

# THE FIRST RESURRECTION

## A SERMON

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“But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.”  
Revelation 20:5

I, LAST Lord's day morning observed that this thousand years is, in my estimation, intended to set forth the gospel dispensation, and that the thousand years can no more be understood literally than the measurements of space in this book can be understood literally. Hence, the city is said to be twelve thousand furlongs square, that is fifteen hundred miles square; but no Christian, surely, would take that in the literal sense. It is expressive of two things; first, that everything is square by Christ Jesus with God; and, secondly, this measurement signifies that everything is taken account of. Therefore, as we must take the measurements of space in this book spiritually and mystically, so, according to my view, we should also take the measurements of time in this book, not literally, but spiritually and mystically; thus, taking the measurements, both of space and time, in the same manner, in accordance with the subject to which they belong. Before I enter upon the subject this morning, I would just remind you of these errors into which the mere words of this chapter, the sound without the sense may lead us. The first is, John here saw the souls of them that were beheaded. The inference might be, from the mere words here, that these were the martyrs that were raised from the dead at the beginning of this thousand years, and that the rest of the dead live not again until the thousand years were finished. Indeed, this is the interpretation that some give; that the martyrs shall by and by when this thousand years commences, the martyrs they say, shall rise from the dead at the commencement of this thousand years, and they only, and that they shall reign with Christ this thousand years. Now, unhappily for this theory, John does not tell us that he saw either the bodies or the persons of the martyrs, but only their *souls*, “I saw the *souls* of them that were beheaded.” So that if you saw only their souls than the resurrection here spoken of could not be literal: it could not be the resurrection of the body, for he saw not their bodies, but only their souls; so, it is the resurrection of the soul. So that John, seeing only the soul, does away with the theory of a premillennial resurrection of the body. And then, secondly another error into which, by the mere words, the sound without the sense, we may feel, is this, that as the rest of the dead lived not again, then, according to that conclusion the others that fall asleep remain in a state of sleep during this thousand years; so that none but the martyrs live and reign with Christ during this thousand years; all other saints and all the other good people, go into a state of unconsciousness, of sleep, and do not live again until the end of the thousand years but unhappily, also, for this

theory we find that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, we're not martyrs, are still living with him; and the thief on the cross, who was not a martyr, yet a saved man, went that same day into paradise and "absent from the body, present with the Lord." And, therefore, it cannot mean there a pre-millennial resurrection, because no, body is spoken of; it cannot mean that the martyrs only lived during this thousand years and the others were thrown into a state of unconsciousness; the Scriptures stand point blank against this. And then, the next error into which we may fall, from the mere sound without the sense, is this, that "Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection." So, according to their doctrine, the martyrs are the only persons who have part in this first resurrection; and if the martyrs only, then the martyrs only are blessed, the martyrs only are holy; the martyrs only are freed from the power of the second death; and so, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and millions of their descendants, are gone to hell after all, if we admit this millenarian theory. See how many errors only one error will lead to. You may thus see how dangerous it is to take things by the mere sound, instead of looking at the sense. Thus, then, we have no bodily resurrection at the beginning of this thousand years; second, that all that are absent from the body among the saints, they are with the Lord; and third, that all saints, as well as martyrs, do escape the wrath to come. Thus, then, we must understand things in their proper order, and then we shall be profited.

We have, in the first place, *some that do live*; that is a self-evident truth; secondly, we have *some that have lived, but do not live, but shall at the end of the thousand years*.

First, then, we have *some that do live*. Who are they that do live? John says, "I saw the souls of them that were beheaded." How shall we understand that? I understand it in this way, that it does not mean literally the souls of them that were beheaded, any more than it means all the saints of the living God; it means all the saints of God. But say you, how can that be? Why, because, in the first place, what is done unto one is done unto all; and, in the next place, all the saints of God are of one heart and of one soul. And they are called the souls of them that were beheaded, for this simple, plain reason, that every Christian possesses a martyr's soul, a martyr's spirit, a martyr's religion, a martyr's faith. If I am a Christian, I possess the soul of the man that was beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God. Nor is it unusual in the Scriptures to represent one by another where there is analogy, and especially such analogy as we shall find here. For instance, it is said of John that he came, and, indeed, he is called by the very name of Elijah, called Elias, that he came in the spirit and power of Elijah's. And as John came in the spirit and power of Elijah's, so every Christian possesses the spirit and power of a martyr; every Christian possesses these two; he possesses the spirit of the martyr; I will describe it presently; I am simply now asserting the fact that every Christian possesses the spirit and power of a martyr. Christ was the martyr's power; they overcame by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives unto the death. And so, every Christian overcomes by the blood of the Lamb. Christ is the martyr's power; Christ is the Christians power; somebody called in Christ is the power of God, and Christ the wisdom of God. Now, it is said, that they were souls beheaded for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus. I might again remind you that even the word "beheaded" does not apply to all the martyrs; all that died for the truth's sake did not die by decapitation; there were many shapes and forms in which they died; many were burnt to death. So that all you cannot take literally, you must take in its proper meaning; they were put to death. Now then, what was the spirit of these martyrs? Their spirit appears clear; first, in what their gospel was, and second, in what their decision was, and third, in what their position was. First, in what their

gospel was; “the testimony of Jesus and the word of God.” Now why these two are put together will appear clear presently. First, “the testimony of Jesus.” I need not here remind you that they themselves held, and that with, unutterable pleasure, the delightful truth that Jesus Christ had accomplished the warfare, that their iniquity was pardoned, that they possessed in Christ the double, all the grace they needed here, and all the glory that should make them happy to all eternity. This is the testimony Christ; and this testimony is given in a great variety of ways, such, for instance, as where the apostle says, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” Now this is the testimony of Jesus. But why is the word of God added? To my mind there is exquisite beauty in the second clause as well as in the first; “the testimony of Jesus and the word of God.” What does it mean? It means they held the testimony of Jesus Christ by the word of God. If you hold the testimony of Jesus Christ by human tradition, how that testimony becomes distorted; if you hold the testimony of Christ by popery, how it distorts that testimony; if you hold the testimony of Christ by Church of Englandism, how it distorts that testimony; if you hold the testimony of Christ by free will or duty faithism, how it distorts that testimony. But hold his testimony by the word of God, without mitigation, alteration, apology, or softening the perfection, the eternal certainty of the results of that work as there set forth; just as sure as he paid the price of redemption, just as sure as that almighty power attend that redemption, that the redeemed shall return, and come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. Let us see, then, that we hold the testimony of Christ by the word of God, and not by the word of men. You find in olden times that they began to hold the testimony of a coming Savior by the tradition of men, and that tradition so accumulated that by and by, it did not only distort the testimony of a coming Savior, but actually got rid of that testimony; so that when Christ came, he found a gospel of the day that excluded him altogether, and they said, “Away with him, away with him crucify him!” They preferred a murderer to such a person as this. They held the testimony of a coming Savior by human traditions and so distorted that testimony, that the nature of his life, and the nature of his death, his resurrection, and the glory that should follow, we're all together lost sight of. Oh, how happy are we, if we have been brought as prisoners to the Savior's feet; and while we read of what Christ has done to hold this testimony not by the doctrines of men, not by the precepts of men, not by the traditions of men, but by this blessed book of which he, who is the author of the creation, is the author. He is the author of this book; it is the book of your Maker; it is the book of your Judge; and if you are a lover of the truth, it is the book of your Savior, the book of your heavenly Father, the book of eternity; such a book as none but an almighty God, none but an all-seeing God, could have been the author of. He calls all human tradition chaff; his holy word is wheat; “And what is the chaff to the wheat, says the Lord?” This is what they were put to death for; and this is what men are hated for. Let them lay hold of the testimony of what Christ has done, not by human tradition, but by “Thus says the Lord,” by the word of God, and bow to no authority concerning the testimony of Christ, and salvation by him, but the authority of God's word. So, the apostle, in all that consistent feeling which he had wanted to destroy the false confidences of people, that their faith should stand, not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. That is the spirit of the martyr so far; I have not done with you yet, come to closer quarters yet. They held, then, the testimony of Jesus, and they held it by the word of God. Do you not see what a contrast there is between the man who, being taught of God, holds the testimony of Christ by the word of God, and that man who holds the testimony of Christ by the traditions of men? Do you not see an infinite difference between the two? Beware of humanly devised creeds, then; beware of humanly made prayers, beware of paper prayers, beware of the machinery devised by men. Let the word of God be your guide; to the law and to the testimony, if they speak not

according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.

But secondly, a martyr's spirit was a spirit not only of truth, and thus that they held the testimony of Jesus, not by the traditions of men, but by the word of God; but it was a spirit of solemn preference for the things of God. Thus, ask the martyr, ask the man who has a martyr's soul within him, What think you, brother, of the loving-kindness of the most high God? His answer will be, It is better than life. God's everlasting love to my soul is better than life; Christ's eternal love to my soul is better than mortal life; the Holy Spirit's love to my soul is better than mortal life. He does, in love to my soul, bring it up from the pit of corruption, and that love is better than life. Say you so? Can you say so in the sight of a heart-searching God? Then you have a martyr's soul, you have a martyr's spirit, you have a martyr's God, you have a martyr's salvation, you are in the right road if you can say this. So that you would not, grace keeping you, sacrifice love to this life, but you would sacrifice this life to his loving-kindness, rather than give up the stupendous and immutable love of a dear covenant God in Christ. Second, the truth also, is that better to you than the good things of this life? "The law of your mouth." says one, "to me is better than thousands of gold and silver." that, of course means, the law of faith, the law of liberty, "is better to me than thousands of gold and silver." In another song, after describing the conversion of the soul, the joy of the soul, the illumination of the soul, he says, "Your word is better to me than gold, yes and much fine gold, sweeter also than honey." Now take gold to represent the riches of life, take the honey to represent all the sweetness and the pleasures of mortal life, yet your word is more precious than gold, yes than much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Have you this spirit also? Is the truth so dear to you that, God keeping you, you would indeed part with silver and gold, you would indeed part with houses and lands, you would indeed part with wife, husband, parent, however near and dear, yes with life itself, rather than part with that only word that can give unto you eternal life? For this gospel holy prophet's groaned and bled; for this gospel thousands of men have died rather than move there from. To confirm the promises of this gospel and incarnate God died.

This is the martyr's spirit, then, and this holds the testimony of Jesus by the word of God, and that can see and know that God's loving kindness is better than mortal life; that the truth of God is better than all the riches and pleasures of this life; because the truth can bring us durable riches and everlasting pleasures, which this life cannot. Again, what say we to Christ himself? It is said of him, he shall be more precious than gold. Now, notice those who possess the martyr's soul had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, nor had received his mark in their foreheads, nor in their hands; they should be kings and priests unto God, and shall reign with him a thousand years, so continue during the whole of the gospel dispensation. Now what is the beast? The original word means "a wild beast", something that is alien to the church, alien to the Bible; something that the church has never recognized, something that the Bible does not recognize as being of God, a wild beast, therefore, means any organized power, whether it be free, or any other power. That is evidently what it means. I will not stop here to prove it, though I could. I shall perhaps have a better opportunity in the future to do so; but the beast means the whole body of error which men bow to. And they do bow to it; it is astonishing. Just let anything happen to have a little popularity, a little human and fleshly respectability, how many wonder after the beast! Who was able to make war with the beast? When we look back into history, why, the prostration of mind into which the wild beast, this whole body of error has brought its millions, it is lamentable to think of. But those that had the martyr's soul, they would not bow down to the wild beast, however, rampart he might be; they would not worship, or they would not submit to it. I have nothing to do but just take you

back again to the idea that they held the testimony of Jesus and they held it, not by the traditions of men, but by the word of God. And this was the offense. They may have held the word of God, and they would not have been persecuted if they had not held the testimony of Jesus; and they might have held the testimony of Jesus, and they would not have been persecuted if they had not held the word of God as well as the testimony. The Devil is crafty enough for this. You should have enough truth to make a professor of you, and to make you acceptable to the world, but you shan't have enough to make you acceptable to God. That is Satan's policy. He will let you have some, in order to deceive you; and withhold the other in order to complete the deception. But we must have both together, we could not have the testimony of Christ without the word of God; and we cannot have the word of God without the testimony of Christ. We must have the testimony of Christ and the word of God together. So, they stood decided, and would not worship the beast nor receive his mark in their foreheads, would not openly and publicly sanction error in any way whatsoever. It is not a pleasant thing, I know to be unfriendly; and, as much as lies in us, let us live peaceably with all men. We are not called upon to trouble everybody with our religion; the least we say, in most cases the better. A better way is to walk silently, and look straight and let our works, and not our words become what we are. We shall make a greater impression by our works than by our words. Others may use words, and if they imitate our words, we should be glad to see them do so; but if men propose friendship to us, on the ground of our mitigating a little of what they call the rancor of our tongue, if we will soften a little, and come a little over to the fashionable systems of the day, better my breath should be stopped than I should see the day! You man of God, you foolish man, you unwise man, you inconsiderate man, see you the snare into which you are going? Can you not see the snare? Snare! Snare! what snare? Why, this man is a good man, he seems like one; he asked me to his house to eat and to drink; he says he is a prophet. Ah! but what did the Lord say? That you were not to proclaim friendship with any of these men; you were not to eat bread or drink water in this place. Well but this man seems a very nice man. Never mind about the man being a nice man, you have to do with God's word. You have the Lord's authority to counteract this man's message. Well, I don't know; that's going too far. I won't be so bigoted. Perhaps I shall be better if I become a little more charitable. Very well, go on. act in opposition to the solemn mission with which you are sent to the idolaters of Bethel, and that very prophet shall be the means of pronouncing your doom; and, ere you get far from the village, a lion shall meet you, expressive of the indignation of the God of truth, that even one of his own children should compromise his message. A lion slew him, and so the man of God met with his end. Ah, then, man of God, flee from all such, and say not a confederacy, with all that would say a confederacy. Worship not the beast, bow not to his image. Jeroboam was then the image. The image is the person that concentrates in himself the doctrine, the authority, and the qualities of the beast. The Pope is the image, the representative of beastly Popery; and many others I could name, but I will not, because I have not room for them in my eight pages, or else I would put them there, just show them off a bit. Now, see how it faired with the man of God. I have been sneered at for my decision, what they are pleased to call my bigotry. I would not change places with any of these men, after all. I would rather have the hatred that I have, than have the applause these charitable men have; it is a better sign. "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you: Blessed are you when men shall cast you out for my name's sake." And those who had this martyr's soul were honest; they received not the mark of the beast in the hand. Mark that. Some that will not sanction error publicly, will do so privately. A gentleman that I don't know what to make of, never could, was travelling in a railway carriage where I was some time ago, and we were speaking of a Socinian parson, so he says, "Well, my private opinion is that the man is a good man, after all." "Oh, dear!" I said, "I have

no private opinion in these things.” That is what I call receiving the mark of the beast in the hand. Well, dear brother, I must not publicly own you; you are a Wesleyan, but I shake hands with you. I think you are a good man Well, dear brother Socinian, you don’t believe in Christ’s Godhead, but I will shake hands with you; and, dear brother, when I am in the pulpit, and preach sometimes against your system, I hope you won’t take it as an insult, dear, no! we all understand it.

No, I would shake hands with any man under the heaven upon the ground of common humanity, friendship, or qualities about him that I might respect; but I will never shake hands with any man on the ground of compromising principle. If he understand, by my shaking hands with him, that I do thereby make light of his abominable heresies, and yield up in a sense the truth, I will not shake hands with him; no, not on that ground, least a lion slay me, and I do not want to be slain by a lion; I want to die comfortably; I want to live as comfortably as I can; I and my Covenant God get on very well together; at least, I get on well with him, and he puts up with me; and I do not want to part with him and he does not intend to part with me; and I bless God that I meet with him, and that we are come together, to depart no more forever. Bless the Lord for this. He has opened my ear to hear, and I love him, and it is well with me. So then, the man that has a martyr’s spirit holds the testimony of Jesus by the word of God, esteems eternal things above mortal life, and would combat, grace enabling him, do as martyr’s did, sacrificed the one to the other; and he will not worship the beast, neither his image, though the image may be as beautiful as there is at Oxford. Where there is a nicer man then Doctor Pusey? One of the most learned, one of the most gentlemanly; and the dear old bachelor, the ladies very much admire him, and yet, with all their admiration of him, not one has been able to catch the old gentleman. He is a most adorable image, and a great many worship him. I esteem him as a scholar and a gentleman; but as a representative of a system, I will never worship him. He who has once seen the image of God, Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ as the brightness of the father’s glory, and the express image of his person; he was once rightly seen the image of God, will despise all other images, pour contempt upon them, and cleave to God by him who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person upholding all things by the word of his power; when by himself he had put away our sins, he sat down where his people shall be, at the right hand of God for ever.

There is one more point I must touch, and then close. It is said of those who have this martyr’s soul, this martyr’s spirit, that they have part in the first resurrection. There are three reasons for this testimony. First, because Christ is the first and the last that ever rose substitutionally from the dead, Christ rose from the dead as the substitute, as the life, as the representative of others. Some were raised from the dead before Christ was raised from the dead; but no one before him was raised as a substitute for others, as the resurrection of others, as the life of others, as the victory of others, he was the first, and he is the last. And those that have this martyr spirit are one with that resurrection; and so, in that sense, though that is not the direct sense here intended, but I think it is included, have part in the first resurrection. Second, because they are regenerated, and that is the resurrection of the soul that precedes the resurrection of the body. Hence the resurrection of the soul in regeneration, the resurrection of the body, are nominated by the same term in some places. For instance, “You has he quickened;” and again, “It the spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies.” There it is you see. So that regeneration is the resurrection of the soul, the first resurrection, that precedes the second and last resurrection, the resurrection of the body. Therefore, because they have a part in this resurrection, that is the second reason why they are said to have part in the first

resurrection. Then, the saints of God will rise first at the last great day. Tradition tells us that the Jews held that he who studied the law, and died in Canaan, will at the last great day rise first. Hence, many of the Jews go there to die now, believing that by doing so, they will rise first. But the apostle comes in, lays the axe of truth to this root of that traditional tree, what a pretty sharp edge, too, and very quietly says, "The dead in Christ shall rise first." Down comes the Jewish tree, and withers and dies. "The dead in Christ shall rise first." There is the secret. I can hear free-will saying, I thought those that had behaved best, and done the most good works, would have the preeminence. No; must be in Christ. "The dead in Christ shall rise first: Christ the first fruits; afterwards, they that are Christ's at the at his coming." Thus, in this threefold sense they have part in this first resurrection, the resurrection of Christ, regeneration, and resurrection at the last day.

A word or two more. I shall not meddle with the other part of the subject this morning. Now just watch me a minute or two. "Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection; on such the second death has no power." Now, mind, it does not say, holy and blessed is he; that would be true, but it does not say so, the blessing comes first, and the holiness afterwards. Just the contrast to the Savior; it is holiness that stood first, and blessedness is came after; in us blessedness comes first, holiness comes after. Hence, the 45th Psalm says, concerning Christ, "You are fairer than the children of men." There is his purity and freedom from sin. Now comes the favor on the ground of his holiness: "Grace", favor, "is poured into your lips; therefore, God has blessed forever." But if God had staid till you and I had made ourselves in whole or in part holy, he never had blessed us; therefore, he staid not for us, but while we were yet sinners, he commended his love unto us. The blessing first, and the holiness afterwards. "Blessed and holy." We are not blessed because we are holy; but we are blessed in order to make us holy. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love;" "a chosen generation; a royal priesthood." Here is election and Christ's priesthood; the blessing is placed at the base of holiness. "A chosen generation; a royal priesthood; a holy nation, that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." Thus, then, these same persons are blessed first; and the blessing consists indeed in their being, by Christ's one offering, perfected forever; blessed first, holy next, and eternally triumphant next: "On such the second death has no power."

But time is gone; and I must say no more upon this subject until next Lord's day morning.