

Rest and resurrection (Revelation 7:9-17)

From dust I came and to dust I shall return—but not forever.

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I don't know what I will be, but eventually, in some endgame of God, let me be like Jesus. I can't tell you how many times I have reached this conclusion when asked about the resurrection of the faithful, or given this answer as an alternative to the certainty of "going to heaven." The All Saints' passage from the Revelation to John is a scene for Peter Jackson to make visual—the intensity of light and the impact of a myriad of creatures who have fought the great fight and prevailed.

It is only for artists and visionaries to imagine such a scene with all its paradoxical fullness: the lamb who is the shepherd, the lamb who is the heart of the throne upon which dwells the unspeakable holiness, the blood that washes white as snow. This is the congregation of the martyred who feel no pain or need. It is living water that bursts forth endlessly from deeps undescribed to heal and cool and answer the existential thirst of the human spirit.

This is poetry which becomes mangled by the literalists and their much-argued millenniums. It is the worship poured out of the lips of those who have become their own fullness of being. But it cannot be reduced to something understood by reason, because it is an expression of the perfected love between God and the creation. Love can be reasonable, but reason cannot capture it like the Revelator does in his epic dream.

Long ago I chose the Persian/Hebrew doctrine of resurrection over the Greek duality of paradise and hades, heaven and hell. H & H may have been necessary to convert the Greek gentiles, but it doesn't entice me as does the idea of being like Jesus. Maybe they are both true, in a different kind of paradox that I can't understand. This is the dark glass I stare into when I contemplate myself dead.

Now ordained nearly 40 years, I want rest. I want to sleep until the trumpet sounds. I need to be healed and refreshed before I will be remotely ready to be raised, enlightened, and ready for the big show. I need amazing, astounding grace to make me like Jesus. I have been too much in this world of compromised and confused Christians, conflicted and enervated church folk. I am one of them. I need rest perpetual, peace beyond understanding, a big nap. No immediate launch into heaven can sound as inviting as becoming one with the earth beneath my feet until I become one with the resurrected Lord.

Don't get me wrong, I am willing to wait awhile longer before that time comes, but I am happy to believe that is my fate. This is for me a direct correlation with the incarnation. From dust I came and to dust I shall return—but not forever. When I am fully rested and ready, when the blood has washed my robes white, when the tears have all been shed and the pain forgotten and a long cool drink of living water enjoyed, then I hope to be gracefully admitted to the redeemed in worship beyond imagining. I hope for a place in the back.

What does it mean to be like Jesus? Read the Beatitudes again as Matthew's poetic description of the Lord, the Messiah. Until the day of the trumpet, I will only be a crude attempt at that—though I truly believe that many, many people of all nations, tribes, and languages have come way closer than I have. They are Saints; I am a saint—just a jaded, wayward child of God who loves the holiness in spite of all the meanness in the world and in me.

This is to me what it means to be "saved by grace through faith." Instant Heaven seems just a little too easy, and I don't want to show up tired.