



Our hope today & tomorrow

By Charles T. Crabtree

Christ is risen from the dead. This fact in itself has been the theme of almost 2,000 Easters. But even more wonderful is how the resurrection of Jesus affects our loved ones. The Bible says Jesus Christ has “become the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20, KJV). In other words, those who die in Christ are not dead. The believer’s body is asleep, but the soul (the real person) is immediately with the Lord. This is a great comfort. Death cannot separate us from our Lord.

The Bible removes all the mystery when it tells us that “to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). To die is to be with the Lord. We are not merely a body; our body is only a treasure chest holding that most precious possession — our soul. At death there is a separation of the soul from the body.

But the Blessed Hope is not limited to the invisible, eternal soul. God’s plan of redemption includes the final triumph of everything that was lost through sin, including our physical bodies.

The resurrection of the body

Our Lord compared physical death to the planting of a seed.

A farmer can say to skeptics and unbelievers, “You may think I’m crazy, but do you see this little seed? I’m going to put this kernel of wheat in the ground and cover it with dirt. In a few days it will lose its covering and die. But it will also begin a process that will set it free from the limitations of its shell. And eventually, it will grow into a tall stalk and be laden down with grain.”



You may say, “I know that; everyone does.” But what if you had never witnessed the miracle of springtime and harvest? You would probably react just as the unbeliever does toward death. To him it is all over; death is the ultimate separation, the tragic end to a farce called life. But to the believer, in spite of sorrow for the temporary separation, there is faith, because Jesus has become the “firstfruits” of the believing dead (1 Corinthians 15:20).

What are “firstfruits”? They are the guarantee of a similar product in the future. If we want to know what is going to happen to us, we should look to Jesus — He passed through death to bring us life.

For centuries, Christians have died and been planted like seeds in the earth. But someday the trumpet of the Lord will announce the fulfillment of

“Merchandise soiled — greatly reduced in price.” We are sown with a record of dishonorable conduct, but we will be raised to honor in the house of God; He will present us faultless before the Throne.

3. *The body is sown in weakness, but it will be raised in power.* “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41). I am astounded at my weaknesses — the weaknesses of my mind, will and purpose, and my lack of discipline. I try, but then grow weary of trying. We are sown in weakness, but we will be raised in the power of the Holy Spirit, never again to struggle against the weakness of self and the flesh.

4. *The body is sown as a natural body, but it will be raised as a spiritual body.* The first Adam was made a living soul, but he sold us into death and our bodies became tombs.

We must be ready. It is tragic to think of those who will be left behind. No earthly loves or pressures should deter us from a state of readiness. Jesus the King is coming soon.

the harvest, and the miracle will happen: the dead will be resurrected.

The Bible says that we are “sown.” The sowing is the only part we have seen. But the Scriptures also say we will be raised. First Corinthians 15:42-44 contrasts the sowing and the resurrection of the body.

1. *The body is sown in corruption, but it will be raised in incorruption.* No matter how we try to prevent it, our bodies are in a constant state of decay.

Our bodies are mortal. Like seeds, they will eventually be put into the ground. But someday they will be raised in incorruption. When the dead in Christ are resurrected, we will have new bodies that will never deteriorate.

2. *The body is sown in dishonor, but it will be raised in glory.* How often we weep over our sins and failures. We are reminded of the store that was having a sale. The sign over the bargain counter read:

But the second Adam, Christ, became a quickening Spirit. When the Rapture takes place, the seed that has been sown in death will spring to full and glorious life.

The farmer does not weep as he sows the grain, nor does he forget about the grain after he has sown it. With watchful eye and constant care he tends the fields until harvesttime. It is a comfort to realize the Lord knows all those who are His, whether they are dead or alive. Not one will be lost, for the believer dies in Christ.

Because of His triumph, when we say farewell to loved ones who have died in the faith, we can have hope. It is a blessed hope, because it is a certain hope.

The nature of the Rapture

The Blessed Hope of the Church involves more than the dead in Christ. First Thessalonians 4:17 says, “We which are alive and remain shall be caught up together

with them in the clouds.” It would be well for us to remember the nature of the Rapture.

The Rapture is a catching away. The Greek word used here, *harpazo*, means to seize hastily; to draw to oneself by swift, sudden movement; and to rob with violence.

The Rapture is a catching up. All believers — living and dead — will be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). It seems appropriate that the uniting of the body of Christ with the Head of the Church will take place in the devil’s territory.

For too long Satan has paraded as the “prince of the power of the air” (Ephesians 2:2). But, as believers, we can take comfort in knowing our Lord is building His Church, and the councils of hell will not prevail against it.

The Rapture is a transfiguration and transformation. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we will be clothed with immortality. Our bodies will be made like unto His own glorious body.

Lessons from the Rapture

What lessons should we learn from the truth of the Rapture?

1. *We must be ready.* It is tragic to think of those who will be left behind. The Bible tells us, “One shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left” (Luke 17:35,36). No earthly loves or pressures should deter us from a state of readiness. Jesus the King is coming soon.

How do you know if you are ready? If you have put your sins under the blood of Christ, and have turned away from them and are living for God, then you will be ready.

2. *We must be diligent in service.*

Our Lord has commanded us to occupy until He comes. Every minute of time we give and ever dollar we invest should be done to the glory of God in expectation of our Lord’s return.

The Bible says the Blessed Hope causes men to purify themselves. How? By doing things only to please Christ, and not for earthly gain or applause. If we really believe He’s coming soon, what the world thinks and the few trinkets that we may gather will not mean much. Only what we do for Christ will last for eternity.

We must be faithful to our coming Bridegroom. We must live a lifestyle befitting the children of God, avoiding the sin and the contamination of a sin-sick world. We must be faithful in our witness. Do we witness of self or of Christ? We must

be faithful to a body of believers: “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, ... so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25).

Most of all, *we must be faithful in our love.* We must not allow the world to press us into its mold. We must not lose the qualities of our first love. Worship and adoration should be our greatest glory.

As we anticipate Christ’s coming, we must be ready to meet Him, diligent in service, faithful unto death, and loving without measure. Because of His resurrection, we have this Blessed Hope. **tpe**

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E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ABCs

OF
SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

A. Admit you are a sinner.

“There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)

Ask God’s forgiveness.

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:13

B. Believe in Jesus

(put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)

Become a child of God by receiving Christ.

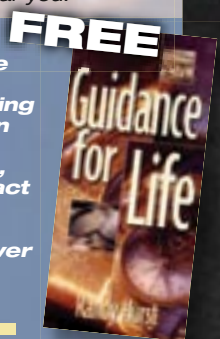
“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)

C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

For further help, contact the Assemblies of God church near you.

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