

In the Twinkling of an Eye!

By Al Felder

(1 Cor. 15:51-58) ⁵¹*Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,* ⁵²*In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.* ⁵³*For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.* ⁵⁴*So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.* ⁵⁵*O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?* ⁵⁶*The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.* ⁵⁷*But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* ⁵⁸*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*

The verses before us are a part of a much larger discussion concerning the resurrection of the dead. It was believed by some that there was not going to be a resurrection for those who had died. Now, before we go any further, we need to point out the fact that such a belief is a damnable heresy. (2 Tim. 2:17, 18) ¹⁷*And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus;* ¹⁸*Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some."* To teach anything regarding the resurrection other than what God has taught in His word is a serious offense.

The resurrection is an extremely important doctrine. It is essential to Christianity. Those who doubted that such an event would take place failed to realize the implications of their doctrine. (1 Cor. 15:13) *"But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen."* Our resurrection is based upon the resurrection of Christ. For one to advocate that we cannot be raised from the dead is like advocating that Christ did not rise from the dead.

If such were the case, the apostle Paul offers the following conclusions. The Church's proclamation is empty and void. The commitment of God's people has nothing for its base; it too is empty and void. The apostles and the whole Church are false witnesses when they say God did what really could not be done. There is no forgiveness of sins. Those who have died are gone, never to be seen again. Finally, they're all fools and need to be pitied above all men because they risked everything on what cannot be.

It's not our purpose in this lesson, however, to prove the resurrection of Christ, nor to discuss the state of those who die prior to the return of Christ. We simply want to consider the meaning of the words the inspired apostle wrote in regards to the resurrection. Before we get

too far into our discussion, I would like to stop here and consider the awesomeness of the resurrection itself.

I would like to bring to your attention (Psalm 8:3, 4) *“³When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou ordained; ⁴What is man that thou art mindful of him?”* While tending his father’s sheep, David gazed into the starry heavens above him on countless nights. He was overwhelmed by the magnitude of God’s seemingly infinite universe. Could a God of such power and transcendence have any real interest in something as tiny as man? The Bible answers such a question with an emphatic YES! Man is the object of God’s loving concern and one human being is more important to God than an entire universe. The fact that He made a resurrection of the dead possible through the sacrifice of His Son demonstrates this.

Paul starts out by telling them of this great mystery. There will be people living at the time of Christ’s return. Now Paul doesn’t indicate in any way that he is going to be one of these people, nor does he presume to know who they are. In fact the apostle Paul, nor any other man, not even Christ Himself knows when this day shall be. (Matt. 24:36) *“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.”* For that reason it is futile to try and determine when Christ will return. The only thing that we can say with confidence is that we are one day closer to His return today than we were yesterday.

The Apostle uses the word sleep as a reference to death. This particular Greek word is used of natural sleep, but metaphorically it refers to death. There is a similarity between a sleeping body and a dead body; restfulness and peace normally characterize both. The object of the metaphor is to suggest that death is not a cessation from existence. Like the sleeper, the dead do not cease to exist. Also, just as sleep is temporary, so is the death of the body.

The body alone is in view in this metaphor. The word resurrection is used in reference to the body alone in the New Testament. It means a raising up or rising. God did not create man a disembodied spirit. “Man” as God made him is an embodied being. If “man” is to survive as “man” he must be embodied.

Paul in (Rom. 8:23) speaks of “the redemption of our body.” In (Phil. 3:21) Paul says, *“Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”* In other words, the bodies that we currently possess will be resurrected. It is these bodies that will be fashioned like Christ’s glorious body.

As the Apostle says in the text, “this corruptible must put on incorruptible.” The resurrected body, while it is our present body, must undergo some changes. (1 Cor. 6:13) *“Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the*

body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body." At present, our bodies have physical needs that will be terminated by God. Notice, however, it is the meat and belly relation that is destroyed and not the body itself.

Notice what is said in (1 Cor. 15:44) *"It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."* The terms "natural" and "spiritual" as used in this verse do not tell us anything about the composition of the body itself. Rather, they have reference to what the body is made for. The "natural" body is one adapted for this present life while the "spiritual" body is adapted for the life to come.

In (Matt. 22:30), we find a change of man's mode of existence. *"For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."* In the resurrection there will be no marriage. What Christ doesn't say, however, and what we must be careful not to read into the text, is that there will be no male/female distinction. It will be our body, recognizable to those who know us, but with adaptive changes which prepare it for life in heaven. Notice (Matt. 8:11), *"And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."* If these ancient patriarchs shall not lose their identity, why should anyone else who goes to heaven?

Some of the positive changes expressly mentioned need a little notice. The body with which we will express life with God hereafter is said to be: incorruptible, immortal, glorious, honorable, like Christ's. And all of that is predicated on its redemption.

This change of our bodies is said to happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. The event is depicted in other passages as well. (1 Thess. 4:16, 17) *"¹⁶For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: ¹⁷Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."* Now the focus of this passage and our main text is on the faithful, but the Bible teaches that both righteous and unrighteous will be resurrected at the same time. (John 5:28, 29) *"²⁸Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, ²⁹And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."*

We find then, that this event will include all mankind, but with different outcomes for those involved. One group will gain heaven and all its beauty to behold, while the other group will spend an eternity in the most miserable existence that is infinitely worse than our darkest fears. Notice too, that this event will be visible to all as evidenced by the fact that all are included. Not to mention the fact that it is accompanied by a shout with the voice of the

archangel and the trump of God. I can only imagine that the sound of such an event will be like the sweet cry of victory for those that are saved. For those still living on the front lines of the spiritual battle, in the weakest part of the line, it will be like the sound of reinforcements coming in such a great magnitude that the enemy will be overrun. To those who are rebellious, it will be a fearful thing. They will be facing an army the likes of which they have never seen and cannot withstand.

It is at this finale charge that the last enemy is defeated. That enemy is death. The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. (Rom. 7:8) *“But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead.”* The law is not sin nor does it cause sin. The law defines sin. Sin is a deviation from God’s holy will. Without law, there is no sin. Sin without law is incapable of accomplishing anything. Sin gets its power to inflict death from the law. Christ, in His redemptive work satisfied the law and in his return He destroys the universal reign of death.

Satan uses the commandments of God to lead man to sin. He seeks to persuade us to believe that the commandment is an obstacle to life rather than a means of regulating it. Eve was told that the command was in her way. She believed the lie and through their actions, she and Adam brought unto man an understanding he had not previously had. As a result, God gave the law so that man might see sin for what it really is and realize his need for a Savior.

On this finale occasion, the last funeral will be for death itself. There will be no more sicknesses, no long nights at the hospital ending in sad goodbyes, no more funeral homes filled with mourners or Hurst to carry the bodies to the grave. Death itself will be defeated. (1 Cor. 15:24-26) *“²⁴Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. ²⁶The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”* Notice if you will, that at this time Christ, having accomplished all He was intended to accomplish, gives back to the Father that delegated authority which was necessary for Him to fulfill His role. The perfect man acknowledges that all he has comes from the Father and that acknowledgement is seen in his subjecting himself to God in surrendering the kingdom.

Also, we notice that, contrary to the belief of many, the return of Christ does not start his reign, it ends it. Prior to his incarnation, the Word reigned by virtue of His Godhood. Having been made flesh, he took the place of a servant and from that time to this, he has only exercised that power which has been given to Him by the Father. When the end comes and He has accomplished all He has undertaken to accomplish, He will make an end of that kind of rule.

What an awesome event that will be, but only for those who are prepared. In order to be ready for this day you must obey the Gospel of Christ. This involves believing the word of

God, repenting, confessing Christ as the Son of God, and being baptized for the remission of your sins. (Rom. 6:4, 5) *“⁴Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ⁵For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”* (Phil. 3:10) *“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.”*