

RESURRECTION FOR THE REDEEMED AND REPROBATE

ACTS 24:14-15

A. INTRODUCTION.

In Princeton Cemetery is an epitaph that light-heartedly reads: “I told you I was sick!” However more realistic is that tombstone inscription near Winston-Salem, NC that reads: “Nothing matters but the resurrection.” Now that latter declaration certainly sounds far more down-to-earth, does it not? Yet is it in fact correct? For we who consider our mortality, far more often than we would dare confess, it may seem the right thing to hope for. The prospect of death causes me to focus on this one dying hope, of rising from the grave to life beyond the grave. I have loved living; I wish I could go on living; I shun the prospect of leaving loved ones behind, but death is inevitable. So the biblical promise of resurrection is what I want more than anything else. “Yes, above all else, nothing matters but the resurrection!”

Now while it may seem irreverent to be critical of the departed, nevertheless it must be pointed out, as a Christian pastor ordained to proclaim only the truth of God as revealed in the Bible, that to declare, “Nothing matters but the resurrection” is not true, and in fact is a mistaken hope. The reason why is that the Word of God clearly teaches that both the righteous and the wicked will rise from the dead. Paul declares, in a sermon before Felix, the Roman governor of Judea, “[T]here shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked” (Acts 24:15). Hence, of what benefit is it for the wicked to express a hope in the resurrection if it only leads to their consignment to the lake of fire? And of what use is it even for the righteous to have a hope in the resurrection except he is confident he is so classified as righteous in God’s sight?

In other words, suppose you confess on Easter morning that you believe, not only in resurrection as a general principle, but also in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and yourself as well. It may come as a surprise to learn that this will not save you. A rogue may make such a confession. Even Satan believes this much! So you can probably sense from the manner in which Paul declares a resurrection of both the *righteous* and the *wicked*, that the distinguishing features of these two characteristic is “what matters most.” It is not merely belief in a future day of resurrection that matters most. Hence we need to discover what Paul actually means by these terms, the “righteous” and the “wicked,” for the destiny of our souls depends upon it.

B. THE RESURRECTION OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

Paul, according to the NASB, is describing the “righteous,” δίκαιος, dikaios, which the KJV translates as the “just.”

1. Paul is describing “righteousness” that is of the essence of, “the God of our Fathers,” that is Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” v. 14.

2. Paul is describing “righteousness” that characterizes a Christian, such as himself, “before God [first] and before men [second], v. 16.
3. Paul is describing “righteousness” that is required of man concerning which he must give account, v. 25.
4. Paul is describing “righteousness” that is obtained through “faith in Christ Jesus,” v. 24. This is confirmed in Paul’s sermon before King Agrippa in which he describes his conversion in 26:15-18
5. In other words, the “righteous” who are resurrected are those who, in decrying their own unrighteousness, are pronounced righteous through faith in God’s crucified, righteous Son, and thus manifest righteousness.

C. THE RESURRECTION OF THE WICKED.

This is something that causes us a measure of unrest. Now we know that the resurrected child of God will have a body in “conformity with the body of His [Christ’s] glory” (Phil. 3:21). But what will the resurrection bodies of the “wicked” be like? What will they conform to? While not wishing to be dogmatic in an area we are not sure about, probably the answer is not pleasant to contemplate.

Paul, according to the NASB, is describing “wickedness,” which is really *ἀδικος*, *adikos*, unrighteousness, the opposite of righteousness. So the KJV translates the “just and unjust.” But who are these “unrighteous/unjust”? Paul certainly explains in his other writings.

1. Consider Romans 3:5 where the same word “unrighteousness” is not simply wicked deeds. Rather, in context with v. 3 it is essentially “unbelief,” from which, of course, wicked deeds proceed.
2. Consider I Corinthians 6:1 where this word “unrighteous,” in the context of v. 2, is identical with the “world.” Then in vs. 9-10 these same “unrighteous” are described as “fornicators, . . . idolaters, . . . adulterers, . . . effeminate, . . . homosexuals, . . . thieves, . . . covetous, . . . drunkards, . . . revilers, . . . swindlers, . . . [who will not] inherit the kingdom of God.”

D. THE RESURRECTION OF THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED.

1. Daniel 12:2. “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.”
2. John 5:28-29. Jesus Christ himself declared: “[F]or an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice [that of the Son of Man], and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.”

E. THE RESURRECTION AND DESTINY.

1. The great question then is not so much whether I believe in the resurrection but rather my destination following the resurrection.
 - a. Certainly Jesus Christ's resurrection is the great vindication, the great demonstration that resurrection is assured.
 - b. Further, for those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Redeemer, his resurrection is the guarantee that I shall rise in His likeness and be a citizen in His kingdom.
 - c. But if you simply see Easter as a vindication of resurrection in some general sort of way, then that may be a vain hope.
2. The great resurrection passages in the New Testament declare not simply a fact, but a hope that unbelievers risen from the dead will not share in.
 - a. I Corinthians 15. It is resurrection unto "glory," v. 45, "the image of the heavenly," v. 49, the "imperishable," v. 54.
 - b. II Timothy 2:11-12. "If we died with Him, we will also *live with Him*; if we endure, we will also *reign with Him*."
 - c. I Peter 1. It is resurrection unto "an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you," v. 4.
 - d. Revelation 20:12, 15 tells of a different resurrection scene. "And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead [obviously raised] were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. . . . And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."