

“Last Day” Raising of the Dead

For any who may be with me still in these restudies of traditional concepts, this one may be the most challenging. They are intended as investigative explorations rather than expressions of dogma. I am receiving positive responses from readers, but your total agreement with me is neither expected nor demanded.

If you are a new reader, I would urge you to at least read two previous discourses, FR 64, “The Great and Terrible Day,” and FR 68, “Prophetic Parables,” before reading this one.

Malachi, John the Baptist, and Jesus warned of a great and terrible day at the coming of the Lord, the “parousia,” or presence when the capital city and nation of Israel would suffer destruction. Jesus predicted the avenging and judging of Israel for their rejection of Him in such parables as that of the barren fig tree, the fish-net, the tares, the pearl of great price, the hidden treasure, the importunate widow, the pounds, the vineyard, the rich man and Lazarus, the marriage of the king’s son, and the “judgment parables” of the wise and foolish virgins, the talents, and the separation of sheep and goats. They depict both national and individual judgment. These predictions were all to be fulfilled in the “last day” at the “coming of the Lord” in the lifetime of some of Jesus’ listeners. These parables are all recorded in the synoptic gospels though no reference is made to them by John. In this study, we will look into John’s record.

John connects the imminent coming of the Lord with the judgment and the giving of life to the dead. “Truly, truly, I say to you, the HOUR IS COMING, AND NOW IS, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him authority to EXECUTE JUDGMENT, because he is the Son of man. Do not marvel at this; for the HOUR is coming when all who are in the TOMBS will hear his voice and COME FORTH, those who have done good, to the RESURRECTION OF LIFE, and those who have done evil, to the RESURRECTION OF JUDGMENT” (John 5:25-29).

“The hour is coming, and now is” speaks of something very near, though not yet accomplished (Compare John 4:21f). Very soon, through his atonement, eternal life would be given to those dead in sin who would believe and obey. Then also the hour was coming when “all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth” to judgment. To speak of those in the tombs was to employ an idiom meaning those who are

physically dead, regardless of whether they had been entombed, burned, eaten of animals, or simply disintegrated. Since God does not have a physical voice, hearing his “voice” is an accommodative expression of the working of His power. In this passage, Jesus implies an imminent raising of the physically dead of all since Adam until that time. And Jesus connects his bringing judgment, which we have referred to previously, in this imminent manifestation.

For over half a century I have read these passages from John that speak of raising the dead and of judgment in their generation, but I transferred them to “the end of time,” as though the Scriptures speak of such. It just seemed too obviously wrong to connect them to his coming in that generation. And a Bible teacher just knows better than to “fool around” with the resurrection and judgment. However, I am now having the audacity to take a sort of squinting look with one eye at the clarity of Jesus’ own words.

Jesus pinpoints these happenings as being “at the last day.” Although John alone uses that specific term, as we have mentioned previously, other writers use similar terms like “the day,” “that day,” “the last days,” “the last times,” “the last hour,” and “the end of the age.” They all point to the imminent “parousia” and the events consummated in AD 70. Life would be given in the “last day” of the “last days.”

Jesus caused murmuring by such statements as, “..and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but RAISE IT UP AT THE LAST DAY. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:39-40). Again, in verse 44, he said, “...and I will raise him up in the last day.” As Martha was grieving the death of her brother, Lazarus, “Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day’” (John 11:23f). In these expressions Jesus gave no indication that he was referring to some time different from that commonly used by the other writers.

In the next sentence of Jesus’ response to Martha (11:15f), we have one of the focal and pivotal statements in the Bible, in my estimation. Why have I not recognized this all along? “Jesus said to her, ‘I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE; HE WHO BELIEVES IN ME, THOUGH HE DIE, YET SHALL HE LIVE, AND WHOEVER LIVES AND BELIEVES IN ME SHALL NEVER DIE.’”

What was the true “hope of Israel”? Many held misdirected hopes or a restored kingdom on earth, even as many people still do. The true hope

of Israel was not a restored kingdom on earth. It was the resurrection! These passages leave no doubt about that: Acts 28:20; 23:6; 24:14f; 26:6f. (Also see: Free To Change, Ch. 30 “The Hope of Israel.)

Under the Law of Moses they offered sin offerings, but the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sins. They had no means of removing sins so that they could be restored to God’s Presence. Their sacrifices were typical of Christ’s atonement, but those who had died through their history still slept in the hadean world in anticipation of a release by resurrection. Also, they were still captive of death which had not yet been conquered. Jesus gave his life in atonement for them, then arose and ascended into heaven as High Priest with the blood of atonement, opening the way through death and into God’s Presence into the Holy of Holies. “Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire!” (Rev. 20:14) enabling the release and judgment of all who lived before Christ.

In Hebrews (9:24-28) this is explained: “For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, **NOW TO APPEAR IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN OUR BEHALF**. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the **END OF THE AGE** to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” We pause here to remind that this was not written **TO US** in the twenty-first century, but to those in the first century who were awaiting the “parousia,” or presence of the Lord in his imminent return to them. Jesus was, at the end of the then present age, taking care of the two greatest needs of Israel and all mankind -- death and judgment for sins. “And just as it is appointed for men to die once and after that comes judgment (Jesus took our appointment of death and judgment so we will not have to deal with either -ch), so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a **SECOND TIME** (the “second coming of Christ), not to deal with sin but **TO SAVE** those who are eagerly waiting for him.” That would be the very near harvest of the world when his angels would gather the righteous of ages past and restore them to life in their Creator (See Matt. 24:29-34 where Jesus said this would be accomplished in their generation.). That was the hope of Israel. It would be also the time of avenging of the nation and judging of individuals as was depicted in Jesus’ prophetic parables. These things were all fulfilled in their generation at the end of the age of nationalist Israel brought about in the events leading to and including the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

The hope of Israel was in reality an anticipation of the Messiah, not for him to reign on earth, but for him to give spiritual life. Jesus was the Personification of this hope. He revealed this to Martha also when he declared, "I am the resurrection and the life!" He was the fulfillment of Israel's hope of resurrection to life!

What of those disciples of Jesus who had already died? Some must have thought they had missed the resurrection. So Paul assured them (I shall insert comments in the text), "But I would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep (had died), that you may not grieve as others who do not have hope (the hope of Israel: resurrection). For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep (died. Jesus had overcome death but was in the process as High Priest of presenting his sacrifice to open the way into heaven.) For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that WE who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord (Paul includes the possibility that he may be still living. "We", not "they who will be living centuries later"), shall not precede those who have fallen asleep (died). For the Lord himself will descend from heaven (as he had promised in Matthew 24 and other references) with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet (figuratively, a call to assemble). And the (physically) dead in Christ shall rise first (Christ, the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ - 1 Cor. 15:23), then (next in order) we who are left, shall be caught up together with them (all at once? or individually as each dies thereafter? The so-called "rapture!") in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. (Is heaven in the cold, tumultuous clouds of our atmosphere? Or is he not speaking in accommodative language of eternal, heavenly fellowship with God in Christ?)

We who live today are among those "who are alive and remain." Since death and Hades are abolished, "We all shall not sleep" (in death in Hades awaiting resurrection and judgment. 1 Cor. 15:51). Jesus has taken care of that for us, so that when we die physically, we are caught up to God in Heaven, ever to be with the Lord.

This takes us back to the fantastic news Jesus announced to Martha. She had the concept of resurrection of the body at the last day. "Jesus said to her, 'I am the RESURRECTION and the LIFE; he who believes in me, though he die (physically like Lazarus), yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me SHALL NEVER DIE.'" No restoration of life is needed! We have already been given that eternal life. We are already reconciled to God. His Spirit lives within us giving us life. His blood

continues to cleanse us. When we leave this mortal tabernacle - tent - habitation - clothing, we shall not be left naked or homeless, as Paul wrote in figure, but we shall be received into the eternal habitation - temple - house- clothing (2 Cor. 4:13-- 5:10).

For those who lived before Christ, death had not been conquered and, because their sins were still accounted against them, the way into heaven was not yet opened. The hope of Israel was for restoration of life. The ancient heroes of faith “did not receive what was promised (being detained in Hades), since God had foreseen something better for us (believers in Jesus who have no wait in Hades), that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (Heb. 11:39f).

We plan to say more about the nature of the resurrection in a later lesson, but now we want to go on through John’s record noting that he taught the immediacy of these events. In the meantime, please do not be too hasty in classifying me with Hymenaeus and Philetus! (2 Tim. 2:16).

As Jesus revealed to his disciples that he would die, he indicated that the time was immediate for judgment and for Satan to be conquered. “NOW is the judgment of this world, NOW shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself” (John 12:31). In preparing them for his departure, he promised, “And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you unto myself, that where I am you may be also” (14:3). He was not saying this to you and me, but to them specifically. He further assured them “I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you” (v. 18). Again, “I go away, and I will come to you” (v.28). The “coming” to them is not speaking of his resurrection but his “parousia” after he would ascend to the Father. Please read the remainder of Chapter 16. Again, these promises were specifically to his listeners before the “parousia”, not to persons centuries later.

Jesus was about to leave the apostles but not without continued guidance during the forty-year interim before his “parousia”. He promised the Holy Spirit who “will teach you all things, and bring to remembrance all that I have said to you” (14:21). Also, “He will bear witness of me” (14:26). “And when he comes, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment” (16:8f). “He will guide you into all the truth, .. and he will declare to you the things that are to come” (16:13f). Those promises were not made to everyone, either then nor now, but were through special endowment to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers (Eph. 4:11f) for that period of time. Those gifted capacities served “in the last days.” We still benefit from the Spirit’s work through the collected writings of some of them.

We conclude this (too long) treatise with the intriguing statement Jesus made about John. Jesus had indicated how Peter would die. Peter asked about John's future. Jesus replied, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?" (21:22). Jesus indicated the possibility of that happening. Do you suppose that John was the only apostle who lived until Jesus' return "in the last day"?

After Jesus told Martha, "He who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die," he asked her pointedly, "Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord!" Do you? (Cecil Hook, 5-6-2001) []