

The Blessed Hope

Paul wrote in *Titus 2:13 (ESV)* ¹³ *waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.* Our ‘Blessed Hope’ is the return of Jesus for His children. On the day that Jesus ascended into heaven we read two men dressed in white said in *Acts 1:11 (ESV)* ¹¹ ... “*Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.*” It could not be any plainer. Jesus is returning in the clouds just the way He left. No matter how desperate our present circumstances may feel, those who follow Christ as Savior have something the world does not have – the blessed hope – meaning we look forward to *the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.* As we celebrate Easter 2021, I want us to rejoice in the truth that just as Jesus resurrected from the grave and 40 days later ascended into heaven, we have this Blessed Hope that Jesus will return opening up the skies to lead us to our home in glory.

Many people believe that this life is all we have. Believers understand that since Christ rose from the dead, we will too.

1 Corinthians 15 may be the earliest written account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, possibly written even before the first gospel. However, an oral tradition, of course, previously existed telling how God raised Christ from the dead.

There will always be people who say that Christ did not rise from the dead. During the time of the Apostle Paul, there was a group in the Corinthian church who did not believe in the resurrection. To deny the resurrection, is to deny one of the greatest truths of the Bible. If there is no resurrection, there is no good news. If there is no resurrection, we have no reason to tell others about Jesus. If Christ did not come out from the grave, then He cannot resurrect us. Life without hope of the resurrection is a bleak existence. However, do not despair, the evidence is overwhelming that Jesus is alive!

There were many elements in Corinth that would have contributed to the denial of the resurrection. The Sadducees had always denied the hope of the resurrection. The Athenians mocked the resurrection. Epicurean philosophers took the “eat, drink, for tomorrow we die” attitude. Paul wanted to confront these corrupters of the faith while at the same time strengthening those who believed.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (ESV) ³ *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,* ⁴ *that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,* ⁵ *and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.* ⁶ *Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.* ⁷ *Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.* ⁸ *Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.*

Paul said that Christ died according to the Scriptures. He was talking about the Old Testament. The New Testament was still being compiled. The life, death, and resurrection of Christ fulfilled what the Old Testament prophets predicted about the coming Messiah. You can call it the “Cinderella principle.” Remember how the prince searched far and wide to find the one person whose foot would fit into the glass slipper? The Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah fit only Jesus. As a whole, the Jewish nation missed the Lamb of

the world! They expected their Messiah to destroy evil and all their enemies and establish an eternal kingdom with Israel as the preeminent nation in the world. However, blended into the promise of a coming Messiah was the prophecy that pictured a suffering servant who would die on behalf of His people. One example of such a prediction is found in *Isaiah 53*. There the inspired prophet wrote about the servant of the Lord who, although innocent of any wrongdoing, would bear the sins of His people in death. This passage is a strikingly accurate prediction of what happened to Christ. Paul was not alone in pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. We have just studied how both Peter and Stephen did the same thing in the book of *Acts*.

The facts reveal that Jesus did actually die. Our Savior died in full view of the crowd. They even stuck a spear in His side to verify that He was dead. Remember, this was not 21st century medicine. Jesus was not rushed to a trauma center where He was resuscitated and kept on a life support system for three days. Instead, He was taken off the cross, wrapped tightly in a cloth with spices and laid in a tomb with a big rock in front of an opening that was sealed with the emperor's seal. Jesus literally died. Jesus' resurrection after three days was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy: *Hosea 6:2 (ESV)* ² *After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.*

After the resurrection, Jesus revealed Himself to various people for approximately 40 days. His appearances were not voices in the night. Jesus was not some mysterious presence in the room. Jesus' resurrection did not consist of a rumor of a look-alike or anything even faintly similar to our present-day Elvis sightings. Let's look at the evidence list of who actually saw the risen Lord.

CHART: JESUS' APPEARANCES AFTER HIS RESURRECTION

Mary Magdalene	Mark 16:9-11; John 20:10-18
The other women at the tomb	Matt. 28:8-10
Peter aka Cephas in Jerusalem	Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5
The two travelers on the road	Mark 16:12-13
Ten disciples behind closed doors	Mark 16:14; Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-25
All the disciples, with Thomas	John 10:26-31; 1 Cor 15:5
Seven disciples while fishing	John 21:1-14
Eleven disciples on the mountain	Matt. 28:16-20
A crowd of 500	1 Cor 15:6
Jesus' brother James	1 Cor 15:7
Those who watched Jesus ascend into heaven	Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:3-8

Taken from the Life Application Bible

Another irrefutable witness to the resurrection of Jesus is our own personal testimony. Let's make sure our actions match our words.

On this Easter morning let us first consider the sin that came into the Garden of Eden as Adam and Eve sinned against their Creator and were cast out from the garden to live under the curse of sin and death. Next turn your eyes to Jesus as He hung on a cross abandoned by God and mocked by mankind at Golgotha and Jesus saying: *It is Finished!* Jesus meant that His work was finished, He gave His life and blood to undo the curse of sin that began in the Garden. Then, turn your eyes to another garden where Jesus' lifeless body had been placed in a tomb in the rocky side of a hill. Jesus is no longer dead after three days. Jesus is alive. Then, move forward in your thoughts thinking of the day when Jesus gathered His disciples and said in **Acts 1:8 (ESV)** ⁸ *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.*”

We are currently living in the church age where our business is to be witnessing about the risen and soon returning Lord of All the Earth. But there will come a day when we are going to experience exactly what the two men had promised as Jesus ascended into the clouds. He will descend and meet us in the air!

Belief in the resurrection of Jesus is what the gospel (or good news) of Jesus is all about. Paul concluded the 15th chapter of **Corinthians** by writing of a future resurrection day followed by our ascension day! Paul begins with this:

Read 1 Corinthians 15:50 (ESV) ⁵⁰ *I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.*

Ironside says, “*Flesh and blood* meaning our bodies in their present condition as sustained by blood are not suited for Heaven, and the coming glorious kingdom; therefore, we must be changed.” How will this change take place?” Paul gives us a glorious description of the events.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:51-58 (ESV) ⁵¹ *Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,* ⁵² *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.* ⁵³ *For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.* ⁵⁴ *When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”* ⁵⁵ *“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”* ⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.* ⁵⁷ *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* ⁵⁸ *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

Behold! I tell you a mystery. A mystery in the New Testament is not something mysterious. A Biblical mystery is a truth that had not been revealed before. What a privileged people we are to be on this side of Calvary and to know the mystery that the people of the Old Testament never knew! What is this mystery? *We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.* God's Word tells us in **Hebrews 9:27 (ESV)** ²⁷ *And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,*

And yet in this passage, Paul reveals the mystery that there will be a generation of God's redeemed people who will be exempt from death. There are a couple of biblical examples. First is Enoch. **Hebrews 11:5 (ESV)** ⁵ *By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him...* The second example is Elijah. He was talking to Elisha when this happened. **2 Kings 2:11 (ESV)** ¹¹ *And as they*

still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

Paul uses the word “sleep” in place of “die” because death to the believer is the putting of the body to sleep until the Lord Jesus comes to wake us again. It is only the body that sleeps. The spirit and soul, is absent from the body and present with the Lord. (*2 Cor. 5:8*)

Every one of us must undergo the glorious change in order to have part in the heavenly side of the kingdom, and that shall take place instantly. It does not say, "In the winking of an eye," but "in the *twinkling* of an eye." As quickly as a gleam of light shines in the eye, so quickly shall we be changed at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a marvelous hope it is! No wonder the apostle calls it this "blessed hope."

Let's look into Paul's mention of the “*last trumpet*.” What is the last trumpet? It was an expression used in Paul's day by the Roman army. When the Roman army was in camp, and the camp was about to be broken up and they were going to move on – the trumpet sounded, and it usually sounded three times. The first trumpet was blown to signify that they were to strike the tents, pull out the tent pegs and prepare to depart – they were to get ready. When the second trumpet blew it meant that they were to fall into line just before going. When the third trump – the last trumpet sounded it meant start marching!

We hear the first trumpet when Jesus calls us and we choose to remove the old pegs of this earth following Him in repentance and faith and are saved. We respond to the second trumpet as we gather with the people of God working for the kingdom of God. But there's going to come a day, very soon I believe, when the last trumpet will sound and we will fly away!

For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. You will notice that you have the two groups. *This perishable body* refers to the dead. The dead *must put on the imperishable*. The dead whose bodies have corrupted away will be raised in incorruptible bodies. But the living, *This mortal* refers to those that are alive but subject to death if time goes on, " *must put on immortality*."

Then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory. Paul is quoting **Hosea 13:14**. Ironside says, “Death comes in and takes from us our nearest and dearest, and our hearts are pained because of the separation. But if we know Christ, and if our loved ones were in Christ, the sting of death is gone, and we are looking on to a glorious reunion when Jesus comes again. What a wonderful event it will be when saints who have been separated here on earth will recognize one another as we are caught up to meet the Lord in the air. Then we can sing, *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?* That which makes death terrible to the unsaved is sin; *The sting of death is sin*; but if we know that sin has been put away, that sin has been purged by the precious atoning blood of Christ, then that sting of death is gone.” Paul exhorts us to stand firm: *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.* **WE WILL SOON FLY AWAY!**