

“Resurrection – Talk about a Make-over”

Romans 8:6-11 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit¹ is life and peace. ⁷ For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law -- indeed it cannot, ⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹ But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit,¹ since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit¹ is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ¹ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through² his Spirit that dwells in you.

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I would like to share an old classic hymn with you folks and I would like you to just listen to it and when I'm done we'll talk about how it diverges from Biblical faith. Unfortunately, it is Fanny Crosby's *All the way my Savior Leads Me*. I'll sing the way the contemporary Christian artist, Rich Mullins, sang it.

All the way my Savior leads me what have I to ask beside?
Can I doubt His tender mercy, who through life has been my Guide?
Heavenly peace, divinest comfort, here by faith in Him to dwell!
For I know, whate'er befall me, Jesus doeth all things well.

All the way my Savior leads me cheers each winding path I tread,
Gives me grace for every trial. Feeds me with the living Bread.
Though my weary steps may falter and my soul athirst may be,
Gushing from the Rock before me, Lo! A spring of joy I see.

All the way my Savior leads me, O the fullness of His love!
Perfect rest to me is promised in my Father's house above.
When my spirit, clothed immortal, wings its flight to realms of day
this my song through endless ages: Jesus led me all the way.

Now if I were to walk away from this pulpit right now having sung that hymn and said this hymn is the sum total of the Christian faith go forth and live it, you would not be remiss in having Presbytery charge me with teaching other than Biblical faith. You may be saying to yourself right now, “What could possibly be ‘heretical’ about that hymn? It’s one of my favorites.” I would agree with your sympathies. It is one of my favorites. It says volumes about Jesus’ presence with us, his guidance, tender mercy, and provision, the grace for every trial, and the undeserved joy he gives to us. It is a poetic treasure trove on the topic of Christian experience. Yet, for all this hymn says about Jesus’ faithfulness to us, it falls away from the faith on the point of what happens to us when we die. Our spirits will not be clothed immortal and wing flight to realms of day and there spend eternity. That is Greek Paganism not what the Bible teaches.

The Bible teaches bodily resurrection. The Apostle Paul writes, “Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For, the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For,

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this perishable body must put on imperishability, and *this mortal body must put on immortality*. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and *this mortal body puts on immortality*, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ ‘Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?’ That was 1 Corinthians 15:51-55. A few verses early in that same chapter Paul writes, “But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For, since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.” Then again from our reading in Romans this morning, “But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.” Then again, Paul says at 2 Corinthians 4:14, “...because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence.” Even Isaiah in the Old Testament attests, “But your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You, who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy. Your dew is like the dew of the morning; the earth will give birth to her dead” (26:19).

Bodily resurrection at the time of the New Creation when heaven and earth will be recreated anew as one and the knowing of God covers the earth as the waters cover the sea (that’s Isaiah 11:19) is our hope as Christians. I can belabor this point with passage after passage. But, what I cannot do with Scripture is find anywhere where it says we have an immortal soul or spirit that leaves our body when we die and goes to spend eternity in a spiritual realm called Heaven never to have to deal with the physical again. As I said, that belief is Greek Paganism and it has been a tenacious booger in the nose of the Church since the 2nd century.

In the Bible, the human soul or spirit is the totality of one’s being inclusive of the body in relationship to God. It is me in relationship to God. The soul or spirit is not immortal. The sting of death is not simply that our bodies die. It is that the relationship with God dies. Only Jesus Christ the first fruits of the resurrection and new creation is immortal (see 1 Timothy 6:13-16). When we who are in Christ because his Spirit dwells in us, when our bodies die, we go to be with him (cf. Phil. 1:23) in a place which he himself called Paradise when speaking to the thief dying on the cross next to him who saw Jesus to be the Messiah (cf. Lk. 23:43; 2 Cor. 12:4, Rev. 2:7). The Bible is vague on what this Paradise is or what we will be like. N.T. Wright says “it is a state in which the dead are held firmly within the conscious love of God and the conscious presence of Jesus Christ while they await that day” (Wright, N.T.; Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church; HarperOne; 2008; 172). I would go further and say that the presence of the LORD that we feel present with us in worship which is so rich at times and the love that we feel from God that grows into love for one another, well, when you die expect that in its fullness.

After Paradise, there will be the resurrection and the final judgment which all people will face even those in Christ. For those in Christ there will be reward

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for how well one kept the faith and walked the walk in this life. There is enough talk of “the first will be last and the last will be first” in the Bible to substantiate this. One does not put the hand to the plow and look back. We need to ask what about those who are not in Christ and have made it a point to reject him, to reject God’s love in this life and next; who are so wrapped in the idolatry of worshipping such things as power, money, sex, and even the Satanic and so dehumanize themselves and everyone they come in contact with to the point that we can see no hope for them nor feel pity for them (see Wright; *Ibid*, 175-183)? What about them? They will be raised too and face judgment. Will they spend an eternity in Hell? There is certainly provision for that in Scripture which we cannot disregard no matter how uncomfortable it makes us feel. Yet, we must ask what exactly Paul meant by the word “all” in Romans 11:32; “For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all” and elsewhere. I do not wish to end sounding universalistic for universalism just isn’t in the Scripture and there will be those in the end who do reject God’s mercy.

I wish I had more time this morning to discuss the relevance that the future resurrection has for our lives now. I will try to do that in the weeks following Easter. I will end today saying the Christian faith ultimately is not about a system of individual salvation by which it is determined who in the end lives and who does not. That way of talking about our faith is ultimately unbiblical and results in the decapitation of the church’s mission as we are now observing in Europe and North America. The Bible is the revelation and historical testimony to how God is “redeeming and renewing his creation *through human beings* and how he is going to rescue those humans themselves as part of the process but not as the point of it all” (*Ibid*, 185). The hope of the resurrection established in the fact of Jesus’ own resurrection and the real presence of the Holy Spirit compelled the early church to proclaim the gospel message that Jesus is LORD and to live in a new form of community that was rooted in the love of God. They proclaimed the message and lived this new life fearlessly because they knew that resurrection and new creation was their end. Death was made powerless to them. They had reason to fear and to hide for in the Roman world they declared that Caesar was lord and to proclaim otherwise was treason. To live together with others sharing the same treasonous claims was most certainly a death wish. Yet, the early Church grew and grew and grew. If I were to get on the stump about things we the church believe today that affects us adversely, one of my top three is that we have lost the hope of bodily resurrection lived in new creation having supplanted it with a privatized faith and system of sin management that just wants Jesus to be faithful to me until my spirit clothed immortal wings its flight to realms of day. We the church have work to do; the work of proclaiming that Jesus is LORD in this very idolatrous world and struggling to live together in the midst of the old humanity as the new humanity molded in the love of Jesus Christ in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit to the Father’s glory. This is the only work in this world that will endure into the next. As Paul closed out 1 Corinthians, “Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (15:58).