

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: CELESTIAL BODIES

Scripture: I Corinthians 15:35-42

But some will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die; and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body which shall be, but grain, it may be of wheat, or some other; But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh; but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. Also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial, and bodies te-
lestial; but the glory of the celestial one; and the terrestrial, another; and the telestial, another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead.

He who is not able to abide the law of the celestial kingdom can not abide a celestial glory.

Through the centuries there have been many speculations about what is going to happen to a man after he dies, and in the endless eternity beyond. Scripture does not tell us all the minute details of God's system of judgments, rewards, and punishments. Speculation is futile and useless, for "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Yet we are warranted in making some assumptions which are reasonable and compatible with what we do know.

God's ways are not our ways; but if he is God, his ways will be higher than our ways, not lower. His love, his mercy, his generosity will be greater than ours. Because he is omniscient, he will be more just, equitable, fair, and reasonable than men -- not less. Human justice recognizes the principle of suiting the degree of punishment to the seriousness of the crime. For example, human law differentiates between petty larceny and grand larceny, according to the value of the property involved. Our law differentiates between first and second degree murder and manslaughter, and provides varying penalties commensurate with the degree of guilt.

Does God have just one degree of punishment for all he finds worthy of

punishment? Jesus said that he who knew not his Lord's will and did it not should be beaten with few stripes; but he who knew his Lord's will and did it not should be beaten with many stripes. There are several mentions in scripture of the "lowest" or "deepest" hell. If there is a lowest or deepest hell, there must be others not so low. Jesus told the Pharisees that theirs would be a greater punishment, because they devoured widows' houses while in full knowledge of the law. (Matt. 23:14)

If there are degrees of punishment provided for in God's judgments, it is reasonable and logical to assume that there may also be degrees of reward, suited to the qualities of life developed by each individual. Would any man deem it fair, equitable, just, or even sensible to include in the same environment all the patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, and saints who had lived noble, righteous, godly, dedicated lives, and also wicked, wanton, selfish, careless, ungodly men and women who had spent their lives in sin and then repented and confessed Christ at the last moment? Would you give the same reward to a cold blooded murderer who confessed Christ a few moments before his execution, and to his saintly victim or ask them to live eternally in the same environment?

There are indications in scripture that the future life will bring greater and lesser rewards, not one uniform reward for all. Jesus told his disciples to rejoice when men reviled and persecuted them, "for great is your reward in heaven." Peter speaks of an "abundant entrance" into the kingdom, indicating that there may be an entrance which is not so abundant.

We pause here, however, to stress again that salvation is of grace, not of works. Men may not bargain with God, offering so much work for so much reward. God's rewards always exceed our works and our merit; they are not based on any arbitrary system of celestial bookkeeping. When a man works through no other motivation than a desire for a special reward or a special preferment -- he gets no reward. Men can't claim a reward as their due; God gives it of his love and grace. Man must give himself unreservedly to God without any question as to what the reward shall be; then God gives freely, without calculation or stint, but in keeping with man's capacity to understand, to appreciate, to utilize, and to enjoy. No sensible man would give a grand piano or a fine Stradivarius violin to a chimpanzee to play with. Nor do we give small children real autos or airplanes or cyclotrons for playthings. So God is not going to waste his gifts on those who would only misuse them, or who have not the experience and capacity to understand, utilize, and enjoy them.

The eternal destiny of every man is to dwell either inside or outside the kingdom of God. Men are saved in his kingdom if they accept Christ, have faith on him, and build on his foundation. They are lost if they don't. Yet this does not necessarily mean that all men are saved to the same thing, or to the same place, condition, or degree of glory. Millions of people live within the territory and governmental jurisdiction of one nation -- the United States; but they also live in different states, territories, counties, cities, neighborhoods, and climates. They dwell in different jurisdictions with varying degrees of privilege and freedom. All are in the United States. All in the Father's house will not necessarily live in the same mansion or condition.

All men will some day come forth

either in the first or the second resurrection, to be given a new body in which to stand before God for judgment. With what body do they come? Will all have the same kind of body? Reason says "No," and scripture, though admittedly meager, confirms this conclusion. It is characteristic of life that it gathers and organizes matter in such a way as to form a body compatible with its nature, its purpose, and its environment. The life that is in a fish egg produces the body of a fish, a body suited to the watery environment in which the fish lives. The life in a bird's egg produces a body designed to fly through the air. There is flesh of men, of beasts, of fishes, and of birds. There are also bodies celestial, terrestrial, and telectual -- new, immortal, glorified bodies, adapted to the nature and glory of the life within, the purpose which that life wishes to accomplish, and the environment in which it is designed to live.

Resurrection is not merely the resuscitation of the old body from the identical elements which were laid in the grave. Resurrection brings a new body, as real as the old, or perhaps even more real, but immortal and incorruptible. It is raised by the power of God to that degree of the glory of God which the inhabiting spirit is capable of enjoying and utilizing. It is adapted to the quality of life which will dwell in it and be implemented through it. Those who have lived on this earth by the laws of the celestial kingdom, who have received the celestial quality of life through spiritual re-birth and the indwelling of God's life and Spirit, will then receive celestial bodies suitable for life eternal in a celestial kingdom. But he who is not able to abide the law of a celestial kingdom even in part, during this earth life, cannot abide a celestial kingdom or the fullness of a celestial glory in eternity.

Spirits and personalities are not changed by the resurrection. The same quality of spiritual life that we achieve here, whether high or low, is carried on beyond the grave -- the only difference being that there it is implemented by new, immortal, incorruptible bodies -- bodies celestial, terrestrial, or telectual, as we have made ourselves worthy and capable of receiving them through our works done in the flesh.