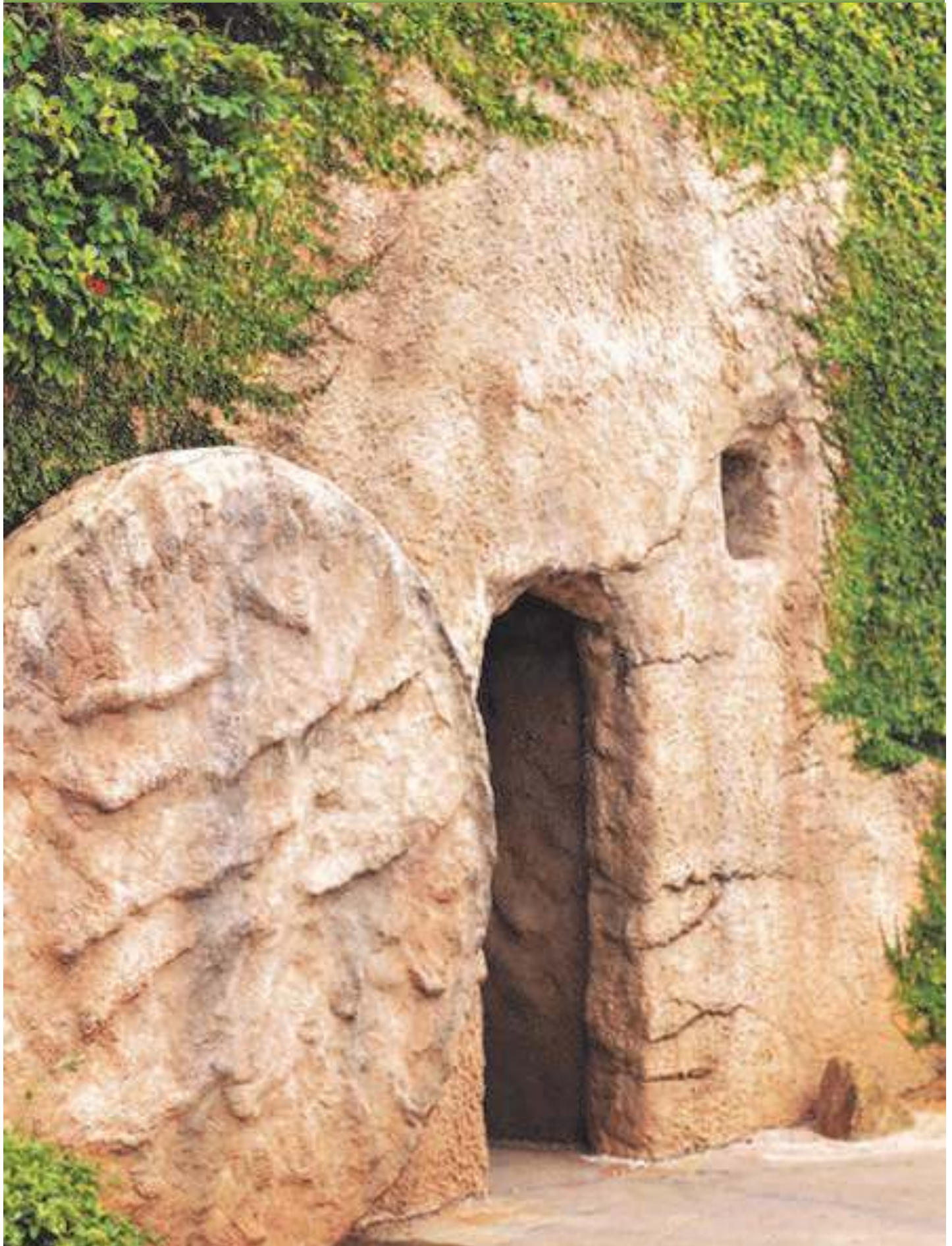


Issue 52  
MAR  
2012

# from death to life in 5.24



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# fromdeathtolife

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# The Gospel

by Jefferson Vann

At the office this week, one of my co-workers (who came from a Catholic background) was asking me about my church. He had heard the term evangelical before, but was not clear on what the word implied. I told him that when a church calls itself evangelical, it tends to emphasize the gospel, rather than some church tradition or heritage. The term comes from the Greek word euangelion (euaggelion), meaning “good news.” My co-worker’s question brought back to my mind something that I had learned some time ago: most evangelicals do not really know what the gospel is.

Oh, they know that if they believe in Jesus they can receive eternal life (and that is certainly true). But most would be surprised to discover that this conditional statement is not the



biblical good news. The Good news that the Bible teaches is something different. Consider, for example, the following texts which contain the word euangelion:

“Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness.”<sup>1</sup>

This first occurrence of the term in the New Testament is remarkable for what it does not say. It does not say that the gospel is a theological concept that someone must believe. No, the good news is not about a theological decision one makes (or prayer that one prays) as much as it is about a kingdom that one can join. Jesus himself is the king of that kingdom. He teaches about himself, and then proceeds to back up that teaching about himself with miracles that prove he is who he says he is. The gospel here is not as much about what you and I believe as it is about who Jesus is.

“Truly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her.”<sup>2</sup>

When Jesus commanded us to proclaim the gospel to the world,<sup>3</sup> he was not referring to another gospel: a gospel other than the one he was preaching. Yet he had not been proclaiming his death and substitutionary atonement. As important as that truth is, it is not the heart of the gospel. The heart of the gospel is something else.

“But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”<sup>4</sup>

Paul called his message “the gospel of the grace of God.” He was set apart to teach and proclaim this gospel.<sup>5</sup> It was the good news – not that we can do something for God (like believe in his Son) – but that God has graciously done something for us. The good news is Jesus himself – a gift of God’s grace.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from

faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.””<sup>6</sup>

Knowing this gives the reader a fresh perspective on how Paul describes the gospel in Romans. If the gospel that is the power of God for salvation is *the person of Christ himself*, then the faith that leads to the righteousness of God is not just acceptance of his forgiveness. It is acceptance of all that he is, all that he has done for us, and all that he will do. The gospel does not simply draw our attention back to the cross. It also draws our attention to the eternal ramifications of the cross. It is good news, not just because of something done in the past, but also because of the future.



The righteousness of God revealed in the gospel is not simply the fact that God regards us as righteous because of what Jesus did for us. It is a righteousness that is imputed by justification, and imparted by sanctification, and realized by faith in future glorification. So, the good news that is the gospel touches us in all three tenses.

**Past:**

Jesus died for me. I have been saved from my sin by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. My sins are atoned for by his death. They are forgiven. I am no longer on the list of those whose destiny is eternal death.

**Present:**

Jesus teaches me. I stand forgiven, and have access to the Holy Spirit to affect true change in my behavior. I can now live in victory over sin, and grow in the likeness of Christ. The key to living this life is the gospel message that Jesus proclaimed when he was on this earth. He gave commands which can drastically alter my life. But I have to learn and obey those commands. I am a disciple of Christ. I must choose to live like one. The gospel is the gospel of the kingdom. If I choose to live outside of the principles taught in the

gospel, I have not responded to the gospel, regardless of what I believe about the atonement.

**Future:**

Jesus will make me immortal. I have an eternal destiny that will begin the day Jesus breaks the clouds and returns from heaven. On that day, if I am still alive, I will be transformed, and never taste death. If I die before that happens, I will be raised to life at Christ's command when he returns, never to die again. The gospel is good news because it shows us the destiny that is ours beyond the grave. It does not deny that death is real. It shows hope beyond death.

“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you - unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures”<sup>7</sup>

This explains why Paul's most extensive presentation of the gospel is found in a chapter entirely dedicated to the resurrection. There is no gospel without the resurrection.

Because Christ was raised, we now can have victory over the penalty of sin in the past, and the power of sin in the present. Because Christ will raise us from the dead, we now have an eternal destiny – a future besides destruction in hell.

You cannot really understand the gospel without this perspective on the future, and that is exactly what the problem was in Corinth. The believers in Corinth had lost the good news of the resurrection. They had lost the gospel.

“how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the world today, this problem continues to exist. People live with no eternal hope. They live for today because they think today is all that we have. Author Paul David Tripp calls it “eternity amnesia.” He outlines the following symptoms of this malady:

1. Living with unrealistic expectations.
2. Focusing too much on self.
3. Asking too much of people.
4. Being controlling or fearful.
5. Questioning the goodness of God.
6. Living more disappointed than thankful.
7. Lacking motivation and hope.

8. Living as if life doesn’t have consequences.<sup>9</sup>

We can understand it when people who do not know Christ live this way. But all too often, those of us who claim to know Jesus find the same symptoms. Tripp explains that “because we fall into thinking of this life as our final destination, we place more hope in our situations, relationships, and locations than they are able to deliver.”<sup>10</sup>

We are victims when we should be living in victory. The victory was already obtained by Christ. Because of what he did for us, we need never live as if these temporary lives are all that we have. We can see everything that happens now in the light of the glory that awaits us in eternity. We can tolerate pain and failure because we understand them to be temporary setbacks. We can better grasp the significance of success when we see it from the standard of eternity as well. We can look on every soul we encounter as another being who is potentially immortal and glorified, which might help us tolerate their present imperfections. We can have a better attitude about our own present failures to hit the mark.

“And if our hope in Christ is only

for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.”<sup>11</sup>

If you take away the resurrection,



Christianity is an empty religion with no real hope, and believers are of all people most to be pitied. The reason is that all human beings are born mortal. We have a death sentence hanging over us because of Adam’s rebellion. We imitate Adam by being creatures who return to the dust. But the hope of the resurrection gives us an opportunity to imitate Christ, the man from heaven.

“As was the man of dust, so also are those who are of the dust, and as is the man of heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.”<sup>12</sup>

People who live without the forever perspective can only hope to accomplish “of the dust” things. No matter how happy or successful or

significant their lives, that happiness, success and significance will be buried in the ground when they die. But people who have a forever perspective – a gospel perspective, can accomplish “of heaven” things. We can make an eternal difference in other people’s lives by pointing them to the Saviour. We can get our minds off of the things which enslave others, because our focus is on serving the “man of heaven.” Knowing our future can free us to truly live in the present.

“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when







this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."<sup>13</sup>

The resurrection is God's victory, and ours. The gospel is the good news about that victory. It is the story of God entering this world of sin and pain through his Son, and taking on that sin and pain through the atonement on the cross. It is the story of the crucial battle won on the cross, and demonstrated by Christ's resurrection. It is the story of the final victory over sin and pain through the resurrection at Christ's return. Coming to faith in Christ is entering into that story.

We know how the story ends. That is why we can have an eternal perspective.

As we celebrate the resurrection this year, may the knowledge that Christ's tomb is empty help us to avoid eternity amnesia. May we not live recklessly – like there is no tomorrow. But may we live fearlessly, because there will be a tomorrow. The gospel assures it.

#### References

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:23 NLT, (see also Mark 9:35).

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 26:13 ESV.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 13:10.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 20:24 KJV.

<sup>5</sup> Romans 1:1.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 1:16 ESV.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 ESV.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:12b ESV.

<sup>9</sup> Paul David Tripp, *Forever: Why You Can't Live Without It*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011). Kindle edition, location 254-287.

<sup>10</sup> *Forever*, location 416.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:19 NLT.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:48 ESV.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:52-54 KJV.



**Jefferson Vann**

# Calvin on Psalm 31:5

by Jefferson Vann

“Into your Hands I commit my spirit.”

David’s statement of trust in the midst of trial was so spiritually significant that the Lord Jesus himself quoted it on the cross. Later, Stephen quoted the same text at the moment of his own death by martyrdom. What does it mean to commit one’s spirit into God’s hands. Does this affirm the immortality of the soul?

John Calvin thought so. He was convinced that “man consists of a body and a soul; meaning by soul an immortal though created essence, which is the nobler part.”<sup>1</sup> He concluded that “Christ, in commending his spirit to the Father, and Stephen his to Christ, simply mean that when the soul is freed from the prison-house of the body, God becomes its perpetual keeper.”<sup>2</sup>

Calvin did not come to that conclusion by reading Psalm 31. He rightly commented on David’s statement by saying “Whoever commits himself into God’s hand and to his guardianship, not only constitutes him the arbiter of life and death to him, but also calmly depends on him for protection amidst all his dangers.”<sup>3</sup> David was asserting his trust in God to deliver him, not his confidence in possessing an indestructible spirit.

Yet Calvin could not resist taking David’s words out of their context,



and teaching that Christ and Stephen asserted something not about theology but about anthropology. His belief in Plato's doctrine of the immortality of the soul was so strong that it led Calvin to forget his rules of exegesis.

Christ quoted from Psalm 31:5 while dying on the cross. He said "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"<sup>4</sup> In doing so, he was expressing the exact same sentiment that David had expressed when he had used those words. He was not saying that his body was going to die, and that the real him was go-

ing to fly to heaven to be safe in his Father's hands. He was saying that he trusted his Father to rescue him.

His Father did rescue him. He was raised from the dead three days later. His spirit had not gone to heaven to be with his Father at death. He told Mary "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father."<sup>5</sup> Christ went to the grave. He had committed his spirit – that is, his life – into the hands of the one person who could redeem it.

Stephen's quote of Psalm 31:5 was also true to its context. Stephen knew that he was going to die. The prison-house was not his alive body, but death itself. But he also had confidence that his death would not be the end. God would rescue him from the prison-house of death in the same way that he had rescued Jesus – by a resurrection. Luke records, "as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.""<sup>6</sup> I heard a preacher at a funeral of a friend of mine say that Stephen did not sleep in the grave because God received his spirit. The preacher had quoted



this verse. Later, I had to remind my students (who also heard this sermon) that the preacher forgot about the next verse! Luke continued “And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And when he had said this, he fell asleep.”<sup>7</sup>

Stephen’s committing his spirit to Christ was not a rejection of the reality of death. It was an expression of confidence that death would not be permanent.

Calvin’s commentary on Psalm 31 also quoted Paul’s reflection on death. He says “What David here declares concerning his temporal life, Paul transfers to eternal salvation.”<sup>8</sup> He was referring to where Paul says “I am not ashamed, be-



cause I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”<sup>9</sup> What Calvin did not point out is that Paul’s words in 2 Timothy are not words of someone who denies death. Paul’s words imply that his death would come, but he has entrusted himself to God who can rescue him from that death. Paul’s trust was not in his possessing an immortal soul, but in his possessing a resurrecting God.



That is the sentiment expressed in Psalm 31:5 by David, and reflected in the words of Jesus on the cross, and those of Stephen at his death. It is not that God has made a part of our being that will never die. It is that God has promised to restore his own by a complete resurrection. It is not about something inherent within us. It is about the faithfulness of God.

**References**

- <sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1. {Forgotten Books}, 190.
- <sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. 1. {Forgotten Books}, 190.
- <sup>3</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Bible Commentaries: Psalms, Part I.* {Forgotten Books}, 429.
- <sup>4</sup> Luke 23:46 *ESV*.
- <sup>5</sup> John 20:17 *ESV* {emphasis mine}
- <sup>6</sup> Acts 7:59 *ESV*.
- <sup>7</sup> Acts 7:60 *ESV* {emphasis mine}.
- <sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin's Bible Commentaries: Psalms, Part I.* (Forgotten Books), 431.
- <sup>9</sup> 2 Timothy 1:12 *NIV*.



**Jefferson Vann and his wife Penny have been missionaries with Advent Christian General Conference since 1996. They have served 13 years as professors at Oro Bible College in the Philippines.**

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# Preaching the Gospel to the Dead

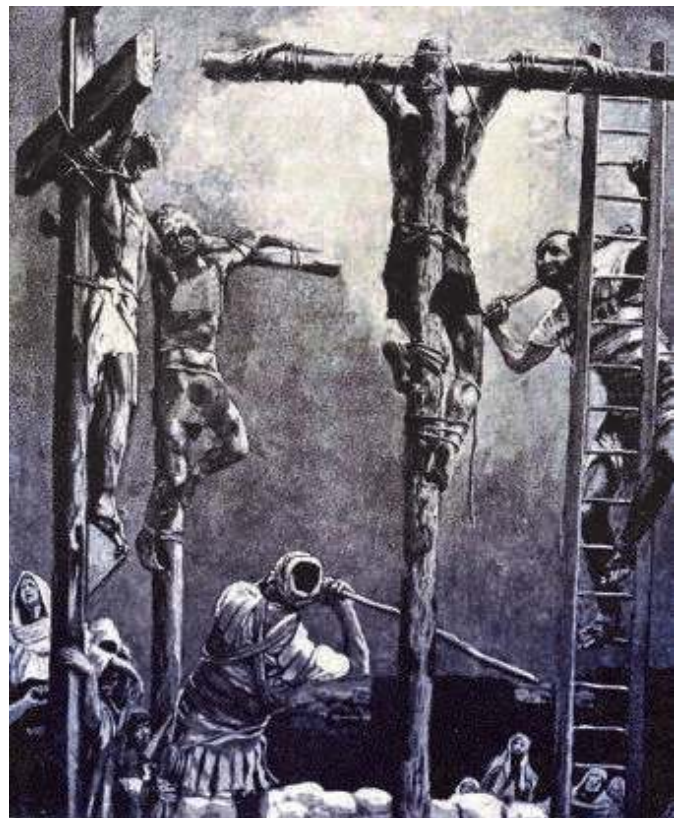
by W. Laing

*Republished from pages 87-88 of the Bible Standard April 1882*

“For this is the reason the gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to men in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit.” 1 Peter 4:6

This passage has been declared by the most learned expositors to be very hard to be understood. Macknight says it is “one of the darkest passages in the New Testament;” Doddridge, that it, “must be confessed to be extremely difficult;” Bloomfield, that “the sense is here obscure;” Dr. Adam Clarke, that “there are as many different translations of this verse and comments upon it, as there are translators and commentaries;” and Dr. John Brown, that “it would serve little purpose to state the various attempts which interpreters have made to extort an opposite meaning out of these words. Their number, and the extravagance of some of them, clearly shows that this passage is hard to be understood.”

The latter writer merely gives what appears to him the probable meaning of the passage in the following paraphrase: “For this end was the gospel preached to you when spiritually dead, that, believing it, ye should abandon sin and follow holiness; and, having gained its object, the result has been that ye are persecuted in your external circumstances, your body, your reputation, your outward condition, by



men; but you are happy in your mind, in all your spiritual relations and circumstances, in God" (Expository Discourses, First Peter, Vol. ii., p. 466).

The context, however, does not seem to us to favour the idea that the apostle's reference was to those who had been "spiritually dead," but to believers of the gospel who were bodily dead at the time he was writing. Such is the view given of the apostle's meaning by John Panton Ham, in his *Generations Gathered and Gathering*, p. 127:

"The gospel was preached in the lifetime of those who are now dead; and to them for this cause, namely, that although they must be judged in the flesh after the manner of men – that is, although they must experience the common lot of man, which is to die – yet that they might live according to God in the spirit that is, that they might, notwithstanding, be made alive again in a spiritual existence namely, resurrection – when Christ shall be ready to judge the quick and the dead."

To the same effect writes the Rev. J. C. M'Causland, M.A.:

"There is not in these words the slightest ground for the notion which has

been too rashly built upon them, that the "dead" here spoken of were preached to in the intermediate state. They were called "dead" by the apostle, because they were so at the time of his writing this epistle, but they were alive when the gospel was preached to them. There is, at least, nothing in the language inconsistent with this position, while the supposing them to have been dead, when preached to, contradicts the uniform testimony of the Word respecting the disembodied state, and therefore cannot be maintained. There is no difficulty connected with the explanation here proposed, as it agrees with the testimony of Scripture which the other views oppose, and has thus a fair claim on our assent. The meaning of the latter part of the passage seems to be, that they were, according to the penalty denounced against sin, subjected to death "in the flesh," but should yet, according to the provision of God, in Christ, "live in the spirit," i.e., in the spiritual body, just mentioned, in the former of which the believer is "judged" to temporal death, while in the latter he will be introduced to eternal life. In fact the natural life, of which they were deprived by death, is to be succeeded by the spiritual life of the resurrection."<sup>1</sup>

The application of the passage suggested by Mr. M'Causland, seems to me very probable; it

agrees entirely with the whole scope of the context, and with the whole testimony of Scripture. Only I am more inclined to Dr. Brown's understanding of the phrase "judged according to men in the flesh," as being equal to "judged by men" – put to death by persecutors; and in like manner regard the phrase "live according to God in the spirit" as referring to the Divine agency by which they were to live again, though put to death. Just as the same apostle had said of his Lord: "Him ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain, whom God hath raised up" (Acts 2: 23, 24).

But the force of the apostle's argument is not materially affected, whether we understand him as referring to death by persecution, or death as the effect of God's judgment against sin, as the common lot of the descendants of Adam. By referring to the preceding context the reader will perceive that the condition of the dead, between the time of their death and resurrection, is not the subject of his discourse; he is rather seeking to strengthen the flock God, amid the sore persecutions they had to bear for their Lord's sake. He reminds them



that suffering for well-doing was not peculiar to them; that the Christ Himself had suffered, even unto death; and therefore, as their Lord had suffered for them, they should be ready and willing to suffer for Him, no longer living according to the desires of the flesh, but according to the will of God. Viewed in this light, the language of verse 6 seems to amount to this: "Your sufferings are in no respect peculiar, for the gospel was also preached to, and received by, the disciples, who have already been subjected to death, who, although it was the will of God they should so suffer, yet that by submitting themselves to sufferings and death they



should live again, according to the pleasure of God, when at the resurrection they are made “alive by the spirit.” Comfort this, like the assuring words of our Lord: “He who loseth his life for My sake shall keep it unto life eternal.”

Such, we think, is the most probable meaning of the apostle’s words; but, as W. G. Moncrieff observes in his work, *Spirit*: “Let the full force of the text be what it may, it teaches nothing about disembodied spirits, for surely it would require a most merciless torturing of the words, “live according to God in the spirit;” to make them express this: “live according to God, as disembodied spirits, in the unseen world”” The translators seem to have viewed the language in a similar way as we have done, seeing they have rendered the Greek verb in the past tense: “For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead.” According to the view taken by those who apply the words to a missionary effort in Hades, they would require to be: “For this cause is the gospel preached to them that are dead.” Perhaps such a rendering may yet be argued for; but it would be in

strange contrast to such statements as: “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest.” “The night cometh when no man can work.” A great deal of Scripture, indeed, would require to be rewritten before we could find any warrant there for the idea of the evangelizing of the dead.

But, after all, the apostle is speaking of dead persons, while Dr. Farrar and his school are thinking of persons still alive! Those unsaved ones who are supposed to be the subjects of evangelization in the unseen state are not thought to be dead, but more sensibly alive than when in the body. It is not they, but their bodies – the house in which they lodged for a while – which has crumbled to dust. As men throw aside a worn-out garment, so they, it is supposed have left their bodies behind them, as so many old clothes, and in the unseen world whither they have gone, have the gospel which they despised here, preached to them there with so much effect that all, or nearly all, shall be saved by it!

Why take a passage, which speaks of those who are dead, to sustain a theory regarding persons who are alive? In the Scriptures there are no two greater opposites than death and life; and never do we find the Scriptures speaking of a person as dead, while he is understood to be alive, whether the reference be to natural or moral life. The persons of whom Peter speaks are evidently regarded by him as having been once alive, and now dead. It is not of bodies, as such, he is writing, but of persons; and the Scriptures uniformly speak of the person as dying—"Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." "Man returneth to his earth; in that day his thoughts perish."

It is only by ignoring the testimony of Scripture, and substituting for it the conceptions of men, that the pleasing fancy of reformation between death and resurrection can be held. Hence we find its advocates speaking with contempt of "an array of texts of Scripture," and denouncing adherence to its natural and grammatical sense as "servile interpretation." The day is at hand when it shall be seen, who is the wiser – he who takes God's Word to mean what

it says, and obeys it, or he who wrests the Scriptures, by making them conform to his own fancy, or treating them as old-world lore, which the march of intellect has left behind!

Notwithstanding our deep sense of the sincerity, ability, and learning of Dr. Farrar, and many others like-minded, we must oppose their dream of salvation in the unseen state, for the apostle of Christ assures us that "Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."

#### **References**

<sup>1</sup> On the Intermediate State, pp. 69,70

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are being published on the  
www.afterlife.co.nz website.***



# What Happens when we die:

## Four Tricky Passages (Part III)

By Armand Newrick

*(This is part of a series of messages that was preached at Hamilton Church of Christ, New Zealand in April 2011. The full audio version and text is available on the web-site.)*

### Introduction

Last Sunday we considered how the Jewish writings, between the testaments, reflected some foreign ideas that were beginning to creep into what some Jews believed about what happens when we die. An appreciation for these developments helped us to form awareness that the parable that Jesus told about the Rich Man and Lazarus was in fact a part of the folklore of the Pharisees that is nowhere found in the OT. Similarly the clothing of martyrs in white robes, making up a full number of the slain, was not an original idea in the book of Revelation; it shows up in other Jewish apocalypses (see 1 Enoch 47:1-4; 2 Baruch 23:4-5; 4 Ezra 2:33-41; 4:33-37).

In concluding that the genres of Par-

able and Apocalyptic are unreliable sources, upon which to solidly build doctrinal beliefs, I made a reference to a top UK scholar by the name of Richard Bauckham who said this – “The NT hope for the Christian dead is concentrated on their participation in the resurrection (1 Thess 4:13-18), and there is therefore little evidence of belief about the ‘intermediate state’. Passages which indicate, or may indicate, that the Christian dead are with Christ are Lk. 23:43; Rom. 8:38f; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; cf. Heb.12:23. The difficult passage 2 Cor. 5:2-8 may mean that Paul conceives existence between death and resurrection as a bodiless existence in Christ’s presence.”<sup>1</sup>

Having spent a couple of decades studying and understanding the development of Jewish thought on this subject Bauckham omits the Parable of the Rich Man



and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) and Souls under the Alter (Rev 6:9-11) from his list for the obvious reasons which we covered last week. Bauckham puts before us only 4 passages which might suggest a conscious intermediate state. I am aware that there are other odd verses that have been cited as support for a conscious intermediate state also and I am happy to consider those if anyone wants to talk about them. However, Bauckham does not acknowledge these “extras” as serious support for the traditional belief in a conscious disembodied intermediate state.

### **A 2004 Debate on Hell at the Baptist College**

In 2004, when studying at the Baptist College, I remember the class having an organized debate as to the subject of hell. Half the class, with surnames A – M, had to argue for “hell” as a place of annihilation

and the other half of the class, surnames N – Z were to argue for “hell” being a place of eternal unceasing conscious torment for the unsaved. Seeing I was border line with a surname beginning with N I decided to jump the chasm that divided the class to argue for “hell” as a place of annihilation. As part of my ammunition for the battle I took along my IVP Bible Dictionary from which I quoted this very reference from Bauckham to demonstrate how little support the NT offered for arguing for a conscious intermediate state that would be required to support the traditional view of eternal conscious torment. At the conclusion of reading the quote to the class our venerable lecturer, Dr. Martin Sutherland, said “even then I don’t believe you can make a convincing argument for a conscious ‘intermediate state’ from 2 Cor 5:2-8 [the difficult passage]. Christian hope is always portrayed as an embodied hope.”

So let’s have a look at these four passages that Bauckham has referred to as possible support for a conscious intermediate state.

#### **(1). Luke 23:43 The Thief on the**



### **Cross**

In the first session in this series I made mention of two families that I knew back in Auckland who had both lost sons prematurely. One of these, a Dutch family; and I am told that the Dutch see things in a very “black and white” way, forcefully quoted this verse to me in defence of the hope and comfort that they had found in it. That is; that their deceased son was immediately present and conscious with Jesus as a disembodied “soul” or “spirit” in “paradise” at the point of death. In their understanding, as in many peoples, it is believed that Jesus was telling the thief on the cross next to him that he would be with Jesus in paradise that very day that they died.

*What did the Thief request that Day?*

Seldom is the context of this verse considered, in particular the thief’s request, when determining what Jesus meant in his answer to the request. In verse 42 the thief asks Jesus to remember him when he returns to establish the Kingdom of God. Some manuscripts say – “remember me when you come with your kingly power.” Obviously the thief hoped to be granted, by Jesus, a better resurrection into a future Kingdom once the present age is wound up; in other words, at the Second Coming. Jesus did not ignore, or replace, the thief’s request with a hope for an immediate intermediate state at the point in which he was to breathe his last. How do we know this?

We know this because on that very day when Jesus died his body was taken by Joseph of Arimathea and laid in state for 3 days. If, as some reason, Jesus went to “paradise” then death is nothing more than an illusion which we should all welcome as a release from the pains and ailments of this physical life. No, death is an en-

emy; it is the wage of Sin. Anyway, where is “paradise”?

### *Where is Paradise Anyway?*

The word is only ever used 3 times in the NT. Although it is not used in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus some of the extra-biblical Jewish literature understood “paradise” as part of Hades in the subterranean underworld. Is that where Jesus went? The later Apostles Creed believes so – whereas one version of the creed states “he descended to the dead, on the third day he rose again” another says “he descended into hell” prior to His resurrection. Such a belief is supposed from a misunderstanding of 1 Peter 3:18-19 where it is thought that Jesus preached to the “spirits in prison”, in Hades, within that 3 day period. Verse 19, in fact, tells us that

Jesus preached to these “spirits in prison” after he was “made alive by the Spirit”, i.e. resurrected from the dead.

In 2 Cor 12:4 we get a different impression of where “paradise” might be. Paul speaks of “paradise” as the “third heaven”. Many Jews in the 1st century had come to believe that heaven had 7 levels, as reflected in the work *The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* (7:24-27), where disembodied souls were parted to the right and to the left of a throne, another spirit world above, where this physical world is “never spoken of”. Paul was himself unsure about such an experience because he is uncertain as to whether this was in the body or out of it.

And just to confuse things further; in Rev 2:7 “paradise” is synonymous with the New Jerusalem which was the anticipated hope at the end of the age (Cf. Rev 22:1-6).

So what did Jesus mean when speaking of “paradise”? He meant his coming again in kingly power in line with what the thief requested and understood of the



future coming Kingdom. Therefore, the emphasis in this verse lies with the promise being given that day, and not the Kingdom being redefined as a spirit world. Let's now read the verse by re-inserting the comma to create an emphasis in Jesus' response; the original Greek does not supply a comma, this is the translators' call. "Truly thee I tell today, with me thou wilt be in the paradise" (Marshalls Interlinear Greek-English). Even though the reputable scholar Leon Morris disagrees and argues for an immediate "paradise" he does, however, acknowledge that a future kingdom hope is another possible interpretation of Jesus' words.

**(2). Romans 8:37-39 Not even Death can Separate us from the Love of God.**

To say that nothing, not even death, can separate us from the "love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" does not define for us how God has made us as human beings. Therefore, what we understand on that foundational issue, in approaching this passage, will undoubtedly affect how we will interpret it. Defining what it is to be a human being is something that we wrestled with in the first session.

The whole of our earlier arguments were that the OT consistently portrayed being human as a psychosomatic whole. In other words everything lives and everything dies – nothing of us consciously survives. It is for this reason that the state of death can be spoken of in the NT by the use of the metaphor "sleep" (cf. John 11:11-15; 1 Cor 15:51-52). However, we believe that God holds every human being in His memory in view of the resurrection of the dead when Jesus Christ comes again. In that sense death does not separate us from God's love that will raise the dead because we are not forgotten. To suppose that Paul is saying that the dead are conscious in an intermediate state is an inference from the passage that is based upon the preconceived notion of "soul immortality". There is



nothing explicit in this passage to say that the dead are conscious prior to the resurrection. Therefore, on the strength of the OT view of being human, I would reason that the memory of one's life is not lost from the love of God by death in view of the resurrection of the dead – God will not forget us in the grave!

**(3). *Philippians 1:23 cf. Hebrews 12:23 Paul desires to Depart and be with Christ***

On this passage I'm going to offer an interpretation that you have never heard before; it's new. In verse 20 Paul wants Jesus Christ to be exalted in his body whether by "death or by life". In fact Paul is writing from prison in anticipation of

what might be the death sentence (1:7). In other words a martyr's death for Paul will exalt Jesus Christ as this will in some way identify Paul more fully with Christ who was crucified. In this sense there is a strange type of posthumous "gain" for Paul to die this way (1:21). Yet to be spared from such a death, in the mean time, will allow for some more fruitful labour to be achieved in the churches (1:22). Paul is torn between the two in verse 23 where on the one hand he sees a martyr's death as a departure to be with Christ.

*A Premature Departing Death just like Christ*

What Paul might be suggesting here is not a conscious presence with Christ at the point of death but rather identification with Christ in the way he might die, as a martyr, in the hope of a more glorious resurrection. In the Greek we read – ἐπιθυμῶ ἐμὴν εἶναι τοῦ ἀπαλῦσαι καὶ οὖν ἰσχυρῶς ἐπιθυμῶ ἐμὴν εἶναι μετὰ Χριστοῦ – "the desire having for the to depart and with Christ to be". This might be like saying "I want to depart and be like (with) Martin Luther King" who was assassinated in 1968 as a hero in many people's





eyes. In other words, I want to follow in his footsteps. Indeed to identify with him will be a gain to Paul in a way which natural death, as an old man, does not afford. Such a special privilege of dying as a faithful martyr is characteristic of the message of the book of Revelation and seen as becoming like “Christ who was slain” (Cf. Rev 13:8).

*Can we back this Interpretation up?*

How can I possibly come to such a conclusion you may ask? Well in Phil 3:10-11 Paul clearly tells us that he wants to know the fellowship of sharing in Christ’s sufferings so as to become like Christ in His death – martyrdom; this is a “gain” by way of identity. This is not to attain an immediate conscious presence with Christ; rather, it will lead on to somehow attain to the resurrection from the dead. So, Paul’s “gain” in a premature “departure” to be with Christ may be in the sense of identifying with Christ

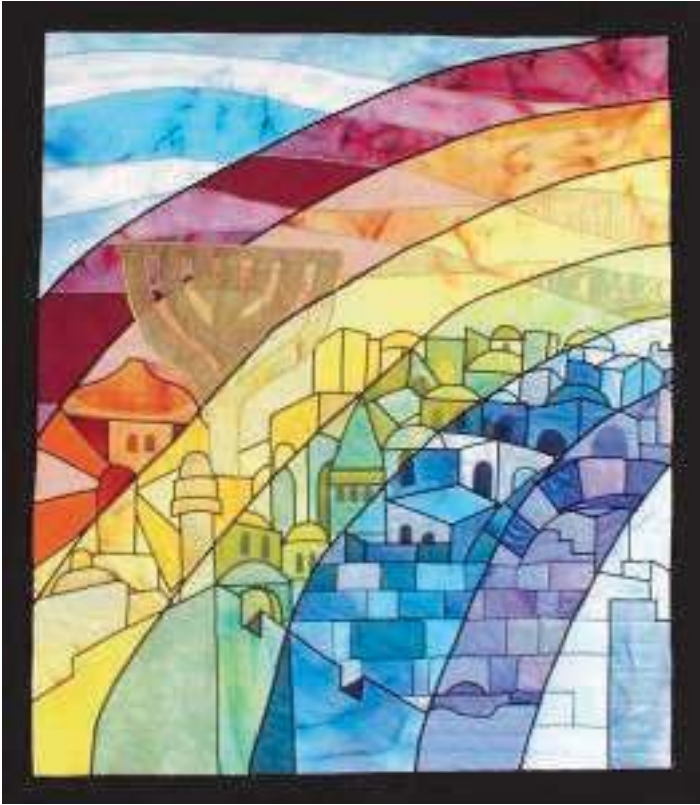
in death so as to attain a better resurrection. Philippians 1:23 should not be sought to be interpreted independently from weighing up the meaning alongside Phil 3:10-11 with an appreciation of Paul’s anticipated death sentence.

In regards to Bauckham offering Hebrews 12:23, as a comparison with Philippians 1:23, the Hebrews quote is clearly in the context of the End time “heavenly Jerusalem” when the things of this world will be “shaken”. Perhaps Bauckham is suggesting that the “departure to be with Christ” might be understood as Paul giving no thought for an intermediate state but rather having his thoughts completely focused on the resurrection hope; many Conditionalists would explain Phil 1:23 in this way.

**(4). 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 Paul wants to be Clothed with the Eternal House from Heaven**

In verse 1 Paul talks of an “eternal house in heaven”. This is not an individualistic hope; he says we have this eternal house; not I have an eternal house. This





sounds like the New Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven at the end of the book of Revelation. When Paul says he groans with longing for this “eternal house” he is in effect saying he desperately wants to see the end of the age arrive along with God’s new house/Kingdom (v.2). Paul speaks of that day of cosmic transformation by the use of the metaphor “clothed” in verse 3. Notice very carefully that if he does not experience that clothing of the “eternal house” coming down from heaven within his life-time he will be found “naked”!

### *What does being “Found Naked” & “Unclothed” Mean?*

What might being “found naked” mean as a metaphor? It means the state of death. In other words he doesn’t want to face an interim in the grave waiting for the “eternal house from heaven”; which is the collective hope of all the saints! Paul groans in this life/body because he doesn’t want to be “unclothed”, in verse 4, before the city from on high arrives. When that city arrives then the mortal will be swallowed up in life; as in 1 Cor 15:54, at the resurrection of the dead. When Paul says in verse 6 – “as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord” he means Jesus Christ hasn’t returned yet. In verse 6 he is not considering the intermediate state. So in verse 8 he is saying I would prefer Jesus Christ to return with the corporate hope of the “eternal house in heaven” i.e. “at home with the Lord”. Rather than striving on in this life and age. He would much rather that this hope comes quickly than be “found naked” (v. 3) or “unclothed” (v.4), which means in the grave.

In all honesty, the passage which Bauckham says is the “difficult one” I find the easiest one to explain because an intermediate state is clearly distinguished from the resurrection hope of the “eternal house in heaven”.

### Conclusion

So far in our series, in dealing with these few seemingly problematic passages in the NT, it might be thought, by some, that I am resorting to special pleading to get around them. I sincerely don't believe this to be the case. These hand-full of passages would make up no more than 1 % of the data used to favour the traditional popular view which is mistakenly thought to be more robust than what it actually is!

If I were to list every passage in the NT that speaks of the return of Jesus Christ, the Second Coming and the resurrection of the dead it would soon become apparent that this is where the genuine emphasis on Christian hope lies.

It is to this hope of resurrection that we will turn next Sunday as we consider afresh the significance of

the empty tomb as the only genuine key available for answering the question that every human being will grapple with in their life time – “what happens when we die?”

### References

<sup>1</sup>Richard Bauckham. Eschatology.' New Bible Dictionary, 2nd ed., ed. J.D.Douglas, et al. (Leicester: IVP, 1982), 346.

***Armand Newrick has had a keen interest in theology since his teenage conversion (See Issue 30) and came to the conditionalist position about eight years into his walk with the Lord. He is married to Suzanne and they have two children Daniel and Emma***



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## Statement of Faith

1. We believe in God and His one and only Son, Jesus the Christ. Heb. 11:6; John 14:1; 3:16; 20:31; Mat. 16:16.
2. We believe in the Holy Spirit. 2Pet. 1:21; 1Cor. 6:19; Jude 20; Eph. 3:5.
3. We believe that Jesus died for us and gave himself a ransom for all. Rom. 5:8; 1Cor. 15:3; 1Tim. 2:6.
4. We believe that God raised Jesus from the dead; that by resurrection He became Lord of both the dead and the living, and the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep; and that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Rom. 10:9; 14:9; 1Cor. 15:20; John 3:16.
5. We believe that baptism is commanded by Christ, was practiced by His Apostles, and is taught in the New Testament. Mat. 28:18,19; Acts 8:12,38.
6. We believe that all Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the people of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2Tim. 3:16,17.
7. We believe that human beings are by nature mortal. Gen. 2:7; 3:19; 1Tim. 6:16; 2Tim. 1:10; Rom. 2:6-7.
8. We believe that human beings in death are unconscious. Psa. 6:5; 115:17; Ecc. 9:5,10. This is likened to "sleep". Job 14:12; Psa. 13:3; Jer. 51:39; Dan. 12:2; John 11:11-14; 1Cor. 15:51.
9. We believe that immortality is obtained only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. 1Cor. 15:21-23; 2Tim. 4:7-8; 1John 5:9-12.
10. We believe that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked, to be followed by the Judgment. Acts 24:15; John 5:25,28,29; Rev. 20:12,13.
11. We believe that evil and evil-doers shall be finally destroyed. Psa. 145:20; Mat. 10:28 Rom. 6:21; Phil. 3:19; Heb. 2:14; 1John 3:8; Rev. 22:3.
12. We believe in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Acts 1:11; John 14:3; 1Thes. 4:16.