

## **The hope of the resurrection**

**Chris Gousmett**

All human beings will inevitably die. This is difficult to face, and we attempt to lessen the impact of death in many ways: belief in reincarnation, denial of personal survival beyond death, pious sentimentality. For the Christian death is no less troubling, although Scripture assures us that death is not the end. Those who die in Christ will, as he was, also be raised to new life. This new life will be unlike the life we now know, as it will be without pain and suffering, living constantly in the presence of God on the renewed earth in which all things are made new [Revelation 21:1-5].

Our faith is based on the resurrection of Christ. If Christ is not risen, then we are without hope and without faith: both present and future are empty [1 Corinthians 15:12-19]. But since he has been raised, “the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep,” then we can be sure that we and all believers who have died will also be raised. The resurrection of the righteous is in two distinct stages: first Christ, then us. The harvest has already begun, and the rest of the harvest will follow in its time [1 Corinthians 15:20-23].

The “first resurrection” [Revelation 20:5] continues the act of God in raising Christ from the dead. He is first in time, in priority and in glory. Those who are united to him in faith will share in the first resurrection, when they too are raised from the dead at the last day. Christ is called “the first that should rise from the dead” [Acts 26:23], and “the first-born from the dead” [Colossians 1:18]. Our resurrection is made possible because he has pioneered the way, setting a precedent, so that Christ's resurrection will have its sequel in our resurrection: the one performance in two acts as it were.

To be raised with Christ we must share in his Spirit. We have hope of being raised to new life because we are joined to Christ, and are partakers of the same Spirit which raised him from the dead, and who will also raise those in whom he dwells [Romans 8:11].

While we are thereby assured that we will be raised, it is not until the resurrection at the last day that we receive the redemption of our bodies. The world is still in bondage, waiting for its release from the effects of sin [Romans 8:19-23], and until that Day we will continue to suffer sickness, disability and death. But on that Day, all such things will be banished forever, hallelujah!

Jesus said, *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.* The trouble and the fears that we know are not to take root in our hearts. At the core of our being we are given peace in the midst of our troubles, and comfort that strengthens us in the face of our fears. The greatest fear that we face is the fear of death. We are often anxious about it, concerned that our lives will be cut short without warning, or that death will be preceded by long illness or much pain. It is to be expected that we will be afraid when confronted with death, for death is unnatural for us. It is the end of the life which God gives us, an end which comes upon the whole human race because we have turned away from God.

Although Christ has defeated death as an enemy and removed the sting of death and the grave [1 Corinthians 15:54-57], so that it is no longer to be feared, those who believe in him still die. But they now die “in the Lord,” that is, it is Christ who controls the keys of death [Revelation 1:18] because he has conquered death and made it subject to him. Those who believe do not escape death, but instead die in trust that God will deliver them from its bonds at the return of Christ. Thus the whole character of death is significantly transformed by Christ's resurrection.

By faith in Christ we receive eternal life here and now [John 3:36; 1 John 3:14], yet it is not received in full measure since we are still subject to death. We await the redemption of our bodies, namely, the resurrection [Romans 8:23]. This is because death is the last enemy to be destroyed [1 Corinthians 15:26; Revelation 20:14].

However, that enemy has been **defeated**. While its power continues to hold sway, when the Kingdom of God comes in all its fullness, with the creation of the new

heavens and the new earth, death will be no more. The end of its power has been assured with the resurrection of Christ.

Jesus tells us to be comforted; he has given us his peace, a peace which the world cannot give. There is nothing that the world can provide that will ease the pain of death, for death cuts us off from the world. This world cannot offer anything beyond the grave. But Jesus has died and risen again, and he has the keys of death. He has power that reaches beyond the grave, because he has conquered the grave. He is not limited by death; death is now under his power.

Because Jesus has conquered death, and risen again in glory, we have a hope that reaches beyond the grave. Those who trust in him will be raised again from the dead, transformed in glory, made imperishable and immortal. Death then will be swallowed up in the victory won through Jesus Christ, the righteous. Death is now no longer an end to life, but merely an interruption like a sleep, from which we shall be woken by the blast of the trumpet and the voice of the archangel.

Christ has risen, the first fruits of the harvest, and because Christ is risen, we can have confidence that we too will rise in due time when the remainder of the harvest is gathered in by the angels of God [Matthew 13:39, 43].

*Where, o death, is your victory?*

*Where, o death, is your sting?*

*Thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, stand firm, and let nothing move you. [1 Corinthians 15:55, 57-58]*