
Parish of Central Saanich - St. Mary's and St. Stephen's

Lent 2016
Bible Study Series
"Perspectives on Life from the Book of Revelation"

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Mondays at St. Stephen's - 7:00 p.m.; Wednesday at St. Mary's - 11:00 a.m.

Study #6: "God Calls Us to Account - How Will It End?"
Revelation 19:11-21; 20:1-15 (chapter 19:1-10)

Opening Prayer:

Heavenly Father, you have told us of your final great judgement over evil; speak to us now, by your Holy Spirit, that we may recognize our accountability to you, and so live in the newness of life won for us through Jesus Christ our Lord, both now and in the life to come. Amen.

Introduction

Perhaps many of you have seen the cartoon of a sour-faced individual holding a sign reading, "The end is near - repent! Coming at 12 midnight (12:30 in Newfoundland)". Smile as we might at such "doom and gloom" predictions, the theme of final judgement runs throughout our civilisation; just look at popular secular films: "Armageddon," "Judgement Day," "Deep Impact," etc. Wikipedia lists over 250 films dealing with either the end of the world, a prelude to such an end, and/or a post-apocalyptic wasteland setting, or a world taken over by a viral infection.¹

However, we do not have to speculate; the authoritative word about final judgement comes from the mouth of Jesus himself; he repeatedly refers to it directly or in parables² such as the parable of the sheep and the goats: "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left" (Matthew 25:31-33). I once heard Billy Graham give some interesting statistics on the new Testament:³

- the "new birth" is mentioned 9 times
- baptism is mentioned 20 times
- repentance is mentioned 70 times
- love is mentioned 222 times but
- the Second Coming or end of the world is mentioned 380 times!

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_apocalyptic_films

² E.g. Matthew 10:14-15; 11:20-24; 12:36-37; 13:36-43, 47-50; 16:27; 25:31-46; Luke 11:31-32; 21:25-36; Mark 8:38; John 5:21-31

³ Given by him at the Billy Graham Mission, Ottawa, June, 1998.

Judgement is also the theme of Revelation 19 and 20 that we are looking at today in the sixth session in our study on the Revelation: "God Calls Us to Account" - future judgement is a reality when evil in all its forms will be finally dealt with. We will conclude with an in-depth look at the importance of the Resurrection of the Body as we look at, "How Will It End?"

A. God Calls Us to Account (Revelation 19 & 20)

Setting the Scene

Let us first set the scene in chapters 19 and 20. In chapter 19, Jesus appears on a white horse and in blazing majesty, "with justice he judges and makes war" (Revelation 19:11). He fights against the forces of evil, "The beast and the kings of the earth and their armies" (verse 19), who are totally defeated (verses 20-21), with the beast and false prophet being thrown into the fiery lake of sulphur at the end of chapter 19. Chapter 20 opens with a perplexing picture of a thousand-year period (verse 4) during which Christ's followers reign and Satan is bound. Satan is then released (verses 7-8) to deceive the nations; he then gathers them for battle against God's people and is subsequently defeated (verse 9). The end of chapter 20 (verses 11-15) shows the day of judgement before the great white throne, and the assignment of people to eternal life or eternal death.

I want us to concentrate on the end of chapter 20, but we must briefly touch on the perplexity I mentioned. If one takes the view that all these are separate events that follow one another, then we end up with two great rebellions (19:19, 20:7-8) and both a second and a third coming of Christ (19:11; 20:5). On closer examination, we see, once again, that God has given John a "web-page" view, allowing him to click on one picture to get further details of the same event. What was first described in chapter 11:18, "The nations were angry, and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both great and small – and for destroying those who destroy the earth" is reiterated in chapters 14 (17-20), 16 (12-16), and 17 (8, 12-14), and is here retold in two versions, one in chapter 19:19-21, and repeated in a new light in chapter 20:7-10. They all describe the same event, the "*one* great rebellion against God's rule, *one* great day of battle, and *one* return of the Lord Jesus to triumph over his enemies."⁴ The "binding" of Satan in 20:2 in this understanding would be his defeat at the cross. In this way, we can see that the thousand-year reign is our experience in Christ *now, in this life*, having been born again through faith. This is "the first resurrection" (20:5) which means that the "second death has no power" (20:6) over us. However, "by implication, the 'first death' (i.e. our ordinary mortality) *does*. Only at the 'second resurrection' will the power of this 'first death' be finally broken."⁵

What about Satan's captivity? Paul clarifies things for us when he tells the Thessalonians in his second letter to them: "Now you know what is holding (the man of lawlessness) back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming" (2 Thessalonians 2:6-8). Though Satan has been

⁴ John Richardson, *Revelation Unwrapped*. (London: St. Matthias Press/MPA Books, 1996), pg. 68.

⁵ Ibid..

defeated at the cross, he is still active in the world at present to deceive and influence us, but he is limited to working through manipulation and instruments, such as human politics and ideologies. As we noted last week, John says in his first letter, "This is the *spirit* of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world." (1 John 4:3). It is only at the end that Satan will be unbound in all his naked power and then finally defeated. How that is expressed we will not speculate upon!

This is enough about chronology and details. Please see the handout on the three views of the Millennium⁶ for further details. Now we move to the most important part of the passage, Revelation 20:11-15, to hear its crucial message: God calls us to account.⁷

The Certainty of Judgement

Even though this passage uses symbolic pictures of thrones, books, and fire, the message is clear - judgement is certain. But this is not a popular message today - why?

- It smacks of harsh fundamentalist views of God throwing people into hell and enjoying it.
- It counters prevalent sentimentalist views of God as all-loving, all-kind who would not punish sin.

The Bible is against both views. First, it shows that God is a God of justice and must punish sin. I think people accept the idea of someone like Hitler or Stalin going to eternal fire as a fitting penalty for their crimes but certainly not ordinary folk who are not really *that* bad. But where do you draw the line - what about all the potential Hitlers - if we saw the true nature of our hearts and had the possibility of exercising our deepest dark desires, would we be any better than those who have actually carried them out? As Paul says, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Secondly, the Bible tells us that, though sin must be punished, God is merciful and wants us to escape judgement and so gives us every opportunity to repent as we have seen throughout our study of the book of Revelation. The Absolution in Morning Prayer sums it up well, "Who desireth not the death of the wicked but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live."⁸

God has demonstrated the certainty of judgement in three ways:

1. In history: such as in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3); at the time of Noah (Genesis 6ff); over Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18); over the Egyptians at the Exodus (Exodus 7-12); and through the ministry of the Apostles in the book of Acts (e.g. Ananias and Saphira, Acts 5; Elymas the magician, Acts 13:8). Lastly, we have the judgements of Revelation 6, 8, and 9 - God's working through natural and human disasters to wake us up out of our complacency towards sin, and ultimately, in chapters 16 to 19, the final verdict of God against sin.

⁶ There are three views on the thousand-year reign or "Millennium" during which Christ's faithful reign with him (Revelation 20:4 - 6) and Satan is bound (Revelation 20:2, 3, 7): a-millennial, pre-millennial and post-millennial. The question, "When is this thousand-year period?" has perplexed Christians for centuries.

⁷ For these thoughts, I am indebted to a sermon given by the Rev. Felix Orji, Associate Priest at St. John's Shaughnessy, Vancouver, Nov. 29, 1998.

⁸ Book of Common Prayer, pg. 5.

2. Through the Resurrection of Jesus: In Acts 17 (30-31) Paul's tells the Athenians, "In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." God showed he was more powerful than sin through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The final judgement will confirm this demonstration.

3. Through the testimony of the whole Bible - Law, Prophets, Wisdom, Jesus and Apostles: Two quotations will suffice. In Ecclesiastes (11:9), the author writes "Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgement." In John 5 (28-29) Jesus tells us, "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out - those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned." All the writers of the Bible are clear that judgement is as certain as death and taxes.

The Nature of Judgement

What is this judgement like? Revelation 20:11-15 tells us four things about judgement:

1. Judgement displays the awesome holiness of God: "Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them" (Revelation 20:11). This is God at "full volume" - the whole created order flies away before his absolute majesty. Unlike the throne room scene of Revelation 4, there are no voices of praise, choruses of angels or elders - everything flies away in terror. God is telling us that judgement is no joke! There is no space for argument or human cleverness. Like Isaiah beholding the glory of God in the temple, we cry, "Woe to me!...I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (Isaiah 6:5). Do we realize the impossibility of sin remaining in the presence of a holy God? Like bacteria and disinfectant, or light and shadow, the two are incompatible.

2. Judgement is inescapable and inclusive: "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne..." (Revelation 20:12). Everyone will stand before the judgement seat of God, both great and small - in ability, status, intelligence, physique, and so on. All will be judged, as verse 13 continues, "The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and *each* person was judged according to what he had done" (Revelation 20:13). There are no exceptions - we will all be there.

3. Judgement is fair: "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books...If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:12, 15). God is not arbitrary; he will look at the record. Judgement will be based on books - one set with *deeds* written in them, the other with *names*. But the Bible tells us that deeds will not save us: "No one will be declared righteous in God's sight through observing the law...there is no one righteous, not even one...all have turned away" (Romans 3:20, 10-12). So how can any one stand before God and live? It is by God's grace received by faith. Paul tells the Galatians: "know that a person is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ" (Galatians 2:16). If we

have allowed Jesus to come into our lives, he has taken our sin and we will stand before God "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned. "The punishment that brought us peace was upon him" (Isaiah 53:5). Our deeds will not save us, but they will reveal what is in our hearts, the source of our faith. God will be fair.

4. Judgement is God's final verdict on sin and evil: "Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire...If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:14-15) "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Revelation 20:10). The fire, which we commonly call "Hell", is not a place where the Devil and his angels enjoy themselves torturing damned souls, it is primarily for them (cf. Matthew 25:41) - it symbolizes despair, hopelessness, punishment. It is God's endorsement of our rebellion, our wish to be out of God's presence. When we declare ourselves to be "gods" and act according to our own rules, then God will leave us to our own universes, away from him and every other person or thing - for ever. We will have reaped his final verdict on sin and evil in ourselves.

Two Challenges

What are we to do? Two things: First, the end has not yet come, so there is still time to heed God's warnings. God's judgement is not like a radar trap, waiting to catch us - he has been warning us all along. Are we listening to what God is telling us through personal, natural and human disasters? Condemnation is based on our refusal to heed God's warnings and accept his invitation to forgiveness and life through Christ.

Secondly, allow God to develop in you deep gratitude. For those who have accepted God's invitation, we have freedom, forgiveness and redemption in Christ - this is great motivation to share the Good News of Jesus, that others, too, might hear God calling them to account, repent, find life and escape judgement. Judgement is a reality – make sure you are in Christ and will escape it.

B. How Will It End?

Now we have arrived at the final chapters of Revelation and their focus on the issues of judgement and the life to come, I want to address the question "How Will It End?" and try and put right some serious misconceptions that most Christians have about the afterlife. There have been both misuses of Scripture and foreign ideas have been superimposed on Scripture - both these approaches have given us a false picture that we need to correct.

First, there is what I would consider one of the most destructive heresies prevalent in the North American Church - "The Rapture." I am not going into it in detail but refer you to the handout by Bishop Tom Wright.⁹ My only comment is that the idea that Christians will be raptured - i.e. taken away at a certain point in history leaving the rest of the world fall into chaos is in direct

⁹ Tom Wright, "Farewell to the Rapture"; *Bible Review*, August 2001. *Reproduced by permission of the author*; found on http://ntwrightpage.com/Wright_BR_Farewell_Rapture.htm

contradiction to the message of Revelation that I have been expounding which is that it will be by our suffering witness that the world turns to Christ. I believe this has weakened North American Christianity as it downplays suffering and refocuses the Gospel as primarily something for us and not primarily God's call to us to reach the world.

Secondly, and more importantly, though, I want to look at the concepts of immortality, resurrection and the nature of the life to come.

As we do so, we need to recognize there are limitations on what we can discover about the afterlife. Even though we know that in Christ we have life forever, we still have questions about the life beyond this one. Where do we go? What will it be like? The Bible gives us broad pictures, but is short on details. Perhaps it is impossible for us to see clearly. It is like trying to tell a baby in the womb what life is going to be like after birth. Imagine trying to explain to a fetus what life on the outside will be like.

The baby says, "What are these?" You reply, "Feet." "And what are they for?" "They are for walking." "What's walking?" The baby says, "What are these?" You reply, "Eyes" "And what are they for?" "They are for seeing." "What's seeing?" The baby says, "What are these?" You reply, "Ears" "And what are they for?" "They are for hearing." "What's hearing?" and so on!

It is almost impossible to explain to a baby in the womb what life will be like after birth. It is the same with life after death. But the Bible does give us two ways of helping us look beyond the grave. One is the concept of resurrection. The other is helpful analogies. Today we will look at the concept of resurrection. Next week, when we come to look at Revelation 21 and 22, we will look at helpful analogies.

Resurrection

In the creed, we recite "I believe in...the resurrection of the body" - do we understand what are saying? Jesus speaks very confidently of the reality of this event and refers to people as "children of the resurrection" (Luke 20:36). What does it mean that we are involved in "resurrection"?

1. The concept of resurrection: In describing the life beyond, people - even Christians - can become fuzzy and unbiblical in their thinking. Many believe in "the immortality of the soul" which means that humans have an existence independent of God, that their soul goes on forever, and that is part of their being in the image of God. However, the Bible says that God "alone is immortal" (1 Timothy 6:16), and our being in his image doesn't involve immortality any more than it involves our being omniscient (all knowing) or omni-present (being everywhere) as God is. Our being in the image of God involves our capacity to have a relationship with him, to be a person, capable of making decisions. Humans are not independently immortal - our existence depends on God.¹⁰

¹⁰ "Second, do we have immortal souls, and if so, what are they? Again, much Christian and sub-Christian tradition has assumed that we all do indeed have souls that need saving and that the soul, if saved, will be the part of us that goes to heaven when we die. All this, however, ends minimal support in the New Testament, including the teaching of Jesus, where the word soul, though rare, reflects when it does occur underlying Hebrew or Aramaic words referring not to a disembodied entity hidden within the outer shell of the disposable body but rather to what we would call the whole person or personality, seen as being confronted by God. As to immortality, 1 Timothy 6:16 declares that only God himself has immortality, and 2 Timothy 1:10 declares that immortality has only come to light, and hence is presumably only available, through the gospel. In other words, the idea that

So, if immortality of the soul is an unbiblical concept, how do we as physical beings with bodies that decay very soon after death continue through to the life hereafter? A friend who is a physicist gave me a helpful analogy to understand this. He said that each person is a unique and complex series of patterns and interactions. There is no one else like you or me, but this series of patterns must be held together and expressed in some way. In this life, our bodies do that for us. Our physical nature is the framework on which these patterns exist and interact, which explains why the Scriptures emphasize the necessity for our spiritual convictions to be lived out and expressed through our physical and psychological beings. Our physical and spiritual natures are so intertwined that faith must be expressed in actions and our actions do affect our spiritual well-being.

So, at death, when our earthly body gives way, our existence is continued by the power of God. However, we are not ethereal spirits floating around, but securely resting in God's care. At the resurrection, we are given new bodies, through which we express ourselves and communicate in a new and totally fulfilling way. So Christians speak of resurrection rather than immortality.

2. The "Intermediate State": Before I go on, I will just touch on what happens in between our deaths and Christ's return - the Day of Resurrection. We must remember that we will be outside of time so it is very difficult to speculate on what happens. Some see the intermediate state as being the paradise Jesus referred to when he spoke to the penitent thief on the cross beside him - "Today, you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). The word "paradise" is not what we would think of as heaven but more like the garden of a palace where folks are gathering awaiting their final entry into the great house. However, the Bible also speaks about those who have departed as being asleep - "We do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death" (1 Thessalonians 4:13; see also 14-15). Using the picture of sleep, what happens when we die will be just like going to bed at night with our next conscious moment being our awakening in the morning - only it will be before the great white throne of God at the Day of Judgement and our joy at being welcomed into his presence. We can not speculate too much, suffice to say that we are safely in God's care so we don't have to worry about details of the "intermediate state" between death and resurrection.

3. Why we need resurrection bodies: We now come to the "life beyond" itself. Most Christians need a major shift in thinking when it comes to the hereafter. We appeal to folk to "Believe in Jesus and you will go to heaven when you die" making the assumption that the life to come is something "other worldly" in the sense of being ethereal and intangible - "up there" and sort of boring. In this scenario, talk of "resurrection bodies" sounds interesting but doesn't seem to fit in with heaven, which is a spiritual dimension, right?

Yes and no! Bishop Tom Wright points out that we have misunderstood verses such as "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you...the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5). We think this implies that we have to go to heaven to enjoy our salvation. But "'Heaven' in the Bible is not

every human possesses an immortal soul, which is the "real" part of them, finds little support in the Bible." Tom Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*. (SPCK, HarperOne, 2008), pg. 39.

usually a reference to a future state, but to God's dimension of present reality, that dimension which is normally hidden from our gaze but where God's purposes are stored up. The point is that salvation is being kept safe in heaven for you, in order then for it to be brought *from* heaven to where you are, so that you can enjoy it there." Bishop Tom continues:

It is rather like a parent, in the run-up to Christmas, assuring the child that "there is indeed a present kept safe in the cupboard for you." That does not mean that on Christmas Day and thereafter the child is going to have to go and live in the cupboard in order to enjoy the present there. Rather, it means that at the appropriate time the present will be brought forth out of its safe hiding-place, so that it can enrich the life of the child in the world of real life, not just the cupboardly world.¹¹

This perspective is reinforced by the description given in Revelation that we will look at next week: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (Revelation 21:1-2). The fact that it speaks of both a new heaven *and* a new earth and coming down "from God" should alert us to the fact that the life beyond is not "other-worldly" but a totally new and united expression of existence, a restored heaven *and* earth.

What's more, this final state is so all-encompassing, that the Bible speaks of it in terms of a *new* heaven and a *new* earth (Revelation 21:1). Romans 8 speaks about the whole of creation being "liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Romans 8:21). The *whole* of creation, not just ourselves, will be restored and renewed. The effects of sin and rebellion will be reversed and the new order established. Far from being "other-worldly" and "ethereal," this new expression of existence will be more solid and real than this one. C. S. Lewis, in his book, "The Great Divorce," pictures heaven as being so solid that the people visiting it on a day trip from hell find their shadowy beings can not even take the pain of walking on the grass; the life to come is real and enduring. This is why we need resurrection bodies – to partake of the new, eminently solid and concrete dimension of the life to come.

4. What the resurrection body is like: This leads us to the question of what our resurrection bodies will be like. Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians 15 (37ff). He describes the resurrection body - that new entity through which we shall be perfectly expressed - using a very helpful analogy. He says that the comparison of our present physical body to the one we shall have in the hereafter is like that of a seed to a plant. The former contains within it the germ of what the plant will become, but we could never guess the beauty of the plant from the little seed in which it began.

To catch a glimpse of what such a body will be like, Paul points to the resurrection body of the Lord Jesus. After Jesus rose from the dead, people could recognize him, but he was somehow different. He could appear and disappear and pass through locked doors, and yet he could be touched and felt. He was physical but in a new way. Similarly, our new bodies will be totally under our control - I imagine we will be able to think where we want to be and, like the members of the Star Trek Starship *Enterprise*, "transport" ourselves over. I often refer to Jesus' final ascension to heaven as "beaming-up." The resurrection state will be vastly superior to what we know now.

¹¹ N. T. Wright, *New Heavens, New Earth*, B11 in Grove Biblical Series. (Cambridge: Grove Books, 1999), pg. 7.

5. *How the Resurrection affects us today:*

The implications of all this for us now are two-fold: Christian holiness anticipates the resurrection of the body; Christian mission anticipates the restoration of creation.

- a. ***Our care of our bodies:*** If we are going to receive resurrected bodies, it matters how we treat our present bodies. To explain this, I want to use an analogy. Most of us here would recognize the need to study the Bible, to pray, to worship – to what end? – to grow ourselves spiritually. We are living out our relationship with God that will last forever. We are preparing our souls and spirits. Well, what about preparing our bodies? True, we know that our present bodies are subject to decay and will be remade – but if we use Paul’s picture of “groaning as in the pains of childbirth” (verse 22) we can see that, just like natural childbirth, if we do not care for the body which will bear the child, the baby to be born will be deficient or underdeveloped. I would propose, that in some way, what we do in the body now affects what we will become later - our new resurrection body. To support this, I will quote from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (6:13) where he discusses sexual immorality: “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” The very next verse then says, “By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also” (verse 14). Why would Paul jump to talk of resurrection bodies in the middle of a discussion about sexual behaviour? Because what we do to our bodies now affects what our resurrection bodies will be like. Paul ends that section with, “You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body” (verses 19, 20).

Now, I would expand taking care of our bodies in the present to include the food we eat, the exercise we take, the sleep we get and so on (and I am preaching to myself here!). I don’t want to be rigid about this because many people are subject to negative physical conditions through no fault of their own. What I will say is that right living and Christian holiness anticipates the resurrection of the body.

- b. ***Our care of the world:*** the second implication of the restoration of creation in general is our present care of the world we live in. Bishop Wright expresses this very well:

If you believe in resurrection, you believe that the living God will put his world to rights and that if God wants to do that in the future, it is right to try to anticipate that by whatever means in the present. It is your job as a Christian, in the power of the Spirit, to anticipate that glorious final state as much as you possibly can in the present. Live now by the power that is coming to you from the future, by the Spirit. And in the same way, live socially and politically because God is going to put the world to rights. That’s the great theme of justice in new creation. It is up to us to produce signs of resurrection in the present social, cultural, and political world.¹²

To me, this means that Christians should be at the forefront of the environmental movement, to say nothing of our need to be socially, culturally and politically involved. “Because resurrection is a creation-affirming doctrine, it also goes with the desire to change injustice in the present.”¹³ Christian mission anticipates the restoration of creation.

¹² Tom Wright as quoted by David Neff, “Editor’s Bookshelf: You Can’t Keep a Justified Man Down” article in the April 17, 2003 issue of *Christianity Today*, Carol Stream, IL.”

¹³ Tom Wright, *ibid.*.

Conclusion

Meanwhile, though, for all of us here, we can join with St. Paul as he says, “We groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:23). For those of us with disabilities or ill-health, we look forward to a time when those limitations will be no more. Joni Erikson-Tada, the once star athlete paralysed from the neck down through a diving accident in her youth, has had an extensive ministry writing and speaking about how God enabled her to cope with her disabilities. She tells of an engagement at a home for the mentally disabled who were not paying much attention until she spoke of her own hope of the resurrection and the new body she would receive. She then said that they would also receive resurrection bodies with new minds at which point their attention was engaged and they burst into applause!

So we join with Paul the apostle, “For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently” (Romans 8:23-25). Such is the “sure and certain hope of the resurrection”¹⁴ we have through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and his great victory of evil. He points us away from mere survival as a shadowy immortal soul to a robust and confident existence with a resurrection body in a renewed heavens and earth where God reigns supreme and which impacts our life here and now. This is how it will end!

¹⁴ Committal prayer in the Burial Office, Book of Common Prayer, pg. 602.