

Clearing the Waters

Into Texts:

Genesis 2:7-10

Revelation 22:1-5

In the beginning there was a Garden, a River, and the Tree of Life. In the end there is a Garden, a River, the Tree of Life.

Purpose:

As Dr. Wallace Roark indicated in *Christian Doctrines*, Christian theology, especially that of the Western Church, is a slow moving river flowing down through the ages. As it has meandered in time, many tributaries have found their way in to its once pristine headwaters. With these added thoughts came confusion, weak interpretation, lost meaning, all of which only served to muddy the waters of the pure fountain that flowed forth from Jesus Christ, His apostles and the early Church. In the day in age we live, it is our obligation to trust the Holy Spirit and the inspired Scripture to clear the water and return to sound doctrine at any point where erroneous teaching has distorted the TRUTH. One such area that has become most muddied through history and into the contemporary Church is the idea of Heaven and the Resurrection. Thus we seek to return to a clearer, more accurate understanding of what exactly is the HOPE of the Christian faith in terms of our final outcome and God's final purpose in Jesus Christ.

Misconception #1- Heaven is our Home.

You would actually be hard-pressed to find a text that clearly states such. There are references throughout scripture of Heaven being an interim period where the dead in Christ, the saints of the ages, await the final judgment. But it is not the end hope that we should cling to.

Misconception #2- Life after Death will take the shape of a spirit or vapor of sort.

The essential in Christian theology is the RESURRECTION. Without the resurrection, both of Jesus Christ and our own, Christianity is reduced to rubble and there is no hope on which to stand.

So what does the Bible actually teach us? The following approach to this question will be as a rock skipped across the water- we will only be skimming the surface of the reality of our hope, heaven, and the resurrection. None-the-less, we will have a good spring board from which to dive deeper and return to a truer understanding of what is meant by the Christian faith and hope.

The First Skip

Genesis 3:17, 19, 24

It is essential to understand the original state of CREATION and God's original intent for it and the man and woman He placed there. In the Garden, God and humanity shared mutual fellowship. In other words the abode of God coexisted with the abode of Creation and Humans. Heaven and Earth were synonymous- there was no separation. Then came the great rebellion and fall. And following that God acknowledged the Curse and so as to

begin His plan of redemption and reconciliation, He separated Creation from Eternity. The Sword of Judgment would stand against Humanity until the last day when Jesus Christ would execute it once and for all.

The Second Skip

Romans 8:18-25

We must include Creation with ourselves in the process of redemption. If God were not able to restore the earth, then Satan would have won. Thus Paul recognizes that Creation longs for the revealing of the Sons of God so that through the Glory manifested in the underscored resurrection, it too might experience recreation. Note that among those who have Hope in Jesus Christ, there should be an anxious longing for the resurrection. It is this hope that produces movement within our relationship to God and spurs on to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

The Third Skip

I Thessalonians 4:13-17

The Resurrection is for a New Earth not for Heaven. N.T. Wright gives us great insight into the metaphor that Paul uses to describe the final Resurrection. In colonial times of the Roman Empire, the citizens of the empire were aware that they enjoyed their status as such, and that they were subjects to the emperor. Although the ruler did not reside among them, they knew they enjoyed the privileges of the being loyal servants to the emperor. In the event that the ruler was to visit their colony, it would have been an insult to permit him to arrive at the city gate unescorted. Thus it was customary to meet the ruler far outside the city or colony and parade in with him in celebration.

This is exactly what Paul is referencing in the passage, stating that we will meet Jesus in the air. Ask yourself the question, where is Jesus coming. He is not coming half way to earth to make a “U-turn.” He is coming as a triumphant King to set things straight on earth once and for all. (Ref. I Corinthians 15 and I John 2:28; 3:2)

The Fourth Skip

Revelation 21:2-5

The New Earth is established and the city of God, the New Jerusalem, descends from Heaven to Earth to be a permanent abode for God among His people. Jesus Christ is the authority and all that is done on the New Earth is for His Glory. The redeemed take part in rulership there as they act on behalf of the King and their reigning is an act of Worship before God. This is what we are being prepared for.

The Fifth Skip

Philippians 3:10-14, 18-21

The Hope of the Resurrection as it unfolds in scripture should motivate us in our devotion to Jesus Christ and His work of salvation within us. Sanctification should not be a question but a certainty in our lives. We are ever being transformed, conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. This Hope should propel us forward as good stewards working in the absence of their ruler, anxiously waiting for His return so that they may offer to Him the fruit of their labor as an act of worship. (Ref. Matthew 25:14-28)

The Final Skip

Revelation 22:1-5

At last we arrive in full view of the hope that God has set aside for those who follow the Lordship of Jesus Christ- a pristine river flowing from the throne, not in Heaven, but on Earth. Somehow we manage to marginalize and minimize this essential reality of Resurrection and the New Creation. And the end result is that we are left with eschatology not very different from Buddhism or Hinduism, perhaps our bodies are only to be scattered to rejoin the natural world as our soul spins off into Karma to spend eternity as a formless, person-less energy. Sorry, but that is not what I signed up for, and that is not the intention that God has lain out for us in His Word.

So perhaps it is time to rethink the story line that we feed our children and to reexamine the focus of our worship songs and favorite hymns. Without a doubt we should reconsider the purpose and place of a funeral and how approach bereavement of a believer. Maybe we should even question the notion of burial, as cremation looks less like the hope for resurrection and more like the ideologies of Buddhists. Where you draw the line may be an item of personal reflection in most regards but on this note a line must be drawn. We must live our lives before the world as a people with an everlasting hope, which is spelled out in the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Dead and the New Creation. If our lives are not reflecting this hope in terms of sanctification and the administration of the Kingdom of God now on planet Earth, then it is time to return to square one and assess what it is we bought into in the first place. Anything short of this undermines the true intention of our God and King Jesus Christ.

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