

“WE LOOK FOR THE RESURRECTION”
I Thessalonians 4:13-18, Revelation 20:11-15, John 11:17-27
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“Her name was Dorothy. He was the Wizard of Oz. Dorothy had a nice, comfortable life in a place called Kansas. But through a tornado, her life got turned upside down and inside out and she found herself in a magical place - a place unlike she’d ever seen before. But there was a problem; she didn’t know how to get back home.

“Somebody told her about a Wizard in the city of Oz and told her if she could only get to him, he’d get her home. So she began a tour down a yellow brick road. She picked up three friends along the way because everybody was hurting. She passed on the word, ‘There’s this guy in Oz and I hear that he can fix it all. He can get me home, he can get you a brain, he can get you a heart, and he can get you courage. I hear that there’s no need the Wizard can’t meet, so I think we need to stop hanging out and we need to follow the yellow brick road.’

“So they skipped down the road singing, ‘We’re off to see the Wizard, the wonderful Wizard of Oz,’ because he had the answer to their problems and their needs. And even though there were a lot of things trying to get in their way - there were monkeys, and soldiers, and the wicked old witch, and all these problems that faced them - they were determined to get to him because he had the answers to all of the difficult dilemmas that they faced.

“They finally get to the place called Oz. They finally get behind the curtain and they discover something very interesting. Dorothy’s told to click her heals three times because the Wizard told her, ‘Dorothy, you’re already home. You’re looking to go where you already are. If you simply click your heals, you’ll discover you’ve been there all the time.’ [Well, it happened something like that.]

But, “Did you know you’re already home? The Bible says that when you got saved, He raised you and seated you next to Jesus Christ in heavenly places. The Bible says when God saved you, He had already taken care of your eternal destiny. You are already home.”¹

¹ (Tony Evans, *tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 89, #248)

The problem is we don't know that! We're here in this mystical and dangerous world surrounded by our own struggles and trials, and we're trying to find our own way home. We're having to travel our own yellow brick roads in search of one who can help us, but it's not a wizard that will assist us to find our way home. It's not clicking our heels together three times to discover it. No, we have our home waiting for us already, but we find it in a vastly different way.

In our Scriptures today, we hear how God has provided a way for us to find our way home. I Thessalonians 4:13-18 helps us to remember that those who are "*in Christ*" (4:16-17) will be awakened from their death sleep and - gathered with those who are still alive - will be brought home to be with the Lord, forever. That's our encouragement for our future all because Jesus is the One who has died in our place. He's taken our sins upon Himself, paid the penalty for those sins, was buried, and then rose again, having defeated death, to forgive us from our sins. He's made a way for us to be face-to-face again with the Lord God Almighty as His children.

This pathway is for all the people of the world, but only those who put their trust and faith in the Lord Jesus find the forgiveness they need to gain eternal life. Only those to trust Jesus to be their Savior, who humble themselves before the awesome work of Salvation done by Him, are those who are received into heaven to obtain their place already prepared for them. Not everyone in the world gets to go to heaven; only those who profess their faith in Jesus Christ, and then live their lives for Him, can hope to receive eternal life with God the Father. It's not something we can earn on our own, but it is a gift given to us as we trust Jesus to lead us beyond this life back to our heavenly home.

And this is the hope we have as we look at the last phrase of the Nicene Creed. **We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.** Our greatest hope is to exit this dark and wicked world, to find ourselves in our eternal home with Jesus, and to rejoice in God's presence with all who have faithfully lived and died.

But this is all dependent upon what we do with the rest of the creed that we say. "We believe in one God, the Father... We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ... For us and for our salvation He came

down from heaven...For our sake He was crucified, died and was buried, and on the third day he rose again...Ascended to the Father...and He will come again to judge the living and the dead...We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life...We believe in the one holy Christian Church...We believe in one baptism..." (Nicene Creed). If we believe what we say, and let our lives reflect what we believe, then our lifestyle and attitude and actions will witness to our faith. And when Jesus returns to collect His own, we will be there with Him.

Revelation 20:11-15 gives us the two ultimate outcomes facing humanity. There is either eternal life with Jesus in the kingdom of God for all those who have professed Jesus as their Savior, OR there is eternal death away from Jesus in Hell, for all those who have rejected Jesus as their Savior. There will be a final judgment for every person based "*according to what they had done*" (20:13) with Jesus.

Revelation 20 tells us that everyone will face Jesus sitting upon the great white throne for our final judgement (20:11). Everyone, both good and bad, will find themselves before Jesus. If their names are not found in the Book of Life, if they have not received forgiveness of their sins from Jesus by His death and resurrection, then they will be cast away from God's presence and "*thrown into the lake of fire*" to experience torment and torture and everlasting punishment (20:15).

This is not because God hates them or because they are predestined to death. It is because of their decision to reject Jesus and forfeit God's way to Salvation. Each of us makes our own decision about what we will do with Jesus, and it is THAT decision that determines our destination. God does not condemn anyone to Hell; we make that choice on our own if we reject Jesus as Savior and Lord of our lives and choose to live outside of God's laws and commands. Every one of us has the opportunity to make the choice about Jesus in order that we might gain eternal life. But each person is "*judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books*" (20:12).

Think of it this way: "A tombstone contains a date of birth, date of death, and a dash. Above these things is the name of the deceased and below, usually, will be some kind of statement. The main part of the tombstone is the dash. It is all about the dash because the dash is talking about what

happened while that person was here on earth.

“When we meet God, He is going to want to discuss the dash. He is going to want to know what we did that served His eternal purposes.”² He will want to know what we did with Jesus Christ. He will want to know whether or not we received His gift of forgiveness that enables us to be rewarded with eternal life with Him. If the dash of our life shows no decision for Jesus Christ, then our decision in this life will make Hell our only option after this life. Our resurrection will be to eternal death.

However, in huge contrast to that judgement, those who believe in Jesus, who receive Him as their Lord and Savior, and then who follow Him their whole lives as one of His disciples, are given eternal life, because their names are found written in the Book of Life. Our claiming Jesus to be our Messiah provides forgiveness for us, and that is the key to receiving eternal life. As we receive Jesus as the Christ, our names are engraved into the Book of Life and we will belong to the hosts of heaven.

You see, we cannot stand before a Holy and Perfect God with all our sins hanging out and expect to be welcomed into heaven. God cannot tolerate any sin in His presence; but there is no way that we, on our own, can eliminate that sin from our lives. We are hopelessly lost on our own. Only Jesus makes it possible for us to find forgiveness for our sins, and that cleansing brings us before God, pure and holy through the blood of Jesus Christ. All our sins are washed away as we let Jesus become our Savior, and only that grants us access into heaven. Without Jesus there is no eternal life for us. Without Jesus in our lives, the only thing left for us is eternal death, in the absence of God’s presence.

Resurrection from the dead through Jesus Christ is our only hope. When we put our trust in Jesus and realize that His resurrection is the avenue in which we can find our way to heaven, our hope becomes more than just on this life. We begin to look beyond this life and we begin to have hope for the life of the world to come.

Jesus explained it to Martha in John 11. Lazarus, Martha and Mary were very close friends with Jesus and they believed that He was their Messiah. But word came to Jesus that Lazarus had become

² (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, pg. 87, #242)

sick, and the sisters were calling for Him to come to cure him (11:3). However, upon hearing about Lazarus' sickness, Jesus decided to stay where He was two more days (11:6). Only then did Jesus and His disciples go to Bethany. But by the time they arrive, Lazarus has been dead and in the tomb 4 days. Yet, Jesus was there right then, on the fourth day after his death, so that many could believe in Him when He brought Lazarus back to life. Though they didn't understand at the time, they became witnesses to the resurrection power of Jesus.

But it's in the conversation to Martha before Lazarus' resurrection that brings hope to us. Listen carefully to the way that Jesus speaks to her. This is John 11:17-27. (READ John 11:17-27)

Now He didn't just stop with His explanation of resurrection to Martha. Jesus went on to raise Lazarus, providing positive proof that He is who He said He is. Despite the hesitation of those there who thought that physical death was final and that there was no hope in seeing Lazarus again, Jesus commanded, "*Lazarus, come out!*" [And] *the dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face*" (John 11:43-44). This wasn't the attack of the Mummy. It was Lazarus, resurrected from the dead, given new life to continue on here in this world a bit more.

But did you catch that it was Martha's faith in Jesus as the Messiah that opened up the door to eternal life. "*Jesus [had told] her, 'Your brother will rise again.'*" [And] *Martha [had] answered, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'*" She knew about the resurrection from the dead at the Last Day. But it was what Jesus said next that changes all the dynamics for us here in this life. "*Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'*" [And her reply was simply] *'Yes, Lord...I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.'*" (John 11:23-27). It was her faith in Jesus that provided resurrection to Lazarus. It is that faith in Jesus that helps us, too.

Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, and when we put our trust in Him, we receive His resurrection and His life RIGHT NOW. We are no longer condemned because of our sin, but through

His forgiveness, we are new creatures through Him and we can then stand in God's presence once again, unashamed and forever free. Through Jesus Christ we can look for the resurrection from the dead, and we can look forward to the life to come in eternal life with the Lord our God. But the question is "How can we live as though it is ours, right now, today, this moment?"

Let me give you an example of this eternal perspective from the world of baseball. "Reggie Jackson was a baseball player known as 'Mr. October.' He got his nickname because he was known to shine when his team played in the postseason playoffs. Reggie would come up to bat, and the ball was going over somebody's fence.

"Reggie Jackson said once in an interview that he lived for the postseason because that is when he would shine. But Reggie Jackson, in order to get to the postseason, had to get through the regular season. His secret to shining in the regular season was to keep his eye on October, [the postseason playoffs].

Well, "God is looking for some Mr. and Mrs. Octobers - people with their eyes set on eternity, who faithfully play the regular season because they're looking forward to postseason glory" in heaven.³ And He's invited each one of us to put our faith and trust in Jesus as His promised Messiah, receive the gift of Salvation accomplished on our behalf on the cross at Calvary, and then believe in the promise that we will be with Him when this life finishes. But that means we have to keep our eyes on the postseason of eternal life, but at the same time also do well during this preseason time that we live here.

There are so many people who still need to hear about the Lord, so we need to keep on batting well, and playing well, and serving well, and reaching as many as possible. Yet we can't be so heavenly minded that we're no earthly good. We need to let our hope in "the resurrection from the dead and the life of the world to come" influence the way that we live each day so that others can see the glory on our faces as we shine out for Jesus. We are to keep walking in faith, being bold witnesses to the love of God here in this world.

³ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evan's Book of Illustrations*, pg. 86, #240)

All too many people have given up on hope for God's love and forgiveness. They've made so many mistakes, they've lived outside of God's laws, they've sought out peace and life in everything but Jesus, and they've refused to let Jesus be their Savior and Lord. They think they are so bad that God cannot, and will not, be able to change them and make them new. They believe that they are hopelessly lost. But God's not done with them yet. Everyone has a chance to find life while they are here.

God desires that all people come to Him. Jesus came to seek and to save those who are lost (Luke 19:10). There is not one person that is turned away from the Lord Jesus when they humble themselves and ask Him to become their Savior. So eternal life is for all people, if they choose it.

Then, as we live faithful lives before them, as we open up our hearts to hear them, and love on them, and as we receive them here into this place so that they can hear the hope that is in Jesus Christ, they will begin to see that the church does not hate them, but rather, loves them and wants them to be in God's grace, too. The Church is to be a rescue mission for all those who are lost and alone and in need of saving. And we are the ones that the world sees as representatives of God's rescue mission.

So we have to prepare ourselves to do well while we are here. We are not to be judgmental toward others in an effort to make ourselves look better than they are. We are not to lord it over them that they have made mistakes and have missed God's blessings. Heaven knows we've all been there too. So instead of condemning them, we are to welcome them and help them to find the love of Jesus so that they might find life and hope in Him, too.

And we're not to focus on the things of this world that can so easily trap us into thinking that life is all about stuff here. It's not about how much we have, or the positions we hold, or the education we have had, or the economic situation we enjoy. We are to keep our eyes on the life beyond this life and remember that it requires our hearts focused on fulfilling the work of Jesus instead of satisfying ourselves with the things of this world. The resurrection from the dead starts here.

“One day a man was talking to an angel. The angel said, ‘What can I do for you?’ The man said, ‘Show me the Wall Street Journal one year from today. That way, I will know where to invest and

will become a multimillionaire.’

“The angel snapped his fingers and out came a *Wall Street Journal* marked one year in advance of the date when they were talking. The man flipped the pages of the newspaper, studying the listings and observing which stocks would be high and which ones would be low.

“But in the midst of his joy, a frown came upon his face and tears began to roll down his cheeks because when he looked over on the next page, he saw his own face. His picture was in the paper under the obituary column.

“You see, this life can only offer you so much. Unless you live now in light of eternity, you are going to waste time focusing on the things of this earth. Enjoy your life, but live it as a Christian focused on the things that matter to God.”⁴ Let Him shine through you so that you can enjoy your postseason glory in heaven. Let’s pray.

Father, it can be so easy for us to focus our lives here on this earth, and miss the eternal life that You have for us. We can be so in touch with the things of this world that we fail to notice the need to have Jesus with us. We can be so delighted with the things of this world that we feel that we don’t need Jesus, and therefore forego making Jesus the Savior and Lord of our life. Help us to find the need for Jesus to forgive us our sins so that we might find redemption and have our names written in Your Book of Life. Then, when this life is over, we have much more to look forward to with You.

Lord Jesus, keep calling out to us so that we might hear Your invitation to “come, follow Me.” Give us the desire to become Your servant and live in such a way that those around us see the difference, and inquire how they might have the peace and joy that we have. Give us hearts to know You closely so that we can share You with all those around us.

Holy Spirit, keep encouraging us to live our faith in Jesus. Empower us to be so bold that we love those who are hurting, we encourage those who are despairing, and we build up those who are broken. Guide us to those who need to hear about Jesus, so that they might find eternal life through Him, for He is our resurrection and our life. This we pray in Jesus’ Name. AMEN.

⁴ (*Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, pg. 87, #243)