

Set on Fire

by: Ronald L. Dart

If a man die shall he live again? That's the question isn't it? "Is this all there is?" People want to know. We are going to live out our lives here in misery, pain, frustration, aggravation and irritation and after that comes oblivion forever and sometimes one thinks that oblivion might even be merciful after all of this. "If a man die will he live again?" It was Job who asked this question, and Job had really good reason to ask whether life was even worth living or not. Here's a man who had been wealthy, successful, I mean, everything the man ever did in his life worked, and all of a sudden everything in his life fell completely apart. All of his children were killed when a windstorm came by and destroyed the house that they were all partying in that particular day.

A group of civilians came by and stole all of his livestock - every bit of it. Left him with nothing, and I don't think they had insurance back in those days to pay for all that. One moment he was a wealthy man, and the next moment he had nothing. And not long after that he began to notice the first signs of the appearance of boils on his body. Finally, he was covered with boils from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet, and there was absolutely no place he could get comfortable. Now, if you've been sick, and it may have been long enough since you were sick you don't remember real well, but when you're sick life gets to be a real burden. You don't think clearly, you can't sleep well and it's difficult to concentrate when the fever goes up, or when pain is in your body. You think, "Well I can just shovel it off to one side, and I can keep my mind clear at least, and I can keep my mind focused on what's important. What I'm doing." No you can't.

As your pain begins to rack your body, and as fever begins to mount, your mind doesn't work like it did when you were healthy and whole and feeling good and everything was working. And this is why this man was. No place to get comfortable, no place to really, you know, be able to get rid of the pain. The pain was with him all the time. And when he slept under these conditions, he could only sleep because of exhaustion. No peaceful sleep for Job in this period of time, and the only encouragement he could get out of his wife was, "Well why don't you just curse God and die?"

I am sure that death was an option that might have crossed his mind, even if his wife had not mentioned it to him, maybe even suggested it to him, that he end his own life because life had become such a terrible, terrible crushing burden. And so, I think it makes a lot of sense that a man in Job's position would want to know, "What is there in this for me to go on? Is life worth living? Should I keep on trying with this?" And there's this marvelous passage in Job where he struggles with this question. He muses on this question. A question that troubled him, and it continues to trouble us. It is the fourteenth chapter of Job, and I'm talking about where he says, "Man that is born of women is few of days and full of trouble." And I don't know where you'd ever find a more compact statement of life than that. Few days and full of trouble because life is short. I mean it sometimes it may seem like its long, but I'll tell you it is the older you get the more you realize how fast it passes, how short it is, and that there is an absolute limit out there. There's a place where you're going to come right up against it, and life is over. He's full of days and he's full of trouble. "He comes forth like a flower and is cut down." You go on your little garden and you plant some seeds of petunias, and the petunias pop up in a few days, or weeks, or

whatever takes them to come up. And out comes somebody was scissors and they go snip-snip- snip-snip and all these flowers are cut down, and they go in a vase in the house, and in a matter of days they're dead. They're gone. Man comes up like a flower and he's cut off. That's life. "That's the way the thing works", Job said. "He flees like a shadow. He does not continue" and he says to God, "And are you going to open your eyes on such a one?" Here you know I don't have many days, and they are full of trouble, and I want a flower that sprouts up and somebody comes along and cuts it off. Now, God, are you going to open your eyes on someone like me and bring me to judgment? What's the point what's going on here that you should care about this? Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Nobody can. Seeing his, that man's, days are numbered, the number of his months are numbered with you. You have appointed his bounds that he cannot pass".

I don't know where it is out there, but for every single one of us there is a boundary we cannot cross. We live our lives and we'll struggle, we may go through the Tortures of the Damned of chemotherapy, radiation, surgery and all that maybe we may have to go through it to keep this miserable body alive, and we may be able to stretch it out a long time, but there is a boundary, there is a brick wall out there that we're going to come up against, and we cannot pass it. Job knew that. He knew that. He said, "No matter what I do there's a limit to this. Turn from him then he says to God that a man can rest until he has finally like a hired hand finished out his time. Just take your hand off and let me finish my time let me just play out my string. You know I've got a boundary. You know I can't get on the other side of it. Why do I have to go through with this thing that's going on here? and he says, in verse seven, "Because there's hope of a tree, if it is cut down that it will sprout again." And you can go out there and get the chainsaw to this thing and take it down, and go off and leave it, there is a pretty good chance something is going to come up out of the roots of it. Have you ever tried to get rid of one of them? You'll know that's true. The tender branch there all of it will not cease, though the root waxes old in the earth, and the stock is dying in the ground, here through the scent of water it will bud and bring forth bowels like a plant. Man is not like that.

They didn't put man in vaults, you know, concrete vaults inside of caskets or steel vaults but they put them in the ground in those days. They wrapped him in cloth and stuck the body in the ground. And from the history of man, all the way forward till the day when Job finally wrote this stuff down, not one of those men that they had buried in the ground had ever sprouted so much as a twig. You can bury them to your heart's content, and you can watch them to your heart's content, and they don't grow. That's what Job is saying here. Man dies. Wastes away. Gives up the ghost, and where is he after a few years? You go back maybe and dig up the bones and those bones will still be there. And that's all there are. He says, "As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decays and dries up, so man lies down and doesn't rise again till the heavens be no more." You put him in the grave that's where he's going to stay. "They shall not wake. They shall not be raised out of their sleep." Now he's talking here about in the normal course of events, like a tree, you know, like a seed, like anything else you put in the ground, you put it in there something may come up if you water it. Not man. You put man in the ground that's where he stays. Then he says, "Oh that you would hide me in the grave that you would keep me secret until your anger is over and that you would appoint me a set time and remember me."

What Job is asking for is death, burial and resurrection. I don't know if he knew exactly what he was asking for but he says, "I wish that you would just take me. Let me die. Hide me in the ground, and put a mark on the calendar, and whenever all the trouble is over, and when you're not mad anymore", because I think he thought God was mad, "When you're not mad anymore when your wrath is passed, and all the stuff is gone by, then, when it comes to the calendar, "Oh yes Job," he says, "I would like for you then, when that time comes, to remember me. If a man die shall he live again, or have the days of my

appointed time will I wait until my change comes. You will call and I will answer you. You will have a desire to the work of your hands.”

It's incredible, and every time I read this it almost gives me goose-flesh to think that, you know, this may have been the first book of the Bible ever written. That he will say that's the oldest and most archaic Hebrew of any of the old books of the Bible. I think it was written well before Genesis was written, so it's old. Even at this old time here was a man who understood the concept that man was the work of God's hands. Now you know what that means? I mean I have in my time had a number of projects I worked on. I'm a ham radio operator. I built a ham radio once upon a time. Not what they call 'homebrew' where you do your own design, but a kit-type of radio, and it was the work of my hands. I enjoyed the work. I enjoyed working on it, but every once in a while something would happen, and I would have to interrupt that work. So I would take my radio, and my tools and put them away, take my radio and put it on the shelf, and I would go, but every time I would walk by I would have a desire to the work of my hands. You know, it is a desire to come back to this project, and finish this project. To me the concept that man is a work in progress, is one of the most profound things you will ever read in the Bible. Ever grasp about the Bible ever come to understand about what God is doing.

Man is a work in progress. He is the work of God's hand. Now I don't think that that is a concept, even when we read the Bible, or even when we really quite get our mind around. What is he doing? What is there that can be so great, what is it that can be so important out there in the future, for God to allow a man like Job to lose all of his children. To lose everything he has. To be impoverished. Go and live down to nothing. Have his wife with no support. No support from anybody. And his three good friends, three best friends, come around earning for themselves the nickname "Job's friends" which made it all the way down to our generation today, so we know what they are; miserable comforters all. And so what is it out there Job wondered, that is so important that God is willing to allow me to go through this? What is there that is so important that he would not heal me now? What does he have in store that he is willing to let me suffer? That he is willing to let things like the Holocaust take place? That he is willing to allow the incredible human suffering that goes on in the world all around us, all the time. What's out there that we don't know about and that we haven't really grasped? You notice, if you've read through Job, he never cited scripture. There wasn't any. He was actually in the process of creating the first scripture that was there. He didn't know a lot of things but he did know one very important thing - he knew God.

And, once you allow God onto the stage, once you allow him in the play, everything changes. Once you allow God into this little play that's being played out between Job, Satan the Devil and his friends, and all that say there is a God. He is here. And so forth. Everything changes because God has a plan, he has a point, he has a purpose, and now you have got to deal with that. You've got to deal with that. What is it? Where is it? Where is it going? What's it for? and what is it that is so great that it almost trivializes everything that we suffer, and everything that we own, everything we possess, all of everything around us, all we have is trivialized because of what he has out there for us. The answer to Job's question lies in the person of Jesus Christ, who died, and who was raised from the dead.

And the most logical place I can take you from that statement is to look at First Corinthians, to the New Testament. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, said this, "Moreover brethren, I declare unto you the gospel that I preached unto you, which you have received, and wherein you stand, by which you are saved, if you keep in memory what I preach to you, unless you believe in vain. Okay, I preached this to you, you believed it, now question what is this Gospel? Here it is, I deliver to you first of all what I received, how Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures".

And I ask you for a definition of the Gospel? Well there's Paul's definition of the gospel. I know, I know, it's the gospel of the Kingdom of God. The soon coming return of Christ. I know all that, but here's what Paul told the Corinthians his gospel was. Jesus died for our sins. He was buried. He was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures. Without that nothing matters.

You do understand that, don't you? Without that nothing matters. And there's something more to it than that. He says also, he was seen of Cephas, and then he was seen by the twelve, we're talking about Jesus being raised from the dead. He was after that seen by about five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remained of the present, but some are fallen asleep and died. After that he was seen of James, then of all the Apostles and last of all he was seen by me also as one born out of due time. Now think about this, when this letter was circulating, and they stood up and read it in Corinth, so we're reading away and it comes to this point, somebody out of that group might very well have said have said, "Yes! Yes! I was there! I saw it!" Five hundred people were wandering around the Middle East bearing witness to the fact that Jesus Christ was alive after his death and burial. Five hundred of them. You know, do you have any idea how hard it would be to pull this off if it was fraud at the time? Scholarship now has pretty well established that every single book that we call New Testament, every one of them, had to have been written in the first century. And all the way to the end of the first century you had people who had seen it, and you had a host of people who had talked to someone who had seen it. Think about that. A host of people were alive at the turn of the century who had talked to Peter, talked to James, talked to Paul. Who knew these men, called them by name and were known by them. This is really something to think about when you understand that, you know, the movement of what was going on in the New Testament times as far as the gospel was concerned. Paul then says, "I am the least of the Apostles in fact I'm not fit to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God but by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace was not bestowed upon me in vain. No sir. I labored harder than any of them. But it wasn't me, it was the grace of God which was in me. So, whether it was me, whether it was them, so we preach and so you believed. Now," Paul says, "If it is preached that Christ rose from the dead, how come some of you are saying that there is no resurrection?" Now we could spend a lot of time charging off on that particular "rabbit", or "chase that rabbit", but I don't want to do that today. I don't really know what these people were up to as to why they were saying there is no resurrection, where they were like the Sadducees who had believed in Jesus and thought Jesus was a nice man but, no there's no resurrection. This life is all there is. Paul is going to address that in no uncertain terms. he says, "No I'm sorry, if there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christ has not risen, and if Christ has not risen then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is also vain, and not only that, but I'm a liar".

Paul says, "You know, just make up your mind to this, you have got to decide that I am, that Peter is, that all five hundred of those people who saw Jesus alive, you've got to decide that we are a pack of liars. You've got to decide that the group of individuals, who are beginning to expound throughout the known world at this time, the deepest most profound most evocative message of faith, belief in God, of the highest standards of morals, all these people and ethics, all these people who do this are all a pack of liars. That's what you have got to decide, if Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, so says Paul. For the dead rise not, Christ isn't risen, and if Christ is not risen your faith is vain. You're still in your sins.

Now you may have thought that the death of Christ cleansed you from all of your sins. and you would be wrong. If he had died in your place, if he had died for you, and stayed dead he could not do you any good at all, that's what Paul says. I was been noticing another round of the argument about whether Jesus had to be God, or man, or whether his sacrifice was sufficient, or what he had to be to make his sacrifice sufficient for all of us, and every time I see that argument make the rounds. I wonder when

somebody is going to pipe up and say, Wait a minute, wait a minute, it isn't Christ's death, it's his resurrection, it's his work. It's what he's doing right now. He is at the right hand of the Father making intercession for us. That's why we're alive. That's why we can live. That's why we're going to make it, not because he died, not that alone, He had to do that. He had to die, and be buried so he could be resurrected, but it is the resurrected Christ who works in us. Lives in us. Paul says, "If you don't have that, you've got nothing." Not only that, "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable". And I think when we read that little passage of scripture you and I ought to blush in shame, we really should, because I can't say that. I personally believe that, even if there were no life after this, living in Christ, living according to Christ, following the teachings of Christ, keeping His commandments, His statutes, his law's, the way he went about doing things, I think that's the best way to live. Don't you think so? I think it's good, and I would want to live that way even if there were no tomorrow, because I know it's better for me.

But it wasn't that way when Paul wrote this. When Paul wrote this it was worth your life to admit that you're a Christian. Christians not only were, you know, we hear a lot about them being burned at the stake, or fed to lions, and so forth. We don't hear as much about the fact that they lost jobs, lost careers, lost family, and were cut off and treated as pariahs in their society. We don't realize that they wound up in the same position as Job. Family gone. Property gone. Everything gone. In some cases their bodies were stuffed in prison holes somewhere and left there to die. We don't realize that in that day in time, Paul's statement was true, "if we only have hope in Christ in this life, we must be the most miserable people alive".

He goes on, "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept, for since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. Just like Adam everybody dies, so just like Christ, all will be made alive, every man in his own order, Christ the first fruits, afterward they that are Christ's at his coming". I recently was talking about this on the program and I took quite a digression on the question of first fruits because I know that's a totally strange concept to most of my radio audience. Time won't permit me to go into it today.

"Then comes the end, when it will deliver to the kingdom to God. Even the father. When he shall put all rule of authority and power, put down all authority and rule in power for he has to reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

Death is an enemy. Yeah, I know, when you're when you're dying, and when you're in pain, and a person is suffering. It kind of looks like a friend, because you know that when death comes the pain is over, the suffering is over. But death is no friend of ours. Death is an enemy, and it is the absolute last enemy that Jesus is going to finally destroy. Death will no longer be able to have any effect. "He has put all things under his feet". Now when he says everything is put under him, it should be made plain that he has accepted who put these things under him. God the Father is not going to be under the Son, and when all things shall be subdued to him the Son himself shall be subject to him that put all this under him in the first place, so that God may be all in all, else what shall they do who are baptized for the dead." Once again that's a 'rabbit' that I don't intend to chase.

Continuing in verse thirty, "If there is no resurrection from the dead" Paul asks, "Why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? Now I protest by your rejoicing that I have in Christ Jesus our Lord. I face death every day". If this is just a matter of a human interaction, if this is just politics, if this is just the way we go about doing things, "You know, that I fought with beasts at Ephesus" what's the point in it? What's the advantage to me in this one what's in this for me if the dead don't rise?

Let's eat, let's drink, with the morrow we're going to be dead men, and you might as well enjoy it while you can. Don't be deceived by that. Evil communications corrupt good conduct. Awake to righteousness. Don't sin because some have not the knowledge of God. Now I speak this to your shame”.

Now somebody is going to say I know it's just a sure as you're sitting out there hearing this letter read to you in church, somebody is going to say, “Well how are the dead raised up then? And what kind of body are they going to have?” Oh, my, the questions. The detailed technical questions about the resurrection are endless. Absolutely endless. And here come at Paul, they come and say I know, well I know some of you are going to say, “All right what about my technical questions? How are the dead raised up? What kind of body have they got? He says, “You fool”. Now, Paul was pretty straightforward, and he basically comes along and tells us that all these technical questions about the resurrection are the questions of fools. “You fool”, he says, “That what you sow is not quickened except it died.” And we went back talking earlier in the sermon, talking about putting seeds in the ground, you know, and I remember as a boy I got some flower seeds, these little packets, and I went out and I got some carrots seeds too, and I went out and I punched some holes in the ground, and put them down in there and covered them all up, and went to bed. Got up the next morning to go out and see if anything was there yet, because I was hoping to see these things come up. You do realize don't you that you can't get this flower, this petunia, to come of out of the ground, unless the seed is destroyed. The seed has to die. It cannot survive intact as it was and produce the plant. It's not possible. OK I think that we probably would understand that. Then, if you're looking toward the kingdom of God, and you're wanting somehow to be in the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, and be around Jesus Christ and God the Father, you do know, don't you, that you have to die?

Just like a seed that is put in the ground, you in the flesh can't get there from here. It's not possible. What you put in the ground can ever come up again unless it dies. And what you sow, you don't sew that body that will be, it's a seed, bare grain, it may be wheat. It may be some other grain; God gives it a body as it has pleased him. Every seed his own body. DNA rules, right? Whatever the DNA says that's going to be, that's what it's going to be, you really can't change that. All flesh is not the same flesh there's one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beast, another of fish, and other of birds. There are heavenly bodies and terrestrial bodies. The glory of the celestial is one the glory of the terrestrial is another. There's one glory of the sun another glory of the moon, another glory of the stars, for one star differs from another in glory, so also is the resurrection from the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.

Now, being buried, having a funeral, with all the beautiful flowers that are all around, and all that is a great honor, isn't it? And to have your relatives pay a lot of money for a mausoleum, or a really nice funeral plot with a nice monument to be placed over it, this is an honor right? And we try our best to honor the dead, but you know, don't you, at the same time it's an honor you would just as soon avoid? It's an honor that you are not particularly looking forward to. It's an honor that you will do almost everything within your power to postpone it as long as you possibly can. Actually it's a dishonor to be put in the grave. It's a dishonor to be stuck in a mausoleum somewhere you know where you are they shove you in there like some library book to be kept for some period of time, and there you are dead. As you know it's a dishonor, you know it's dishonoring in a sense to die and be buried. It is sown in dishonor, but it is raised in glory. This is what Paul is trying to tell us. Sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

I want to back up for a moment. All of you here believe in a resurrection, I think. You really do hope for and believe in that resurrection. You believe man will be raised from the dead, and that raises the most interesting question of all. What for? What for? I mean the guy's dead. He's dead and we're going to go

out there want to dig him up, pump him back to life, make a living creature again. What are we going to do that for? When man has finished out his miserable existence here why not leave him dead? No more pain. He may be sleeping and sleeping sounder than any time he slept in his entire life, what are we going to go out there and wake him up for? To go to heaven? You know, I'm sorry to say this, but some of the most boring sermons I have ever heard in my life have been sermons about what heaven will be like. They just go on and on about streets of gold, and dining on milk and honey, and beautiful music and looking up in the in the Master's face. And, I don't know how much you're into self-analysis but, you probably already know that there is nothing that you do in life nothing, absolutely nothing that you do in your life that would not become boring if you had to do it all the time. The most joyful, the happiest, I remember it was Rita Rudner in one of her routine said this, she said that a friend of hers had been in the hospital giving birth to her baby, and she had been in labor for twenty four solid hours. She had the audience groan, and Rita Rudner said I don't know that I would want to even do anything that feels good for twenty four hours.

Now, just think about it for a minute, what is there that you can think of that you'd like to do for one hundred million years? The same things, over and over again, all the time? Well walking the streets of gold, dining on milk and honey, singing praises with the angels, looking up into the Master's face, I don't mean to be irreverent, but don't you think that might get tedious after a hundred million years or so?

If you really consider that we are created by God in His image, that our minds, and the way our minds work, are in His image, that's the way he has made us, you know that would get tedious. Now, I will admit, it's a lot better than burning in hell for a hundred million years or so, but that begs the question, there is still something wrong with this picture. If God is going to pass us by and wake us up from our eternal sleep, if he's going to say, "Oh yeah, well that's right I did put him over there. Let's go get him and bring him back". He must have something in mind, and it really ought to be a lot more than milk and honey.

I mentioned earlier that DNA rules and buried deep within every seed is a kind of code that determines what it is. If you put a petunia seed in the ground, good soil and water it you're going to get, not merely another seed, you're going to get a flower out of that seed. It's all built into the DNA code. We know also now, thanks to science, that we carry in every cell of our body a unique DNA code. You can find it in every strand of your hair and all they need is one strand, I don't know, maybe even a fingernail shaving, they can take that, and find a code that is that unique one in all the universe code that is you. Everything that makes us what we are physically is recorded in that. Now, as I read through this, it suddenly dawned on me that what Paul is suggesting here, although he himself doesn't know the terminology, is that we also carry some kind of spiritual DNA. Listen to his arguments. All flesh is not the same flesh. Is one kind of flesh is of men, another of beasts, another of fish, another of birds? Of course! DNA rules. You can't breed a dog with a cat. Man is a certain kind of being, but he is destined to become something different from what goes in the ground

Presto! And isn't it amazing? It just is true. Simple, but also what goes on the ground is different from what comes up, but what comes up is controlled by the DNA. Whatever it is that's in that being.

There are celestial bodies, there are bodies terrestrial, the glory of the celestial is one and the glory of the terrestrial is another. The sun is a celestial body, it's a fire. The moon is a terrestrial body, it's just a rock. And, if it weren't for the sun shining on the moon we would not even know it's there. We couldn't see it if the light was not shining on it. The sun is a blazing nuclear furnace.

We go into the ground Paul says as an earthly, moon-light body. We come up out of the ground rather different from that. So also, Paul says, is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it's raised in incorruption. Sewn in dishonor, raised in glory. Sewn in weakness, raised in power. Sewn in a natural body, raised a spiritual body. There is Paul says a natural body. If you want to check that out, you know you can feel it, it's right there it's under your clothes. It is a natural body. And there is a spiritual body, and you can't find that one quite so readily. That's the one apparently that you are to have.

It's a funny thing that I think about this, that oftentimes, I have been asked over the years, and I really do not understand this question, and if some of you do understand it, maybe you'll come to me afterward and explain to me. People want to know will we know each other in the kingdom of heaven? You know, will we be able to walk up and say, "Hi, Bob", and "Hi, Bill" and shake hands and know each other at that time?

Now, as I said I don't understand the question, because Paul statements as he makes it through here makes it as it should make it clear enough, for anybody, that just like every plant, every animal, everything in God's creation is unique and individual. So is every human being, and that every human being, having lived out this life that we live here has received different experiences, and the spiritual code down inside of us, that spiritual DNA, is still in the formative stages in all of us, and it is different in every single one of us. My question would be, if in the resurrection I am not Ronald Dart, or if I am not recognizable to myself as myself, if I do not have my self-identity, if I am not knowledgeable of myself, if I cannot if I am not conscious of myself, what is the point in my being there? Pray tell. And, if I know who I am, and if you know who you are, we're going to know each other.

There's a song that my father used to sing, that I tend to choke up every time I think of the song, you know, it's good, "I'll meet you in the morning, by the bright riverside, when the last winds of sorrow have blown." I won't try to quote the whole song to you because I'll choke up if I did. One of the lines in it is, "We'll sit down by the river, and with rapture old acquaintance renew", and I think wherever you mean, whatever the song means by "river", and whenever "in the morning" is, I think it's that resurrection morning. We are going to know one another, and we are going to be able to sit down and have all the time we need to talk over all the old times, to renew old acquaintances, to ask about whatever happened to old so-and-so? Oh, well he's here, he's over there, let's go get him and talk to him. To be able to find the people that we want to talk to, of course we would know one another. Paul says in verse forty-five of First Corinthians fifteen it is written, "The first Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit." However this next verse is really important, "That was not first which is spiritual but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual".

Now, in the plant world we've got a cycle that goes around and the old saying, "Which came first the chicken or the egg?" It's an interesting question. Which came first, the seed of the plant? That made the seed is an interesting question, but what Paul is telling us in no uncertain terms regarding human beings, that was not first which was spiritual but that which was natural. And what it means is, we have to go through this to get there. There is no other way.

Well, creatures that went the other way are what we call angels, and they have never had the experience that we have had, and they are never going to have the glory that we have in God. "As are the earthy" verse forty-eight, "So are they that are earthy. As they that are heavenly, so are they that are heavenly. As we have been the image of the earthy, we will bear the image of the heavenly". You realize what Paul is saying here? We are growing to bear the image of God. We were made to be, were made originally sort-of in the image of God, but in the flesh, but he says we're headed in the future for the image of the heavenly. Now, keep your finger in first Corinthians, or just stay there and listen to

me read from First John chapter three, verse one, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world doesn't know us because it didn't know him. Brethren, now are we the sons of God It does not appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he appears, we will be like Him, for we shall see him as he is. And every man that has this hope in Him purifies himself even as he is pure.

"Now this I say brethren," Paul says, and continuing on in First Corinthians fifteen verse fifty, "that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption."

Why is it, do you suppose, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God? I mean, God says so, that's good enough for me. But one does wonder what is it that makes that impossible? It's a profound state. It means you can't get there like you are, and it requires a little bit of explanation. One respected theologian opined that, in the resurrection we would be like bright shiny mirrors that would reflect the glory of God. You know an absolutely perfect mirror, a flawless mirror that would reflect the glory of God. I thought that was a charming way of put it, however, there is something you need to know about the glory of God, and the concept of the glory of God in the Bible. Glory in the Bible is not a synonym for honor or adulation or admiration. We speak of a soldier in combat covering himself with glory and we mean the honor and all that is the glory that comes to a man, and that's not what the Bible is talking about. When the Bible talks about glory it is, in a very real way, a synonym for fire. Actually a lot more than just the fire that's in your fireplace, but for an all-consuming fire.

Once again keep your finger there but turn this time to Hebrews twelve and verse twenty-five. Here is a powerful admonition coming from the Hebraist, who tells us this, Hebrews twelve in verse twenty five, "See that you don't refuse him that speaks." I think that when somebody says "See that" it's a special warning. See that you don't refuse him that speaks, for if they didn't escape, or refuse him that spoke on earth, how are you and I going to escape if we refuse him that speaks from heaven? I think we'd better listen. "Whose voice then shook the earth: and promised saying, I'm not through, I'm going to shake again the heavens and the earth", and this word once more signifies that anything that can be shaken will be removed. They're going to destroy it, that's what he means. Things that are made, things which can be, so that all the things, only the things that remain, when all is said and done, are the things that can't be shaken, can't be destroyed, can't be touched. "Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and fear, for our God is a consuming fire."

I don't know if you've ever thought of this, but when we come into God's presence, finally at long last, we will be set on fire - for destruction - or for glory. One way or the other. Not just a nice shiny perfect mirror to reflect the glory of God. You come into the presence of God, and you finally are able to touch him - to reach out to his face - he will set you on fire as he is a consuming fire. We come into His presence, and the real test we get there, by the way, is going to be the kind of stuff we are made out of. I never made the connection, but I think there must be one between the time when Moses first saw God, he was walking along and he saw a bush that was on fire, but it wasn't consumed. Once God's presence had come to this bush that was there under normal circumstances that bush would have just blown up in smoke. It did not get burned. It wasn't consumed. And I think that something like that, something about that has to be understood in our situation, as to what God is going to do with us. "The Lord said to Moses", I won't ask you to turn there, I'll just read as it is probably a fairly familiar account to you. "I will do this thing that you have spoken because you have found grace in my sight, and I know you by name, and Moses said, I beseech you, I beg you God, show me your glory. Let me see your glory. I want to know what you look like let me look at you. And God said, Well I will make all my goodness to pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you and I'll be gracious to whom I will be

gracious, and show mercy to whom I will have mercy, but you cannot see my face, for no man can see me and live.”

Now, there are two ways of looking at that, one is well you say me I gotta kill you now because I don't want anybody telling people what I look like. The other way of looking at that is, that what you have suddenly looked upon will, in the process of looking, destroy you, because there is too much power, too much force, too much flame, that if you come into my presence of my face you will die because you are flesh and blood. That's what God is saying to Moses in this case, and it's clear, in the context, the Lord said, “Behold I've got a place over here and you'll stand on a rock and it should come to pass that while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand when I pass by, and as I get by you, I'll take away my hand briefly and you can see my back parts, my face you cannot see.” Actually, the danger was not some kind of punishment, the danger was the sheer, unshielded power of God's presence. Moses had to be shielded or he would die. And the kind of shields that we put together, made out of lead, would not get the job done, because the power that was there was just too great. It is a simple equation - the equation of flesh and fire. Flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of God, because, to enter the Kingdom of God, you have to go through fire. And only that which is Spirit can survive it. The time will come when every man and woman will have to appear before God unshielded

Do you understand the implications of what I'm saying? Every man and woman, sooner or later, has to appear before God unshielded. Some will be burnt to a crisp, and some will be lit up with a fire that can never be put out - not in a hundred million years - and not in a hundred billion years. Paul says, continuing now in first Corinthians fifteen in verse fifty-one, “Behold, I show you a mystery, we're not all going to die (because some of us are going to be alive when Christ returns) and will be changed in a moment (like a moment in time when you just bat your eyes) for a trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed”. We can't be like we are now. “This corruptible must put on incorruption, this mortal must put on immortality, and when that has happened then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written Death is swallowed up in victory”. We are going to win over death. We're going to win. Death doesn't win in the end, it is destroyed.

“Oh death,” he says, “where is your sting? Oh grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. Thanks be to God, who gives us the win through our Lord Jesus Christ. So my beloved brethren, be steadfast and unmoved, always abounding in the work of the Lord,” because, here is something that you can take home, this is something you can actually depend on, “that your labor is never in vain in the Lord.”

If it's somebody that you just happen some day in passing, you're walking along and you see someone sitting there reading the Bible, and you sit down with them and say, “Do you understand what you're reading?”, and they say, like the Ethiopian did back to Philip, “Well, sometimes I do, and sometimes I don't. I don't have anybody to explain it to me,” and you sit there and talk for a couple hours with this person about the Bible, and about Christ, about all that it means, and you leave them finally at the end, and you go your way, and they go their way and you never see them again in this life. You can know that that time was not wasted. For any work that you do in the Lord is never in vain. Never. To me that is one of the most encouraging passages in the entirety of your New Testament.

When I think about this, and I think about what's in store for us, about what he has in mind for us, and I think of that moment in time I look ahead and I say there will come a time when, for better or for worse, I will appear before God unshielded. Hopefully, I trust, and I know at this moment, that I am in Christ, and that that part of him that is in me, and the changes that he is making in my spiritual DNA, will

survive anything that I can go through. But, you know, a lot of the things that we're going through right now are preparatory. I think was C.S. Lewis who said that even death is a part of the process. You can't really effectively, not in this time, bypass death, although maybe some people will be alive when Christ returns, but for most of us that's not going to happen. Dying is a part of the process of being perfected. Remember Jesus said. "Be you therefore perfect even as your father in Heaven is perfect" Did you ever imagine in your mind that you were going to achieve that yourself in this life by hard work and diligence and care that you were going to somehow be perfect?

C.S. Lewis told an interesting story in his book, Mere Christianity, about how that when he had a toothache he tried his best not to tell his mother about the toothache. And the reason he didn't want to tell her about, I mean, he wanted the aspirin, he wanted a little pain killer, he knew that if he told his mother she would give him something, and the pain would go away but he wouldn't tell his mother about the toothache. You know why? Because he knew that, while she would cure this little problem, tomorrow she would take him to the dentist. And he said, I know the dentist. I knew them and they would not be satisfied with fixing this one little problem, they would pick and probe and pick and probe, because they wanted to go through and get all of my problems solved and straightened out. He said God is like that. We go to him and we take our little problems to him and say, "Lord fix this". Oh and so God says this is all fine, I'll fix that but let's take care of this too, and then there's this over here, and this problem here, and then he begins to go to work on us a little bit at a time, day after day. I don't know whether that's ever dawned on us, or not, but I think that fear sometimes, of what it's going to take for him to make us perfect may hold us back from going to him and saying, "Here am I, Lord. I don't know what the next step is, but I'm ready to take it with you because I know the time is going to come when I will stand before you and be set on fire".

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