



Lesson 25

THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD

Reading 1 Corinthians 15

The word 'resurrection' means coming back to life again

It must have been the most wonderful event in the history of the world, when Jesus Christ came out of the grave after being dead for three days. When his disciples saw him, they just could not believe their eyes. They thought they were seeing a spirit, but Jesus said to them:

"Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said to them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And he took it, and did eat before them" (Luke 24:39-43).

At last, they were convinced that he was really alive again. God had brought him back from death, and given him eternal life. We read of Jesus saying:

"Behold, I am alive for evermore" (Revelation 1:18).

Jesus will raise his followers

Jesus taught his disciples that they, too, would be raised from the dead. Look again at the verse we have just quoted. Jesus went on to say:

"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell (or, the grave) and of death" (Revelation 1:18).

Now, if you have the key to a door, it means you are able to open that door. Jesus has the keys to the grave. This is a way of saying that he has power to open the graves, and set free those who are buried there. This power has been given to him by God. Read John's Gospel, chapter 5, verses 20-29. Notice particularly verse 21, which says:

"For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will."

To quicken is to bring to life; and God has given Jesus the power to bring men and women back to life again.

Abraham was promised resurrection

As we have already learnt in Lesson 12, God made great promises to Abraham. They included:

"... all the land thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (Genesis 13:15).

Yet we know that Abraham died without this promise being fulfilled. Abraham must be raised from the dead so that God can fulfil His promise. The Lord Jesus used this very argument to prove the resurrection of the dead.

You can read this in Matthew 22: 31-32.

Again, Jesus told the Jews of his day that they would see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of God, and they themselves cast out (Luke 13:25).

A hope shared by all faithful men

Men of God throughout the ages have died looking forward to the day when they would be raised to life again. Paul tells us of some of these men, that they

"... died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off" (Hebrews 11:13).

Further on he speaks again of these men who

"... received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:39-40).

We see from this verse that the gift of eternal life is going to be given to all true worshippers of God at the same time.

The early Christians too looked forward to this time. When one of their number died, they spoke of them as having 'fallen asleep', because just as men wake up after sleeping, so the disciples would be awakened from the sleep of death. In the 15th chapter of I Corinthians, which you have read, Paul says of the over 500 disciples who saw Jesus after his resurrection:

"Some are fallen asleep" (verse 6).

This hope of resurrection and eternal life has been shared by true followers of Jesus from that day to this.

The friends of Jesus understood that Jesus could raise the dead

Jesus had three friends, Lazarus and his sisters Martha and Mary, who lived in Bethany, a little village near Jerusalem. One day, Lazarus fell ill. His sisters sent for Jesus, but by the time he arrived, Lazarus was dead. When Martha saw Jesus, she said to him:

"Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died."

Jesus said to her:

"Thy brother shall rise again."

Now notice Martha's answer very carefully. She said:

"I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Martha knew there was to be a day of resurrection in the future. Jesus said to her:

"I am the resurrection, and the life."

Then, to show all who were there that he had power to raise the dead, Jesus called Lazarus out of the grave. And Lazarus came out - alive!

Unlike Jesus, Lazarus was not given eternal life. He would die again, but, as Martha said, he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day. This is what Jesus taught his friends, and they understood and believed him. You can read this story in John 11.

Something better than life today

Life is full of problems for us all. Most of us know what it feels like to be ill; we get anxious about many things. Death can take away those we love at any time. We know, too, that old age must come in time, with all its aches and pains. Do we really want to live for ever in this imperfect world?

The life which Jesus promises to his followers when he comes back is something quite different from our life today with all its cares. In the beautiful words of Revelation 7:16, 17 we are told of those who will be given that life, that:

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

They will no longer have bodies which corrupt, but they will share the spirit-life of God Himself. In Mark 12:25 Jesus says:

"... when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven."

Those who are given eternal life by Jesus when he comes back will! enjoy perfect health and unlimited energy, free from all the troubles of today.

When will the resurrection take place?

Nearly 2,000 years have passed since Jesus was raised from the dead. When is he going to raise those who have "died in faith"? The apostle Paul answers this question for us. He says in 1 Corinthians 15:22, 23:

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

We have seen already that Jesus Christ is coming back to set up the Kingdom of God and reign over the whole earth. When he comes to do this, he will raise the dead. Then those who have been faithful will be given eternal life, and will enjoy the great privilege of helping Jesus to rule the world. We read in Revelation 5:9,10 the words of a song that they will sing in that day:

"... thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."

Some will be alive when Jesus comes back

What of those who are still alive when Jesus comes back?

In I Thessalonians 4:14-17 Paul tells us a little more about this. He says:

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (or go before) them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and 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: and so that we ever be with the Lord."

Notice the words "caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air". You might think that he is speaking of going to heaven. But look again. Paul does not speak of meeting the Lord in heaven, but meeting him in the air. So after the resurrection of the dead and the gathering together of those disciples who are alive at the Coming of Jesus, all those who are accepted will be miraculously taken to serve the Lord Jesus in his work of ruling the earth.

The important thing for all the followers of Jesus is that in that day they will be 'for ever with the Lord'; that is, in his Kingdom on the earth.

You cannot have it both ways

Many people-probably most people who believe in life after death - believe that men and women go to heaven when they die. The dead body is laid in the grave. But, they say, man has a 'spirit' or 'soul' that goes on living when the body is dead. When a man dies, this spirit goes to heaven to be with God.

The Bible, on the other hand, says plainly that Jesus will come back to earth and raise the dead.

Now both ideas cannot be right.

To speak of the soul which has been with God in heaven coming back to join the body and be brought to judgement is nonsense. The Bible says nothing about any man going to heaven. It does say that disciples will lie in the grave, knowing nothing until the Lord raises them from the dead at his coming.

When Christ comes

All who have heard the Gospel will be brought before the Lord Jesus Christ. The dead will be raised, and the living will be gathered together. Before he gives some of them eternal life, there must be a judgement - but you will hear more about that in the next lesson.

Read again 1 Corinthians 15:51-58. Here the apostle speaks of the time when the faithful Christians will be given that great gift of eternal life - or, as he calls it here, immortality. As we look forward to that time, the apostle Paul tells us to be "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord".

Summary

1. God has given Jesus power to raise the dead.
2. He will do this when he comes back again to the earth to set up his Kingdom.
3. At the same time, he will gather those 'in Christ' who are living when he returns.
4. To those who have been faithful, he will give eternal life, and they will live and reign with him on the earth.

Chapters to read

1 Thessalonians 4; Hebrews 11; John 11; Matthew 22:23-33

Verses to learn

John 5:28,29

"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."