

# Theology Matters: Resurrection

## Session 3: Resurrection in the Epistles

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### The Renewal of All Things

Genesis 1-2 lays the foundation for a biblical view of creation. God created a perfect world, and at every point declared that it was 'good' (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The pinnacle of creation was a physical, fleshly, living, breathing being called 'man.' Once man (consisting of both male and female; Gen 1:27) inhabited this physical creation, 'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good' (Gen 1:31). One of the implications of this is that God loves matter; He esteems the physical world, and the physicality of man.

**"Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth" for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" (Rev 21:1-5)**

Revelation 21 and 22 use very physical language, drawing deeply from Genesis 1-2. They speak of a New Heaven and New Earth (Rev 21:1). There is a city, which descends from Heaven to Earth (21:2, 10); from where God resides to where we reside. This city is described in very physical terms, with walls, gates, dimensions, jewels and foundations (21:11-21), and we are invited to enter it (22:14). We are told that God who was previously in Heaven will now live with man on the Earth (21:3). Death, mourning, crying and pain will no longer exist in this New Creation (21:4) and so the curse of Genesis 3 will be entirely reversed. This process is described, not as an abolition of the physical in favour of a new spiritual existence, but rather God making all things new (21:5). The book of Revelation, and indeed the whole Bible, ends with the promise that Jesus will again come to earth, with no hint that he intends to take us away from here, but rather to bring with him all that God has promised, to renew this world (22:7, 12, 20).

So the two bookends of Scripture tell us that God values this material world. He made it perfect, and when man corrupted it, rather than doing away with the world, He planned to restore it.

As the Old Testament progressed, the prophets increasingly began to perceive that God's future plan involved a physical restoration of both our bodies and all of creation. (Dan 12:2; Is 26:19; 53:9-10; Hos 6:1-2; 13:14; Ezek 37:1-14). The Psalmists and the Prophets spoke of the frailty of the earth (Ps 102:25-28; Is 51:6) but also recognized that God would overcome this, by renewing that which man's sin had tainted.

Perhaps it is Isaiah who paints the clearest picture of a physical New Creation.

**'On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine – the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.'** (Isaiah 25:6-8)

He speaks of mountains and feasts (25:6-7, 10) and, with language clearly echoed in Revelation 21, describes God swallowing up death and wiping tears away from eyes (25:8).

Chapters 65 and 66 cement his eschatological vision, with God declaring:

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**'Behold, I will create a new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. They will not labour in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain," says the LORD.'** (Isaiah 65:17-25)

This new creation involves the building of houses, planting of vineyards, and working of hands (65:21-23). Creation will once again experience harmony, and the animal kingdom will be at peace (65:25).

### Personal Eschatology

1 Corinthians 15 is the earliest account we have of the resurrection, penned before the gospels, around AD 55. Paul spends a long time arguing that the resurrection is central to the gospel, and in fact if the resurrection is not true, then we have no basis for faith.

**'But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all.'** (1 Cor 15:20-28)

**Group Work:** Read through your allocated passage and consider the following questions:

- What does this passage say about life after death?
- What will it be like?
- When might it happen?

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### Group 1

**'If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you [...] For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.'** (Romans 8:11, 18-25)

### Group 2

**'For I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honoured in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.'** (Phil 1:19-26)

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## **Group 3**

**'But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.'** (1 Thess 4:13-18)

## **Group 4**

**'But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. Thus it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual that is first but the natural, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is 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. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.'** (1 Corinthians 15:35-49)

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## Group 5

**'I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"' (1 Corinthians 15:50-55)**

## Group 6

**'For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.' (2 Corinthians 5:1-10)**

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### **Conclusion**

We began the series by asking two questions. Now in the light of all that we have looked at, answer the following:

- What does the word 'resurrection' mean?
  
- What is going to happen to you when you die?
  
- How different are your answers now to those you gave in the first session?
  
- How should this affect the way we live now?