

Going Up?

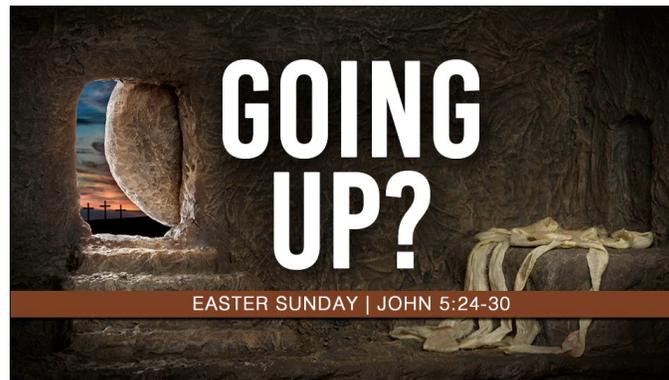
Easter Sunday

John 5:24-30

Written By

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Reflecting on the resurrection of Jesus on that first Easter morning, the apostle Paul offered these instructive words many years later:

“But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, then comes the end, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:20-24).

Note several key things about this significant portion of Scripture. First, Christ is specifically called “the first fruits.” You have to go back to Leviticus 23:9-14 to learn what this means. Under Mosaic Law, the farmer who wanted to participate in the feast of first fruits offered to the Lord in the Temple that portion of his crop which matured first. Why? Because that which was first was considered to be the best and most costly, hence it logically belonged to the Lord. As the “first fruits,” Christ was the best offering that could be given to the Father. Second, the first fruits offering served to demonstrate that there was more harvest to come.

What has all of this got to do with the resurrection on Easter morning some 2,000 years ago? Everything. Christ’s resurrection wasn’t a selfish, lone event, but one where God gave us his best to secure the possibility of our eternal forgiveness of sin. God’s redemption plan was

perfect. Man's flagrant, willful sin in the Garden of Eden against the holy, eternal God, by definition, called for the holy, eternal God to come and secure forgiveness for us. Additionally, as Paul says so clearly by relating Christ's resurrection to the Feast of First Fruits, there is the divine promise that others will be resurrected after Christ. It's a truth echoed elsewhere in the New Testament:

⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him (Romans 6).

²⁵ Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7).

¹⁷ When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, ¹⁸ and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades (Revelation 1).

Sure, there were other resurrections before Christ (figurative, Ezekiel 37; implied, Exodus 3:6; hoped for, Psalm 49:15; 73:24, 25; Proverbs 23:14; Job 19:25-27; taught, Isaiah 26:19; prophesied, Daniel 12:1-2; actualized, 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 13:21); however, none matched the magnitude of His. Those people were raised only to die again. They served as proofs of God's power and existence in their day and time and then experience death a second time. Christ, conversely, died and rose again never to die again. By so doing, He has not become the only One who can bring resurrection life to mankind.

This resurrection truth, of course, leads to a host of provocative and highly intriguing questions: Just how many more resurrections will there be? When will they occur? Who will be a part of these resurrections? What will happen after these resurrections? What happens to our soul at death? Is it resurrected or is the resurrection of the body future? And most importantly, which resurrection will you be a participant in? These are the questions I'd like to address this Easter, for the answers to these questions is really what the Lord wants us to be concerned with.

Where, then, will we unearth our answers? Our quest will take us first to Christ's words in John 5:24-30 where He speaks about the concept of resurrection.

²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. ²⁵ Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live. ²⁶ For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; ²⁷ and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, ²⁹ and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment. ³⁰ I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

By sifting through these words and looking at other relevant biblical texts on the topic at hand, we can ascertain that Jesus is summarizing a very complex and exciting order of future resurrections.

God Has Several Resurrections In His Game Plan (John 5:24-30)

Resurrection #1: The Dead Sinner (John 5:24a)

This first resurrection is spiritual as opposed to literal, unseen as opposed to seen. Listen and learn from Jesus:

²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Some call this resurrection, based upon our Lord's teaching in John 3, being "born again." Others label it "getting saved" or "becoming a Christian." Whatever you call it, salvation of the sinner is what our Lord calls the *first facet of the first resurrection*. To understand His teaching here, I would direct you to two sub-points.

Man's Spiritual Reality. Scripture has much to say about man's spiritual condition at the moment of birth. He is physically alive outwardly, but inwardly he is spiritually dead. Paul develops this concept in Ephesians 2:1-3:

¹ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest."

See the emphasis here upon death? All mankind is born spiritually dead from birth. None are excluded or exempt. The Puritan pastor and writer Thomas Adams puts this in perspective with these words: "Iniquity can plead antiquity." Just how old is sin in man? As old as the Garden of Eden. As Paul teaches in Romans 5:12, we all fell into a state of sin and ultimate judgment when our forefather, Adam, fell:

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned . . ."

We in the West typically say this is really unfair; however, it is a concept we know all too well. What concept is that? The idea that the infraction of one impacts the many. Consider March Madness. Who knows which team will win the championship? What we do know is that the referees will call every foul they see by individual players. If you willfully go against the college basketball rulebook and foul another player, expect your entire time to bear the brunt of your activity. Since this law applies to college basketball, which is not really that significant, it logically follows it most certainly applies to God's rule book and man's choice to either follow it

or not on the court called the Garden of Eden.

Man's Spiritual Remedy. Those who desire to trade spiritual death for spiritual life are told how to here in John 5:24: “*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.*” Repeating “truly, truly” twice, which in the original text of the New Testament means literally “indeed, indeed, serves to underscore and highlight what Jesus is about to say. It’s the verbal equivalent to the civil defense noise you hear on the radio, which is designed to grab your attention and cause you to listen.

Just how does the dead sinner get resurrected? The way is simple. It calls for, hearing Christ’s Word. What is His Word? It is teaching throughout the Word of God that spiritual resurrection is obtained, not by works, but by believing in Christ as the great Redeemer. John 20:30-31 records some of these words:

“Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”

Want to be spiritually resurrected once and for all time? Want to have eternal life ... now? Then you must make the decision today to say to Jesus, “Lord, I realize I’m a spiritually dead man in need of your forgiveness and grace. Wash me clean of my sin and be my personal Lord and Savior. Amen.” The moment you utter that prayer in faith, believing that Jesus and Jesus alone can forgive you and give life to your spiritually dead self, then you, my friend, not only get saved, you get resurrected! Have you done that yet? I would urge you to, because the proverbial clock is ticking.

This is the *first facet of the first resurrection*. It’s is spiritual in nature, but it is made possible by the second resurrection (which is really the first resurrection!).

Resurrection #2: The Lord Jesus (John 5:26)

I want to skip over verse 25 for the time being and look at verse 26. Why? Because verse 25 goes thematically with verses 27-30, and because verses 25, 27-30 are a logical outcome of the teaching and truth of verse 26.

Verse 26 teaches us that God, the Father, and Jesus, the Son, are life in and of themselves.

²⁶ For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself ...

Jesus, has “life in Himself,” meaning that just as the Father is perpetual life, so He is perpetual life. John opened his book with this concept: “In Him [Jesus] was life, and the life was the light of men” (John 1:4). We, as dependent beings do not have life in and of ourselves. Our life came originally from God who is, ontologically, the essence of timeless life. He, as the Necessary One, shared life with us when he, the Uncased One, caused us to enjoy the effect we call life.

Let’s pursue this concept further.

First, Jesus is God because God is the great eternal One. This is why Jesus is called the great “I am” in John 8:58 and the Alpha and Omega in Revelation (Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13).

Second, it latently points us to the resurrection event. Satan and his wicked cohorts thought they scored a major victory over God and His redemptive plan at the cross, but three days later an empty tomb with a living, breathing, tangible Messiah spelled their doom. Why couldn't death hold Jesus within its clutches? Because He, as God, had "life in Himself." Hence, by definition of who he was, it was impossible to destroy Him. You might kill His physical body, but He would always be able to harness His unfathomable divine power to give life to that body at His decree. As Jesus says later in John

"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I have received from My Father" (John 10).

Obviously, Satan wasn't listening, but we should. Why? Because Christ raised His physical body from the grave by His magnificent, wondrous power, He, therefore, is more than capable of raising us too.

Look back through history and you'll see many amazing feats. There was the creation of the signed alphabet by the ancient Egyptians, the creation of law by the ancient Sumerians, the building of massive stone theaters and buildings by the Greeks before there was heavy machinery, the magnificent life-like stone carvings by the Greeks, the unbelievable drawings of Leonardo da Vinci, the creation of the ball and chain pump in the 1600s, the discovery of electricity by William Gilbert in the 1500s, the building of the Suez Canal in the late 1800s, the loom invented in the 1700s called The Spinning Jenny, man's first flight with the Wright brothers, and the creation of whole host of amazing technologies like the telephone, the radio, the television, the camera, the computer, and, of course, the Internet.

Yet, you could wrap all these feats into one, plus the countless others we've no time to mention, and they'd all pale into insignificance where the resurrection is concerned. No one has and no one will ever be able to do what Jesus did three days after His gruesome death. He laid His holy life down, and then He picked it up again. That, my friend, is the feat of all feats. And because He arose we can sing with the hymnist:

"Low in the grave He lay, Jesus my Savior!
Waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord!
Up from the grave He arose, with a mighty triumph o'er His foes;
he arose a victor from the dark domain, and He lives forever with His saints to reign;
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!"

Christ's resurrection is the second resurrection, but it is the first physical resurrection and because of it other resurrections can and will logically follow in God's timetable for mankind.

Resurrection #3: The Saint (John 5:25, 28-29a)

Opening again with those emphatic words, "Truly, Truly, I say to you . . . (used also in John 1:51; 5:19; 6:26, 32, 47, 53; 8:34, 51, 58; 10:1, 7; 12:24; 13:16, 20, 21; 14:12; 16:20, 23), Jesus awakens us to a sobering and exciting truth: There will be a time of resurrection for all men, including all of those who have served Him and all those who have (or had) shunned Him. Before we dig into this most important topic, let me make a few cursory observations.

One, the statement “an hour is coming and now is,” suggests two concepts: First, it is in the process of coming, and when it comes it will be within our space, time continuum. Second, that this resurrection “now is,” points back, I believe, to the spiritual resurrection Jesus has just discussed in verse 24. Thus, He saying that spiritual resurrection is available right now for all those who want it, and that physical resurrection is coming at some specified point in the future.

Two, He says “when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God . . .,” showing the certainty of the future event. He didn’t say if, but when. It is going to happen. You can bank on that, it’s only a matter of time.

Three, all will participate in one of the two resurrections. No one will miss this “day.” Everyone from all time will be there: Alexander the Great, Pharaoh Neco, King David, Goliath, Adam, Eve, Noah, Peter, King Herod, Stalin, Joe Dimaggio, Marilyn Monroe, Frank Sinatra, Richard Nixon, Tupac Shakur, Janis Joplin, Jimmy Hendricks, Dwight Eisenhower, Hitler, Mao Te Sung, and on and on goes the list. Every person who has ever lived will be present for this event of all events. None will be excluded. None will be overlooked. None will be forgotten. None will remain in the grave.

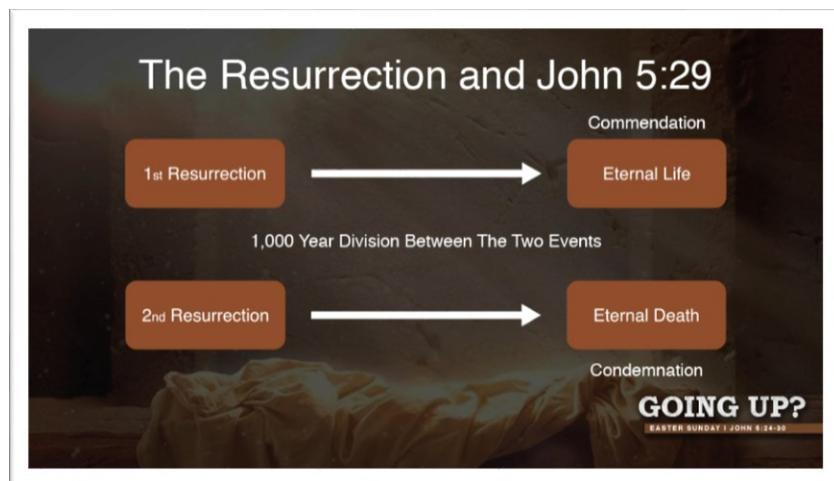
Four, the resurrection will be comprised of two groups: Those who did good deeds and those who did evil ones. Now don’t misunderstand the Lord here. He’s not saying that heaven will be populated with folks who merely worked their way there. Such would be to contradict everything He taught while on earth about how to get into heaven. Repeatedly He taught that man was not saved from His coming wrath by his works, but through belief in His work upon Calvary and in the empty tomb. Placing your belief in this is the core of the gospel which saves a man and one can’t help but see this throughout His teaching (John 1:7, 12; 2:11, 23; 3:15-18; 5:24; 6:35, 36, 40, 47; 9:35-38; 10:42; 11:25-27, etc.). One old saying puts salvation this way:

“Man cannot be saved by perfect obedience because he cannot render it. He cannot be saved by imperfect obedience because God cannot accept it. The only solution is Calvary.”

Another dusty anecdote adds these words:

“God is satisfied with the cross as settling the sin question. We should be satisfied with what satisfies God.”

Amen to that. Salvation is not gained by works, but by placing your faith in His work. If



salvation could be secured by personal righteous works then Christ's salvific, redemptive work would be nullified. What then is Jesus saying in John 5:25, 28-29? Saints are those who are saved by their belief in God's rich grace and then show that faith by how they live. They live a life of good works because of who they are. True, those works don't save them, faith does. But it is the fruit which shows whose tree they really belong to.

Five, there is a chronological order to the resurrections. Paul puts it this way in 1 Corinthians 15:22:

²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming ... (1 Corinthians 15).

The Greek word, order, *tagmati* (τάγματι), is a military metaphor denoting a 'company' or a 'troop.' Paul merely uses a familiar term to denote how the resurrection Christ speaks of is orderly and sequential. We know from other New Testament teaching that's Christ's coming will be twofold. First, there will be the Rapture of the Church prior the seven year tribulation (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), and, then, there will be His glorious return with His Church at the end of the tribulation (Revelation 19) at this which time he will resurrect Old Testament and tribulational saints (Isaiah 26:19-21; Daniel 12:2; Revelation 7:13-17; 13:7; 20:4). Chronologically,



then, these two resurrections of the righteous are the next ones on the immanent horizon. Will you be there?

Six, the resurrections mentioned in verses 25, 27-29 are not, as I have said, a one-time, contemporaneous event. It appears that way here in John, but in the classical Semitic tradition, there was and is a vast period of time between these two events (Isaiah 61:1-2 is a case in point where monumental events

appear as one but are really two events separated by thousands of years). Jesus was simply summarizing. We know this because of what John tells us in Revelation 20:

⁴ And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.⁷ And

when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. ⁹ And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. ¹⁰ And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. ¹¹ And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. ¹⁴ And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20)

John lays down some weighty concepts at this point, but ones we need to understand in order to properly grasp the words of Jesus in John 5. For the sake of time, permit me to summarize John's teaching here.

John is saying that there will be two resurrections, one for the saved and one for the lost, separated by a 1,000 years, the period of time when the Messiah, Jesus, will reign supremely over His throne in the literal city of Jerusalem. So, after the seven year tribulation, the Lord will return to earth at His Second Coming and judge the wicked and the righteous. He will raise the Old Testament saints and the Tribulations saints (Isaiah 26:19-21; Daniel 12:2; Revelation 20:4), who were not part of the Church and its resurrection at the Rapture, so they, too, can enjoy the messianic kingdom. The lost who live through the tribulation will be cast into hell until they are released from there momentarily to be judged by Jesus at the close of His 1,000 year kingdom period. Thus, *the first resurrection is the resurrection of the righteous and the second resurrection is that of the lost*. More precisely, the first resurrection is a series of resurrections, culminating with the final resurrection of the righteous at the end of Christ's earthly kingdom. All of these resurrections of the righteous are lumped together under the phraseology the first resurrection.

Getting back to Christ's teaching in John 5, what will happen for those Christians who are raised first? There are countless benefits awaiting these folks, too many, in fact, to discuss this morning. Suffice it to plant your thinking in John's words in Revelation 21:3-4:

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain, the first things have passed away.'

Amen to that. What a blessed hope we have, we who know we will partake of the first resurrection. Jesus, our Lord, was raised to life, and we, too, shall be raised to life with Him one

day. Many saints I loved have gone one before me, but on that great day we shall all stand together before the throne of God singing “When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we’d first begun.” Amazing is His grace that shares not only salvation with us, but resurrection and eternal life as well.

This is the first resurrection with all of its various facets. Will you be there in that throng? I hope so because any thinking individual wouldn’t want to be part of the fourth resurrection. And while we’re talking about the resurrection of the righteous, I have to ask, What happens to you if you, as a believer, die now? Do you immediately receive a resurrected body? Good question. The answer is “No.” Your spirit will resemble you, as we see from Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus (Matthew 17), and it will be definite “gain” as Paul articulates in Philippians 1:21-23 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-5:10; however, your resurrection ... or reunification with your glorified body ... will not occur until God’s prescribed timetable.

Resurrection #4: The Lost (John 5:29b)

Jesus has emphatically warned you of what’s coming: “... *all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.*” A mere man can stand and call for the dead in a cemetery all day long and nothing will happen. However, when the voice of the Creator, Jesus, calls, the dead cannot help but hear and be awakened to their respective judgment. This hasn’t been the only warning either.

Here’s another, this time from Paul:

“¹ I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom . . .” (2 Timothy 4:1).



And Dr. Luke offers these words:

“⁴² And He ordered us to preach to the people, and solemnly to testify that this is the One who has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10).

You see, the Lord has given you ample warning. If didn’t know what was coming down the pike when you came in this morning, now you are without excuse. There is going to be a

second resurrection, and all those who participate in this one (and the masses will most assuredly be here) will, as we see in Revelation 20, be judged by whether their name is in the Lamb's book of life and by their works, and those works, of course, will be found wanting because they in no way will measure up to the perfect redemptive work of Jesus. The result will be eternal condemnation.

But, you know, it doesn't have to be this way because Jesus has provided the means for you to be spiritually resurrected so you will have a place in the third resurrection. The choice, however, is yours. He will not barge into your life. He will not demand you open your heart to Him. No, He will quietly call to you, speaking to your heart and conscience about your sin and need of a Savior. When you respond by faith to His word you come alive for the first time in your life and have hope that no man can wrench from your hand.

Conclusion

All of this talk about the mystery of the resurrection causes me to think of a song my parents introduced me to as a young boy. Every time I hear it, I can't help but get even more excited. When the chariot of God shows up for you, will you be going with Him? Yes, where will you go on that great, getting' up morning?