

Hope and the Two Resurrections

Revelation 20:4–6

Good afternoon to the family and friends of Henry Funk. Henry's wife Rita told me that Henry's life verse was this: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Henry had this on his wall at Resthaven, and he often pointed it out to me. It comes from Joshua 24. "As for me and my house," says Joshua. That opening tells us that not everyone will serve the Lord. Joshua knows it, as Henry knew it. Nevertheless, Henry, as Joshua, would lead his house to serve the Lord.

The choice to serve the Lord is not just an individual decision. Households come in units, they are people bound together. Joshua was telling Israel that he would lead his household to serve the Lord. Individuals in Joshua's household would either buy in to this, to serve the Lord, or they would leave the household direction to serve the Lord. The Old Testament has enough stories of godly parents with wayward children.

Joshua did not know what his children and grandchildren would do. But Joshua could set the direction for his household, and he did. Henry with Rita could set a direction for their household, and they did. Henry did not just make a private choice to serve the Lord. It was a personal choice, but not private. He also set a direction for his household. Henry was human like all of us. He had strengths and weaknesses as do we all. But he was rock solid on serving the Lord, and he aimed his house that way. And that is just right.

Henry also said that people were not prepared to live until they were prepared to die. That is the truth, and I'm going to use that to take this in a different direction – our hope in the face of death. We are going to talk about death and hope and the two resurrections, because Henry was prepared to die.

Death is by far the biggest human problem. We avoid talking about death because we fear death. That makes sense. It is no smaller because we ignore it, or try to make death small. It is a big problem because it comes to every one of us and there is no cure. It is sad. We grieve. Why should Henry be taken from Rita? Why must he be taken from his children? He didn't want it, and they didn't want it, but it happened, as it will to us all. We are forced to say a long goodbye. We grieve. But that's not the whole story.

Hebrews 2: Since the children have flesh and blood, Jesus too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might ... free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

Jesus shared our humanity, our flesh and blood, so that he could die, and by dying he could free us from our slavery. Our slavery was not that we all die, our slavery is that we are afraid to die. We cannot do what we would otherwise do, because we are in bondage all our lives, slaves to our fear of death.

So that by his death he might ... free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. Faith in Jesus Christ changes death completely. It's still not nice, but it is not what it was.

The only way our world knows how to deal with death is to make the life of the body last longer. We do a lot of things to make this life last longer. Some of those things might work a bit, but either way, we all die. Faith in Jesus Christ has a different answer. Faith in Jesus Christ removes the sting of death by what happens *after* we die. The reason that Rita and their children are not alarmed by Henry's death is that they know what happens to followers of Christ *after* they die.

So that's what we'll talk about now: what happens to Henry after he dies? What is the Christian hope? We will start with Revelation 20, which tells us that there are two resurrections.

The First Resurrection – Revelation 20:4–6

“I saw the souls of those who had been faithful to Christ. They came to life and they were seated with Christ.... This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them.” (my translation)

*The souls of those who had been faithful to Christ **came to life** ... this is the first resurrection.* Folks, that is where Henry is right now. The souls of the faithful are alive with Christ.

The Apostle Paul also speaks of this. He was in prison facing trial, and he did not know if he would be executed or not. Philippians 1:22–24 *If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.* The key line for us here is *“I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.”* Our Henry has departed from his body and is with Christ, which is far better.

Also 2 Corinthians 5:6–8 – *“Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For we live by faith, not by sight.”* As long as we are at home in the body, as we all are here today, we are away from the Lord.

We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. Until the Lord returns, there are only two ways for believers to exist: at home in the body and away from the Lord, as we are here today. Or away from the body and at home with the Lord, as Henry is today. We are confident about these things. This is the first resurrection.

For Paul, the only important thing to say about where he will be is that he will be with the Lord. He does not talk about his loved ones that have gone ahead, and he does not talk about wonderful surroundings. We are either away from the Lord, or we're with the Lord.

The Apostles' Creed says "I believe in the communion of saints." Back in the fourth century, when we first come across this line, the communion of saints usually meant the bond between we here who are away from the Lord, and the faithful who have departed and are with the Lord.

In those days, they were aware that the faithful who are still here and the faithful who are now with the Lord are one community of believers. We are one fellowship, one body, with those who are where Henry is, with the Lord. That's the communion of saints. That present life with Christ is what Revelation 20 calls the first resurrection.

The Second Resurrection

What Revelation sees as the second resurrection is what the rest of the New Testament just calls "the resurrection." When the Lord Jesus returns to earth in triumph, the dead in Christ will rise with their glorified bodies.

John 6:39–40 *"This is the will of him who sent me," said Jesus, "that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."*

There is a wrong idea, that's been around since before Christ, that our physical bodies are a nuisance, and we'd be better off if we were just souls, no bodies at all. We would be free and go where we want. That idea might be good philosophy, but it is bad theology. God created us to be a body and a soul together, and that's how we'll end up. Our bodies are wonderful as they are, and they are going to be much better.

We begin with the resurrection of Jesus. He received his glorified resurrection body on the first Easter. He died, he was buried, and on the third day God raised him from the dead. Let's make sure we pause to look into the Lord's empty tomb. We're looking into the *empty* tomb. Jesus did *not* get a new body. If he'd received a *new* body, the old one would still be in the tomb. But the tomb was empty. He did not get a new body. The body that was buried had been raised and changed.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 - *The Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.* So now we are talking about Henry, and whoever else has gone by then. When the Lord returns, our bodies are raised. Wherever Henry is resting now will be empty.

1 Corinthians 15:42–44. We are raised and changed: *So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.* That's what happened when Jesus was raised, and it will happen to us.

Philippians 3:20–21 - *Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

This is what Revelation sees as our second resurrection, and this will happen to all who believe in Christ. These truths, my brothers and sisters, are how the Lord Jesus freed us from our slavery to the fear of death. We grieve, but not like those without hope. The Scripture says, “so encourage one another with these words.”

I went to visit Henry a week before the Lord took him. He was in his bed, awake but not comfortable. Everyone was pretty sure he would not last long, including Henry himself. Rita was there, and some of his children. But along with some distress, there was a quietness in the room, a peace.

Henry had no doubts about the hope that we’ve talked about here, and neither did Rita, and neither did his family. What a fine thing to walk into a room like that, and to see this confidence around someone who’s leaving the body to be at home with the Lord. The sting of death has gone. We will grieve with Rita and that family, and we will encourage them with these words. Amen.