



The Four Forms of Resurrection

Review

In the last chapter, I made the biblical case that neither Christ nor the church replaces Israel. Jesus taught that one day the Jews will repent, and on a day determined by the Father, Israel will be restored in the messianic kingdom. God used Israel to bring the Messiah into the world, and he will use the regenerated Jewish saints and their nation once again when he establishes the messianic kingdom. God's plan for the redemption of this Genesis creation is built around the restoration of Israel. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul maintained a clear distinction between believing Jews and believing Gentiles, all of whom are justified by faith. And based on Isaiah, the eventual repentance of the Jews leads to the messianic kingdom as described by the prophets. Isaiah and Paul both taught that God's promises to Israel of a messianic kingdom on this earth are irrevocable.

Unfulfilled Human Aspirations

I am surprised how angry with God some people, including Christians, become when something bad happens to them or their families or friends. Why would a gracious and loving God allow this to happen? In fact, the hardships we experience are evidence that our Creator is not happy with mankind. He is demonstrating his anger with Adam and his descendants. God altered nature to cause death and destruc-

tion, and the tragic things that happen to us are reminders, or wakeup calls, that something is dreadfully wrong with the relationship between God and man. God is not pleased with mankind.

Nature communicates two very different messages to mankind. One, there is enough residual beauty, joy, and life to hear the echo of the garden of Eden and know there must be a Creator of this wonderful Genesis creation. Two, there is something fundamentally wrong with this creation for there to be so much misery and death, and for our lives to fall so far short of our human aspirations. The loving Creator of this remarkable creation, in his anger, must have directed his wrath toward man and nature.

When we break a bone in our foot, our nervous system sends us a message of pain alerting us to stop walking on our foot and to seek treatment. With the pain and misery in this world, God is also trying to send us a message. Natural disasters, disease, and death are alerting us that something is dreadfully wrong with this creation. Instead of getting angry with God when life is cruel, it would be much wiser to stop and examine why God is angry with mankind.

The ancient pagans understood that something was wrong with this creation. One year they might have a bountiful harvest and eat well. But the next year, a drought or a flood might devastate their crops, or an invading army might steal their produce and destroy their fields. Their first child might have been healthy and lived well into adulthood, but their second child died at birth. They recognized the discrepancy between their human aspirations for an abundant and fulfilling life and the reality of this unstable and ultimately tragic world. They understood that the God or gods in control of this world must be angry and had to be appeased through some kind of sacrifice. So they developed elaborate rituals for all aspects of their lives to appease the many pagan gods. They called upon gods that they believed controlled the sun, the rain, the harvest, and even fertility.

For many of us today, modern medicine, technology, and material improvements have taken the edge off our short existence. Some of us can live a little longer in a more comfortable and entertaining world. But every year, there are new reminders—in the form of sickness, death, and natural disasters—that our aspirations and expectations are often unfulfilled. The death of a close friend or family member never comes naturally to us, for we are struck with grief and often anger.

Something must have gone terribly wrong. Since the original Genesis creation was created as good, we could say that it is unnatural for man and nature to be in such a fallen condition.

There is a major discrepancy between our aspirations for a healthy and abundant life on this earth and the unreliable condition of nature, our fragile bodies, and our dysfunctional societies. This discrepancy should lead us to search for the cause and for the solution to the human condition and predicament we are in. Yes, we should stop and smell the roses as we take time to enjoy this creation. But we cannot avoid the smell of sickness and death along the way, which should lead us to make an honest assessment of our deeply disturbed world.

Neither philosophers nor scientists nor spiritualists have been able to explain or solve mankind's problems. Darwinian naturalists claim we are trapped in this hostile, natural world of misery and death with no hope of life after death. In some ways, the ancient pagans had a better grasp on reality than modern naturalists. At least they realized the gods were angry and there was an underlying spiritual reason for the world's condition.

Scientific discoveries and advances in technology today can make life a little more pleasant on this earth, but all the scientists and engineers in the world cannot remove the curse on nature and our bodies. Philosophers can come up with some good insights into life on this earth, but all the philosophers in the world cannot come up with a solution to mortal death. Spiritualists believe we can manipulate the gods into providing material prosperity, but they offer no real hope for life after death. As a result, mankind remains lost and confused by its predicament.

If our Creator is the one who put the curse of death on mankind and the curse on this earth, then God is the only one who can restore mankind and this creation. If we are going to escape this tragic world, we will need divine intervention and supernatural help from God. Fortunately, through the Scriptures and divine revelation, God provided some real answers and offered some real solutions.

The Scriptures reveal that mankind used to live in fellowship with the Creator in an Edenic paradise without death and destruction. That is why we have such deep aspirations for an abundant life on this earth. We perceive vestiges of the good creation now, and we subconsciously miss Eden. But why did God become so angry with mankind that he

banished us from Eden and put a curse on this creation in the first place? The Scriptures inform us that the misery and death in this world are a result of Adam and Eve's rebellion against God. They succumbed to Satan's temptation by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, believing that by gaining the knowledge of good and evil they could become self-sufficient. With this knowledge, they could define for themselves what was the right and wrong way to function. They could live autonomous from God and be their own gods, no longer subject to God.

Their rebellion infuriated God and brought about his curse on this creation, which dramatically changed the world. Mankind's good nature became a sinful nature hostile to God. God also allowed Satan and his demonic host to enter the world, influencing all aspects of human thought and behavior. The world became Satan's dominion over fallen mankind instead of God's dominion over righteous mankind.

As spiritual descendants of Adam and Eve, we have inherited their insubordinate nature that is inherently hostile to God. We have a god-self complex that deludes us into believing we can be self-sufficient and have no need for God. We do not need to be dependent on God for truth and life. And we surely do not want to be submissive to him. We are hostile to God, and he is hostile toward us. The death of our mortal bodies is evidence of God's wrath. But this broken relationship is our fault, not God's. Humanity and this creation are in desperate need of redemption, resurrection, and restoration—which only God can accomplish.

God's Options for Fallen Man

After the fall and God's judgment against mankind, God had several ways he could have responded to sinful humanity. To understand God's plan of redemption, it is helpful to explore these options. God could have let man go the way of the fallen angels, with no hope of salvation, and destroyed mankind and this Genesis creation. He could have started over and created the children of God as spiritual creatures with nonsexual bodies that do not experience marriage and reproduction, and he could have created an entirely new kind of heaven and earth as their eternal habitat.

Or, God could have provided a way to redeem mankind and restore humanity to the Edenic paradise he had originally created. After a process of salvation, he could have forgiven mankind of their sins and removed their sinful natures. They would be saved from Satan's dominion and restored to the original good creation that began in Eden. These saints would be resurrected into their natural Adamic bodies as male and female given in marriage and would live forever on a restored natural earth. The human experience would be restored.

In his divine wisdom, however, God chose to institute a plan of redemption that includes a combination of two of these options. He will first restore the human experience to an Edenic paradise for a thousand years. Jesus revealed that after this restoration, the Adamic creation will come to an end. God will then establish a new creation for his redeemed people by transforming their natural Adamic bodies into nonsexual, eternal bodies as sons of God. Christ will then create a new kind of heaven and earth as their eternal habitat. This is an amazing plan of redemption! As Paul wrote:

But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. (1 Cor. 2:9–10)

But why didn't God simply restore humanity to its pre-fallen state of paradise? Why create a new being as sons of God? I do not know the answer to these questions, but it is God's prerogative to do what he wants.

In his divine wisdom, God decided to have pity on mankind and instituted a plan of redemption. When the time was right, God sent his Son into this world as a human being. Whereas the first Adam did not pass the test of obedience and was insubordinate, Christ, although fully tempted and tested as a human being, passed the test and did not sin. He never yielded to Satan's schemes, and he remained fully submissive to God. Because of his perfect obedience, he did not deserve to be under the curse of death, as Adam. Yet, in a manner of substitution prefigured by the Jewish sacrificial system, he was cursed on the cross by the Father for *our* insubordination and sin. Through Christ's

death and resurrection, God created a way to justify the ungodly and overcome death for his people.

Three Forms of Death

Fallen man experiences three forms of death:

1. Because sinful man is alienated from God who is Spirit and Life, natural man experiences a form of *spiritual death* during his lifetime on this earth.
2. The second form of death is *mortal death*, when the natural body dies and the spirit of an unrepentant person is sent to hades and is held there until Judgment Day.
3. The third form of death is "*the second death*" of the body and soul, which occurs on Judgment Day when unbelievers are resurrected from hades and sent to the lake of fire. This final form of death is irreversible and eternal.

Four Forms of Resurrection

God's plan of redemption for those who receive his Son is structured around saving us from these three forms of death and is achieved through four forms of resurrection—two of the spirit and two of the body.

1. Resurrection from Spiritual Death

The first form of resurrection is of the spirit of a person and takes place when we receive Christ. We are born as sinners and are dead spiritually because we are alienated from the life of God. But when we repent and believe in Christ, we experience regeneration and are reconciled to the living God. Our fallen spirits are raised from spiritual death, and we become spiritually alive again. The Holy Spirit indwells our hearts, and we are reconnected to the living God, who is Life. Paul taught that at the moment of conversion, we are somehow miraculously joined with Christ in his crucifixion *and* his resurrection:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised

from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life [as we live resurrected lives with God]. (Rom. 6:3–4)

Our sins are punished through his crucifixion. God justifies the ungodly, and we are made holy like Christ. We are then joined with Christ in his resurrection, which enables us to be reconciled to a holy God who is Life. Satan's power of sin and death over us is broken. We experience a resurrection from spiritual death and become living beings again, as Adam and Eve were spiritually alive before the fall. We become restored men and women of God in a proper relationship with our Creator. As we walk through this life, we fellowship with the living God through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. But we still experience mortal death, even as Christians.

2. Resurrection of the Reborn Spirit to Heaven

The second form of resurrection of the spirit takes place when our natural bodies die and our regenerated spirits are raised up to be with the Lord in heaven. In his encounter with the Sadducees, Jesus discussed this type of resurrection. The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection of the body, nor did they believe in a resurrection of the spirit or soul of a deceased person—nothing survived after the death of the body. They believed we only live for this life. Jesus refuted these false teachings by referencing Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as examples of the resurrected, living spirits of the saints who have departed this world:

And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”? He is not God of the dead, but of the living. (Matt. 22:31–32)

Even though these saints have died, their risen spirits remain alive with God. Hebrews also refers to the spirits of the departed saints as having been resurrected to heaven:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses [in heaven], . . . let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, . . . But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, . . . and *to the spirits* of the righteous made perfect. (Heb. 12:1, 22–23)

God is a living being who dwells in heaven, and the spirits of his departed people have been raised to spiritual life to dwell with him in heaven. The risen saints are described as witnessing the events on earth from heaven. Their bodies may be asleep on the earth, but their spirits are very much alive and awake in heaven.

But how are these disembodied spirits going to inherit the restored Edenic paradise on this earth?

3. Resurrection of the Natural Body

The third form of resurrection in God's plan of redemption is the first to involve the human body. John referred to it in Revelation 20 as "the first resurrection." It occurs at the beginning of the 1,000-year restoration when Christ sits on his throne in heaven and rules over the restored Edenic earth. The spirits of the departed saints come down from heaven to reenter their regenerated natural Adamic bodies and physically reside again on the restored earth. This is a resurrection of the natural Adamic body because it is destined for a regenerated natural earth. The resurrected saints can marry and have children, and they will experience an abundant life on the restored earth with Christ ruling the world, not Satan.

God's plan of redemption also includes the saints experiencing an eternal paradise in heaven as his immortal children. But how are we going to inherit the Father's eternal kingdom of heaven on the last day if we are still in mortal bodies of flesh and blood?

4. Resurrection of the Eternal Body

The fourth form of resurrection is a transformation of the natural body into an eternal body adapted for the eternal new heavens and new earth. This occurs after the millennium at the final resurrection when Christ comes again to rapture the saints into transformed, glorified,

spiritual bodies like his resurrected body. He then takes the saints to the Father's imperishable kingdom of heaven, or the new heavens and new earth. The Adamic order of being comes to an end, and the sons of God will be immortal and will no longer experience marriage and reproduction. Christ referred to this form of resurrection when he responded to the Sadducees:

The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage [the Adamic order of being], but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead [God's people] neither marry nor are given in marriage [non-sexual bodies], for they cannot die anymore [immortal bodies], because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection [a new creation for a new habitat on the eternal new heavens and new earth]. (Luke 20:34–36)

Paul, too, described this same kind of resurrection:

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. (1 Cor. 15:51–53)

To inherit the Father's eternal kingdom as sons of God, our natural bodies will have to be raised and transformed into a new kind of immortal and imperishable body—eternal bodies for an eternal new earth.

As Jesus taught Martha through the power of resurrection, whoever believes in him overcomes the three forms of death:

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day [at the final resurrection]." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life [as God, he has the divine power of resurrection]. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11:23–26)

In effect, because of these four forms of resurrection, believers will never really experience death—nothing can separate us from the life of God. Our bodies may die a mortal death, like Lazarus, but our spirits will be raised to heaven, where they will remain alive with God. Christ's resurrection of Lazarus's natural body foreshadows the first resurrection of the natural body at the beginning of the millennium.

Summary

Nature communicates two different messages to mankind. One, because of the remarkable natural beauty and complexity of this world, there must be a Creator of this creation. Two, because nature can be so cruel and cause so much misery and death, this same Creator must be angry with mankind. Many of our deepest human aspirations for joy and happiness go unfulfilled in this life. We long for a return to the paradise of the garden of Eden.

The good news is that God's divine power of resurrection resolves mankind's predicament of death and paradise lost. The four forms of resurrection are the basic framework within God's plan of redemption to save us from the three forms of death. Through the first resurrection of the spirit, we are born again and become the living children of God while we walk with God on this earth during our short lives. Through the second resurrection of the spirit when our mortal bodies die, our individual spirits are raised up to join Christ in heaven while our bodies sleep on the earth.

Through the first resurrection of the natural body at the beginning of the millennium, the spirits of the departed saints will reenter regenerated Adamic bodies to experience the 1,000-year paradise on this restored Edenic earth. And through the final resurrection when Christ returns on the last day, our natural Adamic bodies will be transformed into immortal spiritual bodies (that neither marry nor reproduce) so that we can inherit the eternal new heavens and new earth as sons of God. To inherit eternal life in an eternal kingdom, we will need eternal bodies.