

RESURRECTION—CHRIST THE FIRST FRUITS

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A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them who slept.”
1 Corinthians 15:20.*

THE fact of Christ's resurrection is exceedingly well attested. It was necessary that it should be beyond dispute, since it lies at the very basis of our holy faith; it is consoling to think that it is so; for thus our foundation stands most secure. Our Lord was careful to show Himself after His resurrection to those who, having known Him before His decease would be able to answer for the identity of His person. Had He merely shown Himself to strangers, who had not known Him before, they might have been able to say that they had seen such a one, but they could not have affirmed that He was the same person who had been buried; but showing Himself to men like Thomas, and bidding them put their fingers into the print of the nails and thrust their hand into His side, He gave to men the most absolute proofs of His resurrection, and received from the most competent witnesses the most assured evidence that no deception had been practiced. “Handle Me, and see that it is I Myself,” was a challenge of identity all the more conclusive because it was addressed to the men who had known Him intimately during the whole period of His ministry! The witnesses were men who had nothing to gain by giving their evidence, but everything to lose; they were unlearned men, utterly unfitted to found or promulgate an impostor, and their evidence was so clearly borne out by the absence of the body of Christ from the tomb that it was found necessary to invent an impossible story in order to account for that absence. The eye-witnesses were just the right men, such as prudence would select if we had now to hand down such a transaction to future faith and history. Our Lord, to put the matter beyond controversy, took care to appear many times, and to numerous companies. Our apostle gives a summary of those appearances which had most fully come under his own notice. “He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, He was seen of above 500 brethren at once; of whom the greater part remains unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time” (1 Cor 15:5-8). From the evangelistic reports, we are led to believe that Christ appeared no less than 12 times to His disciples; for some of these instances which the apostle Paul mentions under one head, may include two or three appearances; as, for instance, “then of the twelve” may denote His two visits to the apostles; for you remember He first appeared to them when Thomas was absent, and afterwards when Thomas was present. Isaac Ambrose gives a summary of these appearances to this effect. He showed himself to Mary Magdalene by herself, then to all the Marys, next to Simon Peter, alone, afterwards to the two disciples journeying to Emmaus; to the 10 apostles when the doors were shut; to all the disciples when Thomas was with them; to Peter, John, and others while fishing in lake Tiberias; to 500 brethren at once; to James, the Lord's brother; to the 11 disciples in Galilee; to all the apostles and disciples at Olivet before His ascension; and lastly, to the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus. There may even have been more than these, for we have no proof that all His appearances are on record. Enough, however, we have, and more would answer no useful end.

So clear is the evidence of Christ's resurrection, that when Gilbert West—a celebrated infidel—selected this subject as the point of attack, sitting down to weigh the evidence and to digest the whole matter, although filled with prejudice, he was so startled with the abundant witness to the truth of this fact, that he expressed himself a convert, and has left as a heritage for coming generations a most valuable treatise, entitled, “*Observations on the Resurrection of Christ.*” He laid down certain laws of evidence to begin with, and then went to the matter as though he had been a lawyer examining the *pros* and *cons* of any matter in dispute; and this, which is the fundamental doctrine of our faith, seemed to him so exceedingly clear that he renounced his unbelief, and became a professor of Christianity!

Does it not strike you that very many events of the greatest importance recorded in history, and commonly believed, could not in the nature of things have been witnessed by one-tenth as many as the

resurrection of Christ? The signing of famous treaties affecting nations—the births of princes—the remarks of cabinet ministers—the projects of conspirators—and the deeds of assassins—any and all of these have been made turning points in history, and are never questioned as facts, and yet, few could have been present to witness them! I venture to assert that even the most recent political event, which has caused so much sorrow to our whole nation—the death of the lamented Prince Albert—had not nearly as many witnesses as the resurrection of Christ! If it came to a matter of dispute, it was far easier to prove that Christ is risen, than to prove that the Prince is dead! If it came to the counting of the witnesses who saw the Prince die, and could attest the identity of the body now resting in the royal vault with that which they saw fever-stricken in the bed-chamber, it strikes me they would turn out to be far fewer than those who saw the Lord after He had risen, and were persuaded that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified and had burst the bonds of death! If this fact is to be denied, there is an end to all witness, and we say deliberately what David said in haste—“All men are liars”—and from this day forth, every man must become so skeptical of his neighbor, that he will never believe anything which he has not himself seen! The next step will be to doubt the evidence of his senses; to what further follies men may then rush, I will not venture to predict! We believe that the very best attested fact in all history is the resurrection of Christ. Historical doubts concerning the existence of Napoleon Bonaparte, or the stabbing of Julius Caesar, or the Norman Conquest, would be quite as reasonable as doubts concerning the resurrection of the Lord Jesus! None of these matters have such witnesses as those who testify of Him—witnesses who were manifestly truthful, since they suffered for their testimony and most of them died humiliating and painful deaths as the results of their belief. We have more and better evidence for this fact than for anything else which is written in history, either sacred or profane! Oh, how should we rejoice, we who hang our salvation wholly upon Christ, that beyond a doubt it is established that, “Now is Christ risen from the dead.”

But you may ask the question at the outset, “Why is it that the resurrection of Christ is of so much importance?” Upon it we have said that the whole system of Christianity rests; for, “If Christ is not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain; you are yet in your sins” (1 Cor 15:14, 17). The *divinity* of Christ finds its surest proof in His resurrection, since the apostle tells us in the first chapter of Romans, at the fourth verse, that Christ was, “Declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” It would not be unreasonable to doubt His Deity if He had not risen! Moreover, Christ’s *sovereignty* also depends upon His resurrection, for Scripture affirms—“To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord, both of the dead and living” (Rom 14:9). Again, *our justification*, that choice blessing of the covenant, hangs upon Christ’s resurrection. “He was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom 4:25). No, more—our very *regeneration* depends upon His resurrection, for Peter, speaking by the Holy Spirit, exclaims, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). And most certainly our *ultimate resurrection* rests here; for, “If the Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead, dwells in you, He who raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwells in you” (Rom 8:11). If Christ is not risen, then shall we not rise! But if He is risen, then they who are asleep in Christ have not perished, but in their flesh shall surely behold their God. It would not be difficult to enlarge this catalog. The fact is that the silver thread of resurrection runs through all the blessings, from regeneration onward to our eternal glory, and binds them together!

It is time to pass on, and come more fully to the text. “But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them who slept.” Let me draw your attention, first of all, to *the pictures here given of the death of the saints*. Further, we shall observe *the singular relationship which exists between Christ’s resurrection, and the resurrection of the saints*. And before we leave the subject, we shall *suggest certain practical considerations arising from the doctrine before us*.

I. First of all, then, THE TEXT GIVES A VIEW OF DEATH VERY COMMON IN SCRIPTURE, BUT NOT SUFFICIENTLY ACCEPTED AMONG US.

The representations of the text, I take it, are twofold. Death is here compared to a sleep—“The first fruits of them who *slept*.” But moreover, you will plainly perceive, it is compared also to a sowing; for Christ is pictured as being “*the first fruits*.” Now, to a harvest there must have been a sowing. If the resurrection of Christ is the first fruits, then the resurrection of the elect must be looked upon as a harvest, and death would, therefore, be symbolized by a sowing.

1. First, then, we have before us the picture so commonly employed in Scripture of *death as a sleep*. We must not make a mistake by imagining that *the soul* sleeps. Such a heresy was once received by a large number of persons—it has long ago been rejected as being inconsistent—as well as with natural as with revealed religion. The soul undergoes no purgatorial purification or preparative slumber in the limbo of the fathers; beyond a doubt, “Today shall you be with Me in Paradise,” is the whisper of Christ to every dying saint! They sleep in Jesus, but their souls sleep not. They are before the throne of God, praising Him day and night in His temple—singing hallelujahs to Him who has washed them from their sins in His blood. It is the *body* that sleeps in its lonely bed of earth, beneath the coverlet of grass, with the cold clay for its pillow.

But what is this sleep? We all know that the surface idea connected with sleep is that of *resting*; that is doubtless just the thought which the Spirit of God would convey to us. The eyes of the sleeper ache no more with the glare of light or with the rush of tears; his ears are teased no more with the noise of strife or the murmur of suffering; his hands are no more weakened by long protracted effort and painful weariness; his feet are no more blistered with journeying to and fro along a rugged road; there is rest for aching heads, and strained muscles, and overtaxed nerves, and loosened joints, and panting lungs, and heavy hearts, in the sweet repose of sleep! On yonder couch, however hard, the laborer shakes off his toil, the merchant his care, the thinker his difficulties, and the sufferer his pains. Sleep makes each night a Sabbath for the day. Sleeps shuts, too, the door of the soul, and bids all intruders tarry for awhile, that the royal life within may enter into its summer garden of ease. From the sweat of his brow, man is delivered by sleep, and the thorn and thistle of the curse cease to tear his flesh. So is it with the body while it sleeps in the tomb. The weary are at rest; the servant is as much at ease as his lord. The galley slave no more tugs the oar, the slave forgets the whip. No more the worker leans on his spade, no more the thinker props his pensive head. The wheel stands still, the shuttle is not in motion, the hand which turned the one, and the fingers which threw the other are quiet! The body and all its members find the tomb a couch of sufficient length and breadth. The coffin shuts out all disturbance, labor, or effort. The toil-worn believer quietly sleeps, as does the child weary with its play, when it shuts its eyes and slumbers on its mother’s breast. Oh, happy they who die in the Lord! They rest from their labors, and their works do follow them. We would not shun toil, for though it is in itself a curse, it is, when sanctified, a blessing! Yet toil, for toil’s sake, we would not choose, and when *God’s* work is done, we are too glad to think that *our* work is done, too. The mighty husbandman, when we have fulfilled our day, shall bid His servants rest upon the best of beds, for the clods of the valley shall be sweet to them. Their repose shall never be broken until He shall wake them up to give them their full reward! Guarded by angels, curttained by eternal mysteries, resting on the lap of mother earth, you shall sleep on—you inheritors of glory—till the fullness of time shall bring you the fullness of redemption!

Moreover, we look upon sleep as a season of *forgetfulness*, and in this, too, it images death. “Their memory and their love are lost,” they are “alike, unknowing and unknown.” Their sons come to honor, and they know it not; or their seed degenerates, but it causes them no grief. Let armies march over their tombs—their tramp shall disturb them no more than the crawling of a worm; let the vault of heaven blaze with the flaming bolts of God, let the earth shake at the awful voice of the thunder, let the cedars be broken, let the rocks be shivered, let the sea roar; there, under their green hillocks, they slumber as peacefully as though it were a soft summer evening when the hum of a bee or the flitting of a fly were the only sounds! The dead may be remembered by their kinsfolk; but they remember not. They have forgotten the joys and the sorrows, the peace and the strife, the defeats and the victories of time. The soul forgets not, and we have no reason to believe that the glorified are ignorant of what is going on below. We have far more presumptive evidence that they “know even as they are known”—that they still have communion with the living Church on earth, and that the Church victorious is not sundered from the Church militant in point of knowledge; but as to their bodies, what do their bodies know? What does the human organism now understand? Take up the skull—see if there is memory there. Look at the place where once the heart was, and see if there is any trace of present emotion. Gather into your hands the bones—see if they are still obedient to muscles which could be moved at will as passing events might affect the mind. Try to discover any live coals amid your heap of ashes—a heart still quivering with delight, or an eye moistened by a sorrow. These dry bones are forgetful, indeed; steeped in forgetfulness, these decayed skeletons know nothing!

But yet, once more—sleep *has its intent and purpose*. We do not close our eyes without aim and open them again without benefit. The old cauldron of Medea has its full meaning in sleep. In the old tra-

dition, we read of Medea, the enchantress, casting the limbs of old men into her cauldron that they might come forth young again. Sleep does all this in its fashion. We are old enough oftentimes, after hours of thinking and of labor, but we sleep, and we wake refreshed, as though we were beginning a new life. The sun begins a new day when he rises from the eastern sea; and we begin a new life of renewed vigor when we rise from the couch of quiet rest.

“Tired nature’s sweet restorer, balmy sleep.”

Now, such is the effect of the body’s visit to its grave. The righteous are put into their graves all weary and worn; but such they will not rise. They go there with the furrowed brow, the hollowed cheek, the wrinkled skin; they shall wake up in beauty and glory. The old man totters there, leaning on his staff; the palsied comes there trembling all the way; the halt, the lame, the withered, the blind journey in doleful pilgrimage to the common dormitory, but they shall not rise decrepit, deformed, or diseased, but strong, vigorous, active, glorious, immortal! The shriveled seed, so destitute of form and comeliness, shall rise from the dust a beautiful flower! A green blade, all fresh and young, shall spring up where before there was the dried decayed grain. Well said the holy martyrs, when their limbs were being torn away—“We cheerfully resign these members to the God who gave them to us.” Our members are not ours to hold or lose, no torment can rob us of them in reality; for, when we wake up in Christ’s likeness, it will not be as halt or lame, but full of strength and vigor—more comely than earthly sons of men! The winter of the grave shall soon give way to the spring of resurrection and the summer of glory. Blessed is death, since it answers all the ends of medicine to this mortal frame, and through the divine power disrobes us of the leprous rags of flesh, to clothe us with the wedding garment of incorruption!

One reflection must not escape our notice—this is not a dreamy slumber. The sleep of some men is much more wearying than refreshing. Unbidden thoughts steal away the couch from under them and throw them on the rack. The involuntary action of the mind prevents us at times from taking rest in sleep. But not so with the dear departed. In that sleep of death, no dreams can come; nor do they feel a terror in undressing for that last bed, for no phantoms, visions, or terrors by night shall vex their peace! Their bodies rest in the most profound slumber. It is sleep, indeed, such as the Lord gives, for “So He gives His beloved sleep.”

Nor ought we ever to look upon it as a hopeless sleep; we have seen persons sleep who have been long emaciated by sickness, when we have said, “Those eyes will never open again; he will sleep himself from time into eternity.” We have felt that the sleep was the prelude of the eternal slumber, and might probably melt into it. But it is not so here. They sleep a healthy sleep—not thrown over them by death-bearing drugs, or fell disease, they sleep to wake, and not to die the second death. They sleep to wake—to wake in joyous fellowship, when the Redeemer stands in the latter day upon the earth! Sleep on, then, you servants of the Lord, for if you sleep, you shall do well; indeed, concerning these departed ones, we may well speak of taking rest in sleep!

Dear friends, ought not this view of death as a sleep to prevent our looking upon it in so repulsive a light? I know we like not to look at dead bodies; we are afraid to touch them. Some foolish people do not like to remain in the same house with a corpse, at least alone, or at night. There is a certain horror connected with the ruins of our earthly house. Did you ever feel horror at a sleeping child? Do you feel any sort of dread of your sleeping mother, or your slumbering husband or wife? Have you felt anything dreadful to draw back the curtain of the little cot and to gaze upon the sweet young face when the eyes are closed in happy sleep? Oh, why, then, should you think it dreadful to look upon the sleeping believer’s brow? True, there are marks of decay which are not pleasant to nature; but are they not the footprints of the retreating enemy and signs that the corruptible is passing away to make room for incorruption? Do not those very marks which mar the form indicate that the ragged smoke-blackened tent of Kedar is being pulled down so that the curtains of Solomon may glitter in their place, and that the soul may dwell there as in a fair pavilion? Oh, look not upon the departed as though they were dead, but speak of them as Christ did of His friend—“Our friend Lazarus sleeps.” Let the ears of your faith hear the Master say, “And I come that I may awake him out of his sleep.” Let not the grave seem more abhorrent to you than your bedchamber!

Let there be, by no means, such a view of the death of the redeemed as to wish them back again! Would you wish, when your friend has long been in excruciating pain, and at last falls into sleep, to shake him in his bed, to awake him, to tell him some idle tale? No; you have been watching for hours, and you have said, “Oh, that he could have a little sleep! Doctor! Can you not give some sleep to this poor tortured frame?” And at last you have said, “Thank God, his eyelids drop; speak softly; tread light-

ly; he sleeps!” And you have been afraid even to let your foot fall upon the ground, lest you should awaken him. And what? After all the pain, the suffering, the temptation, and the trial of your friends, do you wish to awaken them? Rather I think you should say, “I charge you, O you daughters of Jerusalem, that you ask not that he should be stirred up or awakened until Jesus pleases. Let him sleep on while the night lasts; and then, at the trump of the archangel, and the voice of God, he shall wake in the morning when the sun has risen upon the earth!”

2. The text affords us, however, a second figure. *Death is compared to a sowing*. The black mold has been plowed; certain dry-looking seeds are put into a basket, and the farmer takes his walk, and with both hands he scatters right and left, broadcast, his handfuls of seeds. Where have they gone? They have fallen into the crevices of the earth; the clods will soon be raked over them, and they will disappear. So is it with us. Our bodies, here, are like those dry grains of wheat. There is nothing very comely in a grain of wheat, nor yet in our bodies. Indeed, Paul calls them “these vile bodies.” Death comes—we call him a reaper—mark, I call him a sower—and he takes these bodies of ours, and sows us broadcast in the ground. Go to the cemetery, and see his fields; mark how thickly he has sown his furrows! How closely he has plowed the rows! What narrow headlands he has left! We say, they are there *buried*. I say, they are *sown*. They are dead, say we; no, say I, they are put into the earth—but they shall not abide there forever! In some sense, these holy bodies of the just are dead; “For that which you sow is not quickened unless it dies,” but it is not a death unto death, but rather a death leading unto *life*! That molding body is no deader than yonder decaying seed which you have just now disturbed in its bed of earth, it shall soon spring up again and you shall see a harvest. We do lose sight, it is true, and of those who have gone from us, for there must be a burial, how else can the seed grow? Truly it is never a pleasant sound, that rattle of the clay upon the coffin lid. “Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes,” nor to the farmer, for it’s own sake, would it be a very pleasant thing to put his grain into the dull cold earth; yet I know of no farmer who ever wept when he sowed his seed! We have not heard the farmers groan and sigh when they scatter their baskets of seed corn; rather, we have heard them cheerily singing the song of mirth, and have heard them anticipate the reaper’s joy, when they have trod the furrows! Have you seen them robed in black, or wearing the dull clothes of mourning, while they tread the brown ridges of the fertile earth? We grant you that in itself considered, it were no wise or gladsome thing to bury precious grain amid dead clods of earth, but viewed in the light of harvest, since there must be a burial, and after the burial, rottenness and decay, both of these lose all traces of sorrow, and become prophets of joy! The body must become worms’ meat; it must crumble back to its former elements, for “dust you are, and unto dust shall you return”; but this is no more our sorrow, for, “In Christ shall all be made alive.”

Nor will we even mourn because of the stench and rottenness of death. The life germ in the grain of wheat must begin to feed on the food laid up in store for it; a kind of decay must seem to take place; but I know no farmer ever weeps because the seed which he has put into the ground has swollen and lost its former size and shape! He never mourns if he is told the seed he has put into the ground is undergoing the death that is necessary for its future growth. No, he rejoices in patient hope! Why then, you worms, should you force me to weep? And why, corruption, should you make me sigh? Rather will I call you my brothers and my mother, for your kindly glooms are but part of the road to immortality!

After sowing and decay, comes a springing up, and the farmer soon perceives, in a few short weeks, the little green blade—the son of the buried life. So with the dead! There is soon to come, and how soon we do not know—the springing up; we shall thus perceive that they were not lost, but only committed to the grave, in readiness for “the redemption”—put there that our souls might, when reunited, receive them in a better and nobler form!

Dear friends, if such is death—if it is but a sowing, let us have done with all faithless, hopeless, graceless sorrow! “The granary is empty,” says the farmer. Yes, but he does not sigh over it; for the seed is put into the ground, in order that the granary may be filled again! “Our family circle has been broken,” you say. Yes, but only broken that it may be formed again! You have lost a dear friend—yes, but only lost that friend that you may find him again, and find more than you lost! They are not lost; they are sown; and as “light is sown for the righteous,” so are the righteous sown for light. The stars are setting here to rise in other skies to set no more. We are quenched like torches only to be lit once more with all the brilliance of the sun!

II. We will not tarry longer on this point, but rapidly carry you to the second—THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST AND THAT OF BELIEVERS.

The text tells us that Christ is “The first fruits of them who slept.” Some professors take very great delight in the hope that they may be “alive and remain,” at the coming of Christ, and so may never die. I confess I greatly rejoice in the hope that Christ will come; but the prospect of never dying has no sort of charms for me, for I think those who never die lose a great privilege; at least, to our comprehension it seems so, for Christ is “The first fruits of them *who slept*.” Oh, then, it is a blessed thing to sleep, that Christ may be to us in the relationship of first fruits! They who never die can hardly know so much of fellowship with Christ in His death as those who fall asleep in Jesus. Whereas, you and I, who feel the pin’s prick of the dart of death, will be able to say in eternity, “I too passed through the grave. He was with me passing through the valley of the shadow of death; I, in my own proper person, knew a death and a resurrection too, even as did my Lord, which you who never died can only understand by hearsay and report.” Oh, happy they who die! They who are alive and remain shall not precede them in any privilege or honor.

But what is meant by Christ being “the first fruits”? You will remember that there was a feast of the Jews called the feast of first fruits, when the first sheaf was brought out from the harvest as a token of the whole, and first of all, heaved upward as a heave-offering, and then waved to and fro as a wave-offering, being thus dedicated to God, in testimony of the gratitude of the holders of the soil for the harvest which the Lord had given. Now, this happened on the first day of the week. You will remember that the Passover was celebrated first; then came a Sabbath Day; then, after that came the feast of first fruits. So Christ died on the Passover day; He, as the slaughtered Lamb of God, of God’s Passover, died exactly at the Passover season. The next day was the Sabbatical rest—Christ’s body, therefore, tarried in the grave. Then, early in the morning of the first day, before it was yet light, while yet the sun was rising upon the earth, Christ rose—on the morning of the feast of the first fruits; and so He is revealed as the blessed Wave Sheaf preceding and consecrating the whole harvest!

But the uninstructed believer asks me to explain at greater length. Beloved, remember then, *that Christ was the first that rose from the dead in order of time*. You will mention to me Enoch and Elijah. We answer that they never died, but were translated that they should not see death. You will remind me of the widow’s son who was raised by Elijah, and the young man restored by Elisha. Yes, but these are not cases in point. They were raised, but they died again. All the instances in the Old Testament are only temporary restorations, and so also those in the New. In no instance, save in that of Lazarus, were any of them buried at all, so that none of them came out of their graves; and even in the case of Lazarus, he lived but to die; he had a furlough from the tomb; but at the expiration of the due time, his body was yielded to the appointed keeper. Christ was the first who really rose no more to die! He leads the vanguard through the dark, and His brow first salutes the light of the plains of heaven beyond the gloom. Men admire the man who is first to discover a new country; the name of Columbus shall ring in the ears of ages, because he first crossed the stormy sea to win another world; the name of the man who climbed the mountains, and first saw the broad Pacific with exceedingly great joy, is well remembered. Oh, then, sing it in songs, sound it with voice of trumpet to the ends of the earth—Christ is the first who returned from the jaws of death to tell of immortality and light!

He is also *first in point of cause*; for as He comes back from the grave, He brings all His followers behind Him in one glorious train! We read of Hercules in the old mythology descending into Hades and bringing up his friend. Verily, went Christ there, and He gave no sop to Cerberus, but cut off his head. Like a sun, He suddenly flashed upon the night of death and scattered its darkness! Like Samson in Gaza, He tore up the gates of death and carried away the bars of the grave. Like David, He delivered His flock out of the jaws of the lion, and took the monster by the beard and slew him. Like Abraham, He resumed triumphantly from the slaughter of the kings. Like Moses, He led His Israel out of the house of bondage. With ten thousand times ten thousand, He came forth with a high hand and an outstretched arm. Who is this who comes up from the land of darkness—from the gates of the grave? Who is this that drags behind Him captive the grim prince of the realms of death shade? Who is this, so strong, so mighty, that adamantine walls give way before Him, and gates of brass are broken in two? It is He! It is He! It is the same conqueror who came from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah! The victory on the cross is succeeded by a victory in the tomb! He who won heaven for earth when He died, wins heaven for the dead when He descends into the grave. Sound His praises! Proclaim His victories! Let heaven itself take up the strain; He has “led captivity captive,” rifled the grave, and robbed death of his sting! He is the death of death, and Hell’s destruction!

But then, again, He is first *in point of pledge*. The first fruits were a pledge of the harvest. “From where, O husbandman, from where have you brought yonder sheaf?” “I gathered it,” he says, “from the fields that are waving with plenty.” “Verily,” says the priest, “the harvest is plenteous this year, and full and many are the ears, for this sheaf bears good witness.” From where, O divine power, did You bring this glorious sheaf, this body of our Lord, so bright and glorious? From where did You bring it, O Spirit of the Lord? Is there a harvest of many shocks of corn such as this? “Yes, verily,” says the teacher; “This is but one among many, the first born among many brethren.” We know right well that there must be a glorious harvest of resurrection forms and immortal bodies, since Jesus Christ, clothed in immortality and light, walks among the sons of men, the Pledge of all the rest!

He was, again, the first fruits, not only as a pledge, but as the *representative* of the whole. When the first fruit sheaf had been waved before God, it was considered that all the harvest had been brought into the sanctuary; it was all dedicated, all consecrated, from that very hour. So when Christ rose as a heave offering from the sepulcher, and when He went about among the people as a wave offering, moving among His disciples, He consecrated the whole harvest! All the righteous dead were virtually risen in Him; all the chosen members of His body had a resurrection when their head appeared as “risen indeed.” And moreover, they were all dedicated and consecrated to God, by His dedication as the first fruits to the Most High! Triumph, you children of God, triumph in this! You are risen in Christ today! We see not the saints as yet ascended; rather, we see their bones dried in the valley, and we ask, “Can these dry bones live?” But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, and we know that He is risen, and sits at the right hand of the Father, and by faith, we perceive that as our covenant head, He has raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places even in Him, for He is the head over all things to His Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him that fills all-in-all! Never doubt, believer, of your resurrection, since the second Adam was loosed from the bands of the tomb!

III. And now, lastly, we will close by noticing THE INFLUENCE OF THE WHOLE DOCTRINE OF THE RESURRECTION AND CHRIST’S CONNECTION WITH IT UPON OUR OWN SPIRITS.

First, let us look well to the *holiness of our bodies*. “Know you not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit? If any man defiles the temple of God, him will God destroy.” We do not believe in consecrated churches; we think it altogether absurd to talk of holy bricks and mortar; but we do know by Scriptural authority that the body is holy—that the body of the saint is as really holy as men pretend that churches and temples may be. Now, brothers and sisters, if our eyes look upon vanity, we have defiled the windows of God’s house; if our tongues speak that which is evil, have we not desecrated the gates of the temple of the Lord? Let us see to it that our feet carry us nowhere but where our Master can go with us, lest the pillars of our house become our destruction, like the pillars of the Philistine temple of old! Let us mind that our hands be outstretched for nothing but that which is pure and lovely, lest like Belshazzar we profane the vessels of the Lord’s temple. They who pamper the body, they who look to its adornment, they who regard its physical health more than its moral purity, forget the higher end of their being; for what is beauty after all? What is the comeliness which human skill can give? See that skull? “Go, take that to my lady’s chamber, and tell her, though she paints herself an inch thick, to that complexion must she come at last!” And say to all who think so much of comeliness and goodliness—that deadly brown, which worms and earth shall bring upon you, that is the natural complexion of man, and to that the fairest must be bronzed at last! But there is another way of minding your complexion, by seeing that your cheeks never need be reddened with shame, that your hands are never black with evil deeds, that your flesh is not soiled by lasciviousness, or contact with that which is evil. “Will you take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot?” asks the apostle Paul, when he bids men see to it that their bodies are chaste and pure! Know you not that your very flesh, if you are Christians, has been bought with Christ’s blood, and that precious is your very dust in His sight? Mind you, O mind you, that the slime of the serpent come not here, and that you defile not the members of your body, lest the Lord abhor you, and cast you out from His presence, as things He cares not for, being none of His!

Let us look at things in this light, and so, by the Holy Spirit, escape from sin. What? Shall these eyes that are one day to, “See the king in His beauty,” be delighted with vanity? Shall these lips that are to be tuned to melodious sonnets “sung by flaming tongues above,” talk that which is light and frivolous, and ministers not unto edification? What? Shall these fingers that are to strike the golden harps be given up to work unrighteousness with greediness? No, as we are to be fellows with the angels, and more glorious

than they, and as these bodies are to be made like unto Christ's body, let us keep them pure, washed with clean water by His Spirit, renewed and preserved, that we go not astray unto sin!

But, secondly, another thought arises here. *Are we among those for whom Christ thus stood as first fruits?* For Christ is to rise first, as the first fruits; "afterwards, they who are Christ's, at His coming." Then, when do the wicked rise? There are two resurrections; and "Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection; on such the second death has no power." When the Lord shall come from heaven, with the trump of the archangel and the voice of God, then the dead in Christ shall suddenly start from their sleep, and shall be offered to God as the great harvest, the great Pentecost, of which Christ's resurrection was the first fruits. What then shall become of the wicked? They shall continue rotting in their graves; the worm shall feed upon them; they shall be ashes beneath the feet of the saints; and while the righteous shall tread this earth, and, on the scene of their conflict, enjoy a thousand years of triumph with Christ; while Christ's feet shall stand in the latter day upon Mount Olivet; while His people shall bow around Him, and shall reign with Him triumphant over the creature that was once subject to vanity, beneath their feet shall be the dead bodies of their ungodly persecutors, and deep down in their graves shall rot those infamous kings and princes, and those careless crowds and nations who knew not Jehovah, and would not be obedient unto His Son! They said, "Let us break His bands asunder; let us cast His cords from us." And now, where are they? "Death has dominion over them in the morning and the righteous triumph over them, while they lie shamefully like those who fall in battle, a portion for foxes."

But what then? When the splendors of the millennial age are over, and then comes the end; the King shall ascend the judgment seat; He who came to reign with His people, shall suddenly, sitting upon His throne, bid His angel proclaim the last judgment. Then, unwillingly shall souls, tormented in Hell, come back from Tophet to be reunited with their equally guilty bodies, and He, who is able to destroy both body and soul in Hell, shall say, "Gather them together in bundles to burn them." He shall pronounce their sentence, "Depart, you cursed, into everlasting fire in Hell, prepared for the devil and his angels." Oh, that you and I may be among the harvest, and not the vintage! There are two ingatherings mentioned, you remember, in the Revelation. The harvest is the gathering in of the righteous; they are carefully housed in God's barn. The vintage is the gathering of the wicked; they are cast into the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God, "and they are trod under foot till their blood runs forth up to the horses' bridles." Now, how am I to know whether I belong to that portion of which Christ is the first fruits? Why, thus—If Christ rose for me, and if I rose in Him, then I died in Him! Oh, soul, do you believe that Christ died for you? Have you a part in His passion? Do you hope in His agonies? Do you rest on His cross? If so, He who died for you rose for you too, and you are a part of that holy lump of which Christ was the holy offering. Have you died with Christ yourself? Are you dead to the world? Do you hate the things that you once loved? Are you weaned from your old pleasures? Do you seek for something higher and better? Ah, then, if you have died with Him, you are risen with Him! Say now, do you desire to be one with Christ? For if you are one with Him in heart, you shall be one with Him in all His trophies and His glories! Do you say, "No, I care not for Christ"? Soul! Soul! If you die in that mind you shall have no part in the first resurrection; but when the wicked rise, then shall you "Awaken to shame and everlasting contempt." But, and if you say in your heart this morning, "I believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead according to the Scriptures, and I put my sole and only trust in Him; He is to me all my salvation, and all my desire," go your way; you shall "stand in your lot at the end of the days." You shall have your portion among them who are sanctified; you shall rejoice together with Him, and sit down at His marriage banquet forever!

God add His own blessing, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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