

Caught up with Paul

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“Yea doubtless and I count all things loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and do count them dung that I may win Christ and be found in Him, if by any means, I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.” or out from among dead ones, as the Greek plainly reads—Philippians 3:8-11.

The above portion of Scripture is not new to the most of our readers; but it is one of the most interesting, and important subjects that we can look into, in view of the time in which we are living. The Apostle Paul is emphasizing the Christian race in this epistle; but in this chapter he is especially occupied with the goal. He was consumed with an ambition, a burning desire to reach a certain point, and steadfastly refused everything which might hinder him in arriving there, everything of the world and the flesh—the wisdom, religion, fame, emoluments, pleasures, honors, etc., of men, that he might win in the race. He let go of all things, even apparently good things, desirable things in the natural, for the sake of this one consuming desire. It loomed before his eyes continually. He was always looking toward that goal. There was nothing too great to sacrifice if it handicapped him in his onward sweep to win.

Some one says. What is that goal? It must be a stupendous achievement to reach if Paul was so keenly desirous of its attainment. Listen to his words, “If by any means I might attain unto the out-resurrection, or the resurrection out from among the dead ones.” It was this goal toward which he was hastening with all his awakened soul. That was the only way to win the Prize, which is Christ, the Bridegroom. Many teachers confound the goal with the Prize; but these are distinct and separate in the spiritual race, even as in natural feats of speed. The goal is the mark, or point set as the boundary of the race. The Prize is the reward for winning. To arrive at the goal, the out-resurrection or out-translation is the proof that the Prize is won. Those saints like Paul, who have this objective in view and make all things bend to its attainment, will emerge from the tomb, if asleep, or be changed, if alive, before the great majority of believers in the Body of Christ, the Church, have been raised or changed.

Some one says, Oh, then you believe in several ranks in the first resurrection. Yes, more than that. We believe in several ranks in the Church. Here is an important fact of which many are in ignorance. The first resurrection includes all believers from Adam down to the very last changed body of Adam’s race. It compasses a period of time, three thousand years at least, to complete that full consummation.

Let us summarize: The first resurrection began when Christ came forth triumphant from the grave. He was the first rank, or first fruit, of the resurrection. Then a great company of the sainted dead of Old Testament fame arose after Him. They went into the city of Jerusalem and were seen by living Jews of that day - Matthew 27:51, 52. These are no doubt the “cloud of witnesses” to which Paul alludes who obtained a better resurrection - Hebrews 12:1; 11:35. These are a rank that has already been raised - a part of the first resurrection, which no one can deny. Observe the language regarding them by the inspired reporter. It was the “bodies of the saints” who had fallen asleep that were raised. Many bodies that had been in their graves came forth changed and glorified when Christ arose. These resurrected worthies are for the first and only time called “saints” in the Gospels, which proves that sanctity was the price that they paid

for that “BETTER resurrection.” They entered into the holy city, Jerusalem - a pattern of the flight of the later saints to the Holy City, the Jerusalem above.

Future ranks in the resurrection are simply a continuation of that pattern company of which we have this historic account. It proves that the first resurrection is not made up of one instantaneous bursting forth of all the sainted dead, but is composed of various companies, some dead ones raised and some living ones changed and caught up together to meet the Lord in the air. The final addition will be consummated at the end of the millennium. It is a mystery, the Apostle declares. “We shall not all sleep; but ice shall all be changed!” - 1 Corinthians 15:51.

No believers will be in their graves at that time; for no one will die during the thousand year reign of Christ except the sinner. Death as penalty for Adam’s sin shall be done away. Children shall not die. One hundred years will be the age of responsibility; for the longevity of the first days of man’s creation shall be restored - Isaiah 65:20. Hence, we say there will be no resurrection of saints after the Millennium. That will be the time allotted to the resurrection of the wicked dead. But there shall be the final change for all Israel and other righteous folks who have lived thru the thousand years. At the “last trump” they shall all be changed - 1 Corinthians 15:52.

They shall not be taken up to heaven. Heaven shall come down to them Revelation 21:1-6. No doubt a trumpet blast shall be the call to each selective rank; for a last trump undoubtedly implies the fact of an earlier trumpet sounds. In this connection we read, “The Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel (or Chief Messenger) and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air land so shall we ever be with the Lord” - 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.

But, someone asks, “Does not that Scripture citation affirm that all believers in their graves shall be raised at the same moment and with the living ones be changed?” No; it simply declares the manner of the coming of the Lord and the resurrection and translation of each rank. We know that it cannot signify all believers; for some have been raised already as has been clearly shown. Also Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, in which he sets the Church in order, gives us the arrangement of the resurrection - 1 Corinthians 15. He declares that “as in Adam all die, even so all in Christ shall be made alive; but every man in his own order” – “but each one in his proper rank” (Wuest) – 1 Corinthians 15:22, 23

The Apostle compares the great multitude of the righteous of all the ages to a great army, and says that each regiment or “order” (it is a military term) shall come forth at a certain definite time. He is not speaking in this chapter of the resurrection and translation of the Church, or Body of Christ only, as many teach - though’ they are included - but of all the redeemed. He shows us the arrangement of the events leading up to, as well as those coming after the resurrection; which latter he insists is in relays, cohorts, or battalions. All of these meanings may be attached to the word translated “order” in 1 Corinthians 15:23.

Paul further states in this connection, that even nature is profuse in its teaching of grades in the resurrection – 1 Corinthians 15:35-38. The different grains as well as flowers coming forth in different dresses at distinct and separate times, and the differing forms and separate kinds of flesh, also the diverse glories manifested in the heavenly orbits as compared with the earthly, are all unmistakable proofs of various ranks in the resurrection, the Apostle declares. – 1 Corinthians

15:39-41. Hence, if believers are blind after these things are pointed out to them they are willfully so.

There is more proof of the certainty of not only one out-resurrection and out-translation from sleeping saints, physical and spiritual, but incontrovertible proofs that there are several of these companies. These ranks of believers shall come forth in their due order, leaving many of the great army of the Lord behind until a later date. In the book of Revelation symbolic summary of end-time events - we behold several different companies of saints in heaven who have been raised at distinctly separate times. See Revelation 4:4-11; 7:9; 14:1-4. Besides these, we are given a vision of the resurrection of the two witnesses of Revelation, chapter 11, and later still the martyrs of the great tribulation are seen raised and ready to reign with Christ for the thousand years of His visible glory - Revelation 20:4-6. But, even after this, there will still remain the consummating event of the first resurrection - the change of the great host of the nation Israel and other saved nations after the Millennial reign of Christ. It is only then that mortality will "be swallowed up of life." Then only can it be truly said, not only to faith but to sight, that death has lost its sting and the grave its victory - 1 Corinthians 15:54, 55.

We can understand something of the Apostle Paul's insatiable desire for the necessary attainment, when we contemplate the victory of participating therein. It is the apex of Christian hope - the "summum bonum" of all his expectations. It signifies a greater glory - a joint heirship with Jesus Christ - the renown and honor of which vast estate we can only faintly fathom. Those of the Church who came forth from their graves, as well as those who are translated in the early dawn of that glorious day and see the matchless Master first (Mary is the type - John 20:16), will share in greater measure with Christ in His Kingdom honors than those others who are raised later. It is good to have any part in the first resurrection, "Blessed and holy is he." Yet, it is far better, to share with that out-resurrection company, the first fruit of the resurrection of the Church.

But for this supreme boon, there must be the supreme sacrifice, even as was the case with Paul. It necessitates an absolute renunciation of all things, even good things to which other believers cling and enjoy without apparent condemnation. These natural qualifications, such as birthrights, or attainments, either religious or otherwise, any-thing in fact which give us prestige or influence in the world, and in that measure make us independent of Christ, must be relinquished. The Apostle renounced even legitimate things, to which he might have held, but which handicapped him in his race toward the goal - 1 Corinthians 9. He had one ambition into which all others merged - TO WIN CHRIST. He looked steadfastly toward the out-resurrection; for to reach that attainment is to win the Prize.

Paul is the pattern racer. He not only tells us how to run, laying down the rules of the racecourse; but he runs on the course and shows us how to run that we may obtain. As in natural games, the trainer of the contestants always puts an old successful racer before the young ones to teach them the manner of the game by his example. It is the forcible way. Therefore the Apostle is not only our teacher, but our example. He writes to us of the theory and rules of the race, and then gets out and runs. Yes, and he wins the Prize, as he informs us 2 Timothy 4:6-8. We are taught by a successful contestant; but he does not declare that it is an easy race, or that a passive, indifferent runner will win. No, indeed, rather otherwise. He insists that winning the Prize in this heavenly race, means an absolute overcoming of all the allurements of the world, the flesh and the devil. He intimates that we will suffer in the way of renunciation even as he suffered - the loss of all things. The majority of believers want to win; but they do not desire to suffer to win. The price

of the out-resurrection is suffering with Christ. Running with Paul signifies a dropping of all excess baggage. It is the stripping route. Handicaps of the flesh which weight us down must be dropped if we are determined to win. Pride of race, of face, of grace and even pace in the natural must be let go. We must stand in Christ and run as Christ to win Christ.

The Apostle sets before us his experience as that of the successful contestant. He says that he cast away as dead refuse, all those things of the flesh which he once valued - "I...Do count them but dung" - in comparison with the privilege of winning the Prize. "If by any means I might arrive at the goal, namely, the out-resurrection from among those who are dead" - Philippians 3:11, (Wuest). He counted no loss, no suffering too great in view of the attainment of the end. He expresses uncertainty at this stage of the race as to the out come as regards himself. He adds phrase upon phrase, achievement to achievement, implying the difficulties to be overcome. He wants us to know that he was not claiming that he had reached the goal at the time he wrote this letter to the Philippians (the racers). He says, "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect; but I press on..." - Pilippians 3:12, RV. He was in hot pursuit of the goal. His conception of the Prize and the standard required by the Lord for the winning of the race was so high, that he disavowed all self-confidence as to the result. And yet, at the same time he declares that he was more abundant in labors, in suffering, in trials, in renunciation than others of the early Church. He had the clearer vision of the Prize; hence, his estimate of the attainment was greater. That applies to believers today. If we have a light and trivial apprehension of the Truth and of the place and the privilege and the race, we will have the same manner of experience. We will be shallow. The measure of our vision will determine our speed, and vice versa.

Not a Gift but a Reward.

The following paraphrase, of the Apostle Paul's words at this place, is beautiful and striking. "Do not mistake, I hold the language of hope, not of assurance. I have not yet reached the goal. I am not yet made perfect. But I press forward in the race, eager to grasp the Prize; forasmuch as Christ also has grasped me. My brothers, let other men vaunt their assurance. Such is not my language. I do not consider that I have the Prize already in my grasp. This, and this only, is my rule - forgetting the landmarks already passed and straining every nerve and muscle in the onward race, I press forward ever toward the goal, that I may win the Prize" - Lightfoote.

The explanation of the uncertainty is that the out-resurrection is not a gift; but a reward for loyal service and suffering with Christ. Here is what causes the objection to the ranks in the resurrection. So many saints fail to distinguish between God's gifts in grace and His reward for a laying hold of His grace for achievement in over-coming. The first resurrection is for all believers on the merits of Christ's death and resurrection; but the out-resurrection and out-translation are a selection because of an attainment. Paul did not know the standard which God has fixed in His own purpose; but he was determined to win at any cost. He pressed on to seize the Prize; for which privilege he had been seized. All believers of this glorious Church age have been called to so run that they may be among the first to rise from their graves, or be translated (for resurrection includes translation). No racer is ever sure that he has won except at the very end. If a runner has the idea that he is far ahead of his competitors, he will immediately cease his strenuous activity and thus lose the prize.

The fable of the hare and the tortoise is a good illustration of the above fact. They started out together to reach a certain goal. The hare leaped far in advance of the tortoise who was jogging along at a slow pace. Finally, after he had run ahead, the hare looked back with satisfaction at the

ground he had covered, inwardly amused at the poor tortoise who was nowhere to be seen. He was sure that he had won the race, so he laid down to take a rest and was soon fast asleep. After a long time, the tortoise came in sight - slow it might be said, but sure. He passed the sleeping hare with intense concentration, but not satisfaction. He knew the race was not won yet, hence, he hurried on; and he arrived at the goal before the hare awakened. He won the race, not because of speed but persistency. He went right on, forgetting the ground already traveled - the things behind - intent only on the objective before him. He was not confident of winning until he had reached the journey's end.

That expresses exactly what the Apostle is teaching in our present portion. There is no place in this spiritual race for boastful satisfaction. The nearer we are to the goal the more difficulties we will encounter; hence, the more need of persistent running to win. Our vision will be clearer and our eye more single. We will more keenly realize the worth of the Prize which at the outset was only faintly discerned. Only shallow souls imagine that there is no reward for achievement in the Christian race. It was the goal and the Prize set before the Apostle which made him suffer, labor and die to win. Some one says, "My merit for resurrection and translation is the blood only." Surely that is the basis. But the out-resurrection and out-translation are reward for sacrifice and service. Another objector says, "Such teaching makes divisions." No, it does not. Saints who would divide from saints because of this glorious revelation are already divided from them in heart. But even if it were so, truth must not be sacrificed for unity. It need not divide believers. The Apostle emphatically taught an out-resurrection in this epistle, but he guards against a separation by these words. "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded." - Philippians 3:15. The mature believer is here contrasted with the babe. He is perfect in the sense of full growth, likeminded with Paul, not doubting nor denying that there is an attainment, nor foolishly scorning the fact of reward; but making the supreme effort to win at any cost.

These mature saints have received a revelation beyond some others, which is marvelous and glorious. They can but declare what they have been taught by the Spirit, and say, even as Luther, "So help me God, I cannot retract;" but they are not boasting of having arrived at the goal, nor ruling others out of the race. Oh no; they are glad to hear of others stepping out to run to win. In fact they desire that all the saints get the light upon the subject. And at the same time they remember the warning of Paul, "...Lest by any means when I have preached to others, I myself should be castaway" - 1 Corinthians 9:27. He was teaching of the race in that chapter also, and he was guarding against self-confidence. He was not resting on past laurels nor sleeping on the race course. So it is, even today. There are some racers pressing on, rain or shine, looking neither to the right hand nor to the left, finding no satisfaction in anything or any one. Sometimes they are perplexed by the loneliness of the way - slightly cast down that they are so utterly unknown and unappreciated, and so separated from the great majority of believers - but they are neither despairing nor are they daunted. Oh no. They must go on, regardless of circumstances or difficulties of the way. It is the last half-hour. The end is in sight. They are running to obtain, like Gideon's three hundred - "faint yet pursuing." - Judges 8:4. They have not yet reached the goal. But in this perfection they are boasting - they are running to win. They are not perfected in the sense of having won. That will be known in the out-resurrection and out-translation.

Hope for You

There is a promise of cheer for those who are not likeminded with Paul, those who are yet babes, "If in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." - Philippians 3:15

That is, if you cannot see that there is any out-resurrection or even any ranks in the resurrection of the Body of Christ; or on the other hand, if you think that the reward is not worth the strenuous running - the loosing from all the coveted things of the world and fame, the consecration, the dedication; or if you think you will get it if any one does, or that you already have won - if you are honest in all these cogitations and really want the Truth at any cost, God will reveal it unto you. No one can be correct in doctrine, and disagree with Paul on any point; but the Truth must be revealed. He says, gently and tenderly, "...whereto we have already attained, LET US WALK BY THE SAME RULE, let us mind the same thing." - Philippians 3:16. Unity, as far as we can go, is the thought; but we cannot let the Truth slip away. It is better to let the saints slip away, if they cannot bear to hear the glorious glad Message of an overcoming life. Paul tells us to walk with him and with one another as far as we can and if in anything we differ, God is pledged to reveal EVEN THIS unto us. Observe that this apex of Christian vision and hope - this great golden vista, this overwhelming transcendent revelation of the out-resurrection and out-translation, the peak of all honor and glory - will be given to all saints who ask for all the Truth with a single eye.

Oh, it seems to us that to fail to reach and seize hold of the exalted place for which we have been seized, would be an irreparable loss. And we know it signifies marvelous honor to win, as we learn by the language of determination and renunciation of the Apostle Paul. The vision of the Prize was so real and sure to him that it lightened every burden and lifted every sorrow. Let us ask for the revelation, then follow Paul.

There is no uncertainty of the attainment in his last letter to Timothy. He wrote it on the border land of eternity, as it were, saying, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing."- II Tim. 4:7, 8. Now he waits for those of his rank, the dead raised and the living changed, to be caught up together and crowned with Christ. Have you got the vision sure?

