their final state? Has death conquered? And will the tyrant hold them captive? How long wilt thou forget them, O Lord, for ever?" No, saith the voice from heaven, the word of divine revelation: **the righteous** are all 'prisoners of hope' (cf Zechariah 9:12). There is an hour (an awful

secret that, and known only to all-foreseeing wisdom) an appointed hour there is, when an act of grace will pass the great seal above, and give them a universal discharge, a general delivery from the abodes of corruption. Then shall the Lord Jesus descend from heaven, with the shout of the archangel, and the trump of God. Destruction itself shall hear His call, and the obedient grave give up her dead. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, they shake off the sleep of ten thousand years; and spring forth, like the bounding roe, to 'meet their Lord in the air'.

And O! with what cordial congratulations, what transporting endearments, do the soul and body, those affection companions, re-unite! But with how much greater demonstrations of kindness are they both received by their compassionate Redeemer! The Ancient of Days, who comes in the clouds of heaven, is their Friend, their Father, their Bridegroom. He comes with irresistible power and infinite glory; but they have nothing to fear from His majestic appearance. Those tremendous solemnities, which spread desolation and astonishment through the universe, serve only to inflame their love and heighten their hopes. The Judge, the awful Judge, amidst His magnificence and splendour, vouchsafes to confess their names; vouchsafes to commemorate their fidelity, before all the inhabitants of the skies, and the whole assembled world.

Hark! The thunders are hushed. See! The lightnings cease their rage. The angelic armies stand in silent suspense. The whole race of Adam is rapt in pleasing or anxious expectation. And now that adorable Person, whose favour is better than life, whose acceptance is a crown of glory, lifts up the light of His countenance upon the righteous. He speaks, and what ravishing words proceed from His gracious lips, what delights they enkindle in the breasts of the faithful: "I accept you, O my people! Ye are they that believed in My name. Ye are they that renounced yourselves, and are complete in Me. I see no spot or blemish in you, for ye are washed in My blood, and clothed in My righteousness. Renewed by My Spirit, ye have glorified Me on earth, and have been faithful unto

death. Come, then, ye servants of holiness, enter into the joy of your Lord. Come, ye children of light, ye blessed of My Father; receive the kingdom that shall never be removed; wear the crown which fadeth not away, and enjoy pleasures for evermore!”

Then it will be one of the smallest privileges of the righteous, that they shall languish no more; that sickness will never again shew her pale countenance in their dwellings. Death itself will be ‘swallowed up in victory’. That fatal javelin, which has drunk the blood of monarchs, and finds its way to the hearts of all the sons of Adam, shall be utterly broken. That enormous scythe, which has struck empires from the root, and swept ages and generations into oblivion, shall lie by in perpetual uselessness. Sin also, which filled thy quiver thou insatiate archer – sin, which strung thy arm with resistless vigour, which pointed all thy shafts with inevitable destruction – sin will then be done away. Whatever is frail or depraved will be thrown off with our grave-clothes. All to come is perfect holiness, and consummate happiness; the terms of whose continuance is eternity.

O Eternity! Eternity! How are our boldest, our strongest thoughts, lost and overwhelmed in thee! Who can set landmarks to limit thy dimensions; or find plummets to fathom thy depths? Arithmeticians have figures to compute all the progressions of time; astronomers have instruments to calculate the distances of the planets: but what numbers can state, what lines can gauge, the lengths and breadths of eternity? *“It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea”* (Job 11:8-9) ...

The wicked – my mind recoils at the apprehension of their misery. It has studiously waived the fearful subject, and seems unwilling to pursue it even now – but ‘tis better to reflect upon it for a few minutes, than to endure it to eternal ages. Perhaps the consideration of their aggravated misery may be profitably terrible; may teach me more highly to prize the

Saviour, who 'delivers me from going down into the bottomless pit'; may drive me, like the avenger's sword, to this only city of refuge for obnoxious sinners ... Who can imagine their confusion and distress, when they stand guilty and inexcusable before their incensed Creator? They are received with frowns. The God that made them has no mercy on them. The Prince of Peace rejects them with abhorrence. He consigns them over to chains of darkness, and receptacles of despair against the severer doom and more public infamy of the great day. Then all the vials of wrath will be emptied upon these wretched creatures. The law they have violated, and the gospel they have slighted, the power they have defied, and the goodness they have abused, will all get themselves honour in their exemplary destruction. Then God, the God to whom vengeance belongeth, will draw the arrow to the very head, and set them as the mark of His inexorable displeasure.

Resurrection will be no privilege to them; but immortality itself their everlasting curse. Would they not bless the grave 'that land where all things are forgotten', and wish to lie eternally hid in its deepest gloom? But the dust refused to conceal their persons, or to draw a veil over their practices. They also must awake; must arise; must appear at the bar and meet the Judge; a Judge before whom 'the pillars of heaven tremble, and the earth melts away'; a Judge once long-suffering, and very compassionate; but now unalterably determined to teach stubborn offenders what it is to provoke the omnipotent Godhead; what it is to trample upon the blood of His Son, and offer despite to all the gracious overtures of His Spirit.

O! the perplexity! The distraction that must seize the impenitent rebels, when they are summoned to the great tribunal! What will they do in this day of severe visitation? This day of final decision? Where? How? Whence will they turn? Wither betake themselves for shelter or for succour? Alas, 'tis all in vain; 'tis all too late. Friends and acquaintance know them no more. Men and angels abandon them to their approaching doom. Even the Mediator Himself deserts them in this

dreadful hour. To fly will be impractical; to justify themselves still more impossible; and now to make any supplications, utterly unavailable.

Behold, the books are opened! The secrets of all hearts are disclosed; the hidden things of darkness are brought to light. How empty, how ineffectual now are all those refined artifices, with which hypocrites imposed upon their fellow-creatures, and preserved a character in the sight of men! The jealous God, who has been about their paths, and about their bed, and spied out all their ways, sets before them the things that they have done. They cannot answer Him one in a thousand, nor stand in the awful judgment. 'The heavens reveal their iniquities, and the earth rises up against them' (cf Job 20:27). They are speechless with guilt and stigmatised with infamy, before all the armies of the sky, and all the nations of the redeemed. What a favour would they esteem it, to hide their ashamed heads in the bottom of the ocean, or even to be buried beneath the ruins of the tottering world!

If the contempt poured upon them be thus insupportable, how will their hearts endure, when the sword of infinite indignation is unsheathed, and fiercely waved around their defenceless heads, or pointed directly at their naked breasts? How must the wretches scream with wild amazement, and rend the very heavens with their cries, when the right-aiming thunderbolts go abroad with a dreadful commission, to drive them from the kingdoms of men and plunge them – not into the sorrows of a moment, or the tortures of an hour – but into all the restless agonies of unquenchable fire, and everlasting despair?

Misery of miseries! Too shocking for reflection to dwell upon. But if so dismal to foresee – and that at a distance, together with some comfortable expectation of escaping it – O how bitter, inconceivably bitter to bear, without any intermission, or any mitigation, through hopeless and eternal ages! Who has any bowels of pity? Who has any sentiments of compassion? Who has any tender concern for his fellow-creatures? Who? In God's name, and for Christ's sake, let him

show it, by warning every man, and beseeching every man, to seek the Lord while He may be found; to throw down the arms of rebellion, before the act of indemnity expires; submissively to adore the Lamb, while He holds out the golden sceptre. Here let us act the friendly part to mankind; here let the whole force of our benevolence exert itself; in exhorting relations, acquaintances, neighbours, whomsoever we probably influence, to take the wings of faith unfeigned, of repentance undelayed, and flee away from this wrath to come.

Upon the whole, what stupendous discoveries are these! Lay them up in a faithful remembrance, O my soul. Recollect them with the most serious attention, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. When thou walkest, receive them for thy companions; when thou talkest, listen to them as thy prompters; and whatever thou dost, consult them as thy directors. Influenced by these considerations, thy views will greaten, thy affections be exalted, and thou thyself raised above the tantalising powers of perishing things. Duly mindful of these, it will be the sum of thy desires, and the scope of thy endeavours, to gain the approbation of that Sovereign Being, who will then fill the throne, and pronounce the decisive sentence. Thou wilt see nothing worth a wish, in comparison of having His will for thy rule; His glory for thy aim; and His Holy Spirit for thy ever-actuating principle.

Wonder, O man; be lost in admiration, at those prodigious events which are coming upon the universe: events, the greatness of which nothing finite can measure; such as will cause whatever is considerable or momentous in the annals of all generations, to sink into littleness and nothing. Events (Jesus prepare us for their approach; defend us when they take place!) big with the everlasting fates of the living, and all the dead. I must see the graves cleaving, the sea teeming, and swarms unsuspected, crowds unnumbered, yea, multitudes of thronging nations rising from both. I must see the world in flames; must stand at the dissolution of all terrestrial things; and be an attendant on the burial of nature. I must see the vast expanse of the sky wrapped up like a scroll;

and the incarnate God issuing forth from light inaccessible, with ten thousand times ten thousand angels, to judge both men and devils. I must see the curtain of time drop; see all eternity disclosed to view; and enter upon a state of being that will never, never have an end.

And ought I not, (let the vainest imagination determine), ought I not to try the sincerity of my faith, and take heed to my ways? Is there an inquiry, is there a care, of greater, of equal, of comparable importance? Is not this an infinitely pressing call, to see that my loins are girded about, my lamp trimmed, and myself dressed for the Bridegroom's appearance? That, washed in the fountain opened in my Saviour's side, and clad with the marriage-garment woven by His obedience, I may be found in peace, unblameable, and unreprouable? Otherwise, how shall I stand with boldness, when the stars of heaven fall from their orbs? How shall I come forth upright and courageous when the earth reels to and fro like drunkard (cf Isaiah 24:20)? How else shall I look up with joy, and see my salvation drawing nigh, when the hearts of millions upon millions fail for fear?

Now ... lest my meditations set in a cloud, and leave any displeasing gloom upon your mind, let me once more turn to the brightening prospects of the righteous. A view of them, and their delightful expectations, may serve to exhilarate the thoughts which have been musing upon melancholy things, and hovering about the edges of infernal darkness ... The righteous seem to lie in the bosom of the earth, as a wary pilot in some well-sheltered creek, till all the storms which infest this lower world, are blown over. Here they enjoy safe anchorage; are in no danger of foundering amidst the waves of prevailing iniquity, or of being shipwrecked upon the rocks of any powerful temptation. But ere long we shall behold them hoisting flags of hope; riding before a sweet gale of atoning merit and redeeming love; till they make, with all the sails of an assured faith, the blessed port of eternal life.

James Hervey (1714 – 1758)

THE RESURRECTION OF THE JUST

“...for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.” (Luke 14:14)

The dead in Christ shall rise first. They shall rise incorruptible, powerful, spiritual, and glorious; in exact conformity to the glorious body of Christ. His voice will rouse them, His power will raise them, and His glory will surround and adorn them. They shall be like Him, for they shall see him as He is. What a glorious morning will the resurrection morning be! How deeply we are interested in it, and yet, how little it exercises our thoughts, or draws out our anticipations. It may be the very next morning we shall see ... for aught we can tell, Jesus may come tomorrow. Are we ready? Are we justified before God through faith in Jesus? Are we just with men rendering to all their dues? The resurrection of the just will be most glorious: they will come forth perfect in holiness and beauty; they will rise to be openly united to Jesus, to share His glory and be with Him where He is. We ought often to think of that day – to prepare for it daily; to live and act as if it was just at hand; to do as Paul did, who laboured, suffered, and prayed, if by any means he might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. *“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power”* (Revelation 20:6).

James Smith (1802 – 1862)

“...my prayer for you shall be, that the Lord would awaken you, and set up a choice light in your souls, that you may see where you are, and what you are; that He would grant you to break off your sins by repentance, and give you a saving interest in Himself; so that ‘for you to live may be Christ, and to die may be gain’, (cf Philippians 1:21); that in life and death Christ may be advantage to you; and that death may be the funeral of all your sins and sorrows, and an inlet to all that joy and pleasure, that blessedness and happiness, which is at God’s right hand!”

Thomas Brooks (1608 – 1680)

EDITORIAL

In the purposes of God, the Hebrews were brought to the east bank of the river Jordan at precisely that time when crossing it seemed hardest: *“for Jordan overfloweth all his banks all the time of harvest”* (Joshua 3:15). As though to exacerbate their woes, they were caused to camp within sight of it for three days (cf Joshua 3:1-2), during which period, the insurpassable nature of that obstacle, and the inability of themselves, was further impressed upon their minds. Neither would there be such a miracle as happened forty years previously, when the Red Sea was divided in advance of the people’s passage, by a strong east wind the previous night. A greater exercise of faith would be required at Jordan – for not until the feet of the foremost persons in the column had been immersed in its waters would the waves divide (cf Joshua 3:13, 15).

Thus began the ordeal of crossing the riverbed; the divinely-restrained waters ominously out-of-sight to the north; the people’s minds perhaps dwelling as much upon the past drowning of the Egyptians, as upon their forefathers’ experience of deliverance. To the priests bearing the ark was given the task of remaining in the very centre of the river’s former course, until the last of the people passed safely over. But still all was not accomplished. Before they could quit their station, instruction had been given for the raising of two monuments. Twelve stones would be placed in the midst of the river, where the priests’ feet had stood, to remain visible after the waters returned (cf Joshua 4:9); and twelve stones were to be conveyed from the riverbed to the farther, western shore, and erected at Gilgal, for a memorial sign: *“That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever”* (Joshua 4:24).

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, and many are the trials of their faith – the history of the Hebrews serves as an object lesson and illustration of this very thing. God often appoints a way – seemingly

impossible, via difficulties insurmountable, and problems intractable, at a time most inopportune – wherein to lead His people on. They are not spared from such experiences, but encounter them face-to-face; are brought to an end of themselves, and the very brink of their fears. God’s design for His saints is not ‘avoidance’, but ‘endurance’; not ‘exemption’, but ‘enablement’; not ‘mitigation’, but miracles of grace.

It is inherent in human nature to suppress the memory of hardship, and draw a mental veil over seasons of greatest personal adversity – but this ought not to be so with the Christian. Though they are brought by rocky paths, and close by death’s swelling flood, the commandment is: *“thou shalt remember **all** the way which the Lord thy God led thee”* (Deuteronomy 8:2) – for even in the most arduous of experiences, tokens of divine grace are there to find, and treasure up. Baca’s dark vale has its wells and pools; goodness and mercy flower in the valley of the shadow of death; Ebenezer stones lie on the bed of Jordan. These times are never to be forgotten, but should intentionally be recalled to mind, as faith-strengthening evidences of God’s deliverance, and proofs of His presence in the flames. It is a blessed testimony to say with the Psalmist: *“This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles”* (Psalm 34:6).

Indeed, one of the defining characteristics of the inhabitants of glory is – not that they arrive there untouched by pain, privation and the rigours of the journey – but rather, having hungered and thirsted below, they will do so no more; having borne the heat of the day, they are unburdened; having wept much, those tears are wiped away. These are they who reached heaven by way of much tribulation (cf Revelation 7:14-17), and praise God’s delivering grace all the more loudly. What joy it will be, when, at this life’s close:

“My grateful soul, on Jordan’s shore,
Shall raise one sacred pillar more,
Then bear, in His bright courts above,
Inscriptions of immortal love.” (Doddridge)