

B. The Resurrection

The final, everlasting kingdom promised throughout the Old Testament scriptures has been realized in Christ. This is evident on at least three accounts:

- First, Christ is true *Man*. Jesus is the fulfillment and fullness of man – the being uniquely created in the divine image and likeness in order to exercise God’s creational dominion as royal image-son (cf. Genesis 1:26-30, 2:7-15; Luke 3:38).
- But He is also the true *David*. At the time of the Fall God promised to deliver His creation from its estrangement and to do so through a man. But the creation account indicates God’s design that the created order should have the form of a *kingdom*, implying that His restored creation would share the same structure. This implication became explicit with the Abrahamic Covenant; God promised a kingdom to Abraham and this promise found its first fulfillment in the Israelite theocracy. That prototypical manifestation of the Abrahamic kingdom came to its full expression under David’s reign, and God promised in the Davidic Covenant that the true, everlasting kingdom portrayed by the Israelite theocracy would similarly be established by a regal descendent of David. The New Testament shows Jesus of Nazareth to be that son of David (2 Samuel 7:1-17; cf. Acts 2:22-36, 13:32-39 with Psalm 2, 110; Romans 1:1-4 with Ephesians 1:18-22).
- Finally, Jesus came as the prophesied *Servant of Yahweh* and *Man of the Spirit* (Isaiah 11:1ff, 42:1-7, 61:1-3; Luke 4:16-21; cf. also Matthew 12:27-28). It was in His Servant, the Branch of David – the One who would possess the fullness of His Spirit – that the Lord would establish and administer the consummate kingdom of His restored creation.

Jesus inaugurated the promised kingdom at His first coming, but according to the paradigm of *already-but-not-yet*. The Servant has triumphed through His self-offering and thereby effected Zion’s renewal such that she is now gathering in the sons of the kingdom (Isaiah 49-54). Those sons commemorate the Servant’s work by their participation in His Table (1 Corinthians 11:26), but in so doing they look forward as much as backward; they eat and drink in anticipation of the day when they will eat in the Lord’s presence in the fullness of His kingdom (Luke 22:14-18).

And precisely because the kingdom of the new creation is ultimate and everlasting, Christ’s inauguration of this kingdom is His inauguration of the eternal state. Eternity was introduced with His first coming and it will be consummated at His return. There are several aspects of that consummation, the first of which is the *bodily resurrection* associated with the renewal of the entire material creation.

1. More than any other biblical theme, resurrection speaks to the central kingdom principle of “life out of death.” Again, God’s declared determination to recover His estranged creation was His promise to sovereignly bring life out of death. Estrangement is death, so that reconciliation implies life from the dead. Throughout the time of preparation, God continually reaffirmed this kingdom principle, eventually bringing it to its realization in Jesus’ resurrection. By it the Lord didn’t merely triumph over the grave; *He more importantly inaugurated the “life” that is consummate, glorified humanness.*

- a. Jesus' resurrection manifested the fact that God had fulfilled His promise to bring renewal and restoration to His creation, specifically in relation to *man*. Thus Christ's victory over death and His emergence into consummate life weren't purely self-referential. His resurrection testified to the world that the new creation had finally been inaugurated; He is the *first fruits* of God's renewal such that His life out of death ultimately comprehends the whole created order. But being the Last Adam, Jesus is the first fruits of the new creation with particular respect to the human race: "*For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive*" (ref. 1 Corinthians 15:20-22).
- b. Jesus' life out of death as the Last Adam means life out of death for Adam's fallen race. But His impartation of His life to men has two distinct components consistent with the overarching principle of already-but-not-yet:
 - 1) Jesus' resurrection life is first imparted to men through the *new birth*. Through faith in Him and the power of His life-giving Spirit, men are delivered from death and joined to Him so as to share in His own consummate ("eternal") life (cf. John 5:24, 8:12, 10:10).

Moreover, the new birth translates a person from death into life in two respects: First of all, the believer is delivered from death as the determinative reality that defined him in his estrangement from God (Romans 6:1-11; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:1-6). But he also enters into Christ's life having "died" to his former nature and the governance of the "old order" of things (Colossians 2:6-3:11, ref. esp. 2:20-3:4).

- 2) Christ has inaugurated eschatological life in Himself and men enter into it through personal union with Him by His Spirit. In Him, they presently possess eternal life: Through the new birth, they have been "glorified" in obtaining the consummate humanness of the eternal state. But they don't possess His life *fully*: The "already" aspect of eternal life pertains to the human spirit, while the "not yet" points to the fullness of life to be realized in the resurrection of the body. This second aspect of resurrection (as "life out of death") involves the complete overthrow and "death" of death.

Christ's first coming saw the destruction of death as *spiritual estrangement*; His second coming will bring the end of death as *creational corruption*. Though the whole creation has been reconciled to God through Christ's redemptive work (Colossians 1:19-20), it is only man in his spiritual aspect that presently enjoys the life of that reconciliation. Man's physicality – together with the rest of the material creation – still exists under the corruption associated with the curse. But precisely because man is both body and soul, the future triumph of immortality and imperishability in the resurrection of the body is a central feature of the New Testament's eschatological hope.

2. As resurrection speaks to participation in Christ's *life*, so it also speaks to participation in His *likeness*. The reason, again, is that, being the Last Adam, Jesus is the fountainhead – the source and substance – of a new race of men that constitutes God's consummate humanity. And because human destiny resides in Christ, the impartation of His likeness as well as His life applies equally to both human components of body and soul.

- The “first resurrection” that is the new birth generates the life of Christ in the believer's *spirit*, and that life is then nurtured and progressively perfected by Christ's Spirit as He transforms him in the inner man into the likeness of the Savior (2 Corinthians 3:18).
- So also, the aspect of “life” that is Jesus' own consummate, glorified *physicality* is imparted to those who are His at His return. This is the second resurrection (ref. 1 Corinthians 15:42-49; Philippians 3:20-21; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 1 John 3:2; cf. also 2 Corinthians 4:13-14).

Both body and soul have been appointed to share in the life and likeness of Christ, but each in its own order. The first “resurrection” occurs at the point of regeneration with Christ's *spiritual* epiphany in the heart; the second at Christ's *physical* epiphany at the close of the age. In the interim, Christians – along with everything else under the present form of the new creation – exist in the already-but-not-yet state. This is the case not simply with respect to the incompleteness of their spiritual conformity to Christ, but also in the essential discontinuity between their spirits and bodies (Romans 8:9-11).

- a. The most obvious issue in the discontinuity between the believer's body and soul pertains to the present earthly existence. As Paul observed, the Christian's spirit is now alive because of righteousness, but the body is dead (corrupt and mortal) because of sin. But of equal importance is the body-soul discontinuity that characterizes the *intermediate state* which follows upon physical death.

Christians already possess eternal life such that the grave holds no terror and has no ultimate power over them; for them, “*to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 5:8; cf. Philippians 1:23). They presently share in Christ's resurrection so that physical death only transforms faith into sight. And yet this transition doesn't consummate Christ's life in them:

- The intermediate state that follows death brings the release of the soul from the body's corruption and constraint, but it leaves the Christian “unclothed” and incomplete, waiting to be clothed with his heavenly “tabernacle” (2 Corinthians 5:1-4).
- Even as Christians on this side of the grave are marked by deep longing as they live in faith and hope (Romans 8:23-24; Philippians 3:17-21; Titus 2:11-13; etc.), so the spirits of departed saints await the day of Christ's Parousia when the new creation inaugurated by Him is brought to its consummate and all-comprehending fullness.

- b. When Christ returns, the “not yet” dimension of the believer’s conformity to His life and likeness will be realized. In the present age, the spirits of Christians participate in the new creation while their bodies remain subject to corruption, and this discontinuity within their humanity is maximized at death when the body is relegated to the grave and the spirit enters the Lord’s presence. But man wasn’t created to be a non-corporeal being: Man is body as well as soul, so that his transformation into Christ-likeness must extend to every aspect of his humanity.

In this regard the Christian’s redemption is incomplete and anticipates the Lord’s glorious appearing. At that time “*the dead in Christ will rise*” and those believers “*who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord*” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). The perfected spirits of believers will then be reunited with their glorified bodies; then at last the “unclothed” saints will be clothed with their “*dwelling from heaven*” (2 Corinthians 5:1-4).

This bodily resurrection/renewal is the “second resurrection” and is the precursor to the final judgment and disposition of all men that ushers in the consummate eternal state. For some, this resurrection and conjoining of body and spirit will fit them for judgment and condemnation; for others, it will complete their conformity to Christ and equip them for eternity in the heavenly kingdom (cf. John 5:25-29; Revelation 20:11-15; also Matthew 25:31-46).

Thus the bodily resurrection of dead believers must not be regarded as merely the reconstitution and reanimation of their physical substance. *The issue isn’t the animation of dead flesh, but the **christiformity** of the whole man*; the resurrection of the last day serves to consummate mankind’s decreed participation in the life and likeness of the True Man (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:3-12). As believers have born the earthy nature of the first Adam, so they must bear in fullness the heavenly nature of the Last Adam. “Flesh and blood” are unsuited to the spiritual new creation that is the new heavens and earth (1 Corinthians 15:42-53).

Though glorified, incorruptible and eternal, the resurrection body will nonetheless be truly physical and material, able to function in accordance with the dynamics of human physical existence in this age (ref. again Luke 24:36-40; cf. also John 21:1-14). And yet, it will transcend the definitions and limitations of the present order of things. Being a “heavenly” body, it will operate according to the principles of the heavenly realm (Luke 24:28-31; John 20:26; Acts 1:9).

The resurrection of the last day thus speaks to the present as much as to the future. It sets in front of all men the consummation to come, and thereby calls them to rightly judge the present. For the unbelieving, it warns them that neither time, death, nor decay will separate them from the day of reckoning appointed for all men. At the same time, it holds out to them Christ’s power over death and destruction as the Lord and giver of life. For the saints, the final resurrection is a reminder that they already enjoy Christ’s resurrection life; even now they have passed out of death into the life of eternity. For them, the resurrection of their bodies will simply consummate their transformation into the likeness of the True Image (1 Corinthians 15:54-58).