

"YOUR LABOR IS NOT IN VAIN."

– 1 COR. 15:20,21,50-58. – APRIL 12. –

"Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept."

VERY appropriate to its date, this is a lesson on the resurrection. There are few features of truth on which Christian people in general seem to have greater need for Bible study than that of the resurrection. There are many systems of religion in the world, but none but Christianity teaches a resurrection of the dead. We mean true Christianity – the Bible teaching; for alas! with deep regret we write it, Churchianity does not believe in the resurrection of the dead: it has adopted the heathen theory that the dead are not dead, but alive; hence, whatever resurrection it teaches is along that line – of a resurrection of the living. Its claim is that at death something leaves the body (although they have not the slightest evidence of such departure, except that breath and vitality leave it); they claim that dying is a release, a benefit, an advantage; an unprisoning of the one who appeared to die, but who, they claim, is really more alive than ever. However, finding the doctrine of resurrection in the Bible, they do not wish to ignore it entirely and, hence, teach that its beneficiaries, whom we will call "shades" or "ghosts" have hankerings after their bodies – which continue persistently after centuries of experience without bodies – although they perhaps had only a few years' experience in bodies. This hankering for a body (which they claim is unnecessary to existence and happiness) God proposes to gratify, and by and by the resurrection of the bodies will take place. They anticipate a grand, glorious time in getting back into bodies which they describe much after the manner of present bodies, which they say are "prisonhouses." Surely there is inconsistency enough in such a theory to nauseate almost anybody, and it is not surprising that great confusion prevails throughout Christendom on this subject which, as we shall see in

examining our present lesson, finds so prominent a place in the Scriptures.

The Scripture teaching is most explicitly to the contrary of the above, but seems obscure, because of certain doctrinal errors which the great Adversary has introduced. One of these is a confusion of thought respecting what constitutes a soul. Churchianity's view of a soul was expressed by a Methodist bishop in these words: "It is without interior or exterior; without body, shape or parts – and you could put a million of them in a nutshell." The bishop's definition of a soul would be a proper definition of *nothing*, and one could just as readily put ten thousand millions of nothings in a nutshell, – and have room left. In the Bible, the word "soul" is used to signify being, or person; and a human being, or human person, is made up of two parts; viz., a body and its vitality, otherwise called the spirit of life, or breath of life. The body is not intelligent of itself, neither is vitality intelligent; but when the two are brought together, intelligence, being, or soul, commences. So it was with Father Adam: the Lord formed his body, but it was not a soul, – it was merely so much organized matter in good form. Next God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of lives" – the vitality common to all living creatures, but [R3174 : page 106] not a soul. It was when these two things, *organism* and *vitality*, were properly united that man came into existence, a living, thinking being – "*man* became, – a living soul." (Gen. 2:7.) We must notice carefully that the lesson is not that man *has* a soul, but that man *is* a soul, or being.

Let us take an illustration from nature – the air we breathe: it is composed of oxygen and nitrogen, neither of which is atmosphere, or air; but when the two combine, as they do in proper chemical proportions, the resulting thing is atmosphere. Just so with soul. God speaks to us from this standpoint, of our being each a soul. He does not address our bodies nor our breath of lives, but he does address *us* as intelligent beings, or souls. In pronouncing the penalty of violating his law, he did not address Adam's body specifically, but the man, the

soul, the intelligent being: "Thou!" "In the day that *thou* eatest thereof *thou* shalt surely *die*." "The *soul* that sinneth it shall *die*." – Gen. 2:17; Ezek. 18:20.

When we perceive, then, that it is the soul that dies, we perceive also that it is the soul that will need the resurrection from death. Death is the dissolution of the union between organism and vitality, whether it be in man or in beast, in fish or in fowl. Scientists agree that a general repair of the tissues of our bodies is continually in progress; some elements constantly [R3174 : page 107] sloughing off, and new ones as constantly being added; they assert that this process renews the body every seven years. If, therefore, God had pronounced the death sentence merely against Adam's *body*, it would have been paid within seven years. But the penalty was not against Adam's body, but against Adam himself, the soul, the *ego*, the being, and hence, the sloughing off of the atoms of his body did not pay the penalty. It required the sacrifice of another *soul* to redeem him. Hence, we read that our Lord Jesus made "his *soul* [being] an offering for sin"; that he "poured out his *soul* unto death." – Isa. 53:10,12.

The Apostle Peter points out that the soul of our Lord Jesus was not left in death – in *hades* – and he quotes from the Prophet David in corroboration. David declares, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in *sheol* [Greek, *hades* – the death-state]." The Apostle explains that David was a prophet, and spoke, not of himself, but of the Lord Jesus, that "his *soul* was not left in *hades*." (Acts 2:25-32.) This constituted the Apostle Peter's argument regarding the resurrection of our Lord – that his *soul* was not left in *hades* – in the death-state; that God raised him up by his own power. And this is the proper thought respecting all death and all resurrection from death. It is the *soul* that dies – the being is dissolved by death. Then the body, subject to corruption, returns to dust. If it was our Lord's soul that died and was raised, and if he gave himself a ransom, a corresponding price, for soul-Adam (and his race in his loins at the time of his transgression) the thought now must be that all the souls of Adam's race are to be recovered from that death

penalty; – and that the resurrection is for the purpose of restoring these souls of Adam's race, who have been bought back from destruction by the soul of the Redeemer.

Let us now look at the words of our lesson, and see that they are in full accord with what we have here set forth to be the Scriptural teaching. Vs. 20 mentions the dead as asleep, and declares that Christ was the first one to experience a resurrection from death. Let us note these two points: (1) In what sense is death a sleep? We answer that really, actually, death is an extinction of the soul; but that God, having purposed our redemption from before the foundation of the world, purposed also, as a result of that redemption, the calling of us back to being again in his own due time, by a resurrection of the dead: as it is written, "Thou *redeemest* my *life* from *destruction*." Psa. 103:4; 34:22.) In view of this the Lord speaks of death as a sleep, and his people are similarly justified in using this term "sleep." Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the prophets, and the kings, good and bad, are all declared to have "fallen *asleep*," "*slept* with their fathers," etc.

The New Testament records our Lord's words respecting the maid whom he called back from death: he said of her, "The maid is not dead, but *sleepeth*." So of Lazarus he declared, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth," and when his disciples understood not the meaning of his words "then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead." The plain statement is death; the proper figure of death, in view of the divine purposes and promises, permits it to be called by the more comforting term, *sleep*, which expresses at the same time both our hope for the dead and our faith in God. The record of Stephen's death is that "he fell on sleep;" and the apostles, in writing to the Church regarding, not only the brethren of the household of faith, but all their dear friends who go into death, speaks of them as "them that sleep in *Jesus*," while of the Church he declares that they are "dead in *Christ*." Only the members of the "body" can be said to be *in* Christ, or to have any hope of sharing with him in *his* resurrection. (Phil. 3:10.) But, it was "the man Christ *Jesus*, who by the grace of God tasted death

for *every man*," and thus, in harmony with the divine plan, turned what would have been death for every man, into a sleep from which all will awaken at Christ's second advent, – after he shall have established his Kingdom. Respecting this awakening, and the place from which the dead will come forth, he says, "All that are in the grave shall hear the voice of the Son of man and shall come forth." – John 5:28.

(2) This statement that our Lord was the firstfruits of them that slept is in general accord with the testimony of the Word, "that he should be the *first* that should rise from the dead"; and also that he should be the "first-born [from the dead] among many brethren." (Acts 26:23; Rom. 8:29.) Our Lord, as the Head of the Church which is his body, was raised from the dead by the Father's power, on the third day after his crucifixion; but the body, the Church, will not be raised up until the time of its completion, in the end of the Gospel age. When raised up it will, as his "brethren," or the members of "his body," share in "his resurrection" – his kind of a resurrection – a chief, or superior resurrection; not a resurrection in flesh and as human beings, but, as we shall see shortly, to a spirit nature, with a spirit body. Our Lord was not only the firstfruits from the dead amongst the brethren, the Church, but the first to arise from the dead in every sense of the word, none having preceded him.

What, then, becomes of the theory that the dead are not dead, or that their resurrection to a higher life took place at the moment of their dying? We answer that these theories have no foundation whatever in Scripture. They are the vaporings of those who have learned in the school of Plato science falsely so-called, [**R3174 : page 108**] and who have not on this subject, at least, been taught of God in the school of Christ. Mark the words of the Apostle Paul on this subject. He did not claim that our Lord arose from the dead the next instant after he expired on the cross, but plainly declared that he "rose from the dead *on the third day*." Incidentally, too, Peter refers to the prophet David, and while speaking of him in most respectful terms, as a

prophet of the Lord, he declares, "David is not ascended into the heavens." – 1 Cor. 15:4; Acts 2:34.

The Apostle balances this question of *life* and *death* in the 21st verse, declaring that death passed upon all by a man's transgression, and that the resurrection provision is for all, through the obedience of the man Christ Jesus, – who "poured out his *soul* unto death" on behalf of our race. There could have been no resurrection without this redemptive work, the substitution of our Lord's *soul* for the *soul* of Adam. It was a man who had sinned; and only the life of a man could meet the penalty prescribed; hence, as the Apostle says, the blood [death] of bulls and of goats could never take away sin (Heb. 10:4); and we might add that likewise the death of angels or archangels could never take away sin, – because of this divine arrangement of a life for a life, a man for a man. (Exod. 21:23-5; Lev. 24:12,17-22; Deut. 19:21; Matt. 5:38.) Hence, the necessity that our Lord should leave the glory of his spirit condition, which he had with the Father, should humble himself, and take a lower nature, – the human, – in order that he, by the grace of God, should taste death for every man. He gave his soul, his being, all that he had as the *man* Christ Jesus – he kept nothing back – the price has been paid fully and satisfactorily. The evidence of its satisfaction to God is doubly attested, (a) by the fact that he raised our Lord Jesus from the dead – giving him a new life, – life on a new plane of being, far above angels, and principalities and powers. (Eph. 1:20,21.) (b) It is also attested by the giving of the holy spirit at Pentecost, after our Lord had ascended up on high and had presented the merit of his sacrifice on our behalf.

Having thus established the general principle of a resurrection, and its applicability to all mankind, because the redemption was "a ransom for *all*" (1 Tim. 2:6), the Apostle proceeds to discuss particularly the First Resurrection, in which the Church is specially interested (he was not addressing his words to the world, but to the "sanctified in Christ Jesus" – 1 Cor. 1:2). His words, found in vss. 42-44, describe, as clearly as it is possible for us to understand things so

far beyond our plane of existence, the grandeurs and perfections of being which shall be ours when we shall have experienced this great change of the First Resurrection: we shall no longer be weak and imperfect, with dying tendencies and with animal bodies; but shall be incorruptible, powerful, and have spiritual bodies. "We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2.) We will not discuss these [R3175 : page 108] verses particularly here, as they are not made a part of this lesson, and as we have treated them at length previously.

When, in the 50th verse, the Apostle declares that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, we are not to delude ourselves, as some dear Adventist friends are inclined to do, – by saying that "flesh and blood" cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, but flesh and bones can. We are to recognize that the Apostle, in the use of these words, "flesh and blood," signifies *human nature*, as when our Lord Jesus, for instance, said to Peter, "*Flesh and blood* [humanity] hath not revealed it unto thee." The Apostle's declaration thus properly understood, is that *human* nature cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. This is in full accord with his own statements and the statements of other apostles, to the effect that we must become "New Creatures in Christ" – "partakers of the *divine* nature," if we would be sharers with our Lord in the coming Kingdom, and its great and glorious work. Our Lord's words to Nicodemus are in full accord with this, when he declared, "Except a man be born again [begotten now to a new nature, and born in the resurrection] he cannot enter the Kingdom of God," and cannot even see it. (John 3:3.) Earthly beings of human nature, flesh and blood, can see earthly beings, but as "no *man* hath seen God at any time, likewise no *man* can see the glorified Son of God; and for similar reasons none will be able with the natural eye to see the glorified Church – for all these in their resurrection change will be spirit beings, and like their Lord, "the express image of the Father's person." We must keep in memory the fact that the Church is entirely separate and distinct from the world; and that the hopes of the Church are to be differentiated from those of the world in every particular.

"Neither doth corruption inherit incorruption": this word "incorruption" (*aphtharsia*) is the same that is rendered "immortality" in Rom. 2:7, and in 2 Tim. 1:10. It is rendered incorruption in vss. 42,53,54 of this chapter. The thought is that our flesh is subject to decay; but that the new body which all who participate in the First Resurrection shall receive, will be an incorruptible one – one that cannot decay, that cannot die. This incorruptibility, or immortality, to be attained in their resurrection by the faithful of the Lord's disciples of this Gospel age, is to be applicable to all who will have a share in the Kingdom; and now the Apostle notices what might be a difficulty in the minds of his readers. He imagines them asking the **[R3175 : page 109]** question, How will it be with those who will be alive and remain at the time of the second coming of the Lord and the setting up of his Kingdom, and the awakening of these sleeping brethren to immortality? Will the living ones pass over into the Kingdom with flesh and blood and inferior bodies?

The Apostle undertakes to clear up this mystery; but although he handles his subject with lucidity the matter is not clear to the majority of the Lord's people. We may presume that the Lord intended it to remain more or less of a "mystery" until now, in the due time for its fulfilment, it should be understood. The Apostle's plain declaration is that "we shall not all *sleep*," but this is misunderstood by many to mean, "We shall not all *die*." There is a vast difference between dying and sleeping. We die in a moment, in an instant; it is the period of unconsciousness that is styled sleep, and the Apostle's declaration, therefore, is that we shall not all pass through a period of unconsciousness, "but we shall all be changed." It will be as impossible for the human nature, flesh and blood, of those living at the close of the Gospel age, to participate in the spiritual Kingdom which Christ will then establish, as it was impossible for any of the brethren of the past to do so. How, then, will these get rid of their flesh and blood, their human nature? We answer, that the Scriptural declaration is most explicit, that all who will be partakers with Christ in "*his resurrection*," must be sharers with him in "*his death*." As he himself

expressed it, "Be thou faithful unto *death*, and I will give thee a crown of life." It was not sufficient that our Lord should merely consecrate himself, nor that he should merely sacrifice portions of his time and energy in the service of the truth; – it was necessary that he should complete the matter of sacrifice in literal death. And so it must be with every member of his body; as it is written, prophetically of the Church, "I have said, Ye are gods, all of you children of the most High; but ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes" – not like Prince Adam, a convict, but like Prince Jesus, in sacrifice – filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ. – Psa. 82:6,7; Col. 1:24.

The change from corruptible to incorruptible, from mortal to immortal, from weakness to power, from ignominy to glory, from human nature to divine nature, in the case of these last members, will be so sudden as to occupy no appreciable space of time, and to be illustrated only by the twinkling of an eye; – the instant of their dying will be followed the next instant by their "change."

The thought of some, that resurrection "change" has come to each individual at the moment of dying throughout the Gospel age – that resurrection has all along followed the dying of all, is abundantly contradicted again, when the Apostle definitely fixes the time of the First Resurrection of the Church, the body of Christ, to be "at the last trump" – when the seventh trumpet shall sound – then "the dead [in Christ, – his members] shall be raised incorruptible, and we [of them then living] shall be changed; for this corruptible *must* put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality" – there can be no doubt that the present bodies would be wholly out of place in, and unpermissible, – impossible, to the Kingdom.

After this change of the Church has been completed – after this First [or chief] Resurrection has been accomplished – "*Then* shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." Here again the Apostle's statement is generally misunderstood: most readers get the impression that he means that the

victory over death and the grave is already accomplished; and a few nearer the truth infer that the "victory" will be fully accomplished in the "change" of the Church, the body of Christ, in the First Resurrection. However, neither of these views meets the scope of the statement. On the contrary, the First Resurrection, the "change" of the Church, will be but the *beginning* of the great victory which Christ is to achieve over death and the grave. This will be merely the bringing forth of the "first-fruits," as the Apostle declares: "A kind of *firstfruits* unto God of his creatures." (James 1:18.) This is the force of the Apostle's expression, "*Then* shall be brought to pass;" – that is to say, *then* this prophecy of victory over death will begin to have its fulfilment. It will require all of the Millennium to accomplish the victory over death; and Christ and the glorified Church will be the victors, as it is written (vss. 25,26), "He must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet; the *last* enemy that shall be destroyed is death." To accomplish this complete victory over death and the grave will be the very object of the establishment of the Kingdom, and will require a thousand years; as it is written again, respecting the reign of those who have part in the First Resurrection, "They lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years." – Rev. 20:4.

This First Resurrection glorifies the Kingdom class; and forthwith the Kingdom will be set up – "The mountain [Kingdom] of the Lord's house" will be established in the earth. This agrees with the statement of the prophet, from which the Apostle quotes, "In this mountain [Millennial Kingdom] shall the Lord of hosts make unto the people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined; and he will *destroy in this mountain* [Kingdom] the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all [R3175 : page 110] nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces, and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth; for the Lord hath spoken it." (Isa. 2:2; 25:6-8.) How much of the beauty and fulness of the divine Word has been hidden

from our eyes by reason of the errors introduced into the creeds of Christendom by the great Adversary for this very purpose!

The Apostle, glancing down to the grand culmination at the close of the Millennium, exclaims with poetic fervor (vs. 55), "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" The thought is: Death has been stinging our race, blighting it for six thousand years, and sending it ignominiously to the tomb; but God, who justly condemned us as a race, has looked down in compassion, and beheld our impotence, and has provided a Savior and a great one – Jesus, the Head, his only begotten One, our Redeemer, and the Church, his body, whose Kingdom shall destroy, at one and the same time, death and the grave, and their power over all who will obey the requirements of the Kingdom – completely delivering such from their power. Adamic death is to be utterly destroyed – not a soul of Adam's posterity is to be left therein, – for those who will not accept the grace of God when offered to them will be destroyed utterly, not for Adam's transgression, but for their own transgression, – not, therefore, by Adamic death, but by Second Death. – Ezek. 18:2-4,20.

This utter destruction on account of personal, wilful sin is Scripturally known as the Second Death, which is nowhere denominated an enemy. On the contrary, it is the friend of God, – his servant, to "destroy those who [would] corrupt the earth." It is the friend of all who love righteousness, and desire peace, joy, blessing, in harmony with the divine will. It is not even the enemy of those whom it will destroy – the wicked – because it is better that they should be destroyed **[R3176 : page 110]** than that they should be permitted to institute another reign of sin and death out of harmony with the Lord's righteous arrangements. It is Adamic death that our Lord Jesus will destroy; and it is denominated an enemy, because it came upon Adam's posterity contrary to their wills, and because some, at least, of the thousands of millions under its control, are disposed to be perfect and righteous, and are hindered by the weaknesses and restraints imposed by the great enemy in whose clutches they were born. It will

be the "last enemy" to be destroyed, because other evils will be brought into subjection early in the Millennium; but men will get the victory over death only in proportion as they obey the voice of the great Teacher, Priest and King, and gradually rise, inch by inch, through restitution processes, up, up, up, out of death, until finally, at the close of the Millennial age, they shall reach life in its full, perfect degree. When all shall have become thus released from death to life, or else transferred to the Second Death, – *then* this enemy, death, – Adamic death, – will have been vanquished; its victory over all who long for righteousness and life eternal will be at an end.

It will be noticed that the translators of the Revised Version have usually avoided the use of the word "hell" throughout the Scriptures, substituting therefor in the Old Testament the Hebrew word "*sheol*," and in the New Testament the Greek word, "*hades*." Evidently, in view of the meaning attaching to the word "hell" the translators could not conscientiously so render *sheol* and *hades* and, therefore, avoided any translation; – not wishing to translate these words "grave," for fear, perhaps, that the public should quickly see that they had been hoodwinked on this subject for many years. We much prefer not to think ungenerously of men of such great scholarship, but circumstances certainly point in this direction. One of these pointers is found in vs. 55, where, instead of translating *hades* "grave," as in the old version, or leaving it untranslated, *hades*, as in most other places in the Revised Version, they have translated it "death."

What was the object of this deviation from the general usage? We can only surmise that it was to help keep the public in the dark respecting the true sentiments of the Word of God. Had they rendered the sentence, "O *hades*, where is thy victory?" it would have given some, doubtless, the thought that *hades*, whatever it is (hot place of torture, or the cold grave), would finally yield to this triumph of the Lord Jesus, which will begin as soon as his Church shall be "changed" and his Kingdom established.

The Apostle continues his argument and shows that the victory will not be completely brought to pass until the end of the Millennium. He declares that the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is in the law. Under Christ's Millennial Kingdom the sins of the past will be forgiven, because of the atonement accomplished; and the perfect Law of God, having been met by the Mediator, will be applied to the ransomed race only in such proportions as they can receive it – in proportion to their knowledge and ability to obey. Thus the Mediator of the New Covenant will ultimately bring off conquerors all who will obey him.

The Apostle next turns back the line of his argument from the future time, when men will be actually lifted up out of sin and death and imperfection, to the present time in which this is *reckonedly* accomplished for the Church, the body of Christ, through faith. His words are, "But thanks be to God, which giveth us **[R3176 : page 111]** [now] the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Although as yet we see none of these things accomplished; although we have not our spiritual bodies, incorruptible and powerful; although we still have the treasure of the new mind in the earthen vessel; although we see nothing of the Kingdom's establishment; – nevertheless, God giveth us victory through Christ, by faith; so that even now we can "rejoice with joy unspeakable," and can so confidently look forward into the future as to claim a share in the victory over sin and death and the grave, through him who loved us and bought us.

The closing argument is that on this account – because we see these things so clearly with the eye of faith, we should be "steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that our labor is not in vain in the Lord"; – realizing that it is God who is working out this great plan of salvation, through our Lord Jesus Christ, and supporting all those who are seeking to walk in his steps, and to come off conquerors through him. Death and the grave may still seem to be gaining victories over us. But faith sees the matter from the other

side, from the standpoint of accomplished victory in the future; and even now it exults and rejoices in the privilege of colaboring with the Redeemer, and realizes that time and energy and life so spent are spent "not in vain," because we confidently hope for, expect and wait for the glorious First Resurrection "change" and the glorious privileges of association with our Master in his Kingdom and work.

