

“The end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.” (1 Pet 4:7)

✠ Lecture I: Eschatological Preliminaries ✠

The term “eschatology” comes from the Greek term *ta eschata*, “the last things,” and relates to such matters as the end of history, the expectation of the resurrection from the dead, judgment, heaven and hell. The terms death, resurrection, and judgment have several biblical meanings, which need to be discerned:

1. Physical or Clinical Death:

This is when the spirit leaves the body and the earthly life of the individual ends. This type of death is common to all people regardless of their spiritual state, “Abraham is dead, and the prophets.” (**Jn 8:52**) – “So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried.” (**Lk 16:22**)

→ Sometimes this death may be referred to by the word “sleep” as our Lord said, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up ... However, Jesus spoke of his death ...” (**Jn 11:11,12**) – St. Paul said, “I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.” (**1 Thess 4:13**) – The Coptic priests say in the prayer for the departed, “For there is no death for Your servants, but a departure ...” (The Holy Divine Liturgy of St. Basil)

→ St. Paul explained that, on the Last Day, the righteous people who are still alive would not go through this physical death, “Behold, I tell you a mystery: **We shall not all sleep**, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” (**1 Cor 15:51-53**) – This change is what is called the Rapture of the Church, which shall take place on the Last Day, “The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” (**1 Thess 4:16,17**)

2. Spiritual Death of Sin (The First Death):

Holy Scripture refers to the state of sinfulness by the word “death” as our Lord said in the parable of the Prodigal son, “my son was dead and is alive again” (**Lk 15:24**) – St. Paul also said, “She who lives in pleasure [indulgence] is dead while she lives.” (**1 Tim 5:6**) – “To be carnally minded is death” (**Rom 8:6**). Our Lord said to the Bishop of the Church in Sardis, “you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.” (**Rev 3:1**) Likewise, “let the [spiritually] dead bury their own [physically] dead” (**Mt 8:22**).

→ The state of sinfulness is sometimes referred to by the word “sleep” as St. Paul said, “Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.” (**Eph 5:14**) – “now it is high time to awake out of sleep” (**Rom 13:11**) – Lord Jesus Christ also said, “Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming ... lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping.” (**Mk 13:35,36**)

3. Eternal Death (The Second Death):

The eternal punishment in hell is called the second death, “the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is **the second death.**” (**Rev 21:8**) – “He who overcomes shall not be hurt by **the second death.**” (**Rev 2:11**) - St. Paul said, “The wages of sin is death.” (**Rom 6:3**)

4. Spiritual Death to Sin;

This is a different kind of death that Holy Scripture recommends, St. Paul exhorts us saying, “Put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.” (**Col 3:5**) – “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” (**Rom 6:2**)

5. The Special Resurrection of the Spiritually Dead (The First Resurrection):

Since Holy Scripture refers to sin as death, therefore, it is no surprise that repentance would be considered a resurrection. Our Lord said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, **and now is**, when the [spiritually] dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and **those who hear will live.**” (Jn 5:25)

→ Notice that our Lord said, “now is” signifying that this resurrection is different from the general one that He mentioned later on in the same chapter. Moreover, not “all” will participate in this resurrection but only “those who hear.” Therefore, the Holy Book of Revelation says, “Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death [eternal punishment] has no power ...” (Rev 20:6)

→ Because the Holy Book of Revelation called repentance the “first resurrection”, sin was called the “first death” and the general resurrection was called the “second resurrection.”

6. The General Resurrection of the Physically Dead (The Second Resurrection):

On the Last Day, all those who physically died will rise again as our Lord said, “the hour is coming in which **all** who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth – those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.” (Jn 5:28,29) – Daniel the Prophet said, “those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Dan 12:2)

7. Judgment:

On the Last Day, all humans (good & evil) will stand in front of the judgment seat of Lord Jesus Christ, “we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ ... then each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom 14:10-13) – “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” (2 Cor 5:10)

→ Lord Jesus Christ said, “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats ... and these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” (Mt 25:31-46)

→ After being justified before the judgment seat of Lord Jesus Christ, the saints will, apparently, be included in the process of judgment as judges. However, since the Church Fathers themselves were extremely careful when talking about this matter, we shall just mention some of the Holy verses that refer to this issue:

- “When the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Mt 19:28; compare to Lk 22:30; Mt 12:27)
- This is not only restricted to the Twelve Apostles but “the men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it ... the queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it ...” (Mt 12:41,42)
- Moreover, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? ... Do you not know that we shall judge angels?” (1 Cor 6:2,3)
- “I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them.” (Rev 20:4)

→ After the judgment, the evil will be subject to the “condemnation of hell” (Mt 23:33), which will be an “eternal condemnation” (Mk 3:29).

* This lecture is adapted from a sermon by late Fr. Bishoy Kamel about “*The First & Second Resurrection*” and from “*The Salvation that We Are Awaiting – Book I*” by Fr. Shenouda Maher.