

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Power Everlasting

Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:15–16, KJV 1900)

Let's begin our study with a simple observation. When Paul wrote the words, "...to whom be..." he was not giving God something that God did not already possess. He was rather acknowledging the obvious eternal and unchanging character of God. This simple principle applies to God's honor, as well as to His power. What is there about God's power that Paul reserves for eternity? Why single out these two attributes from all of God's other incommunicable attributes? I suggest that Paul emphasizes these two attributes because they dominate God's purpose that shall appear most clearly throughout all eternity with Him and His beloved children.

More than once I have spoken at funerals or simply preached the Scriptures consistent teaching of a literal, bodily resurrection, and observed one or two facial expressions in the audience that said, "I don't believe that," without the expression of a sound. I can appreciate that some people by training might find the idea incredibly difficult to accept; for example a medical doctor or a career soldier. People in both of these fields have seen the frailty of the human body up close and personal.

Two major segments of Judaism in the first century held to polarized different views on this question. The Pharisees, regardless of all their other problems, believed in a literal, bodily resurrection. They appear most prominently as Jesus' critics in the gospels. The Sadducees were more a political party at times than a religious party. They wholly rejected belief in anything after death. They are more prominent in the New Testament after Jesus' resurrection. No surprise, the presence of a growing number of people who believed in a dead, but now resurrected and living Jesus, refuted their whole belief system. While Jesus often challenged many beliefs held by the Pharisees, He taught the same truth about the resurrection as they. At least, they had one truth right.

The gospels record an informative conversation between Jesus and the Sadducees regarding the resurrection. No doubt, they had often used this example in debates with the Pharisees over the resurrection. Mosaic Law provided a system of Levirate marriage, meaning that, if a married man died without children, and if he had unmarried brothers, his brother would marry the widow. If they

had children, these children inherited the deceased man's estate and position. In the Sadducees' question, seven men in a family were all one by one married to one woman. The first husband had six brothers. He died childless. Each of his brothers in succession married the widow and died without children. If you were a Sadducee, this would be a delightful question to throw at your Pharisee critic. When the Sadducees asked Jesus this question, they likely expected an anemic answer from him, similar to many such answers they'd heard from the Pharisees. Imagine their surprise when Jesus wholly refuted their question, reducing it to a simple childish question that failed to consider the most obvious.

Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. (Matthew 22:29–32, KJV 1900)

First, Jesus explains the fundamental error in their belief. They do not know two things that should frame every true belief about God, the Scriptures and the power of God. To reinforce His point regarding the Scriptures, Jesus tells them that they have ignored the most basic truths of Old Testament writings. He appeals to Moses' conversation with God at the burning bush. God didn't say, "I **was** the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," all then dead for centuries. He said, "I **am** the God of..." (Exodus the third chapter) What was Jesus' intent with this Scripture? Despite Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob being dead for centuries, God was still, in the present moment, their God no less than He had been during their lifetimes. They were alive and with Him, even though their bodies were buried. Jesus chose one simple verse from the Old Testament to refute the Sadducees' trick question, and to affirm the truth of a literal bodily resurrection.

Notice that Jesus did not cite fifteen different translations of the Exodus verse. He did not indulge in “Textual criticism” to explain why the record in the third chapter of Exodus didn’t mean what it clearly states. He rather appealed to the precise accuracy of the text of the passage that the Jewish people possessed and read some fifteen hundred years after Moses saw God in the bush, and wrote about it. If Jesus showed that much respect for the inspired and preserved Scriptures of the Old Testament, should we regard them with any lesser respect and belief? No.

The second point Jesus made to refute the Sadducees’ denial of the resurrection was that they also did not know the power of God. The Greek word translated “knowing” in this passage is defined:

...to comprehend the meaning of something, with focus upon the resulting knowledge—to understand, to comprehend.’¹

Not only did the Sadducees not comprehend the meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures, they also did not comprehend the power of God. No one ever comprehended the reality of a literal resurrection from the dead through human reasoning. Albert Einstein with all his genius needed God’s revealing power and a knowledge of the Scriptures to grasp the truth of resurrection no less than you and I need it.

From a rational perspective, I get the difficulty that people struggle to overcome to believe in a literal, bodily resurrection. However, no explanation surpasses Jesus’ conversation with these unbelievers. Even a child of God who believes in the Lord and loves Him, will struggle with the belief unless he/she takes full knowledge of God’s Scriptures and of God’s power. Scripture tells us this is a fact. To believe that the fact is true requires a full belief in God’s power, for nothing within this material world could accomplish resurrection, much less explain it.

In his defense before Agrippa, Paul rehearses God’s dealings with, and promises to, the ancient Jewish people. He explains that the promise that remained unfulfilled was the theme of his ministry and life.

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? (Acts 26:8)

Something “incredible” is literally unbelievable. Paul obviously aimed his point directly at the Sadducee denial of the resurrection. They had the

¹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, vol. 1, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., 379 (New York: United Bible societies, 1996).

Scriptures, but they refused to “know” them, to embrace them as God’s true revelation to them, and to believe them.

Let’s take these two passages back to our study verse from Paul’s letter to Timothy. In the end, two major attributes of God shall shine, His honor and His power. No matter how many unbelievers join the Sadducees and deny the resurrection, it is no less true today than it was when Jesus came out of the grave. And just as surely—and literally—as He arose from the grave in the same body that He inhabited for over thirty-three years, though now with added glory and power, even so, according to Scripture, every one of His beloved children shall also arise at the Last Day.

How do we come to believe this truth? Why do we believe it, as opposed to a nearly endless list of alternate beliefs regarding what happens at death and at the Second Coming? We must go right back to the two bedrock truths that Jesus highlighted to the Sadducees, a knowledge of the Scriptures and of God’s power. What we believe today based on those two truths, no one will deny at that day. As our beloved and holy God sits in regal judgment of all, these two truths shall stand forth as if jewels in His holy crown. Nothing He ever did shall then diminish His honor. Everything He ever did shall appear unquestionably as honorable as His revealed holiness and righteous character appear in Scripture. And the presence of resurrected humanity, all of them, before Him shall testify to His power. No Sadducee shall deny the resurrection on that day. No unbeliever shall pose a trick question to Him then. His power shall then be so evident that it cannot be denied.

Occasionally you will hear or read of people trying to split hairs and draw a distinction between “eternal” and “everlasting.” Forget it! In most cases in the New Testament, the two English words were translated from the same exact Greek word. Here is a simple definition of that word.

...pertaining to an unlimited duration of time—
‘eternal.’²

Whether you read “eternal” or “everlasting” in your KJV, the principle is the same. God intends to direct us by this word away from our time-bound, temporal—and thus temporary—world to the timeless truth of His eternal person and things.

What does this all mean to you and me? How do we fit into this grand truth? A mere academic belief in the doctrines that lead us to Paul’s belief that God’s honor and power shall prevail, and shall be unquestionably seen for ever, will not satisfy the passage any more than it will satisfy the soul. We only come to the truth of the passage when we realize that we shall personally, individually bow there and then in His presence. We shall spend eternity praising His honor and His power.

² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida...

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor