

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS: 2b
The Incredible Journey
Of The
Church Age Believer

INTRO: Pilgrim's Progress, the incredible journey of the church age believer. Where does the journey begin? It begins at salvation, at the dust at the foot of the cross of Christ. It begins with justification and then regeneration. Then begins an often times painful part of the journey. As the journey began at a narrow gate, so the journey continues on a narrow pathway. On this pathway the new born Christian will be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

On this part of the journey some people make shipwreck of the faith. Revelation 17:14 describes those who ultimately walk with Jesus on blissful shore of glory. The writer, John, the beloved apostle describes these people in a three-fold manner. First, they have been called. The Gospel has come to them. Second, they are chosen. Yes, they became chosen by choosing to respond to the call. And last, they are faithful. The faithful are the overcomers mentioned seven times in Revelation 2-3.

But this first phase of the believer's incredible journey does come to an end. It is as the Apostle Peter says, this life of trials is but a "little while". This first phase of the believer's four phase journey comes to an end at one of two times; either at death or at the rapture of the Church.

C. Completed - Doctrine of Eschatology

1. At physical death

John Bunyan's story, Pilgrim's progress ends here at physical death. One day, Pilgrim and his friend Hopeful came to a place where they can see the celestial city but between them and the celestial city is a river. This river is the river of death. For fear of the river they began to enquire if there was no other way to the city but through the river. Here is how they were answered, "Yes; but there hath not any save two, to wit, Enoch and Elijah, been permitted to tread that path since the foundation of the world, nor shall until the last trumpet shall sound." For Christian and his friend, as for multiplied thousands of others, the way into the celestial city was accessible only by passing through the river of death.

Then Christian and his friend asked if the waters were all of a depth. They meant, is it the same depth for all? The answer according to John Bunyan was this, "No...you shall find it deeper or shallower as you believe in the King of the place."

I thought of these words when my dad passed away. I don't know if my dad knew what fear was. In circumstances where many might have feared I saw him almost enjoy the challenge. He seemed fearless. But not so the night he crossed the river of death. That night he was even afraid to sleep because he feared the river. John Bunyan said, "...you shall find the river deeper or shallower as you believe in the King..." And so for a good many, the river is deep. Yet there are those who rejoice to cross.

a. Definition of death

Now we need to define death. What is it? Let us look first at what death is not. I have talked to a good many people about their eternal destiny. I said to them, "If you should die today where would you go?" Now in our community you would not often get this answer but in America in general you will often get this answer, "I'll go six feet down." To these folk's view, death is the end of existence. One simply ceases to be. How shocking must be their experience when they experience death and enter an unalterable experience, Hell fire! (Read Luke 16:19-26).

What is death? The basic idea of death in the Bible is not the end of existence, it is separation. The Bible deals with three kinds of death. There is spiritual death. God told Adam that the day he ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil he would die. The death God was talking about was spiritual death. Spiritual death is spiritual separation from God. There is no fellowship or communion with God for those who are spiritually dead and the spiritually dead are the unsaved.

Then there is physical death. Physical death separates man in his parts. Man is made up of three parts; body, soul and spirit. The separation of

soul and spirit from God is spiritual death. Physical death is the separation of the soul and spirit from the body. When the spirit departs from the body the body ceases to function. James 2:26 says, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." That is physical death. That is the death we are talking about when we speak of crossing the river of death.

The Bible speaks of the third kind of death. This is eternal death. As long as unsaved man has not died physically there is hope of heaven for him. But if he never gets saved and dies then he experiences eternal death. This is eternal separation from God in hell fire. In our topic this morning we are talking about physical death, the separation of body from soul and spirit.

Now I want to mention a truth I have mentioned before and purposely mention again. The five senses; touch, taste, smell, sight, sound are part of the soul not part of the body. The soul uses the senses through the body before death but at physical death those senses go with the soul. So at death man does not cease to experience the senses. Consider the senses mentioned in Luke 16:19-25.

When a person dies, the senses keep right on going. The person keeps right on seeing and hearing and remembering. The memories are all there and will be forever, as we see in the account of the rich man in hell. He rich man remembered that he had five unsaved brothers.

What makes hell so horrible is that the senses are all there. What makes heaven so wonderful is the fact that the senses are all there to enjoy the beaties and glories of heaven. The pilgrim whose journey ends in death here, will see sights, hear sounds, and think of things not allowed to be known in this world. It will be joy unspeakable with all the senses enjoying every part of it to the full.

b. Destination at death

What is the Christian's destiny at death? Let's read it in John 14:1-3. In verse 3 Jesus says that

we are going to be where He is. Now we only need to find where is and then we will know where we will be. In John 14:2 Jesus speaks of His Father's house. Then in 14:12 Jesus tells us plainly where He is going. He said, "I go to my Father." We know from the prayer Jesus taught, "Our Father which art in heaven..." that Jesus' Father is in heaven. So, at death the Christian goes to heaven.

c. Duration of death

We have said that death is the separation of soul and spirit from the body. Man, when he exists as soul and spirit without the body, is incomplete. That is why the resurrection of the body is such a crucial doctrine in Scripture. We will look at the resurrection later. Here we only mention that the duration of death is until the resurrection. At the resurrection soul and spirit will be reunited with the body. This will take place at an event we will look at in next.

2. At physical change - Doctrine of Glorification

When Pilgrim and his friend came to the river of death they feared the river and asked if there were no other way into the city but by way of the river. The answer according to Bunyan was, "Yes; but there hath not any save two, to wit, Enoch and Elijah, been permitted to tread that path since the foundation of the world, nor shall until the last trumpet shall sound."

The indication is that Bunyan's view was that there would be people alive at the time of the Lord's return and they would go to heaven without dying. That is correct. Let us look at it in Scripture (1 Cor. 15:51-52). We will discuss this further in Phase Two. Let us just say here that Bunyan's view thus far is correct theologically. This pilgrimage on earth ends at one of two places: physical death or at physical change.

a. Explanation of this change

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is one of the clearest passages on an event we call the rapture (read). We will be looking at that event in more detail under Phase two of the Journey of the Church Age

Believer. In this passage I want us to note simply that, as Bunyan held, there will be living Christians on earth at the time the Lord returns for the Church. According to 4:17 *those who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them (the resurrected dead Christians) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air...*

Now you and I know that when you travel up too far without an oxygen mask or such like man cannot survive. Something has to happen before you can go up too far. Either you have to give the body those things essential for survival, oxygen, water and food and the right temperature; or you have to change the body. It is the latter God will do. This body is not fit for heaven anyway. It is sin-stained and susceptible to disease and death.

In 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection chapter of the Bible, Paul tells us how God has chosen to handle this problem (Read 15:50-55). Notice first that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God any more than corruption can inherit incorruption.

Then Paul adds, "Behold, I tell you a mystery..." Since flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God and there will be people alive when the Lord returns, how will those who have not died and been resurrected be able to inherit the kingdom of God? Paul says, "I will explain this mystery to you." If you read the Bible from Genesis 1:1 to 1 Cor. 15:50 you would not know how those people can inherit the kingdom of God. Here is the answer, "We shall not all sleep (die and be resurrected), but we shall all be changed..." This physical body must undergo a change if it is to inherit the kingdom of God.

This change will take place in a twinkling of an eye, not a second of time but a nanosecond of time. It will be faster than instantaneous. In our day we have more and more things that are instant, but this will not be an instant change. It will be nano, or pico-second change. Faster than instantaneous.

When will this happen? Throughout the teaching of the Bible this event is at an unknown time. We will talk of this more in another message. I simply tell you at this point that the time when this will take place is imminent, it could happen at any moment.

Well, let us consider the effects of this change. What will our bodies be like after this change takes place?

b. Effects of this change

To see the effects that will happen we need to look at what Jesus' body was like after the resurrection because we are getting a body like He got when He was raised from the dead (read Phil. 3:20-21). So, as to the effects of this change, notice that He will transform our lowly bodies that our bodies may be conformed to His glorious body. To understand then the effects of this change we need but to look at the Lord's resurrected body to get an idea of what our own changed bodies will be like.

In Luke 24:36-43 we learn several things about Jesus' resurrected body (read). We note that Jesus had a material body. Not only did He have a material body, but His new body had the same members and organs as our bodies do now. When those two were walking on the road to Emmaus Jesus came and walked alongside them. There was nothing visibly different from the body He now had and the one He had before. He talked. He could think and reason. His body with regard to the members of the body was the same as before. He had hair, ears, eyes etc... Not only did His new body have the same members as before it had the same organs as before (Note Luke 24:41-43; John 21:1-14).

Jesus' body was a real, material body. It could be touched and was of flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). It had not changed in physical appearance from His pre-resurrection body. People recognized Him as Jesus. But there were respects in which it differed from His pre-resurrection body. Other material objects did not keep Him from passing right through. He could walk into buildings while the doors were closed (Jn. 20:19).

Furthermore, gravity had lost its power on Him. When He ascended from the Mount of Olives He did not need an airplane. He just went straight up (Acts 1:9). He did not need an oxygen mask to go up. He had a changed body. That is what our resurrected bodies will be like.

c. Endurance of this change

How long will this new body last? Well Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 that we will always be with the Lord when we go to be with Him. That indicates that we will have a body that lasts forever. He spells this out more clearly in 1 Corinthians 15:51-55, where it is spoken of as immortal. The endurance of this change? Forever and ever. Praise God! No more sickness. No more pain. No more death!

CONCLUSION: And so we complete Phase 1 of the journey of the church age believer. The journey commenced at the moment of salvation at the cross of Christ. It is continued throughout life in the process of sanctification and is completed at physical death or physical change.

I wonder, do you, what it will be like to reach heaven? Well we are not told, but it will certainly be an experience unequalled in all the rest of the Christian's journey up to that point. I have shared with you the verse that says there is rejoicing in the presence of angels when one sinner repents. I believe that those who are in the presence of angels are none other than Christians who have gone on before. So if there is rejoicing among the saints in heaven when a sinner repents, what must it be like when a believer dies and is escorted into heaven by an angel (Lk. 16:22). What will it be like to enter the courts of heaven among all the saved? Gary Inrig, who was a pastor in Calgary AB for some time, gives us an earthly story that may give us a little idea of what it will be like:

"What will it be like to reach heaven? A story out of the recent past may give us some idea. During June, July and August of 1965, an ordinary man from Cleveland Ohio lived out a dream. Forty-six-year-old Robert Manry purchased a thirteen-and-one-half foot, thirty year old, dilapidated boat. He repaired her, christened her *Tinkerbelle*, and learned how to sail. Then on June 1, 1965 his dream began. He set out from Falmouth, Massachusetts for Falmouth England, far across the Atlantic.

Manry's voyage was to take seventy-eight days, many of them cold, wet, and painful. Hit by storms, confused by hallucinations of hitchhikers and assassins, washed overboard, delayed by winds that were too great and becalmed by lack of wind at all, plagued by loneliness, and troubled by saltwater sores, he kept sailing.

Manry expected to sail into Falmouth Harbor quietly, let his family know of his arrival, secure passage for himself and *Tinkerbelle*, and return to the States. It did not turn out quite that way. Word of his voyage had reached England. As he neared the coast, Shackleton bombers from the Royal Air Forces 42nd squadron flew over in salute. Newspaper teams from both sides of the Atlantic vied for his story. Great ships hovered alongside with congratulatory messages.

During the last miles, a flotilla of ships and boats sailed out of Falmouth to greet him. Royal Navy helicopters formed an umbrella above. Boats circled and flocked about him and the people called out, "Good show!" "Glad you made it, Mate!" "Well done. Well done!" Sailing along the quay, he could see crowds of cheering people jamming the ramparts of Pendennis Castle. Manry later wrote:

"People were everywhere; standing along the shore, perched on window ledges, leaning out of doorways, crowded onto jetties, thronging the streets, clinging to trees, and cramming the inner harbor in boats of every size and description. The whole place was teeming with humanity. I heard later that 50,000 people were there to see *Tinkerbelle* and me complete our voyage.

"I was dumbfounded, numbed by the enormity of it all, and not a little bewildered. It was just too much to take in all at once...every boat and ship in the harbor let go with its horn or whistle and shook the whole waterfront with reverberating sound as the crowd yelled. Royal Air Force Shackletons flew overhead in wigwagging salutes and a band...St. Stythians Silver Band, played 'The Star-Spangled Banner' and 'The Stars and Stripes Forever.'"

Well, that may give us a little earthly idea of what it will be like to enter heaven at death. From that I want to urge us all, "Push on Pilgrim friend, push on". And if the Christian's entry to heaven at death will be glorious, I ask, what must the reunion of all those Christians who have died in the past, with the changed Christians at the rapture be like? No doubt, it will

be one of the rarest and most glorious moments of all time;
past, present and future.

