

The Blessed Hope

Paul says to Titus, "For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. (Titus 2: 11-13) What is this "blessed hope" of which Paul speaks?

In the beginning God "formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (Gen. 2:7) But God told him "dust you are, to dust you will return." (Gen. 3:19)

Adam and Eve began a pattern of mankind living a life of sin, for all have sinned. (Rom. 3:23) The wages of our sin is death. (Rom. 6:23) It says in Ezek. 18:20, "the soul that sins will die." Death to mankind is a reality, but death is an enemy of mankind. (1 Cor. 15:26)

The serpent called God a liar and told Eve she would not die. "Eve said, 'God has said, you shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.' Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die.'"(Gen. 3:1-4) This was the beginning of the belief that we have an immortal soul and has been the belief of many throughout history, including the Egyptians, the Babylonians, Plato and the foundation of our modern Christian teaching of heaven and hell. But this is a lie begun with Satan in the garden. God says we die, our life is gone and we return to the dust where we came.

But if there is not an immortal soul, what is meant in Eccl. 12:7 which says, "the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." What is this talking about? Is this in reference to the breath of life that God gives man as he did Adam when he said he became a "living soul"? (Gen. 2:7) Or is it in reference to the "spirit in man" Job refers to in Job 32:8 when he says "there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding." Is it this spirit that makes us different from the animals? Scripture doesn't make it absolutely clear, but we know this spirit returns to God and that man dies.

So is there no hope for mankind? Job contemplated this topic saying, "There is hope for a tree. If it is cut down it will sprout again...but man dies and is laid away; indeed he breathes his last and where is he? Man dies and does not rise...If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You will call, and I will answer You. You will desire the work of your hands." (Job 14:7-15) It seems Job had hope in a rising from the dead, a return to the living, a resurrection upon God's call.

The Bible speaks of two resurrections. Paul says in 1 Thess. 4:15-18, "for the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we will always be with the Lord." This is referred to as the first and better resurrection. (Rev. 20:4-5, Heb. 11:35) It is a resurrection to

eternal life of the “dead in Christ”, the faithful who have died since the time of Adam (Heb. 11), and the faithful who are alive at the time and who are changed to immortal. (1 Cor. 15:50-53)

John speaks of the two resurrections this way, “the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves 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 5:28-29) Scripture says, “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” (Heb. 9:27) This resurrection to judgment is referred to in Rev. 20:11-15, in which, “the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.” The first death of mankind is temporal; all will be resurrected. But there is a second death mentioned that is permanent and ultimately anyone not found written in the book of life will die the second death. (Rev. 20:15, Rev. 21:8)

However, “blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they will be priest of God and of Christ and will reign with Him a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:6) Wouldn't we all strive to be in the first resurrection? Paul speaks to the believers saying, “Behold I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed.” (1 Cor. 15:51-52) Paul thought the return of Jesus would happen in his life time and expected the faithful to be part of the first resurrection, whether dead or still alive.

So, what makes us worthy to be in this better resurrection? Is it having right doctrine, being part of the right church, praising and worshipping God or spreading the gospel? Paul teaches of a changed man as being important. He says, “through baptism we are no longer slaves of sin. If we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection...our old man was crucified that the body of sin might be done away, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.” (Rom. 6:4-6) Many scriptures tell us of our responsibility. “Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God...and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Rom. 12:1-2) “As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:15-16)

John speaks of the hope and our responsibility this way, “Beloved, now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we will be, but we know that when He is revealed, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” (1 John 3:2-3) Paul said to Timothy, “exercise yourself toward godliness, for bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.” (1 Tim. 4:7-8) We are to have “holy conduct and godliness, being diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.” (2 Pet. 3:11, 14) We are to “deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope.” (Titus 2:11-13).

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was the beginning of man's resurrection from the dead. (1 Cor. 15:20) Although all mankind will experience a resurrection from the dead, it is better to be amongst the resurrection of the faithful. This is the blessed hope!