

# Resurrection!

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At the beginning of my split sermon today, I would like to read to you a portion of the explanatory notes from the Second Symphony by the Austrian classical composer, Gustav Mahler. It was better known as the Resurrection Symphony. This was written in 1894 after the death of Mahler's good friend, Hans Von Bulow. Here is a little excerpt of what he said:

We are standing beside the coffin of a man beloved. For the last time in his life his battles, his sufferings, and his purpose pass before the mind's eye. And now, at this deeply stirring moment, when we are released from the paltry distractions of this life, our hearts are gripped by a voice of awe-inspiring solemnity, which we seldom or never hear above the deafening traffic of mundane affairs. 'What next?' it says. 'What is life? . . . And what is death? Have we any continued existence? Is it all an empty dream? Or has this life of ours and after death, a meaning?' If we are to go on living we must answer this question!

At the Feast of Trumpets every year, God's people, too, shut themselves out from "deafening traffic of mundane worldly affairs." The world out there is going on as if it were a regular Thursday. The children are going to school across the street, and the people are going to work. We shut ourselves out from the deafening traffic of mundane affairs which are more deafening today than they were back in 1894, 113 yrs ago.

At the Feast of Trumpets every year, God's people ask the same questions that Mahler wrote 113 years ago. We ask, "What next?" "What is life?" "What is death?" "Have we any continued existence?"

In the final movements of the Second Symphony, Mahler answers his own questions with surprising accuracy, and I will read some of that for you later on. The answer that Mahler gave in this symphony was the same one that is revealed to God's people. And that answer in one word is "Resurrection." What an answer, and what a fabulous promise!

In this split sermon today I would like to examine the beliefs of God's church concerning the resurrection of the dead, and compare our beliefs and doctrines with those of other religions.

First let us take a look at some of the beliefs of other religions. The churches of the world, to my knowledge, rarely address the subject of the resurrection. When I was young, from as early as I can remember, until my mid teens, I attended the Church of England. They preached a lot about going to heaven when one dies. But I cannot remember any real biblically-based truth about a literal return of Christ to this earth, or the resurrection of the dead on this earth.

Maybe some of our young people in the church have never heard anything otherwise, and that is good. Maybe they can take this wonderful knowledge for granted. But for most of us "first

generation Christians," the gospel of the Kingdom of God, the gospel of the return of Jesus Christ, and the resurrection of the dead, when we first heard it, when it was first revealed to us, it was the most fantastic good news we had ever heard. Never forget that, young people.

But the time was when most of even the professing Christian world out there did know something about the resurrection of the dead. As we have seen as recently as 1894, Gustav Mahler, who was actually a Jew who converted to Christianity, knew about the resurrection. He understood many of the details of it that he got from the Bible, and they are proved by the words that we will read later on.

The second example is that every Sunday, if one were to make the mistake of going to one of the

mainstream churches, he would find that they recite a "creed" which is a repetitive prayer containing summary of their beliefs. That creed contains these words: "I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting."

But also every Sunday, the people in those same churches formally reject God's intervention into world affairs. Millions of worshippers end the reading, singing of psalms, or other prayers, by parroting a vain repetition that is called the doxology: "As it was in the beginning . . . is now . . . and ever shall be . . . world without end . . . Amen."

They sing or say that after virtually every prayer. In doing that, they do not allow for God's intervention in world affairs, they do not allow for the return of Jesus Christ, and they do not allow for the resurrection of the dead.

Throughout the years, accurate knowledge and belief about the resurrection has been diminished and almost lost. It has been buried in fables about immortal souls going "up there" to heaven on puffy white clouds, or "down there" to the eternal torments of a fiery, ever-burning hell. The truth about the end of this age is mocked by an increasingly decadent world, and the people of the world reject the idea of God's intervention into world affairs. They do not want it.

Pagan belief in a resurrection dates back thousands of years before Christ's birth and traces are found with the ancient Persians in their religions of Zoroastrianism and Mithraism. I ask myself the question, did they learn this little spark of truth from those who did understand? People like the Magi perhaps, who visited Jesus Christ? We do not know.

But like many since those times who have mixed truth with erroneous teaching regarding immortal souls and an afterlife in netherworld, the true belief about the resurrection has been virtually lost. The Greeks developed these beliefs and the concepts of an immortal soul into concepts and beliefs in Elysium and Hades, which were the Greek versions of heaven and hell.

Most of us know that the Roman Catholic Church, in their zeal to convert as many as possible to their brand of what they call "Christianity," very much allowed pagan beliefs to be folded in with a remnant of the truth that they still had. So error increased upon error as the years went by. Again, true knowledge was virtually lost, clouded by man-made myths with such beliefs as the beatific vision, purgatory, and limbo.

The Protestant churches were not much better. The Reformation in Western Europe under Martin Luther and the establishment of the Church of England under Henry VIII led to the fragmentation of the Roman Catholic Church, and eventually the Protestant churches fragmented into countless different denominations. So there is a wide array of interpretations and beliefs.

Today the belief in the actual return of Jesus Christ and the literal resurrection is almost totally superseded by spiritual explanations. Here are just a few of them. I have to smile because some of them are quite funny:

1. The Kingdom of God will come to each individual.
2. The Kingdom of God will be set up in our hearts.
3. The Kingdom of God is represented by values of western civilization. (I wonder if the people who wrote that one ever read the newspapers.)
4. The resurrection is actually the steady, upward progress of mankind [which is absolutely absurd].

There are out there some non-Christian monotheistic religions, and one example is the non-orthodox Jews. They have watered down the Old Testament prophecies so that they really do not any longer believe in the coming of the Messiah, and do not believe in the actual resurrection from the dead.

We once had spark of truth about the resurrection, but it has been clouded by time and Satan's influence, of course, and we end up with such ideas as nirvana, reincarnation, etc.

What about God's true church? What do we believe about the resurrection, and what is the origin of our beliefs?

First of all, the origin of our beliefs is the word of God. We simply believe what it says. When we read the plain, simple scriptures on this subject, we wonder how any who profess to accept the same Bible as we do could preach otherwise. We ask the question, why do they not read these scriptures? The answer comes for the same reason that we did not before God opened our minds.

The basic doctrine of God's true church concerning the resurrection is this:

God the Father raised His Son Jesus Christ from the dead, and that same God will also raise to life again all of the dead. For some, that will be a resurrection to eternal life. For others, that will be a resurrection to physical life with a later opportunity for eternal life. For others, hopefully few, that will be a resurrection to face second death.

Yes, the Bible reveals three resurrections:

The first resurrection is given to those baptized church members who died in the faith, and will be raised to eternal, spiritual life at the return of Jesus Christ to this earth. The bodies of true Christians who are still alive at that time will be changed from physical to spiritual.

The second resurrection will be given to those who died without the opportunity to become

members of God's true church. They will be raised to physical life at the end of the millennium and they will be taught God's way of life, and if they accept that way of life they will be given eternal spiritual life.

The third resurrection will be for those from any of man's eras who, with full knowledge of what they are turning down, refuse to accept God's way of life. They will be raised to face their penalty. Not a cruel eternal life in a fiery "hell," but merciful, eternal death, which is called the second death in God's word.

We have the three resurrections—so simple, and yet so incredibly exciting! What are the main scriptures that support our belief in the resurrection? You would think that there were only a few because they are so easily hidden from many churches of the world who claim to use the same Bible as we do. But there are actually many scriptures that give information about the resurrections, and too many for me to quote in the limited time that I have today. Let us just examine five scriptures, two from the Old Testament and three from the New Testament.

Job 14:10-15 But man dies and is laid away; indeed he breathes his last and where is he? As water disappears from the sea, and a river becomes parched and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep. Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands.

Job asked same questions that Mahler asked thousands of years later: What is death? What happens to man after death? Job came up with the same answers. Man does not have immortal souls. Once man dies, he would remain dead forever, if God did not have other plans. The vast majority of the dead will remain in their graves until the time of second resurrection, at the end of Jesus' thousand year reign on earth, which we call the millennium.

For a group that Jesus called "elect" (and Job will likely be among them), the resurrection will come at the beginning of the millennium, and God will raise them from their (and hopefully our) resting places and will meet Jesus Christ in the air.

Job seemed, when writing these words, almost to have a preference for the second resurrection. You have probably heard people who have that same preference. Look at verses 12-13 again.

Job 14:12-13 so man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep. Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me!

But like others who overcame and remained obedient and loyal to God, Job will probably witness the apparent flight of the heavens. And, Job will probably witness the wrath of God which will sadly be necessary to bring the rebellious peoples of the earth into subjection to His way of life

Another Old Testament personality who was blessed with the true, revealed knowledge of the

resurrection was Daniel.

Daniel 12: 2-3 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.

God tells us here, through Daniel, that some of the "many" who sleep in the dust of the earth will come up in the first resurrection as spirit-composed sons of God. Those who God considers have true wisdom and who continually participate into turning many to righteousness will be worthy to have a part in teaching His way to the world.

These brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ will no longer be limited by physical flesh and blood.

We will be like our elder Brother, and we will be composed of spirit. It is hard to believe that one day we will cast off these painful physical bodies and we will have painless spiritual bodies like that of Jesus Christ.

I John 3:1-2 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

Others, who have not known God's way, remain at rest until the second resurrection at the end of the millennium. I know that I am repeating myself, but I want you to get the concept of these resurrections. Then they, those that come up in the second resurrection, will be raised to physical life and they will be taught God's ways. The vast majority will gladly accept God's ways. They will have Jesus Christ right there standing before them.

I have often wondered about people when Christ returns and says, "This is My way of life," and they say "No." And Christ is standing right there before them and He is saying "I am telling you, this is it." How would anybody dare to call Jesus down and say, "No, I am not accepting it"? I do not think that many people will do that. Also at that time, during the millennium, Satan will be imprisoned and powerless. I ask the question: "Is this an unfair second chance?" It really is not, because the vast majority of the world's billions have never really had a first chance. They have never had an opportunity to know truth of God's way.

These scriptures and many others show us that thousands of years ago God revealed the glorious good news of resurrection to those who believed and obeyed him

Many people get confused about the order and the nature of the three resurrections, and some even criticize the teaching of multiple resurrections at all. A New Testament scripture that clarifies the concept is I Corinthians 15. This is one of the chapters that we call the "Resurrection" chapter.

I Corinthians 15:20-24 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in

Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power.

This is amongst one of the most exciting and inspiring chapters in the whole Bible and these five verses that we read here just merely whet our appetite to read the whole chapter. But these five verses do clarify the points that the different resurrections take place at different times.

Jesus Christ was raised first; He was the first of the firstfruits.

God's chosen people will be raised later at His return.

And the rest of the dead will come up still later.

We have all heard various church members who are undergoing trials expressing "wishes" similar to Job's: "I wish I had not been called in this life; it would have been better for me if God had not called me until the second resurrection."

But there are real benefits to having a part in the first resurrection. What are those benefits? Is there really any reason to desire a place in the first resurrection? Could we not just go and do our own thing, and then come up in the second resurrection and then join in with all of those other people? Let us see what the apostle John says.

Revelation 20: 4-6 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

So the benefits of having a part in the first resurrection are these:

? Death will no longer have any power over us; we will have made it.

? As priests and co-rulers with Jesus Christ, we will have a part in helping rebuild the broken world.

? We will have the blessing of being alive during transitional millennium. What a wonderful time that will be.

There we have it, the resurrections! At the blast of the seventh trumpet will come the greatest turning point in the history of the world. This Feast of Trumpets is a pivotal day. Everything hangs on the fulfillment of this day.

I promised you that I would come back to Mahler's Resurrection Symphony, and now would like

to conclude with some very inspiring words. I want to quote the English translation of the words that end the choral section that is sung at the close of the symphony. These are wonderful words. Just listen to these.

Arise!

Yes, you shall arise, my dust, after brief rest.

Eternal life!

Eternal life, He will give...

He who called you.

To bloom again you shall be sown.

The Lord of the harvest goes...

To gather the sheaves of us who died

O believe, my heart, o believe!

You have lost nothing.

Yours, what you craved.

Yours, what you loved,

What you sought.

O believe!

You were not born in vain.

You have not lived and suffered in vain.

What has arisen must pass away.

What has passed away, arise!

Cease to tremble;

Prepare to live!

O all-pervading pain, I have escaped you!

O all-conquering death, now you are conquered!

In fervent, loving aspiration,

Shall I soar to the light no eye has ever seen.

I shall die...

That I may live!

Arise!

Yes, you shall rise again, my heart,

In an instant.

What you have borne...

Shall bear you...

To God!