

More on the Bodily Resurrection of the Dead (John 5:28-30, Part B)

Expository Lessons from the Gospel of John

I. Review from Previous Lesson

- a. Jesus heals a man who had been crippled 38 years. Accused of breaking the Sabbath by “working”.
- b. Jesus defends His actions by declaring that He, like His Father, is working on the Sabbath: making Himself equal with God. He then goes on to explain that His Father has entrusted all judgment to Him.
- c. Jesus speaks about the bodily resurrection of all the dead, which will happen when He returns. He says,
 - i. “...The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (**John 5:28-29**, NKJV)
- d. The resurrection of the body is a foundational Christian doctrine.
 - i. Some pagan Greek philosophers like Plato believed in one God and that we have an eternal soul that lives on after death.
 - ii. However, in the ancient world only Christians (plus *some of* the Jews, and perhaps the Zoroastrians of Persia) believed in a bodily resurrection.
 - iii. This teaching is throughout the New Testament.
 1. **1 Corinthians 15**, essentially the entire chapter is devoted to this teaching.
 2. In **Hebrews 6:1-4**, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment (all to be judged at the same time, on the Last Day; with those who died before being bodily raised) are two of the six “elementary teachings” of the faith.
 - iv. This is such an important foundational teaching that I want to devote this additional lesson to a deeper study of this subject. Understanding this will help us to see many passages in the New Testament more clearly. It will have important implications on our faith and walk with God.

II. Further Thoughts on Bodily Resurrection of the Dead

- a. Early Christian writers had a great deal to say about the resurrection of the body. Also, it is included in the *Apostles Creed*, a brief statement of the orthodox Christian faith from ancient times. It goes back to at least 390 AD, and a very similar profession is documented by Tertullian c. 200 AD. The *Creed* acknowledges belief in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and it summarizes the most basic things a new believer would have to confess in order to be baptized.
 - i. The *Apostles Creed* concludes, "I believe in... the resurrection of the body (*literally, in Greek and Latin, the resurrection of the flesh -CP*) and life everlasting. Amen."
- b. In **John 5:28-29**, in speaking about the general resurrection of the dead on the Last Day, Jesus was confirming something that many Jews already believed (namely that the dead ultimately would be bodily raised). So, *that* was not a new teaching. However, what *was* a new teaching was Jesus' statement that He would be the one to call all the dead out of their graves.
- c. At the time of Jesus, some Jews believed in the resurrection while others did not. This created significant tension at several points in the New Testament, pitting the Sadducees (who did not believe in the resurrection) against *both* the Pharisees and the followers of Jesus (who did believe).
 - i. Read **Matthew 22:23-33**
 1. Here the Sadducees try to trap Jesus with a trick question about the resurrection. They set him up with (they think only) two alternatives, both of which would get Jesus in trouble: either deny the resurrection, or endorse the sin of polyandry (a wife having multiple husbands).
 2. Jesus begins his response by saying, "you're wrong"! (He must not have read the books on good *active listening*!)
 3. He further says that they are wrong for two reasons:
 - a. They do not know the Old Testament Scriptures, and
 - b. They do not know the power of God.
 4. Since the Sadducees only considered the Five Books of Moses to be authoritative (while the Pharisees and others fully accepted the authority of the Prophets and the Writings as well), Jesus used a passage from Moses, **Exodus 3:6**, to make His case.

5. Jesus makes his case based on the tense of one word in the **Exodus 3** account of Moses at the burning bush. There, God said “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” He did NOT say “I was the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”
 - a. If that is the kind of confidence that Jesus and even his opponents put on the Old Testament Scriptures, inspiration down to the tense of a single word, we should have the same attitude!
 6. Jesus further explains that marriage and procreation will not continue after the resurrection. In that regard, people will become like the angels in heaven.
- d. Let’s look at other examples of the tension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees in regards to the belief of the bodily resurrection, illustrating the significance of this issue.
- i. After the apostle Peter heals the crippled man in **Acts 3** and preaches in Jerusalem, he is confronted by a group of priests and Sadducees. Consider what they are upset about.
 1. “Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening.” (**Acts 4:1–3**, NKJV)
 - ii. Later, after the death of Ananias and Sapphira, plus more healings by the apostles:
 1. “Then the *high priest rose up, and all those who were with him* (which is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison.” (**Acts 5:17–18**, NKJV)
 2. Note that while the Sadducees were not large in number, they held very influential positions in Jewish society. The high priest and his associates were of the Sadducees.
 - iii. After Paul is seized in Jerusalem after creating a great disturbance, he is brought before the Sanhedrin.
 1. “But when Paul *perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees*, he cried out in the council, ‘Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and

resurrection of the dead I am being judged! And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both. Then there arose a loud outcry. And the scribes of the Pharisees' party arose and protested, saying, 'We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him, let us not fight against God.' Now when there arose a great dissension, the commander, fearing lest Paul might be pulled to pieces by them, commanded the soldiers to go down and take him by force from among them, and bring him into the barracks." (**Acts 23:6–10**, NKJV)

2. Things we notice from this passage:
 - a. Paul is being quite shrewd, isn't ready to die yet! (Perhaps he realizes there is more work to be done.)
 - b. Paul notices that there were both Pharisees and Sadducees in the Sanhedrin.
 - c. He skillfully exploits their differences by crying out, in essence, "I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee...and I am being persecuted for my hope in the resurrection of the dead."
 - d. One of the Pharisees jumps to Paul's defense, and a riot breaks out between the two groups.
 - e. The Roman commander has to pull Paul out to avoid having him torn to pieces.

- iv. Later, under arrest, Paul defends himself before Governor Felix. Let us read **Acts 24:14-15**, a very important passage where Paul recounts:
 1. "But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust." (**Acts 24:14–15**, NKJV)
 2. Paul anchors his defense on the belief that he and his Jewish forefathers had in the resurrection of the dead (both the just and the unjust).

3. This belief in the resurrection, according to Paul, was based on the Law and the Prophets (the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament).
- e. According to Jesus and Paul (and the Pharisees would have agreed here), the Jewish Scriptures clearly teach that there will be a resurrection of the bodies of all the dead.
 - i. Jesus rebuked the Sadducees in **Matthew 22**, “You are mistaken...not knowing the Scriptures....”
 - ii. Paul in **Acts 24** tells Felix that he and his Jewish forefathers believed in the resurrection of the dead based on the Law and the Prophets.
- f. My question to you: What are Jesus and Paul talking about? How did the Jews know that? Where does it talk about the dead being raised?

III. Where Does it Talk About Resurrection of the Dead in the Old Testament?

- a. For those who were at our Wednesday midweek meeting, I asked this question and gave you a few days to think about it. Now let’s explore this.
- b. Early Christian writers had a lot to say about the resurrection of the flesh, (the body), writing both to unbelieving pagans and to struggling Christians. We will look at some of the passages from the Old Testament that they pointed to, in defending this teaching.
 - i. “For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God” (**Job 19:25-26**, NKJV)
 1. In the LXX it is even more compelling: “For I know that He is everlasting. He who is about to set me free on the earth and to raise up my skin that endures these things; for these have been accomplished for me by the Lord” (**Job 19:25-26**, LXX, OSB)
 2. The Greek word in the Septuagint for “raise up” my skin is the same word used throughout the New Testament for *resurrect*: ἀνίστημι (anistemi).
 - a. (The Septuagint, abbreviated LXX, is the Old Testament version quoted by the apostles and used by the early church.
 3. This passage from **Job** is cited by Clement of Rome to support belief in the resurrection of the body. Clement was a bishop of the church in Rome writing c. 95 AD, in *The First Epistle of Clement*, in ANF vol. 1, p. 12.

- ii. “The dead shall rise up; and those in the tombs shall arise. Those in the earth shall be glad, for your dew is a healing of them, but the land of the ungodly shall come to an end.” (Isaiah 26:19, LXX, OSB)
 1. Irenaeus, bishop of the church in Lyon (modern France), writing c. 190 AD, quoted this passage in defending the resurrection of the dead and remarked, “Isaiah himself has *plainly declared* that there shall be joy of this nature at the resurrection of the just.” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, in ANF vol. 1, p. 563)
- iii. (A heavenly spokesman announces to Daniel things that will happen in the future.) “Then many of those *who sleep in the dust of the earth* shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to disgrace and everlasting shame. Those who understand shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and some who are righteous, like the stars of heaven forever and ever.” (Daniel 12:2-3, LXX, OSB)
 1. In this passage, “sleep” is being used as a metaphor for death. Therefore, the passage teaches that both the good and the wicked shall be raised: either to everlasting glory, or to everlasting shame.
 2. Origen (Christian teacher from Alexandria, Egypt, c. 185-255 AD) points to this in defending the resurrection of the dead in *Against Celsus*, in ANF vol. 4, p. 547
 3. “But as concerning the resurrection of the dead, and the recompense of reward for the martyrs, Gabriel speaks to Daniel: ‘And many of them that sleep shall arise out of the dust of the earth, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that understand shall shine as the sun, and as the firmament, and as the stars.’ Therefore, the most holy Gabriel foretold that the saints should shine like the stars: for His sacred name did witness to them, that they might understand the truth. Nor is a resurrection only declared for the martyrs, but for all men, righteous and unrighteous, godly and ungodly, that everyone may receive according to as he deserves.” (Source: *Apostolic Constitutions*, in ANF vol. 7, p. 440)
 4. In the same discussion in *Apostolic Constitutions*, the point is made that God throughout the Scriptures showed that he has power over death; that nothing is impossible for Him. The following examples are called upon to illustrate this:

- a. God breathing life into the lifeless form of Adam, whose body was formed from the dust of the earth. (**Genesis 2:7**)
 - b. Elijah raising the widow's son. (**1 Kings 17**)
 - c. Elisha raising the Shunammite's son. (**2 Kings 4**)
 - d. Jonah coming out of the belly of the whale alive and unhurt after 3 days. (**Jonah 2-3**)
 - e. The "three children" who were friends of Daniel, delivered out of the fiery furnace in Babylon (**Daniel 3**)
 - f. Daniel delivered from the lion's den. (**Daniel 6**)
 - g. Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. (**John 11**)
 - h. (The argument concludes: The God who is able to do all these things is not lacking the ability to raise our bodies from the dead as well!)
- iv. Perhaps the most spectacular example: Ezekiel in the story of the Dry Bones.
1. Read **Ezekiel 37:1-14**.
 2. I had seen this story as no more than a metaphor or allegory for God "resurrecting" or bringing back the "dead" nation of Israel from captivity, and returning them to their land in the future.
 3. However, several early Christian writers saw even more to this story: a foreshadowing of the resurrection of the dead, revealed to Ezekiel.
 - a. Here, Ezekiel is given a test question: "Son of man, can these bones live?" After looking at all the dry bones, Ezekiel may have been inclined to say, "No, of course not!". However, with great wisdom, he tells the One who created the universe out of nothing, "O Lord, you know this", or "You know these things".
 - b. Recall that Abraham also was tested by God when he was told to go and sacrifice his son Isaac, in **Genesis 22**. However, God had previously told Abraham that the great promises made to Abraham (a great nation, many descendants, kings to come, all nations blessed through

his seed; **Genesis 12 & 15**) *would be fulfilled through Isaac (Genesis 21:12).*

- i. Abraham's faith in God was tested to the utmost. He embraced both the *promises* (which would come through his son) and the *directive* (to kill his son). He reasoned that the only way God could fulfill His promises, after Abraham killed his son, was that God could, and would, raise the dead back to life.
 - ii. "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called', concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense." (**Hebrews 11:17-19**, NKJV)
- c. Tertullian (Christian writer from Carthage, North Africa, c. 160-230 AD) makes the point that God was testing Ezekiel in the story of the dry bones. The Lord showed him the bones and asked Ezekiel the question first, BEFORE explaining that the bones represented the house of Israel.
- i. "But immediately on showing the bones...He tries the prophet's own faith: 'Son of man, can these bones ever live?' so that he makes answer: 'O Lord, You know.' Now God would not, you may be sure, have tried the prophet's faith on a point which was never to be a real one....
 - ii. "Therefore, God first instructed the prophet (since he, too, was not free from doubt), by revealing to him the process of the resurrection, with a view to his earnest setting forth of the same.
 - iii. "...Then in the concluding sentence He says, 'And you shall know how that I the Lord have spoken and done these things,' intending of course to do that of which He had spoken." (Source: Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, in ANF vol. 3, p. 567.)

IV. Why is Belief in the Resurrection of the Body Important to Christians Today

- a. While this was a foundational teaching of Jesus and the apostles, believers over the ages have struggled with it, and it has disappeared in much of the church today. Does it really matter?
 - i. Some of the Corinthian believers were doubting the bodily resurrection, which is why Paul wrote **1 Corinthians 15**.
 - ii. I found evidence of three early Christian works specifically devoted to explaining the resurrection of the dead. And many other writers touch on it, in explanations to skeptical unbelievers.
 1. In his work *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, Tertullian went after Christians who believed in immortality of the soul but did not believe in resurrection of the body. He referred to them “Christian Sadducees”, who denied the resurrection of *the entire man*. (ANF vol. 3, p.571-572)
 2. So, what’s wrong with being a “Christian Sadducee”?
- b. There are many problems with being a “Christian Sadducee”. Unfortunately, I was one myself (so I can’t look down on those who do not understand this teaching). Here are some reasons why it important for us to correct others who are mistaken about these things:
 - i. There are a lot of New Testament teachings that we cannot fully understand unless we “get” the teaching on the resurrection of the body. We gave a few examples in this and the prior lesson. Here is one more:
 1. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (**Matthew 10:28**, NKJV)
 - ii. You will not be able to appreciate the extent of God’s victory, and ours, over Satan and death.
 1. Man was God’s handiwork, created body (first) and spirit in the beginning, before there was any sin.
 2. God’s plan is to achieve total victory, to save the entire man, body and spirit. Our enemies, Satan and the grave, will be completely defeated in the end.
 - a. “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the

dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.”
(**Revelation 20:12-14**, NKJV)

- b. “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?’” (**1 Corinthians 15:54-55**, NKJV, quoting **Hosea 13:14**)
- iii. You will never experience a funeral, a burial, or walking through a graveyard, in the same way, after you believe that, “all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come forth”. (**John 5:28**)
- iv. As Paul explains in **1 Corinthians 15**, if the dead are not raised, then Christ was not raised either (and our faith is worthless).
- v. This is a test and demonstration of our genuine saving faith in God: that He can do all things; nothing is impossible for Him!
 1. In **Hebrews 11**, saving faith is defined as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (**Hebrews 11:1**, NKJV)
 2. Abraham’s belief in the resurrection of the dead (and demonstrated by his willingness to sacrifice his son) is held up as an example for us, in **Hebrews 11:17-19**.
 3. “Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.” (**Hebrews 11:35**, NKJV)
- vi. Our bodies are important. They will be transformed and endure. Jesus as the Word of God who became flesh not only demonstrated His own humility, but also gave greater honor to the human body.
 1. Read **1 Corinthians 6:12-20**
 - a. Paul ties his strong teaching on sexual immorality back to the body, the resurrection of the dead and final punishment of the body for the ungodly.
 - b. Sexual sin is worse than other sins: it is against the body.
 - c. Our flesh and spirit sin together and will be judged together as well!

- vii. God's plan is to redeem man *entirely* (not just the spirit but also involving the body) has implications regarding conversion (baptism) and the Lord's supper. Our bodies are involved in God's plan to redeem us and sustain us on our journey.
1. There are a great number of believers today, even including many who faithfully hold to unpopular kingdom teachings of Jesus, who struggle with recognizing the importance of the Lord's Supper and baptism. In my opinion, part of the problem is that they do not recognize God's plan to redeem our bodies. When we grasp that, the spiritual significance of things related to the body "make sense". Our bodies are "washed" and "buried with Christ" in baptism, so that we will be raised with him, and in his likeness. Also, we are sustained in our spiritual journey by the regular meal, the Lord's Supper, which involves our bodies (eating and drinking) and our spirits as well.
 2. Consider these New Testament passages in connection with our salvation, which directly mention or allude to baptism.
 - a. "and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." (**Hebrews 10:21-22**, NKJV)
 - b. "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him...." (**Romans 6:3-8**, NKJV)
 - i. Paul's statement: in Christian baptism, we are buried with Christ. If we are buried with him in the likeness of His death, we also will be raised with Him (body and spirit) in the likeness of His resurrection (body and spirit).

3. As discussed in our lesson on **John 3:3-5**, I believe one of the main reason so many have problems with the importance of baptism in conversion is that they do not understand God's plan to redeem us in our entirety: the body as well as the spirit.