

Looking forward to the Resurrection.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

Our Wonderful Hope

You get ready for what you expect to happen.

You expect to be examined on a subject, you study.

You're pregnant, expecting that baby – and you start to gather what you will need – the cloth nappies if you are going to use them, the baby clothes; the various bits of equipment - the capsule, the change table, the pram; some even repaint what will be the baby's room; and then you pack the bag, arrange someone to mind the children, or the dog.

You get ready for what you expect to happen, and if it is something you desire, you look forward to it happening.

The Creed says we, believers in God, Father, Son and Spirit, *We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world [or age] to come.*

And the sense is not – we hope in some vague way that this is how things will work out.

The Greek word the authors of the Creed chose [prosdokew] has the sense of expect, look for [LSJ 3]

This is what we expect to happen at the end – and it is a wonderful expectation, something believers in Jesus can look forward to

Resurrection – the continuation of our lives in individual embodied existence, when the Lord Jesus “will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject all things to Himself.”

Phil. 3:²⁰ Our citizenship is in heaven, and we eagerly wait for a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹ He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject everything to himself.

And a body like the Lord Jesus' body will never know death, or grief, or pain for it shares in the life of the age to come, when the Lord Jesus will have destroyed death and death will be no more

You heard our Lord speak in his response to the Sadducees about the resurrection of 'this age' and 'that age'.

Luke 20:³⁴ Jesus told them, “The children of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵ But those who are counted worthy to take part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage.

That is the way they thought of time. There was this age, or what Paul can call this present evil age – the life we experience now [Gal. 1:4], and then beyond the close of this age [Matt. 13:39-40, 28:20] there was the age to come [Mk. 10:30, Eph. 1:21].

The age to come is the time of the new creation, the transformation of heaven and earth – when, in Isaiah's picture

*Isaiah 11:⁶ The wolf will dwell with the lamb,
and the leopard will lie down with the goat.*

*The calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf will be together,
and a child will lead them.*

*⁷ The cow and the bear will graze,
their young ones will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like cattle.*

*⁸ An infant will play beside the cobra's pit,
and a toddler will put his hand into a snake's den.*

*⁹They will not harm or destroy each other
on my entire holy mountain,
for the land will be as full
of the knowledge of the LORD
as the sea is filled with water. [Is. 65:17-25];*

the time when there would be no more sin, no more death, no more rebellion against God and God's people would be secure, at peace, enjoying all the blessings of creation in God's presence, forever.

If you let yourself think about it you see that what believers in Jesus expect is wonderful, satisfying our longing for life and embracing the liberation of all creation from its slavery from futility.

I could at this point expand on the content of this expectation – on the goodness of a resurrection hope and the glory of the age to come

But that can be for another time, although you can read the Scriptures that speak of it – for example 1 Corinthians 15 or Revelation 21-22 for yourselves,

What I want to do now is firstly make the point that the resurrection and the life of the age to come has been the expectation of Christians from the beginning – always what we signed up for, and then ask “What do the lives of those who expect the resurrection and the age to come look like? How do Christians live so that they are ready for what they say they expect?”

The expectation of Christians from the beginning

Firstly, resurrection and the life of the age to come has always been what Christians have expected at the end. The resurrection of believers and participation in the life of the age to come was promised by our Lord Jesus

Mark 10:²⁹ “Truly I tell you,” Jesus said, “there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the gospel,³⁰ who will not receive a hundred times more, now at this time —houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions —and eternal life in the age to come.

John 11:²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live.²⁶ Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

That promise has two parts. Firstly, v. 25 – resurrection. If a believer dies, they will live – that is, they will be raised from the dead. Secondly, they will rise to the life of the age to come v. 26 – those who, risen, live – will never die.

This is what Jesus promised to those who believe in Him.

And the resurrection was preached by the apostles from the beginning, our resurrection being proclaimed in the preaching of Christ's resurrection.

That is what Paul makes clear in 1 Cor. 15 in the face of those who said they were Christian, that they believed the gospel that Christ has been raised from the dead, but wanted to deny that the Christian hope was our resurrection. He reminds them that the gospel all preach is that Christ has been raised. You cannot be a Christian without believing in Jesus' bodily resurrection.

1 Cor. 15:³ For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

v.¹¹ Whether, then, it is I or they, so we proclaim and so you have believed.

¹² Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say, “There is no resurrection of the dead”?

And then, as you heard in the reading, makes the point that if Jesus, a true human, has been raised then humans can be raised, and to deny that is to deny Christ's resurrection. In fact, Christ's resurrection has made believers resurrection certain.

²³ *But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at his coming, those who belong to Christ.*

All preach Christ's resurrection, and if Christ has been raised then we will be too

And in the ancient world it was their hope of resurrection that Christians were known for

This was the hope for which Peter, who starts His letter praising God for the living hope Christ's resurrection has given us [1 Peter 1:3-4], says believers must be able to give a defence, to be

1 Peter 1: ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

1 Peter. 3: ¹⁵ but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. ¹⁶ Yet do this with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame.

The resurrection was Promised, preached, and the hope of believers from the beginning

Expecting the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come were inseparable from believing the gospel, for they are part of the gospel.

Resurrection was what every believer in Jesus signed on for, and if there was no resurrection – being a believer was a waste of a life

As the clear-eyed Paul said

1 Cor. 15: ¹⁹ If we have put our hope in Christ for this life only, we should be pitied more than anyone.

The focus of our hope, our expectation, has always been the resurrection and the life of the age to come.

We need to hear that

Our secular society is preoccupied with the present, with this world, with living as if this is the only life there is – and so you have to get it all now

And that preoccupation is the air we breathe, the unspoken assumption of so much of modern Western life

And so for a lot of contemporary Christianity there has been a shift to focus on the this worldly benefits of believing

'Not pie in the sky when you die but steak on the plate now mate'

The together life, the benefit of believing for your relationships, your prosperity, your health

And our resurrection hope has been obscured, relegated to the background

It is notionally on the books, but as A kind of consolation prize – we are really focused on being well, wealthy, having great relationships

But if you get sick and not healed – and die, there is resurrection

Or it's there as the retirement plan – life after real life, the life you have but you are not in a position to enjoy as much

Resurrection is not front and centre, real and substantial, the focus of our longing

But what if the resurrection and the life of the age to come was something you really expected, something that you were genuinely looking forward to and preparing for

Not because you believe in the idea, but because you really believe Jesus who said my Kingdom is not of this world

Who tells us following Him has Never been about getting it all now, in this world, this life

What if resurrection is your expectation because you are convinced of the greatness of Jesus' achievement on the cross, removing the sting of death by dealing with our sin

OF the reality of His present reign with all authority

Your expectation because you are Convinced of the certainty of His promise of life in the age to come because He is mighty, gracious and faithful.

How would that expectation show?

What do lives expecting the resurrection and the age to come look like?

Expecting the Resurrection

We don't need to guess – the New Testament tells us.

And now I have seven points – to help you see the good of this expectation, the comfort and courage it brings, and also to allow you to test your heart to see if your expectation is as you confess it to be, if you are living as someone who reckons Jesus is Lord, and Jesus is faithful.

Seven might seem a lot, but I am giving them to you as they are in Scripture – and my hope is you don't just engage with God's truth in this 30-40 minutes – but that you will make this time useful by going home, looking them up, reflecting.

So, what do lives expecting the resurrection and the age to come look like?

Firstly, it is a life of focused longing

Romans 8: ²³ Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ Now in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

Believers are people who will never be satisfied in this life, who don't expect to be. There is a Spirit given discontent that is always orienting us to what is to come

As long as we are living in this world – a world subjected to futility and decay, a world which is not ultimate, we eagerly wait for our hope, the resurrection – the redemption of our bodies.

And our lives are characterised by patience, the patience that comes from trusting God to give us what He has promised, and what is our deepest, most embracing, desire

This longing is a gift, for it is a longing powerful enough to put our disappointments and difficulties, our successes and achievements in this life, in perspective. They are never ultimate, and so don't have the power to crush or consume us, to ever rob us of our hope.

Secondly, expecting the resurrection changes our view of suffering.

Romans 8: ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

That is the glory of our resurrection and the life of the age to come. Again, 2 Cor. 4

2 Corinthians 4: ¹⁶ Therefore we do not give up. Even though our outer person is being destroyed, our inner person is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory. ¹⁸ So we do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

With the resurrection hope our suffering is seen as temporary and preparatory. It does not fill our vision as if it is all our reality. We focus on the unseen eternal glory.

And where suffering is temporary and preparatory, it is also now seen as purposeful, preparing us for the realisation and enjoyment of our hope – so that we can boast in our affliction

Romans 5: ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, ⁴ endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. ⁵ This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

With the expectation of resurrection believers are not crushed by our suffering, as if we are ultimate losers for enduring pain or chronic weakness, for missing out on so much, now

Not overwhelmed by a sense of purposelessness when bad things happen.

Even if we don't know the particular purpose of this or that affliction in someone's life, or in our own life, we know that they have a purpose in our sovereign God's care for us, and they will cease

The expectation of resurrection lets us face our own future in these mortal bodies with courage.

Many of us, like me, have seen our parents live long lives, and the last year or two, if not longer, is often awful.

We are simultaneously thankful for good nursing homes, and fervently wishing we never end up there.

We know that the reward of living long is not a rich and full life, but decrepitude – weakness, mental and physical, and dependence

It is not a great prospect, and it is no wonder that many older people become depressed and anxious, fearful, about what will happen to them, the suffering that will certainly overtake them.

But having an expectation of resurrection

That suffering is preparatory and purposeful – we can have a hope, an expectation, that can grow even as our life diminishes

Thirdly, this expectation changes the way we mourn

1 Thess. 4: ¹³ We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For we say this to you by a word from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

To lose one you love – with whom you have shared life, or to whom you have given life, or who gave you life

That is what it is to be human – to have that inevitable loss

But the Grief can be overwhelming

Rising up in you at any time, sweeping over you, filling your mind

To have at the same time as you grieve the knowledge that they are better off

More – that **we** will be with the Lord forever, that our parting is not final

That is Comfort without denial of the reality of our grief, hope without minimising your loss

When you think of the fruit of this expectation in focussing our longing, changing the way we think about and endure suffering, comforting us in our grief

See also how a real expectation of the resurrection and the life to come changes the way we deal with disappointment

Disappointment is a particular feature of modern western life. You meet a lot of disappointed people, people disappointed with their relationships, or their jobs, or themselves

We are trained to have high expectations for ourselves and of others, to think that life owes us – a high standard of living, rewarding careers, relationships that are always bolstering our sense of worth, many healthy years – that life owes us happiness

And we are flattered by advertisers to think the world is here to meet our felt needs

And where you believe this life is all there is,

when life doesn't seem to be working out the way people expected, delivering the kind of life they had imagined for themselves, where they feel their needs are not being met, that disappointment is supercharged, and easily gives way to envy of others who seem to be doing better, bitterness at those who disappointed them, and complaining about those who have frustrated the realization of what they felt entitled to. Their life is poisoned by disappointment

Yet Disappointments are a feature of life in this age, subject to futility and death,

You will be disappointed with your spouse, your friends, your job. Your body may well betray you to weakness and pain and fewer years

and the higher your expectation that others are there to make you happy, the more certain disappointment is

But if your expectation is resurrection and the age to come

Know this is the present evil age – never expect perfection and unmixed happiness in this life. Prepared for disappointment

Know no matter how much others let you down – never the ultimate loser

You will come to see the expectation that they are there to make you happy as idolatrous, something to be repented of

And Knowing grace from God for your own imperfection – you can be gracious to others

And Thankful for the good you do receive, which, like life itself, is undeserved

Expectation of resurrection and the life of the age to come focuses our longing, changes the way we think about and endure suffering, comforts us in our grief

And There are other ways that expectation of resurrection and the life of the age to come will show in the lives of believers.

Fourthly, it will show in the way, or better where, we invest

Matt. 6: ¹⁹ "Don't store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves don't break in and steal.

1 Timothy 6: ¹⁷ Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy. ¹⁸ Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share, ¹⁹ storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life. [Luke 16:9-10, 13]

Expecting the life of the age to come we will invest in heaven, in eternity, with gratitude, not grudging duty

Because we are certain there will be a lasting return on our investment

Think about this wonderful opportunity.

In my life it doesn't look like I will be a martyr for the faith

With my gifts I am not likely to do mighty works

But I can invest

Confessing our hope is a good time to think about whether your investment pattern looks different from your neighbour who does not have this hope.

So ask yourself, 'Is the way I spend my money determined by my expectation of the resurrection, or by my fear of missing out now – on this pleasure, or that experience?'

Why do you spend your money on what you spend it on? Are you investing where you will get an eternal return as one who expects the resurrection?

Fifthly, our expectation will show in a life that does not get bogged down in past achievements or failures, joys or griefs. Speaking of his desire to attain the resurrection [v. 11] Paul writes

Phil 3: ¹² Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, ¹⁴ I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Therefore, let all of us who are mature think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this also to you.

That is how mature Christians will live.

Not chained to past success or failure, not having their identity determined either by what they have done or what has happened to them

But pressing on, *Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead*

And they will want to do everything now that furthers and sustains that journey to the prize – putting to death sin – especially the greed and lust that tie us to this world, taking up their cross daily to follow the Lord Jesus v. 18, a life of prayer, a mind transformed by God's word, a pattern of life that meets with other believers for encouragement

Sixthly, our expectation of resurrection will show in a life that perseveres in the work of the Lord

1 Cor. 15: 58 Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. [1 Cor. 16:10 Timothy is working the work of the Lord as Paul is]

An expectation of the resurrection and the life of the age to come is a personal hope, but it is more than a personal hope

It expresses a perspective on the world

That Jesus is Lord, and He will return, and all His enemies will be placed under His feet

And so those who give themselves to do His will and proclaim His greatness in sharing the gospel through which He will save sinners, do what our Lord came into the world to do [Luke 19:10]

are on the winning side – they are not wasting their lives in serving Him

Where resurrection is your expectation, your confident expectation, you will persevere, not just in faith, but in seeking opportunities to call others to the Lord Jesus

To abound, excel in the work of the Lord

Seventh, our expectation of the resurrection will prompt those gospel conversations we desire

*1 Peter 3: 13 Who then will harm you if you are devoted to what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. **Do not fear them or be intimidated,** 15 but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. 16 Yet do this with gentleness and reverence, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame.*

Resurrection is a wonderful expectation in itself – that you don't just rot, and you are not condemned to an endless cycle of rebirth and suffering

And where we are confident that we will rise because the Lord Jesus will keep His word, we will be willing to be faithful to Him even if it means suffering, to live as He did to a life of suffering for doing good

And that life and hope will prompt questions

Why are you willing to suffer now to be faithful to Jesus?

To not share in the pleasures of those around you [4:1 ff] – the drunkenness, the sexual immorality

To forgive and not exact retribution?

To stay in a difficult marriage?

Even to die or be imprisoned rather than deny Him?

How can you be sure He will raise you?

Where you live with a real expectation, where it affects your choices now, it may even prompt conversations with your children – about why you make the choices you do, whether it is about church, about sport, about where they go to school.

We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.

That is the expectation of believers in Jesus.

Is it real to you?

Do you know, in your suffering or mourning, the comfort of saying those words?

Do you know their encouragement to faithful, persevering sharing of the gospel? To wise investing for an eternal future?

Do you know the freedom from being bogged down that expectation of resurrection brings, freedom from being ensnared by disappointment or worldly success, the freedom to press on for this great prize – to rise with Christ?

Do your neighbours know – by your choices, as well as by your words – that this is your hope?

Resurrection is what Jesus promised.

It is what the apostles preached

It is what we have believed for

And it is what the Spirit in us prompts us to long for

Know this hope for yourself by trusting the God you confess in the Creed, the Father almighty who sent His Son into the world to save, the risen reigning Son who pours His Spirit on all who believe

Let it grow in you by Giving yourself to the Spirit's work in you through the gospel word, trusting your mighty Saviour and meditating on His promises and victory, and then press on, run for this prize that is worth more than all.