

Jesus' Resurrection and the General Resurrection.

The Old Testament reports the raising of the widow's son at Zarephath through Elijah, the raising of the son of the woman of Shunem, and the raising of a man in a tomb through Elisha. The New Testament reports Jesus' raising of the daughter of Jairus, the young man at Nain, and Lazarus. Tabitha was raised from the dead through Peter, and the young man Eutychus was raised through Paul.

There was a general belief that people could raise again. Even Herod thought that John the Baptist had risen again as Jesus (Mk 6:14). The raisings from the dead by Jesus were signs that the Messiah had come. They should be understood in the light of Jesus' claim to raise all the dead. "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to those whom He wishes" (John 5:21). He claimed that He would not lose anything of what the Father had given to Him, but that He would raise it on the last day (John 6:39). He said that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him would have eternal life; and He would raise him on the last day (John 6:40, 44). Eating His flesh and drinking His blood assure believers that they have eternal life, and that Jesus will raise them up on the last day. There are clear allusions here also to the benefits of the Lord's Supper (John 6:54). What happened when Jesus died on the cross also showed its life-giving power, as the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had died were raised. They came out of the tombs, after Jesus had risen, went into Jerusalem, and appeared to many people (Mt 27:52-53).

Jesus had foretold that He would raise His body on the third day (John 2:19). He explicitly foretold that He would rise again (Mk 8:31, 9:9, 9:31, 10:34). As the Good Shepherd He would take His life again after laying it down (John 10:18).

Jesus and the apostles affirmed that the Old Testament Scriptures foretold that the Messiah would rise from the dead (Lk 24:25-27, 44-46; John 20:9; Ac 2:22-31; Ac 17:3; 1 Cor 15:4). In his Pentecost sermon Peter explained that Psalm 16:8-11 referred not to David, but to the Messiah, whose body would not see decay. Isaiah 53 had foretold that, after the Servant of the Lord had given His life in sacrifice, He would see His offspring. He would prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD would prosper in His hand (Isa 53:10). The words of the risen Jesus to the group of women returning from the tomb, "Go, and tell My brothers to go to Galilee" seem to allude to Ps 22, where the suffering and despised Messiah says "Let Me declare Your name to My brothers! I shall praise You in the midst of the assembly" (Ps 2:22). At Antioch in Pisidia Paul also appealed to Psalm 2:7; Is 55:3 and Ps 16:10 as support for his affirmation that the Old Testament Scriptures foretold Jesus' resurrection.

The Old Testament affirmed the future resurrection of all the dead (Isa 26:19; Dn 12:2). Jesus refuted the Sadducees' refusal to believe the resurrection by appealing to Exodus: "Now concerning the dead, that they are raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God told him: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living" (Mk. 12:26). Before Agrippa Paul aligned himself with the Pharisees' belief in a general resurrection when he asked, "Why is it considered incredible on the part of you people that God raises the dead?" (Ac 26:8).

The proclamation of the good news by the apostles after Pentecost rested on the prophecies of the Old Testament that Jesus would rise, and that they had seen and talked with Him personally after He had risen again (Ac 1:22; 2:24, 2:31-32; 4:33; 10:41; 13:33-34; 17:3, 17:31; Rm 1:4; 1 Cor 15:1-21 1 Jn 1:1-3). The apostles linked their own witness of Jesus' resurrection to the witness of the Holy Spirit (Ac 2:32; 3:15; 5:31-32). John 10:18 said that Jesus would raise Himself, and Rm 8: 11 says that the Holy Spirit was also active in Jesus' resurrection. However, the chief emphasis is on the Father's raising Jesus from the dead.

Christians are baptised into Jesus' resurrection. God has worked faith in them by the same power as He used when He raised Christ from the dead (Rm 6:1-4; Col 2:12; Eph 1:19-20). This coming to faith is probably what is meant by the first resurrection in Rev 20:5-6. The second death has no power over them, and they reign with Christ during the time of the New Testament era. Christians are renewed creatures by the power of Jesus' resurrection and will live with Him in the life to come.

Paul spoke about Jesus as the first to rise from the dead, as a Light (Ac 26:23). Jesus was not first in time, but first as the author of all other resurrection. Paul contrasted what Jesus had done with what Adam had done. "Now Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a man. For, as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor 15:20-22). In Colossians chapter 1 Paul writes about Jesus in words that recall the creation, applying the concepts of "first" "summary", and "being first", and "image of God" to both the created order and to the church (Col 1:15-18). He is the firstborn, the cause, and the heir, both of creation and of the church.

Jesus' power to raise the dead extends to all human beings, believers and unbelievers. He said, "An hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and will come out. Those who have done good will come out to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil will come out to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29). Paul wrote, "Christ died and became alive again for this reason: that He might be the Lord of both the dead and the living" (Rm 14:9). He also wrote, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due to him according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Cor 5:10).

Gnostics erred in regarding the body as totally beyond redemption, and reinterpreted it as having come through knowledge about how things really are in their scheme (2 Tm 2:18). In 1 Cor 15 Paul affirmed the resurrection of the body because to deny it would deny that Jesus Christ had not risen bodily (1 Cor 15:13).

Recently we witnessed some Iraqi people using their feet and their shoes on the statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad. They were the Eastern customs that showing the soles of one's feet to someone and putting one's feet on something were serious insults. Those customs may give us a fresh angle on the New Testament assertion that Jesus has all things under His feet, including death (1 Cor 15:26-27). He not only has them under His complete power, but also indicates His rejection of death and contempt for it through His own resurrection from the dead.

Jesus' resurrection provides comfort for bereaved believers. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians who were concerned that their departed would be at some disadvantage when Jesus returned. They would be raised first, and those who were still alive at His coming would be caught up with them to meet the returning Lord in the air, and they and their departed would be with the Lord for ever (1 Ths 4:16-17). Although there will be judgment of all people (Rm 2:16; 2 Ths 1:9-10; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 5:10) believers have nothing to fear in it, because it will be the affirmation or their justification through faith in the risen Lord already now (John 5:24).

Believers have already risen with Christ in baptism (Rm 6:4-8; Col 2:12-13; 3:1-4) and continue in their renewed life in Christ through faith. That is how we understand Paul's figurative language in Eph 5:14: "Wake up, you who sleep! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." This "realised eschatology" corresponds to what John in particular says about eternal life as a present fact already (John 3:18; 3:36; 5:24; 11:25; 1 Jn 3:6, 9, 14; 5:18). Jesus will raise our bodies will physically when He returns on the last day (John 21:22; 6:39-40, 44; 17:24; 1 Jn 2:28.) He will change our bodies, make them like His own glorified risen body, and we shall see Him as He is. (Plp 3:21; 1 Jn 3:2;).

Although believers have already been raised with Christ, the resurrection to life is still the goal of their hope, and also of their striving (Plp 3:11).

The apostles repeatedly appeal to Jesus' resurrection in their teaching (Compare Gal 2:20; Col 3:1-4; E 2:1, 5; 2 Cor 4:10-14. 1 Pt 1:3). The primary teachings of the New Testament, including justification through faith, are connected with it (Rm 4:25; 5:18; 2 Cor 5:17-21; Rm 8:28-39).