

THE ORDER AND METHOD OF THE RESURRECTIONS

TEXT: I CORINTHIANS 15:20-50

INTRODUCTION:

1. I am going to speak tonight on the order and the method of the resurrections. Our Lord referred to two resurrections in John 5:28, 29.
2. “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.”
3. Revelation 20:5 refers to “the first resurrection.” This is “the resurrection of life,” and it includes everyone who is caught up in the rapture as well as those saved afterwards during the tribulation.
4. The “first resurrection” is the first of two resurrections in Revelation 20, which are separated by the thousand-years millennial kingdom.
5. The first is “the resurrection of life” (John 5:29), and the second is “the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29).
6. Revelation 20:5 speaks of “the resurrection of damnation.” “The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.”
7. Those who are raised in the first resurrection will reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev. 20:4), and those who are raised in the second resurrection will stand before the great white throne judgment, which will take place after the millennium (Rev. 20:11–15).
8. Here in I Corinthians 15, more information is given concerning the order of the resurrections. Tonight, we will look at when the dead are raised, why the dead are raised, and how the dead are raised.

I. WHEN THE DEAD ARE RAISED

1. In I Corinthians 15:20 and 23, Paul refers to the feast of firstfruits (cf. Lev. 23:9-14).
2. The feast of firstfruits was the third of seven annual feasts in Israel. It was connected to the Passover and to the feast of unleavened bread.
3. It was kept on the day after the sabbath, that is, on the first day of the week. Therefore, this feast pointed forward to the day Christ rose from the dead.
4. Leviticus 23:11 says that the priest waved the sheaf before the LORD “on the morrow after the sabbath,” i.e. on Sunday, the Lord’s Day (cf. Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1, 2).

5. We worship on Sunday because that is the day Christ rose from the dead. It was not a church or a pope or anyone who changed the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday.
6. Christians started assembling on Sunday because that is the day Christ arose (cf. Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:1, 2).
7. Paul discusses here the order of the resurrections (cf. 15:23).
8. In I Corinthians 15:21 and 22, Paul refers to Adam, the first man – “For since by man came death... For as in Adam all die.”
9. Paul links the fall of Adam with the resurrection of Christ. God has promised that we too, will be raised from the dead (15:21, 22).
10. Theologians refer to the theory of “federal headship.” By this they mean that when Adam sinned, he sinned as our representative. When Adam sinned, he sinned for all of us.
11. H.A. Ironside said, “It was Adam as federal head of the race who plunged our entire humanity into death and judgment by his sin. But the Second Man, the Lord from heaven, has gone down into death; He has triumphed over it; He has robbed it of all its terror; and He has come forth a victor. And now through Him comes the resurrection of the dead, whether of course the resurrection of the righteous dead or the wicked dead, all shall come forth from the tomb through Him. The emphasis here is upon the fact that it is the Man Christ Jesus who calls the dead to life, and that is what we should expect, for God sets the one over against the other. The first man plunged the race into ruin, the Second Man brings redemption” (*I Corinthians*).
12. Now concerning the feast of the firstfruits, that sheaf of grain waved by the priest spoke of a coming harvest. Our Lord came forth from among the dead in fulfillment of this Old Testament feast.
13. When He arose, it was a pledge that an abundant harvest is coming in the future resurrection of believers (I Cor. 15:23). We are going up but not until “His coming” (15:23b).
14. The two most important men in the Bible are Adam and Christ, “the first man” and “the second man” (15:47).
15. Because of Adam we all must die but because of Christ we shall “be made alive” (15:21, 22). “As in Adam all die” means that because of Adam’s sin, over all of Adam’s race hangs the death sentence.
16. “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (15:22). The term, “in Adam,” takes in the entire human race, and the term, “in Christ” refers to a narrower, smaller, group – only those who have been saved by faith in Christ.

17. “In Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order.” The word “order” was a military term in those days, and was used to describe the different companies of soldiers – “Every one after his own rank.”
18. “Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming” (15:23). When Christ returns, “the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air” (I Thess. 4:16b, 17a).
19. Right now, our Lord is seated at the right hand of God the Father, and soon He will descend, and then He will establish His kingdom and will reign for a thousand years.
20. Isaiah 11:9 says, “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”
21. Habakkuk 2:14 says, “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”
22. Then will come the day of judgment, when the wicked shall be raised from their graves, and will have to stand before God at the Great White Throne and be judged according to their works (Rev. 20:12).
23. The order of the resurrections is this: “Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at His coming” (i.e. at the rapture, I Cor. 15:23). This is the next scheduled event on God’s prophetic calendar (cf. 15:51-53; I Thess. 4:16, 17). The rapture is imminent.
24. Christ will come back to earth to reign. “Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father...” (15:24, 25).
25. The last enemy is death (15:26). “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Rev. 20:14).
26. When our Lord delivers up the kingdom to God, the eternal state (the “new heaven” and the “new earth”) will begin. This is described for us in Revelation 21 & 22.
27. Psalm 8:6 says, “Thou hast put all things under his feet” (cf. I Cor. 15:27). The one obvious exception is God Himself (15:27).
28. Verse 28 describes the end of the millennial kingdom, when God the Son yields everything to God the Father, so “that God may be all in all.”

II. WHY THE DEAD ARE RAISED

1. Paul gives many reasons for the importance of resurrection, and the first one he mentions here is baptism (15:29). This is a very difficult verse.
2. The Mormon cult practices what they call “baptism for the dead,” which is really some type of proxy baptism. A Mormon goes ahead and gets baptized on behalf of some dead relative (or even a complete stranger).

3. Historians tell us “baptism for the dead” was practiced by cults in the early days of Christianity, but not in Paul’s day.
4. Not surprisingly, Ancestry.com, the largest for-profit genealogy company in the world, is based in Utah and is operated by Mormons.
5. In his commentary on I Corinthians, H.A. Ironside says that the Mormons have many temples in which they carry out the ceremony of baptism for the dead, and people are urged to be baptized, some over and over and over again, for dead people who were never baptized in this life. Then Ironside tells of a conversation he had with a Mormon elder in Salt Lake City.
6. “When in Salt Lake City some years ago, a young Mormon elder told me he believed that the members of the Mormon church were saving more souls through being baptized for the dead than Jesus Christ ever saved through dying on Calvary’s cross. He mentioned a very wealthy lady who had come out from the East a good many years ago and had been baptized in Salt Lake City over thirty thousand times. Every time she was baptized she paid a sum of money into the church, so you can see that baptism for the dead is rather a good thing from the financial standpoint. She was using her entire fortune redeeming people from death and destruction through being baptized for the dead! She had been baptized for all the friends and relatives about whom she knew anything at all who had died, and then she had gone into history and literature and sought out thousands of names and had been baptized for every one of them. She had been baptized for Alexander the Great, for Nebuchadnezzar, for Julius Caesar, for Napoleon Bonaparte, for Cleopatra, and thousands of other historical characters, in order that she might be the means of their salvation; and it was concerning this lady especially that this youthful elder said to me with a very solemn face, ‘I believe in the day of judgment it will be proven that this lady through being baptized for the dead has saved more souls than Jesus Christ!’ That blasphemous theory finds no place whatever in the Word of God. In the first place the Word of God never teaches that baptism is essential to salvation. Nowhere in Scripture are we told that if people die unbaptized, they are lost.”
7. So, this is obviously not what Paul is talking about. Baptism is a personal matter and no one can be baptized in the place of another.
8. The phrase probably means “baptized to take the place of those who have died” (cf. Scofield margin).
9. In other words, if there is no resurrection, why bother getting baptized and joining the church? (15:29).
10. And if there is no resurrection, why bother risking your life (“stand we in jeopardy”) for the Gospel (15:30-32)?

11. There is some question as to whether “beasts at Ephesus” (15:32) were literal beasts or a ferocious mob (cf. Acts 19).
12. Paul adds, that if there is no resurrection, why bother living a separated life (15:32b-34)? Corinth was a very wicked city. It was so wicked that if a man was a very immoral and perverted, people would say, “He lives like a Corinthian.”
13. Some of the members of the Corinthian church were involved in gross sin before they were saved. They were fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners (I Cor. 6:11).
14. Because God will resurrect their bodies they should keep them clean and pure. “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (I Cor. 6:19, 20).
15. Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. “For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (II Cor. 6:16).

III. HOW THE DEAD ARE RAISED (15:35)

1. The pagan Greeks had decided that the resurrection from the dead was an impossibility. Paul said they were fools (15:35, 36).
2. To illustrate his point, Paul talks about sowing seed (15:36-38). Jesus said in John 12:24, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”
3. Grain sown into the ground seems to decay, but the farmer knows that it will bud and bring forth the same kind of grain. Likewise, a wonderful transformation has been planned by God for His children.
4. If wheat is sown, it is wheat that rises from that grain (15:37, 38). There is a wonderful change, and yet there is also continuity; there is identification in some way to the body that died.
5. H.A. Ironside said, “How much of that grain is in the seed of wheat? Get down to the root of the wheat-stalk and you will still find the little shell out of which this stalk has come. Just so will it be in the resurrection.”
6. “There are also celestial bodies” (15:40), that is, the sun, and the moon, and the stars (15:41).
7. “And bodies terrestrial” (15:41) – earthly, the bodies of men, and beasts, and fishes, and birds, etc. (cf. verse 39).

8. Albert Barnes said Paul's point was that since we see such great differences in the works of God – the glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, etc. – “why should we doubt that he is able to make the human body different from what it is now, and to endow it with immortal and eternal perfection” (*Barnes' Notes*).
9. Our bodies were “sown in corruption,” but they will be “raised in incorruption” (15:42, 43; cf. vs. 53, 54).
10. “It is raised a spiritual body” (15:44).
11. We will not have “rebuilt” bodies but brand-new immortal, incorruptible, resurrection bodies.
12. Also, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (15:50).
13. We would not be able to enjoy heaven in our “natural bodies” (15:44); we need our “spiritual” (resurrection) bodies (15:44), which will be suitable for that environment. Just like an astronaut has to wear his space suit when he goes up in space, you and I will need our resurrection bodies (cf. 15:42-50).
14. Consider this: Our bodies are going to be transformed like our Lord's resurrection body. Philippians 3:21 says Christ “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.”
15. First John 3:2 says, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”
16. In His resurrection body our Lord walked through shut doors, yet He also ate food (Luke 24:33-43; John 20:19-29). This gives us some idea as to what we can look forward to.
17. To illustrate the fact that the glory of the resurrection body will be quite different from the glory of our present bodies, Paul points out that “all flesh is not the same flesh” (15:39, 40). There are some similarities, but they are different. Likewise, our resurrection bodies will be similar to our mortal bodies but they will be different.
18. “The last Adam (Jesus) was made a quickening (life-giving) spirit” (15:45).
19. Regarding the order: “that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual” (15:46). The “first man” is Adam (15:47).
20. And just as we have borne the image of Adam (the earthy), we shall also bear the image of the heavenly (Christ)” (15:49).
21. God's eternal kingdom is spiritual, and man needs to be born again in order to enter it. He needs a new nature and a new body (15:50).

CONCLUSION:

1. We have been focusing tonight on the resurrection bodies of believers, because this is what interests us the most. We are not too concerned about what happens to the body of some old Christ-rejecting sinner.
2. However, the lost will be given bodies suitable for their punishment in hell. For example, the Bible says they will “stand before God” and after being judged will be “cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:12, 15).
3. There will be conscious torment in hell. The lost will have new eyes to see how horrible hell is.
4. They will have new noses to smell the sulfur and smoke, and new ears to hear the screams and shrieks of the damned as they cry out in their torment. And they will have new teeth to gnash because Jesus said hell is a place where there is “weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.”