

Easter Sunday 2021

"All Rise"

When baseball-great Ted Williams died at age 83, things got weird. Despite his wishes to be cremated and his ashes scattered in the Florida Keys, son John and youngest daughter Claudia opted to have his body sent to Scottsdale, Arizona, where he was frozen at the Alcor Cryonics facility.

Cryonics is the process of storing the deceased in stainless steel containers at frigid temperatures hoping that someday scientists will have the ability to bring them back to life.

Ted Williams next made *headlines* (wait for it) when it was reported that his *head* had been decapitated by surgeons and stored separately from his body at the Alcor facility.

A severed head would be no problem for Italian neurosurgeon Dr. Sergio Canavero. He has been dubbed, "The brain behind the first head transplant." Canavero intends to take a living patient whose body is physically disabled and transplant their head on a fully-functioning body.

Well-known secular futurist Ray Kurzweil predicts a different path to human immortality. He contends that humans will have machine bodies by the year 2100.

If you want to stay young until 2100, take a trip to San Francisco and set your GPS for Ambrosia Plasma. They perform transfusions of the blood of healthy teenagers to people 35 or older.

A column writer who follows anti-aging research said, "People who view death as oblivion are still trying hard to defeat it."

All approaches to living forever have this in common: They view death as an enemy that somebody must defeat.

They have one other thing in common:

**They ignore the fact that death
has already been decisively defeated**

Jesus' resurrection was an outright defeat of death:

⇒ The apostle Peter explained: "It was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him" (Acts 2:24).

⇒ The triumphant, risen Christ said, "I am the Living One; I was dead, and now look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades" (Revelation 1:18).

Not cryogenics, but Christ, has defeated death

Over the last three-plus decades, I have had the privilege to officiate many memorials and graveside services. I've seen the faces of death. I don't mean the deceased.

I've seen the faces of death on the living

⇒ As I look out upon the crowd, some face death with faith. They may be weeping and grieving, eyes wet and red from tears, but they are believers in Christ who know that He conquered death. They have no doubt that if their loved one was a believer they are safe in Heaven.

⇒ As I look out upon the crowd, some face death with fear. They know that death is coming hard for them. They have no basis for hope.

People might claim that they don't fear death. They do. COVID19 is exposing the fear of death in more ways than just fear of the virus:

⇒ I read an article this week titled, *Scared to Death*. It reported that chronically ill persons are avoiding getting the medical care they desperately need because they fear acquiring a lethal COVID infection on top of their illness. Putting off treatment on account of fear is killing them.

⇒ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Rochelle Walensky went off-script at a briefing and made an emotional plea to Americans not to let up on public health measures amid fears of a fourth wave of COVID19. "I'm going to reflect on the recurring feeling I have of **impending doom**," Walensky said, appearing to hold back tears.

⇒ President Joe Biden said, "We're in a life-and-death race."
Professionals are starting to call it, Coronaphobia. I read this in a medical journal:

Based on a review of... studies, we define *coronaphobia* as an excessive triggered response of fear of contracting the virus causing COVID19, leading to accompanied excessive concern over physiological symptoms, significant stress about personal and occupational loss, increased reassurance and safety seeking behaviors, and avoidance of public places and situations, causing marked impairment in daily life functioning.

(On a positive note, you can stop worrying about the asteroid Apophis. NASA announced that it would not cause the end of the world for at least the next 100 years).

I want you to picture yourself at your graveside service

- ⇒ There's the casket, with your remains.
- ⇒ If you opt for cremation, there's the urn, with your cremains.

Do you know where you will be when your body has been reduced to remains or cremains?

Christians have confidence that at the moment of their death, they will be "absent from the body and... present with the Lord" (Second Corinthians 5:8).

If you are not in Christ, your soul has a different destination at death. You will be confined to Hades. The Bible describes it as a holding place where nonbelievers suffer while awaiting their final judgment.

I should add that there are no second chances after death. No purgatory or any other opportunities to earn salvation. The Bible is clear: "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

- ⇒ The deceased believer waits in Heaven for resurrection.
- ⇒ The deceased nonbeliever waits in Hades for resurrection.

I enjoyed making timelines in Junior High History class. A simple biblical timeline for the future of the world would include the following significant events, in this sequence:

1. Since we are living in the Church Age now, it is our starting point.
2. The Resurrection of the Church Age believers.
3. The seven-year Great Tribulation.
4. The Second Coming of Jesus Christ.
5. The one-thousand year Kingdom of God on the earth.
6. The Great White Throne judgment of God.
7. Eternity.

Believers who have died from all eras of human history are not raised from the dead all at once. They - we - will experience resurrection at specific points along the future timeline. The apostle Paul said, "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep... **But each in his own order:** Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming" (First Corinthians 15:20,23).

We can add the "order" of the resurrection to our timeline:

- ⇒ We always start with Jesus. He was the "firstfruits," the first to rise from the dead never to die again. His resurrection guarantees believers that they, too, will be raised to eternal life.

⇒ Next, everyone saved between Jesus' resurrection and His coming to remove His church from earth and take us to Heaven will be resurrected.

⇒ Next, believers who survive the Great Tribulation and the Old Testament believers will be resurrected at the Second Coming of Jesus.

⇒ Next, the believers who enter the one-thousand-year kingdom, called the Millennial Kingdom, and those born to them who get saved will be resurrected.

We can 'circle back' and add more detail about resurrection at each point on God's timeline.

We live in the Church Age. It is a unique, distinct time in history between the first and second comings of Jesus. In this age deceased believers are described as having "fallen asleep." Their bodies are what "sleep," awaiting resurrection. Their spirit goes immediately to be with the Lord.

Looking ahead to his death, the apostle Paul said, "For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain... I am hard-pressed between the two, **having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is** far better" (Philippians 1:21, 23). "To be absent from the body" at death "is to depart" and "be with Christ."

Jesus promised to come back to resurrect deceased believers of the Church Age. The apostle Paul said, "For the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first" (First Thessalonians 4:16).

(The "dead in Christ" are all the believers of the church age who have died. It is another way of saying "those who have fallen asleep").

When Jesus comes for His church as promised, deceased believer's remains or cremains will be instantaneously transformed into an immortal resurrection body and united with their spirit. "The dead," we read in the Bible, "will be raised imperishable."

When Jesus returns for His church there will be millions of living believers. What happens to us?

⇒ “We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...” (First Corinthians 15:51)

⇒ “Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (First Thessalonians 4:17).

We call this the Rapture of the Church & it is *imminent* - it could happen any moment during the Church Age

At some point, but *after* Jesus resurrects & raptures His church, the seven-year Great Tribulation will break like a storm upon the earth. It is a time of unprecedented global judgment. It’s horrible, for sure. Nevertheless, God will still be offering salvation to *any* and *all* who will believe on Jesus. Those who believe will, for the most part, suffer martyrdom.

At the end of the seven-years, Jesus will return to earth. We call it the Second Coming. Martyrs from the Great Tribulation will be resurrected.

We read, “I saw souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the Word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4).

Old Testament believers are likewise resurrected at the Second Coming: “At that time Michael, the great prince, the protector of your people, shall arise. There shall be a time of tribulation, such as has never occurred since nations first came into existence. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life...” (Daniel 12:1-2).

This, then, is the series for the resurrection of believers in Christ:

1. Jesus rose from the dead.
2. He is coming for His church at which time He raises deceased believers and transforms the bodies of living believers.
3. At His Second Coming the martyrs from the Great Tribulation and Old Testament believers and are raised.
4. Lastly, there will be some believers who appear before the Great White Throne. They were born during the Millennium and became believers in Jesus. They will receive their resurrection bodies.

Every believer, from the time of Adam, will have been resurrected.

What about nonbelievers? You, too, will be resurrected. However, it will not be in series. It will be all at once.

Rev 20:11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the Heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them.

Rev 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

Rev 20:13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works.

Rev 20:14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Rev 20:15 And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

You will either participate in the “first resurrection” or you will suffer “the second death.”

The “second death” is a spiritual “death” that follows physical death. It is resurrection to eternal, conscious punishment in the Lake of Fire.

Let's list your choices. You can only check one box:

Cryogenics

(In the movies, the power always fails, or the chamber cracks, and you thaw).

Re-attached head

(Can you say, "Frankenstein?").

Machine body

(Remember the Borg, the Rise of the Machines & Bladerunner).

Teen Age blood transfusions

(You'll want to listen to Taylor Swift & start watching the CW).

Resurrection to suffer the Second Death in Hell

Or, Resurrection in Jesus Christ to enjoy Eternity.

While you contemplate the only answer, let's take a look at the face of Jesus at the tomb of His friend, Lazarus. We'll call it a tomb-side service seeing as they were still in mourning.

The sisters of Lazarus, Mary and Martha, sent a message to Jesus explaining that their brother was deathly ill.

When Jesus heard it, He said that the illness would not end in death but in glory for God and His Son. He stayed where He was for another two days before telling His disciples that He would go back to Judea.

Jesus arrived in Bethany to find that Lazarus had already been dead four days. Martha said that if He had been there earlier, her brother would not have died. Jesus responded that her brother would rise again. Hearing this, Martha said that she knew he would rise again in the resurrection. Jesus told her that He was the resurrection and through Him those who believed would yet live.

Martha went to Mary and told her that Jesus had come. Hearing this, Mary immediately went to meet Him. Mary met Jesus, and told Him that Lazarus would not have died if He had been there.

When Jesus came to the grave of Lazarus, He wept. He then ordered that somebody should move the stone in front of the tomb. Jesus prayed, thanking God the Father for the opportunity to give glory to His name. After He had finished praying, Jesus called for Lazarus to come forth.

Lazarus emerged from the tomb, alive and well.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is the backstory for one of Jesus' famous "I AM" statements:

"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"
(John 11:25-26 CSB)

Jesus Christ declared His own "resurrection" and "life" and made two promises to anyone who would "believe in" Him:

- ⇒ If you die, you will live.
- ⇒ If you live, you will never die.

Believer, If you die before the Lord returns for His church, you will live. "To be absent from the body" at death "is to depart" and "be with Christ" as you wait to be physically resurrected.

*Believer, If you live, i.e., if you are alive when He comes for His church, you will never die. You will "be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye... Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."*

At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus asked all of us, "Do you believe?"

Listen intently to these further words of Jesus:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him** should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, **he who believes has eternal life**” (John 6:47).

“This is the work of God, that you **believe in Him whom He has sent**” (John 6:29).

We expand upon what Jesus said by asking, “Do you believe Jesus Christ is who the Bible says He is, and are you trusting Him as your Savior?”

- Do you believe that Jesus is God in human flesh?
- Do you believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins, for which you deserve the Second Death?
- Do you believe that the sacrifice of Jesus is the only adequate payment for your sins?

Billy Graham said, “The word “believe” in the Bible means more than simply agreeing in our minds that something might be true. It means “trust” - that we believe so strongly in God that we are willing to commit our lives to Him and live the way we know He wants us to live.”

Jesus is “the resurrection and the life.” [If you] believe in [Him], though [you] may die, [you] shall live. And whoever lives and believes in [Jesus] shall never die.”

“Do you believe this?”