

Listener Feedback and Matthew 27:52-53

By Ed Stevens -- Then and Now Podcast -- Jan 19, 2014

Opening Remarks:

- A. Thanks for joining us here in our study of the past fulfillment of biblical prophecy from a full preterist perspective.
- B. Last time we took a historical look back at the origin of the Collective Body resurrection concept as it was originally developed by John A. T. Robinson and then later borrowed and adapted to preterism by Max King. We quoted from Robinson's 1952 book on The Body, as well as from a couple of recent authors (Holland and Gundry) who have interacted with Robinson's views, to show how Robinson used his Collective Body view to teach Universalism. Gundry points out how the Collective Body concept undermines the pre-70 saints' hope for a resurrection event at the Parousia by replacing it with a dying-rising process during the transition period. Since that contradicts Paul's clear teaching of the resurrection as an event at the Parousia, it means that the Collective Body View is in hopeless conflict with Apostle Paul and the rest of the eschatological scriptures.
- C. In this session we need to take a break from our series on Romans and interact with some of the great **Listener Feedback** we have been getting recently. So if you have emailed us with your questions or comments recently, don't be surprised if it shows up here on one of our Listener Feedback sessions. Of course, your name will not be attached to it, and some of the wording may be changed in order to protect your privacy. We will delete all personal references, and only use questions and comments that will be of interest and benefit to all our listeners.
- D. Before we get started, let's ask God to help us in our study:

Our merciful and gracious Lord who created all things for your glory. Thank you so much for saving us and giving us your Word. Be with us now as we study your Word and try to understand it better. Through your Spirit indwelling us, guide us into not only a better understanding of it, but a proper application of it to our lives as well. We pray this in the Name of Your Son and our Savior Jesus. Amen.

Listener Comments and Questions

[COMMENT] I wanted to bring something to your attention. As I was being discharged from the hospital last night I met a tall young lady from Africa that was cleaning my room for the next patient. In conversation I discovered that she was from Somalia and that she and her family were Christians. I surmised that she was a college student here on a visa. She had a heavy heart for her family in Somalia. A local war broke out where her family lives and Muslims had killed hundreds of people the day before yesterday. Then the internet was cut off so that she could not find out if her family was alright. I only had time to ask her family name which is David Lee (sp?) before they wheeled me away in a

wheel chair. I promised to pray for her family. Perhaps you might join me. I have no way to follow up with her, but her plight does represent a very common one for so many Christians in Muslim harassed countries. When one part of the body hurts the whole body hurts.

[QUESTION] I am eagerly looking forward to each of your podcasts. This CBV thing has been my biggest stumbling block over the years. Trying to figure out how they try to make it work has really perplexed me in the past. All of the podcasts that you have done on the IBV and others showing the fallacies of the CBV are making a lot of sense to me! I have also re-listened to your last 3 Garrettsville seminars and am getting a better grip on the rapture. I especially appreciate all of your work on Cosmology. Anything you can send me on that would be great! I am really enjoying your exegesis of the Romans passages that the CB guys try to use. This is really helping me see the differences between the two views. I guess the concepts that I struggle with, have to do with the fact that we know there was a covenantal change in AD 70, and that there is a collective body aspect in Galatians and a few other texts, as opposed to the resurrection texts in 1 Cor 15 and 2 Cor 5 and others which seem like such obvious IBV texts. I know you acknowledge that there is such a thing as a collective body (the Church), and that some of the resurrection texts might apply to a collective body approach, but I have a problem figuring out which texts are COLLECTIVE and which ones are INDIVIDUAL.

[ED'S REPLY] All of us preterists struggle with trying to discover which texts are meant to be interpreted from a COLLECTIVE BODY approach, versus which ones can only be properly understood from an INDIVIDUAL BODY perspective. The only way to interpret each text correctly is to get down into the context and see what the author was trying to communicate to his original audience. Context is king. That is difficult, time-consuming work, but it pays big dividends in our understanding of the text. That is the kind of grammatical, historical, and contextual study that we are trying to do here with the book of Romans.

[COMMENT] In your podcast on "Our Body, Collective or Individual," The following statement that you made on that podcast really seals the deal for me. You said, "This verb focuses on the idea of an *outer change*, so that the inner person remains intact. This harmonizes with the usage in our 2 Cor 5 text, where Paul, in using the verb "clothe upon" [Gk. *ep-endo*] to describe the bodily change, is emphasizing the continuity of the inner person [between those two bodily forms]." Trying to see Phil 3:21 in the way Max King interprets it, would never even occur to me, no matter whether I knew Greek or not. His approach seems to be forcing another meaning into the text to fit his pre-determined paradigm. I really appreciate your honest efforts to get down into the context of each scripture and draw out its originally intended meaning.

[COMMENT] Your podcast on the differences in AFTERLIFE concepts between the Collective Body and the Individual Body views was extremely helpful. Now I understand why I've had so much trouble sorting out the differences between the two views. In regard to benefits of the afterlife for the individual soul, the collective body guys seem to be saying that the only difference between our life now and our afterlife later, is that we will not experience the afterlife in an individual body, but rather only as a part of a collective body. *That is pretty scary for me to contemplate!* It reminds me of my Hindu days. I had a very good friend named Suresh Verma who was a priest and the son of a guru and professor. Suresh had studied Hinduism at the Univ of New Deli for 11 years and was on his way to becoming a guru. Someone gave him a bible and He decided, against his father's will, to come to America and study the bible. He ended up, of all things, at Westminster East and studied under the big guns Murray, VanTil, Poythress, Frame, etc. He got a PhD there. With 21 years of higher education in both Hinduism and biblical theology he began to minister by teaching all over the US about the dangers of Hinduism. What drove him originally to study the bible was the utter futility of the final outcome of those who reach Nirvana. He said that it is not very well understood that Nirvana is actually a **merging back into the cosmic [collective] consciousness and losing one's identity, as a drop of water joins an ocean.** It is actual extinction of the individual consciousness ultimately. Suresh could not accept that very dark and hopeless end to his consciousness. That is why the Collective Body view of the afterlife sounds so scary to me. It sounds like the Nirvana that Hinduism teaches.

[COMMENT] Your podcast on "Perfection Now, But NOT Here" was excellent. You clearly pointed out that there is a gaping hole running through the entire argument of the collective body view. The Bible teaches perfection in the afterlife in heaven -- NOT while we are here on earth. Paul teaches that clearly in 1 Cor. 13. Deep down our Collective Body brothers have to believe that they will eventually be perfect only after they die and go to heaven. Hebrews 11:40 mentions perfection when it says O.T. saints will not be made perfect apart from us (i.e. N.T. saints). It was referring to the afterlife in heaven in our new perfect immortal bodies. But, the collective body guys claim to be in **heaven now**. If they are in heaven now then they must be **perfect**. That means that they are not capable of making mistakes, and not capable of committing any sin. That is the real implication of their "heaven now" and "perfection now" view. They have to admit to it if they want to be consistent. Once they admit they are **perfect** now, you will not even have to refute it because of the laughter from their spouses, friends, and all who know them. The **perfection now** idea shows the total absurdity of the **heaven now** view. Remember, Jesus came to destroy the work of the devil. He did -- completely! The result of that victory is perfection in the afterlife, NOT while we are on earth. One simply cannot be in heaven without perfection. If the Collective Body guys are in "heaven now," then they also are **perfect now!** If we challenge the collective body guys with this argument, perhaps the Holy Spirit may use it to lift their blinders. You're doing a great job. Keep it up, for your teaching is fresh air in a very stuffy room.

[COMMENT] I am listening to your podcast about "Refuting Resurrection Errors". This has really helped me better understand the whole IBV vs. CBV issue. I have to admit that it was confusing to me before this podcast.

[COMMENT] When the podcast did not show up at 6 PM this evening, I was starting to go through "withdrawal" [anxiety], so I just had to email you and find out about the delay. So glad to know that you are okay, and that the podcast is coming soon.

[COMMENT] Thanks for standing up for the Bible's simple eternal truths. I like the fact that you don't compromise on key tenets of the faith, and that you have stayed the course, and continue to press on, even while so many others have abandoned the faith. Thanks for your commitment to provide biblical answers to all of us who are hungering and thirsting after truth. I am with you 100%.

[COMMENT] I could not figure out what it was about the collective body view which made me uneasy about it, but this podcast explained it. It is its inherent leanings toward *universalism* which bothered me. When you showed that connection, it all clicked for me. One of the elders at my church was recently removed when it was discovered that he was an unrepentant universalist who got it from reading radical liberals like John A. T. Robinson.

[COMMENT] I finished reading your awesome report on the "Fall of Adam". It is very enlightening and helped me to understand much more fully what was involved in the "Fall of Adam". The truth that the ultimate destiny of mankind was always heaven makes a lot of sense. I now more clearly understand the truth of Adam's original condition at creation; the power of the Tree of Life in the garden; and the whole concept of Adam's probationary period. Perhaps even most valuable for me was your discussion and clarification about the kind of death they died on "that day". Thank you for sending that to me. Finally, I like the fact that you are taking extra time in your Podcasts to clarify the "resurrection" regarding the CBV vs. the IBV. I agree with you that this is much more crucial to the integrity of Preterism than I had realized. So, hang in there dear brother. Keep on clarifying all this for us.

[COMMENT]

Ed, I was thinking yesterday that your rapture book could be subtitled: "EXPECTATIONS demand a rapture: The deafening silence proved it."

People forget that even though silence and/or absence can't prove anything 100%, it can offer the best explanation. Interestingly, your critics employ the same use of silence that they accuse you of using. They offer quite a number of lame excuses for ignoring the two-thousand-pound gorilla in the room (the expectations of the pre-70 saints). But the greatest and most outrageous excuse is that they see no reason why the saints should have said or written anything afterwards about what they saw, heard, and experienced at the Parousia. Say what???

The second most-anticipated event in history, and we expect nothing but silence afterwards? It seems that all your critics assume your position to be "silence demands a rapture," but that is not a fair representation of your argumentation. I think too often the critics focus almost entirely on the "We can't prove anything from silence" objection, while they totally ignore the plethora of texts which use the EXPECTATION language. It wasn't just that they were expecting something *soon*, it was *what* they were expecting that should cause people to reconsider their view.

We, as Preterists, hammer home the *time* statements, but yet we ignore the *expectations* embedded in those time statements. Your critics focus SOLELY on the *wrath* component of the Parousia, and totally ignore the expected *blessings* that would occur to those saints at the Parousia. Or they *spiritualize the blessings* as though they were never intended to be seen, heard, or experienced in any cognitive way.

The blessed hope wasn't merely something that they could only **know** they received when they saw God's judgment poured out on the Jews, it was to be **experienced** when they saw Jesus clearly, face to face.

1 Thessalonians 4:17-18

Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore **comfort** one another with these words."

If the saints merely remained in the same state they were in prior to the Parousia, weren't Paul's "**comforting**" words rather hollow? Not much of a rescue mission to me. Were they "with the Lord" in a way **different** than they had been pre-parousia, if they were never actually translated into God's presence? Was there any **perceptible** change? Were their lives any **different** after the Parousia? Did they even know they had been changed? Or was it merely business as usual, as if they were not even aware that anything significant had happened? Same old persecution, suffering, sickness and sorrow? That was not much of a change, if they didn't even know it happened, nor **experience** any of the benefits of it. How comforting would that be to them if they didn't even know they got those blessings that they were expecting to receive?

They weren't simply **expecting** some sort of nebulous, ethereal, non-cognitive covenantal change in the unseen realm only. They expected tangible benefits! Their imputed righteousness would finally be imparted in a cognitive and experiential way! Indeed, silence was *evidence* of a rapture, but it was the fulfillment of their great expectations which *demand*ed a rapture. :)

[QUESTION] I love being a preterist. It's the only view of eschatology which really gives us biblical answers. I have been trying to understand the Collective Body View of the resurrection, but none of the Collective Body guys have answered my questions about how Abraham, David, Job, and Moses were resurrected in AD 70. I understand their idea of a covenantal or spiritual-only change of the **living** saints in AD 70, but in what way were the **dead** saints raised out of Hades (i.e., those who had already died before AD 70)? I can easily understand the Individual Body View, which teaches that the dead were raised out of Hades, so that both the living and dead saints received their new immortal bodies, which is what I have always believed, but I wanted to understand the Collective Body view of this, and they will not answer.

[ED'S REPLY]

1. What was the resurrection at AD 70?

It was the raising of the dead departed disembodied saints out of Hades to give them a new immortal body like Christ's, so that they could live forever in heaven with Christ (See Rev 20:11-15). The wicked were also raised out of Hades and cast into Gehenna where the Devil and his angels were also cast for eternal conscious punishment outside the gates of the heavenly city (Rev 22:15). This all happened in the UNSEEN realm where God and the angels are. They were NOT raised back into the SEEN realm to become visible again and live on the earth again.

2. How were Abraham, David, Job, Moses, and "the rest of the dead" resurrected in AD 70?

Rev 20:11-15 shows how "the rest of the dead" were raised in AD 70 and given their allotted inheritance in the new heavenly city. Again, this all happened in the UNSEEN realm where God and the angels are. They were NOT raised back into the SEEN realm to become visible again and live on the earth again.

[QUESTION] When Jesus was resurrected, other bodies were resurrected with him and went into Jerusalem to appear to the folks there (Matt 27:52-53). **What kind of body** did they have, and **what happened to them afterwards**? Did they have to die again, or live another forty years until the rapture? The bible does not seem to say anything more about them after that.

[ED'S REPLY]

I checked a couple dozen commentaries to see what they had to say about this resurrection of saints mentioned here in Matthew 27:52-53. I found several of them which were very helpful. I have copied them into this lesson outline for us. We are not going to read everything from these sources, but only those sections that are yellow-highlighted here in the lesson outline. As we read them and comment on them, try to notice how they answer the two questions that this dear listener asked. Some of them answer both questions, while others only answer one of the two questions. Here are the two questions again:

1. What kind of bodies did those saints get when they were resurrected with Jesus out of Hades (Matt 27:52-53)?

2. What happened to those saints after they were raised (Matt 27:52-53)?

• **Bible Knowledge Commentary (BKC) - Mt 27.52f**

...some say they may have been raised with glorified [or immortal] bodies like the Lord's. Walvoord suggests this event was "a fulfillment of the Feast of the Firstfruits of harvest mentioned in Leviticus 23:10-14. On that occasion, as a token of the coming harvest, the people would bring a handful of grain to the priest. The resurrection of these saints, occurring after Jesus Himself was raised, is a token of the coming harvest when all the saints will be raised" (Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come*, p. 236).

[ED'S COMMENT] Notice that the BK commentary suggests that these saints may have been raised with immortal bodies just like Jesus had when He was raised.

• **Tyndale Commentary - Mt 27.52f**

...reflecting the view 'that Jesus' resurrection was the beginning of the general resurrection at the end of time' (Dunn, p. 118), a view picked up in e.g. 1 Corinthians 15:20ff. The saints are presumably the people of God in the Old Testament, those who according to Hebrews 11 all died 'in faith' looking forward to resurrection to a better life (Heb. 11:13-16, 35, 39-40); through Jesus that hope now comes to fruition.

[ED'S COMMENT] This, of course, implies that this resurrection here in Matt 27:52-53 was the "first resurrection" (Rev 20:4-5), and the firstfruit of the ultimate harvest or resurrection at the End of the Age.

• **Calvin's Commentary - Mt 27.52f**

What became of those saints afterwards? For it would appear to be absurd to suppose that, after having been once admitted by Christ to the participation of a new life, they again returned to dust. ... That they continued long to converse with men is not probable; for it was only necessary that they should be seen for a short time, that in them, as in a mirror or resemblance, the power of Christ might plainly appear. As God intended, by their persons, to confirm the hope of the heavenly life among those who were then alive, there would be no absurdity in saying that, after having performed this office, they again rested in their graves. But it is more probable that the life which they received was not afterwards taken from them; for if it had been a mortal life, it would not have been a proof of a perfect resurrection. Now, though the whole world will rise again, and though Christ will raise up the wicked to judgment, as well as believers to salvation, yet as it was especially for the benefit of his Church that he rose again, so it was proper that he should bestow on none but saints the distinguished honor of rising along with him.

[ED'S COMMENT] Calvin suggested that it is absurd to think that those resurrected saints "returned to dust" again, and that it is more likely that the new life they received was not taken from them. It was a perfect resurrection, implying that they received immortal bodies, which did not remain on earth after their appearing, but went to heaven with Christ at His ascension. Notice he mentions the final resurrection in which the wicked will be raised, and contrasts it with this resurrection of "none but saints" who were raised with him. This again is leaving the door open for the idea that this was the "first resurrection" that is mentioned in Rev 20:4-5.

- **John Wesley's Notes - Mt 27.52f**

Some of the tombs were shattered and laid open by the earthquake, and while they continued unclosed (and they must have stood open all the Sabbath, seeing the law would not allow any attempt to close them) "many bodies of holy men were raised" (perhaps Simeon, Zacharias, John the Baptist, and others who had believed in Christ, and were known to many in Jerusalem), "and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection, went into the holy city (Jerusalem) and appeared to many" (who had probably known them before) – God hereby signifying that Christ had conquered death, and would raise all his saints in due season.

[ED'S COMMENT] Notice the mention of Jesus conquering death here at His resurrection (implying that it was indeed the beginning of the resurrection harvest, and therefore the "first resurrection") and the fact that the rest of his saints would be raised "in due season".

- **Matthew Henry Commentary - Mt 27.52f**

We may raise many enquiries concerning it, which we cannot resolve: as, [1.] *Who* these saints were, that *did arise*. Some think, **the ancient patriarchs**, that were in such care to be buried in the land of Canaan, perhaps in the believing foresight of the advantage of this early resurrection. Christ had lately proved the doctrine of the resurrection from the instance of the patriarchs (*ch. xxii. 32*), and here was a speedy confirmation of his argument. Others think, these that arose were **modern saints**, such as had seen Christ in the flesh, but died before him; as his father **Joseph, Zecharias, Simeon, John Baptist, and others**, that had been known to the disciples, while they lived, and therefore were the fitter to be witnesses to them in an *apparition* after. **What if we should suppose that they were the martyrs**, who in the Old-Testament times had sealed the truths of God with their blood, that were thus *dignified and distinguished*? Christ particularly points at them as his forerunners, *ch. xxiii. 35*. **And we find (Rev. xx. 4, 5), that those who were beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, arose before the rest of the dead. Sufferers with Christ shall first reign with him.** [2.] It is uncertain whether (as some think) they arose to life, now at the death of Christ, and disposed of themselves elsewhere, but did not *go into the city* till after his resurrection; or whether (as others think), though *their sepulchres* (which the *Pharisees* had *built and varnished*, *ch. xxiii. 29*), and so made remarkable, were shattered now by the earthquake (so little did God regard that hypocritical respect), yet **they did not revive and rise till after the resurrection**; only, for brevity-sake, it is mentioned here, upon the mention of the *opening of the graves*, which seems more probable. [3.] Some think that they arose only to bear witness of Christ's resurrection to those to whom they appeared, and, having finished their testimony, retired to their graves again. **But it is more agreeable, both to Christ's honour and theirs, to suppose, though we cannot prove, that they arose as Christ did, to die no more, and therefore ascended with him to glory. Surely on them who did partake of his first resurrection, a second death had no power.** [4.] To whom they appeared (not to *all the people* it is certain, but to *many*), whether enemies or friends, in what manner they appeared, how often, what they said and did, and how they disappeared, are secret things which belong not to us; we must not covet to be *wise above what is written*.

[ED'S COMMENT] Some really great suggestions here by Matthew Henry. He thinks this group of saints who were raised along with Christ may have been the martyrs. That makes a lot of sense in view of Rev 20:4-5 referring to those who had been beheaded for the sake of Christ being raised in the "first resurrection". Then he

suggests that those saints "arose as Christ did, to die no more", implying that they were raised immortal (not mortal) and would not have to die again, but instead "ascended with Christ to glory". Then he says that they had partaken in Christ's "first resurrection" so that the "second death had no power". This is clearly suggesting that the resurrection here in Matthew 27:52-53 was the "first resurrection" that is also mentioned in Revelation 20:4-5. I can agree wholeheartedly with that.

- **Jamieson Fausset Brown (JFB) - Mt 27.52f**

But it is far more natural, as we think, and consonant with other Scriptures, to understand that only the graves were opened, probably by the earthquake, at our Lord's death, and this only in preparation for the subsequent exit of those who slept in them, when the Spirit of life should enter into them from their risen Lord, and **along with Him they should come forth, trophies of His victory over the grave**. Thus, in the opening of the graves at the moment of the Redeemer's expiring, there was a glorious symbolical proclamation that **the death which had just taken place had "swallowed up death in victory"**; and whereas the saints that slept in them were awakened only by their risen Lord, to accompany Him out of the tomb, it was fitting that **"the Prince of Life . . . should be the First that should rise from the dead" (Acts 26:23; 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23; Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5)**. *and went into the holy city* — that city where He, in virtue of whose resurrection they were now alive, had been condemned. *and appeared unto many* — that there might be undeniable evidence of their own resurrection first, and through it of their Lord's. Thus, while it was not deemed fitting that He Himself should appear again in Jerusalem, save to the disciples, provision was made that the fact of His resurrection should be left in no doubt. **It must be observed, however, that the resurrection of these sleeping saints was not like those of the widow of Nain's son, of Jairus' daughter, of Lazarus, and of the man who "revived and stood upon his feet," on his dead body touching the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13:21) — which were mere temporary recallings of the departed spirit to the mortal body, to be followed by a final departure of it "till the trumpet shall sound."** But this was a resurrection **once for all, to life everlasting**; and so there is no room to doubt that they went to glory with their Lord, as bright trophies of His victory over death.

- **The Fourfold Gospel - Mt 27.52f**

There has been much speculation as to what became of these risen saints. We have no positive information, but the natural presumption is, that **they ascended to heaven**.

[ED'S COMMENT] We might have some "positive information" for their ascension in Ephesians 4:8-9 where it talks about Christ taking a host of former captives in Hades with Him when He ascended. Then Rev 6:9-11 mentions some "souls under the altar" being already in the heavenly temple before the Parousia, as well as Rev 20:4-5 mentioning the first resurrection martyrs going to heaven at the beginning of the transition period millennium. Plus, Hebrews 12:23 refers to the "spirits of righteous men made perfect" being already there in the heavenly city at the time Hebrews was written (AD 62-63). This is "positive evidence" at the mouth of two inspired apostles (John and Paul) that some saints were already in some part of heaven before the Parousia and final resurrection of "the rest of the dead."

- **Ryrie's Study Bible - Mt 27.52f**

These people may have been ... **resurrected with glorified [or immortal] bodies.**

*[ED'S COMMENT] When we remember that Ryrie is a premillennialist, it is surprising to see him admit the possibility that there might have been a real resurrection of saints with "glorified" or **immortal bodies** here. That implies that this was the **first resurrection**, and that it was the firstfruit of the resurrection harvest. In the Old Testament days, the presentation of the firstfruit at the temple was followed "soon" afterwards with "the rest of the harvest." There was not a two thousand year delay between the firstfruit and the rest of the harvest.*

- **Meyer's Commentary on Matthew - Mt 27.52f**

Ver. 52. The opening of the graves is in like manner to be regarded as divine symbolism, according to which the death of Jesus is to be understood as preparing the way for the future resurrection of believers to the eternal life of the Messianic Kingdom (John 3:14f, 6:54). ...For a specimen of still further and more extravagant amplification of the material in question – material to which Ignatius likewise briefly alludes (*ad Magnesians* 9), and which he expressly mentions (*ad Tral. interpol.* 9) – see *Evang. Nicodemus* 17ff. This legend respecting the rising of the Old Testament saints is based upon the assumption of **the descent of Christ into Hades**, in the course of which **Jesus was understood not only to have visited them, but also to have secured their resurrection** (comp. *Evang. Nicodemus*; Ignatius, *ad Tral.* l.c.). ...Besides, the legend regarding the rising of the saints on this occasion is, in itself considered, no more incompatible with the idea of Christ being the "firstfruits of those who are asleep" or "firstborn from the dead" (1 Cor 15:20; Col. 1:18) than the raising of Lazarus and certain others. See my comments on 1 Cor 15:20. **It is true that, according to Epiphanius, Origen, Ambrose, Luther, and Calovius, the dead now in question came forth in spiritual [or immortal] bodies and ascended to heaven along with Christ;** but with Jerome it is at the same time assumed, in opposition to the terms of our passage, that: "They did not rise before the Lord had risen, in order that He might be the firstfruits of the resurrection from the dead" (comp. also Calvin, and Hofmann, *Schriftbew.* II.1, p. 492).

Ver. 53. ...After life was restored they left their graves, but only after the resurrection of Jesus did they enter the holy city. Up until then they had kept themselves concealed. And this is by no means difficult to understand; for it was only after the resurrection of Jesus that their appearing could be of service in the way of bearing testimony in favor of Him in whose death the power of Hades was supposed to have been vanquished, and hence it was only then that their rising found its appropriate explanation.

*[ED'S COMMENT] Note again the early second and third century testimony for this idea that these saints were raised with "spiritual" or immortal bodies, and that after their appearance in Jerusalem, they "ascended to heaven along with Christ". Meyer does not speculate whether this was the first resurrection event or not, but he lays the foundation for it by admitting that they were raised immortal and ascended to heaven with Christ where it is assumed they will reign with Him until His return. The apocryphal tradition that he refers to here is found in both the **Gospel of Nicodemus** and the **Acts of Pilate**.*

- **John Gill** seems to agree with this idea that they ascended with Christ and did not stay on earth afterwards. Here is how he describes it in his commentary (note the words I have boldfaced):

Matt 27:52. And the graves were opened, Which were near the city of Jerusalem: this was a proof of Christ's power over death and the grave, by dying; when he through death, destroyed him that had the power of it, and abolished death itself; and became the plague of death and the destruction of the grave, taking into his hands the keys of hell and death: **and many bodies of saints which slept, arose**: not that they arose at the time of Christ's death: the graves were opened then, when the earth quaked, and the rocks were rent; but the bodies of the saints **did not arise till after Christ was risen**, as appears from the following verse; but because the other event now happened, they are both recorded here: these were saints, and such as slept in Jesus; and of whom he is the first fruits that now rose; and not all, but many of them, as pledges of the future resurrection, and for the confirmation of Christ's, and the accomplishment of a prophecy in Isa 26:19. **And they rose in the same bodies in which they before lived, otherwise they could not be called their bodies, or known by those to whom they appeared**: but who they were is not to be known; some have thought them to be the ancient patriarchs, as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, &c. In the Septuagint on Job 42:17, Job is said to be one of them, and a tradition is there recorded, which runs thus: "it is written, that he rose with whom the Lord rose." But it should seem rather, that they were some later saints, such as Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, John the Baptist himself, good old Simeon, Joseph the husband of Mary, and others, well known to persons now alive. Some think they were such, as had been **martyrs** in the cause of religion; and so the Persic version renders the words, "and the bodies of many saints who suffered martyrdom, rose out of the graves." **Matt 27:53. And came out of the graves after his resurrection**, The resurrection of Christ; for he rose as **the first fruits**, as the first begotten of the dead, and the firstborn from the dead; **for he was the first that was raised to an immortal life**; for though others were raised before him, by himself, and in the times of the prophets, **yet [they were raised again only] to a mortal life**; but these saints came forth to the **resurrection of [immortal] life**, and therefore **it was necessary that Christ the first fruits, should rise first**. . . . **and went into the holy city**; the city of Jerusalem, which though now a very wicked city, was so called, because of the temple, and the worship of God, and his residence in it: the burying places of the Jews were without the city, and therefore these risen saints, are said to go into it: **and appeared unto many**; of their friends and acquaintance, who had personally known them, and conversed with them in their lifetime. **These saints, I apprehend, continued on earth until our Lord's ascension, and then joining the retinue of angels, went triumphantly with him to heaven, as trophies of his victory over sin, Satan, death, and the grave**. Vid. Gloss. in T. Bab. Kiddushin, fol. 80. 2. & Maimon. Hilch. Shemitta veyobel, c. 13. sect. 3. [John Gill's comments on Matt. 27:45ff in his *Exposition of the Whole Bible* (available online at: www.freegrace.net/gill/matthew/matthew_27.htm).]

[ED'S COMMENT] Gill points out the implications of Jesus being the first one to be raised to an immortal life, so that those who were raised with him could be raised immortal also. He contrasts the resurrection of these saints with the other Old Testament resurrections, who had been raised merely to a mortal life which was still subject to dying again. This indeed was a new kind of resurrection. Gill also affirms the same idea that most of the other commentaries have already suggested, that those saints only remained on earth for the same forty days of Jesus' appearances,

and then ascended with Him. This definitely allows for the idea that this resurrection was the "first resurrection" that is mentioned in Rev 20:4-5.

• **BEALE-CARSON Commentary (NT Use of the OT) - Mt 27.52f**

...The resurrection of certain "saints" in 27:51–53 is clearly the oddest part of this chapter, but it builds on OT belief in the general resurrection of all people when the Messiah comes (see esp. Dan. 12:2; cf. Ezek. 37:12). Recall also Zech. 14:4–5 with its great earthquake. What was unexpected was the death and resurrection of the Messiah in advance of the general resurrection and final judgment, but **perhaps this handful of additional faithful people coming back to life was meant to further guarantee that Jesus' resurrection did in fact function as the "firstfruits" of many more to come** (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20–22; see further Senior 1976).

Joseph of Arimathea's desire to bury Christ's body quickly (27:57–58) was based on the Mosaic legislation that the corpse of a capital offender hung on a tree should not be left there overnight lest it defile the land (Deut. 21:22–23). By Jesus' day, crucifixion—suspending a person from a wooden cross—was deemed equivalent to hanging on a tree, so the same legislation applied. This same Deuteronomic text also explains the scandal of the cross (cf. 1 Cor. 1:18); orthodox Jews would understand the crucifixion as demonstrating that Jesus was cursed by God (but see Gal. 3:13). **Probably nothing short of bodily resurrection could have convinced Jewish followers of Jesus that this curse had been overcome!** The wealthy Joseph's burial of Jesus' body in his own unused tomb provides one final allusion to the fate of Isaiah's Suffering Servant, who similarly was assigned a place "with the rich" (Isa. 53:9).

[ED'S COMMENT] Note that Beale-Carson say that the resurrection of Jesus was "the firstfruits of many more to come." This implies that Jesus and those who were raised with Him were the "first resurrection" that is mentioned in Rev 20:4-5.

CONCLUSION:

So it appears that those saints who were raised with Christ were indeed the first ones to ever be raised out of Hades, *never to return*. That means they must have had *immortal bodies like Christ's body*. This means that they were *firstfruits* with Christ of the eschatological resurrection, or in the terms of Revelation 20, they were the *"first resurrection"* of the dead out of Hades.

Furthermore, that implies that they did not need to stay on earth any longer than Christ did after His and their resurrection. Evidently they remained for the same forty days that Christ appeared to His disciples, and then ascended with Christ at the end of those forty days of appearances. They could be part of the first resurrection group that we see mentioned in Rev 20, as well as include the martyrs who are mentioned in Rev 6:9-11.

There is a good chance that this group of saints who were raised at this time were alluded to in several other texts of our New Testament:

John 5:25-29 -- those in the tombs will hear His voice and come forth...

Heb 11:40 (and related "perfection" texts: Heb 2:10; 7:11; 10:14; 12:23 – "spirits of just men made perfect" were already in heaven – who were these folks, and how did they get into the heavenly city before the Parousia?)

Eph 4:8-9 -- they ascended with Him

1 Pet 3:18f and **4:6** -- Jesus descended into Hades to redeem them

1 Thess 4:14 -- Christ would bring them back with Him at His Parousia

Of course, we don't have time in this podcast to explore all those related passages and discuss how they are connected with our text here. That will have to wait for another time. But that does not prevent you from exploring those passages and discovering the connections for yourself. I hope you will. If you find any other verses that may be connected with this story in Matthew 27, be sure to email me and let me know about it.

Next time we need to get back into the text of Romans and let Paul tell us in context what he was communicating to those first century saints. If you want to read ahead on that, you might cover chapters 6-8 of Romans.

Well, that will do it for this time. Thanks so much for listening.

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