

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God*

IN CHRIST JESUS.

(Philippians 3.13-14 NASB)

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SONS OF THE RESURRECTION

Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; for they cannot even die anymore, because they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.” (Luke 20.34-36 NASB)

As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant. (Mark 9.9-10 NASB)

The previous issue [#02-0839 June 13, 2008] dealt with the general resurrection of the dead, both the righteous and the unrighteous, that will occur before the commencement of God’s day and the new creation. Now, this issue deals with the first resurrection that leads into the millennial kingdom of Christ on this earth.

In the above verses, notice how Jesus clearly states that one must be considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead. First, the age that He referred to entering is the coming age of His kingdom, for, according to John, the first resurrection will bring forth conquerors who will reign with Christ for 1,000 years. Those who rise in the first resurrection will rise from among the dead, which means that the rest of the dead will remain dead for 1,000 years. Second, entering the kingdom of Christ in the next eon is about sonship. All who conquer will be sons of the kingdom, sons of God, and sons of the resurrection.

Also, take note of the response of the three disciples that had been with Jesus as He was transfigured on the mountain. As He was coming down from the mountain, Jesus referred to rising from among the dead. On one level, they still did not grasp the fact that their Master was soon to die for the sin of the world. Yet, on another level, they did not understand what He meant by rising from the dead, for their expectation was for all the dead to rise at the same time. However, Jesus introduced a new concept that some would rise from among the dead, which meant that all would not rise together. This thought introduces us to what is called the *first* resurrection, the *better* resurrection, or the *out*-resurrection.

Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God.... and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 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. (Revelation 20.4-6 NASB)

Women received back their dead by resurrection; and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection.... (Hebrews 11.35 NASB)

If by any means I might arrive at the goal, namely, the *out*-resurrection from among those who are dead. (Philippians 3.11 WAET)

Notice that John declared that the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. Only those who conquer will be in the first resurrection. The conquerors (he who overcomes) of the ecclesia in Smyrna, and by extension all seven ecclesias, will not be hurt by the second death, which occurs after the 1,000-year reign, because they will come to life in the first resurrection (Revelation 2.11). The second death has no power over them because they have taken on immortality, life beyond death, and they reign with Christ.

This is the better resurrection promised to the saints of old who were strangers and exiles on earth and who desired a better country, that is, a celestial (heavenly) one. **God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them** (Hebrews 11.15, 16). This is the company of believers of the faith of Abraham, who went out not knowing where he was going, but he was looking for the city whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11.8-10). Later, I will write a whole series on the city, but it is what Paul called **the holy temple in the Lord, the dwelling of God in spirit** (Ephesians 2.21, 22). It is not so much about a physical city filled with spiritual, celestial people as it is about a people filled with the spirit in spiritual, celestial bodies like the Lord Jesus. The city is about God's people and God tabernacling with them.

Becoming part of the dwelling of God in spirit in the next eon is something to be gained through the first or better resurrection, or what Paul called the *out*-resurrection, or in the Greek, the *exanastasis*. *Exanastasis* is made up of two words. It is comprised of *anastasis*, which means "standing up again." This is the most commonly used word in Greek Scripture to refer to the resurrection. However, Paul added the prefix *ex*, which "denotes origin or the point from whence motion or action proceeds, or out of a place, time or cause." It can mean "out among."

Thus, Paul sought to stand up again from among the dead. In other words, Paul saw a resurrection in which only some will stand up; others will remain dead. Obviously, this cannot refer to the general resurrection of the just and the unjust, for they all will stand up at the same time, in the same hour. Having been a devout Pharisee, Paul knew that all the dead will be resurrected one day, but this was not Paul's goal. He sought to arrive at or to attain to a very special goal. *Attain* (Greek *katantao*) means "to arrive at." In other words, Paul's goal was to one day arrive at the resurrection *from* the dead, the same resurrection that his Lord had attained. In desiring to die as his Lord died, Paul was seeking to rise from among the dead as a firstfruit (barley harvest) just as the Lord rose as the firstfruit of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15.20).

For me, this answers the age-old question about the fate of what many call *nominal* Christians; the ones who say they believe, but whose words and actions do not match a life given completely to the Lord. We all have known people who fall in this category. I have known ones very close to me who were like that. Some would say that they will be cast into outer darkness during the millennial reign; they will suffer great loss but be saved. I once held this view, but it has always bothered me that such ones have very little heart to see the Lord. I don't question that they are saved and one day will receive immortal life, but does Scripture really teach us that ones such as this that have no desire to see the Lord will be in the same resurrection with Paul and the others who sought to be worthy to attain to be a son of the resurrection? Scripture seems to point to the ones who conquer being raised in the first or *out*-resurrection, and the ones (believers) who do not conquer being raised with the multitudes in the general resurrection. They will be saved, yet so as through fire. Paul knew that all who believe are promised to rise and receive immortality in the general resurrection, but he saw the first resurrection as a goal to press on toward and to attain.

Which resurrection do you seek? Let us strive to be **considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead!** Let us seek to be **sons of the resurrection!** Let us press on toward the goal for the prize of **the *out*-resurrection.**