

Christian Holidays #13

by: Ronald L. Dart

"Behold, I show you a mystery," said the apostle Paul, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

There is no idea more central to the Christian faith, than the resurrection of the dead, and yet in those early years of Christianity, it had already been called into question, in the church!

It's in the great 15th chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians that he wrestles with a group that claimed there was no resurrection from the dead. I presume, they still held the doctrine of the 'Kingdom of God,' but for them it was a physical kingdom. It was something that a lot of Jews believed in and expected. They expected the Messiah to come, conquer the Romans, set up a rule of God on this earth in the physical sense.

Behold, I Show You A Mystery

But Paul made it plain that they had it wrong. It is in first Corinthians 15 and verse 50, "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." The whole discussion ends right there if you accept Paul's authority. Paul said, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." We are not talking about some physical thing, "Neither does corruption inherit incorruption." Then he makes this famous statement, {51} "Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed, {52} In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

What is Paul talking about? He is talking about this mortal putting on immortality. He is talking about human beings becoming spirit beings. He is talking about moving into a whole new phase of existence. It all happens at the same time, the dead are raised, the living Saints are changed.

The Last Trumpet

According to Paul, all this happens at an event, he calls the 'last trumpet'. Now in saying, the 'last trumpet', he implies that there's more than one. More than one trumpet in a series, it is the last one that results in the resurrection from the dead. There is only one place in the Bible where such a series of trumpets is described. It's in, of all places, the book of Revelation.

Book of Revelation

Now Revelation is not an easy book to interpret. In fact, I think, most Bible teachers try to over interpret Revelation and they try to explain too much.

The book of Revelation is a description of a vision seen by the apostle John. John tells us what he saw. The problem is, that what he saw was not real in itself, it was all highly symbolic and it didn't take place in real time anymore than your dreams do.

Now while Revelation is difficult, it does have something of an outline that helps us follow it. After some introductory letters and opening remarks, John comes to the core of the vision in chapter 4 and verse one, where the events begin to transpire that lead up to the time of the end.

John says, "After this I looked, and behold the door was opened in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet talking with me, which said, "Come up here, and I will show you the things which must be hereafter. {2} And immediately I was in the spirit." I presume what he means by that is, I was in vision, I was in spirit. His body was still sitting down on the isle of Patmos staring into space but John's spirit and mind was somewhere else.

God's Throne

John said in Revelation 4 and verse 2, "Behold, look, a throne was set in heaven and One sat on the throne. {3} And He who sat there was like a jasper (Clear as crystal) and sardius stone (Blood red in color), and there was a rainbow around about the throne and in sight like unto an emerald (Light green in color)." A green iris is really what this is describing. The term 'rainbow' is the Greek word 'iris', I think this is the word from which we get the word 'iris' of the eye.

"It was an iris about the throne that looked like emerald." It was green. {4} "And around about the throne were 24 seats, and upon the seats I saw 24 elders sitting, clothed in white raiment. They had on their heads crowns of gold {5} And out of the throne proceeded lightning and thunderings and voices. There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God."

You know, down through time, artists have tried to put this on canvas with really poor results. What this really needs is special effects, Hollywood style, a Lucas film perhaps or Steven Spielberg's Dream Works could work with this idea because it would take that to get the human imagination to be able to see what's going on here.

By the time John saw all of this, I expect his hair was standing on end, because he had come into the very throne room of the universe. He was where God was. And that One sitting on the throne was God.

A Scroll With Seven Seals

In chapter 5 and verse one, John continues to watch what goes on. He said, "I saw in the right hand of Him that sat on the throne, a book. It was written on the inside and on the backside and sealed with seven seals" Now you have to understand, this is not a book like you and I would think of as a book, it was a scroll. Scrolls were sometimes unrolled and written on one side and then rolled up. In this case, this was written on both sides of the scroll. It was rolled up and then there were seven seals that had been placed on this, so that someone couldn't open it up and look at it.

Verse 2, "I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose the seals thereof." A great proclamation goes out and {3} "No man in heaven, nor on earth, neither under the Earth was able to open the scroll and to look on it. {4} And I wept," John says, "because no man was found worthy to open and read the scroll, neither to look at it." This is so dreamlike. You can sort of visualize in a dream, seeing this all take place, of one standing up and making this great proclamation and then people scurrying around looking and finding no one and you almost feel yourself in the dream weeping uncontrollably about why no one could be found. John is just crying his heart out. There is no time frame for it, it is just a dream.

The Lion of the Tribe of Judah Has Prevailed to Open the Scroll

Let's continue in Revelation 5:5, "And one of the elders said to me, "Don't weep, behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose the seven seals of the scroll, {6} And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and the four beasts, (right in the middle), stood a lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the Earth."

Iconography

In Christian iconography, the slain lamb is Christ. In this case the slain lamb risen. There is something else you need to know about icons and iconography in the Bible. A generation ago icons meant very little to us. If you heard someone speak of an icon you might imagine something in the Greek Orthodox Church.

In the computer age, that's all changed. Icons are now common. An icon is a little picture or an image on your computer screen that stands for something. Instead of them having to write a whole sentence of words in English or some other language, they actually just put a little image of something on the computer screen. It may be a little image of a printer, click on it, and the print program is executed immediately. I have counted on the screen of my computer, when I had the word processing program open, some 65 separate icons on the screen. I was shocked. I had no idea there were that many there. All of these little tiny icons are there to enable you to have commands at your fingertips so that you can just click on

them and the computer goes off and does things. It is much simpler, much quicker, than having the words written out there.

So when you look at the Bible, you find icons, that is images, that means something. Icons are common in the book of Revelation, but you find it in the Old Testament prophets as well and you have to look at these things and do a little study of icons, that is iconography, to understand what the biblical writers were seeing, what these things meant, and what their audience was supposed to get from it.

I really believe that in some cases, we have lost the significance of the icon, and just like on your computer screen, if you go and look at certain icons on your screen, you might say to yourself, "I wonder what that does?" And the only way you will find out is by clicking on it, and sometimes you really don't do that without knowing what is it.

Most computers today are programmed so that when you move the mouse arrow across the icon, a little text box pops up and tells you what that particular icon does.

Well, so it is with the Bible. There are many of these icons that people don't recognize. This one, however, is well understood. The lamb is Jesus Christ. The lamb slain is Jesus Christ. And this lamb in the center, where the throne of God was, is the slain lamb risen from the dead.

Worthy Is The Lamb

Continuing in Revelation 5 and verse 6, "And I beheld, I watched, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne," John said, {11} "And all these creatures and elders and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, {12} Saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing. {13} And every creature in heaven, and every creature on the earth and every creature under the earth, and such as are in the sea and everything I heard say, "Blessing, and honor and glory and power be unto him that sits upon the throne and unto the Lamb forever and ever.""

Boy, you could have a hard time figuring this out, couldn't you? You have the Father on the throne. You have His Son, Jesus Christ, represented by the lamb and they are there receiving the worship of everybody.

Jesus Opens the Scroll

John says in Revelation chapter 6, verse one, "I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard a great clap of thunder and then one of the four beasts said, "Come over here and look. {2} And I saw, and behold a white horse and he that sat on him had a bow, and a crown was given to him and he went forth conquering and to conquer." This particular icon,

while you might initially think, of a man sitting on a white horse would be Christ, this is not. This one is a false Christ. It is the icon of the false Christ.

And {3} "When he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, "Come and see. {4} And there went out another horse that was red and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, that they should kill one another, and there was given to him a great sword." The icon of the red horse, with a man with a sword in his hand, stands for war.

And {5} "When he opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, "Come and look, and I beheld a black horse, he that sat upon him had a pair of balances in his hand, {6} And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, "A measure of wheat for a penny, three measures of barley for a penny, be careful not to hurt the oil and the wine." The icon of the black horse with a pair of balances in a man's hand is the icon for famine.

And {7} "When he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast saying, "Come and look." {8} And I looked and behold a pale horse, and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed him and power was given him over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with the sword and hunger and death and the beasts of the earth." The pale horse is the icon for pestilence.

More persecution of the Saints follows on the heels of what is called the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

And {9} "When he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held, {10} And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long Lord, holy and true, will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? {11} And white robes were given to them, and it was said that they should rest for a little season, till their fellow servants and their brethren who would be killed as they were, should be fulfilled."

Sixth Seal - Heavenly Signs

Revelation 6 and verse 12. "I looked and beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and there was a terrible earthquake, the sun became as black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood, {13} The stars of heaven fell to the earth like a fig tree casts her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind."

What an image. I'm reminded of what happens here in East Texas, when the time comes to get the pecans out of the trees. They have a machine that grabs a tree by the trunk and gives the tree a shake and all around them comes a rainstorm of pecans.

What he is saying is, that you're going to have a meteor shower, not just meteor showers that you see in the sky like a pretty display of fireworks, these are going to be hitting the earth,

and they are going to be coming down like a fig tree casts her untimely figs when she is shaken of a mighty wind. Do you realize that there's a connection in this passage between the earthquake and the sun becoming black and this meteor shower? Because when these things start hitting the ground, everyone of them that hits the ground explodes and throws up a great cloud of dust. I mean, even one big one could turn the sun black and the moon into blood.

He said, (14) "The heaven, departed like a scroll, when it is rolled up, and every mountain and every island fled out of their places." This is shocking because, a while back, I read on the Internet, an explanation of what goes on in the universe. If you take a look at our moon, with your binoculars on a nice clear night, that poor battle scarred moon of ours has been beaten to death, down through the eons of time with meteors and asteroids hitting it. It doesn't have an atmosphere to protect it. Even the smallest ones create enormous problems. It's hard for us to realize that a meteor hitting this planet, lets say half the size of a football field and exploding, what it would do, as it came down through the atmosphere, it would begin to burn and then it would explode above a section of our country and it would flatten everything for miles around with a kind of explosive power that several megaton nuclear weapons would have going off at the same time.

What you're actually hearing described here in the sixth seal is the kind of things scientist tell us might well happen to us some day. I have read that what some people speculate may have happened with Mars, because it is now evident that there was water on Mars at one time, you obviously have lake beds there. Mars had a close encounter with a planet sized asteroid which may very well have stripped it of most of its atmosphere. Prior to that time, Mars had an atmosphere. It is shocking to think that it's conceivable that there are objects out there, that if they went by close enough to the earth they could do the same thing to us.

What did he say? He said in verse 14, "The heaven departs like a scroll when it is rolled together and every mountain and island are moved out of their places, {15} And the Kings of the earth, and the great men, the rich men, the chief captains, the mighty man and every bondman and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, {16} And said to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, {17} For the great day of His wrath is come, and who will be able to stand.""

I can almost imagine God saying at this moment, "All right world, do I have your attention now?" and I certainly think He would.

The Seventh Seal and the Seven Trumpets

Let's continue at Revelation 8 and verse 1, "And when He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour." After this incredible set of events in the fifth and sixth seals, that silence might be very welcome.

{2} "I saw the seven angels, which stood before God, and to them were parceled out seven trumpets." And right here is where we find the only series of trumpets in the Bible that might lead up to what Paul was talking about when he said the resurrection would take place at the last trumpet.

We also get a little hint of the outline of the book of Revelation because the seventh seal, as it is opened, is actually composed of seven trumpets. The seven trumpets are that seventh seal.

Now verse six, "And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. {7} The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood and they were cast upon the earth, and the third part of trees were burned up and all green grass was burnt up." This is a terrible thing to consider and one really wonders what on earth is going on here.

"And {8} the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea, and a third part of the sea became blood." Blood by the way, is an icon for death.

"And {9} the third part of everything in the sea, that had life died and the third part of the ships were destroyed." Apparently this thing hits like a meteor from outer space and a section of it hits the water and a third of everything on the planet dies as a result. They tell us that that's not at all an unlikely occurrence if a big one hits the ocean.

"And {10} the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning like a lamp and it fell upon the third part of the waters and upon the fountains of waters, {11} And the name of the star is called Wormwood, and the third part of the waters became wormwood, and many men died of the waters because they were made poison."

Now you really begin to wonder as you read through some of this, are these natural disasters? Because the ones back in the six seal were. The things that happen in the six seal are things that happen as a result of the earth going through the tail of a comet. But this isn't! This sounds very different and one wonders if what he is describing here, a great star fallen from heaven, is a missile, burning as it falls, and then turning the water to poison. It sounds a lot like chemical warfare, doesn't it?

"And {12} the fourth angel sounded and the third part of the sun was smitten, and a third part of the moon, the third part of the stars, so a third part of them was darkened, and the day didn't shine for a third part of it and the night likewise."

Woe, Woe, Woe

John continues, "And I beheld an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!"

This is shocking to think about, isn't it? And all this is in our future.

The ninth chapter of Revelation has the events surrounding the sounding of the fifth and the sixth angels as they blow their trumpets and when you read them, you basically have to conclude that this is war and human beings will be engaged in the final act of war. That war that Jesus spoke of in the Mount Olivet prophecy in Matthew 24 and verse 22 when He said, "Unless those days were shortened there would be no flesh saved alive."

When you read through these things on this fifth and six trumpets you begin to realize, yes this could actually be the end of all human life. It is really odd, you don't have to go back that many generations to a time when someone spoke of the end of all human life on the planet caused by man, you might have chuckled and said, "No chance buddy." But we have come to the place to where if man set out to do it, he could do it. We now come to the place where we could do it without meaning to. It's kind of a scary time in which we live. The fifth and sixth trumpets really make you wonder about that time.

The Last Trump

It is not until Chapter 11 that the seventh and last Angel blows his trumpet. Verse 15, "And the seventh Angel sounded, and there were great voices in heaven saying, "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and He shall reign forever and ever." {16} The four and 20 elders, that sat before God on their seats, fell on their faces and worshiped God saying, {17} "We give you thanks, Lord God Almighty, who are and were and are to come, because you have taken Your great power and have reigned. {18} The nations were angry, and Your wrath is come and the time of the dead that they should be judged, and that you should give reward to your servants the prophets, and to the Saints, and to all those that fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy them that destroy the earth. {19} And the Temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His Temple, the ark of His covenant, and there were lightnings and voices and thunders and an earthquake and great hail."

Shouting at the Resurrection

Right here, at the last trumpet, is the moment of the resurrection of the dead and the changing of all the Saints into godlike beings. I made a point in an earlier article, that the early Church connected the Jewish New Year or the Feast of Trumpets to the resurrection. I also made the point, that that day is called in Hebrew, a day of shouting and cheering.

Some day in the future you will gather your feet up in your bed and you will die. It may be a heart attack that takes you, it might be congestive heart failure, it may be the gradual shutdown of your vital organs and you will sleep. Or perhaps you'll be like the Bible term, 'grinding at the mill' which in our language today would involve working in your cubicle. You might be cutting your grass or you might be hiding out in a cave someplace, but "in a moment," to use Paul's term, "in the twinkling of an eye," both you who are alive and those who have died will find yourselves cut loose from the earth, rising upward with your body radically changed and 'in that moment' you will know.

You will know that you are finished with the flesh and that you are about to meet the glorified Christ in the air. Do you think you will shout?

You know, no pilot forgets his first solo flight. I recall mine vividly to this day, and one part of it in particular, after the takeoff, and I climbed to pattern altitude, setting up the downward leg, when finally I got a moment of time to think. I turned around and looked at that empty seat behind me and I shouted at the top of my voice. The part of the flight that I remember most vividly is the moment of the shout. Some of us have a saying when we land an airplane successfully, we grin and say, "Well we cheated death again." I know that all of that is nothing compared to the shout I'm going to make when I know I have finally cheated death.

It should make your hair stand on end to imagine the scene around Christ, when we meet him in the air. I expect all of us, including Jesus Himself, will be grinning from ear to ear and weeping at the same time, and the cheer will be deafening and the celebration overwhelming.

I don't have any certain knowledge of the timing of events after that, but I expect it will take all the 10 days between the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, to settle down, to see what Yom Kippur is all about.

Are You Ready?

My favorite TV commercial is the one about the brave new world coming our way through technology, the Internet, communications and voice after voice around the world asks, "Are you ready?" From Thailand, "Are you ready?" From Africa, "Are you ready? And finally a little girl comes on the screen and looks me right in the eye and asks, "Are you?"

You see, in the end, we will face death and we will win. Paul said, "O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law, but thanks be to God, who gives us the WIN (victory) through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:55-57).

God did not put us down here on this planet to lose, to lose out, to give death the victory. He put us here to WIN. Remember, you were Born to Win!

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