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CHRISTIAN LIVING IN LIGHT OF AN ASSURED FUTURE

By James Crabtree

“For I know that my Redeemer lives and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another...” (JOB 19 : 25-27).

“I believe that when I die I shall rot and nothing of my ego shall survive” (Bertrand Russell).

The only characteristic these two well known statements share is their expression of certainty. The nature of that certainty is, of course, in each case, massively different.

Bertrand Russell regarded death as the means by which both body and ego were extinguished forever. For him, this was not a matter of conjecture, but certainty. Theology was rejected as *“a dogmatic belief that we have knowledge where in fact we have ignorance”* (see his *“History of Western Philosophy”*). Life’s questions were to be addressed against the background of *“the terror of cosmic loneliness”*. In other words, no divine source of information exists which can reveal answers to mankind’s deepest questions, or offer certainty in an uncertain universe. Wisdom in this world is to be found within the realm of philosophy. Beyond that are merely the bleak certainties of a Creator-less universe and the finality of an unavoidable death of body, ego and all conscious existence : *“...when I die I shall rot...”*

Of course, one of the remarkable things about Russell’s brand of humanistic philosophy is that it continues to shape the thinking of many people, notwithstanding his death over forty years ago. We live in a world dominated by temporal preoccupations and the arrogance of human intellect, dismissive of God, divine revelation and matters of eternal destiny. We just have to do our best to make sense of the world around us, in the cold certainty that there is nothing else to cling to. That is the basic point, according to this perspective.

In stark contrast, however, stands the Book of Job, offering us certainty and hope amidst the many sufferings and uncertainties of this life. Indeed, the certainty and hope articulated in the verses set out above provide a model for Christian faith.

First, there is the certainty that *“my Redeemer”* lives. Job’s Redeemer God is a living God and in Christ, He supplies the way of redemption from sin for fallen mankind and conquers death. For the Christian, the resurrection is a foundation stone. This is clear from the logic of 1 Corinthians 15 :17 - 19 (*“And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins...If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.”*) Bertrand Russell would have regarded any notion of resurrection as pure fantasy but for the Christian, his own resurrection is founded entirely upon the historical fact of Christ’s resurrection.

Second, there is the certainty of the future completion of God’s salvation plan with the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Book of Job, this is prefigured in Job’s realisation *that “...at the last he will stand upon the earth.”* Job’s living Redeemer - the Christian’s Redeemer too - will one day present himself *“upon the earth”* as Lord of all things and supreme judge, at the end of the present age.

Third, Job has assurance that physical death, does not bring annihilation, but a transformed relationship with the living God : *“...yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself and*

my eyes shall behold, and not another.” Job’s relationship with his Redeemer is the basis of this assurance, enabling him to look beyond his own death to the remarkable prospect of seeing God face to face. Confidence of this kind also lies within the Christian’s grasp :

“Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3 : 2).

“They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads” (Revelation 22 : 4).

These great truths do not simply form the bedrock of our future hope; they call for a response now. We should be spurred on in the Christian life, knowing that eternity can be embraced with confidence. The despair of Russell’s *“cosmic loneliness”* is dispelled by the firm assurance of an everlasting relationship with the Lord. That should lead to a life of resolute Christian obedience in this world.

1 Corinthians 15 concludes with the following exhortation : *“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”* In other words, confident of the knowledge of an assured future in which, like Job, the Christian will see his all-powerful, holy, Redeemer God face to face, the Christian should not waver or give up, but should persist in the Lord’s work, knowing that it is purposeful and will lead to the eventual privilege and glory of seeing the Lord.

We live in a world full of conflict and social unrest, family breakdown, economic uncertainty and moral and spiritual confusion. Indeed, these are the hallmarks of its fallen state. As biblical truth seems to be pushed ever further from our country’s understanding of itself, the Christian is called to stand firm and be steadfast in the work of the Lord, knowing that a certain future has been secured : *“...yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself and my eyes shall behold and not another.”*

As members of Church Society, we should pray that we are spurred on by these truths to live for Christ in opposition to the lies and emptiness of humanistic philosophy. We should also pray that the Church of England will once again be captivated by them too, for our nation’s sake.

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