

ESCHATOLOGY IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

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I. *Introduction*

It would seem that the subject, "Eschatology in John's Gospel," is so straightforward as to allow us to get on immediately with the study. Certainly there is general agreement about what document is in view under the title "John's Gospel." At this point, however, any agreement ends. Traditional study of eschatology has recognized that there are two sets of last things (ἔσχατα) which the Bible addresses: individual eschatology and corporate eschatology (e.g., the parousia, the tribulation, the millennial kingdom, etc.). The first category of information relates to matters of personal destiny, while the second deals more with God's future plans for the world in general. In practice, however, attention seems to be given to one or the other in theological writing rather than to both. Further, there is no agreement as to whether eschatology should be limited simply to "last things" in a quantitative sense, that is, strictly to end-time things, or whether it is to be understood as predominantly "realized," that is, relating more to this age than to the age yet to come.

A balanced view which takes all of the biblical data into consideration, will need to give place to all these elements. There is much revelation relating to both individual destiny and the future of Israel and the nations. There is an emphasis upon both this age and the age to come with interplay between the two. Eschatology must be viewed as having strongly qualitative overtones as well as quantitative ones.¹

¹ W. Robert Cook, *Systematic Theology in Outline Form* (Portland: Western Baptist, 1981) 719.

Eschatology does indeed deal with last things since it has to do with the consummation of the old order, the bringing to an end of that which has never had God's approval. It also deals with ultimate things since it has to do with the establishment of that which God has always intended.²

The question that must now be considered is how eschatological teaching is set forth in the fourth gospel.

II. *A Summary of the "Critical Problems"*

To announce a subject such as "Eschatology in John's Gospel" at this juncture in NT studies is to evoke the consideration of names such as C. H. Dodd, R. Bultmann, J. A. T. Robinson, and R. Schnackenburg. These men have, and to some extent continue, to set the direction for the discussion of this subject. They have made eschatology key to the understanding of the Gospel of John so that G. E. Ladd could say, "The question of the eschatological teaching of the Fourth Gospel brings the entire Johannine problem into sharp focus."³

The "problem" to which Ladd refers is the apparent discontinuity between the eschatology of the Synoptic Jesus and the eschatology of the Johannine Jesus. How can we account for great difference between the apocalyptic emphasis on the kingdom of God in the synoptics and the contemporary emphasis upon eternal life immediately received through faith in Jesus Christ in John? It is held by many scholars that these messages are so disparate that they could not have come directly from the mouth of the same person. Were there indeed two schools of eschatological thought, one futuristic and one realized, which vied for ascendancy in the early church? Did the latter eventually supplant the former and, if so, why? Did Jesus set forth one line of thinking and editors (redactors) set forth another or are both representative of the thinking of differing groups of his followers? In any case, no matter which explanation is offered, it would be held that the evangelist who gave the record (in this case John), a later redactor, or a circle of disciples whose views are being expressed, was honestly intending to represent the *meaning* of what Jesus said and did for the believing community. Since, as is widely acknowledged, the gospel writers had access to and utilized a variety of traditions or sources, it is to be expected that somewhat different emphases would evidence themselves. Dodd, for example, formulates the question, "To what extent and under what conditions may the Fourth Gospel be used as a

² Ibid., 720.

³ G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 298.

document for the historian in that sense?"⁴ That is, how may it be used to determine how things actually happened? He goes on to state,

The answer to the question depends upon the sources of information which were at the disposal of the evangelist, if we assume. . .that he intended to record that which happened, however free he may have felt to modify the factual record in order to bring out the meaning.⁵

In order to illustrate how two of the major shapers of thought on Johannine eschatology answer these prior questions we will consider statements from Dodd and Bultmann.

In commenting on John 14:2-3 regarding Jesus' promise to his disciples that he will come again Dodd writes:

By now it is surely clear that the 'return' of Christ is to be understood in a sense different from that of popular Christian eschatology. It means that after the death of Jesus, and because of it, His followers will enter into union with Him as their living Lord, and through Him with the Father, and so enter eternal life. That is what He meant when He said, 'I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am you too may be' (cf. also xvii. 24). This is the true 'epiphany,' and it is essentially an epiphany of the love of God, as the evangelist has set forth clearly and emphatically in xiv. 21-4.⁶

It is no wonder that Robinson, in noting Dodd's earlier views on Johannine eschatology, characterizes it as "quasi-Platonic mysticism."⁷ This line of thinking is predicated on Dodd's view that John, in contrast to the synoptic writers, set forth a realized eschatology.⁸ "He believed that Jesus' message was the proclamation of the inbreaking of the eternal into the temporal world. . . . Jesus indeed used apocalyptic language to describe this event, but it was only a symbolic way of describing the otherness--the transcendental character of the kingdom of God."⁹

Robinson suggests that earlier in his writing Dodd accounted for this change from the futuristic view of the synoptists by viewing it as a later corrective "when the primitive apocalyptic expectation reached a point at which no literal fulfillment could be looked for. . . ."¹⁰ Later

⁴ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (London/New York: Cambridge University, 1953) 447.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Dodd, *Interpretation*, 405.

⁷ J. A. T. Robinson, *The Priority of John* (London: SCM, 1985) 339. See also,

⁹ Ladd, *Theology*, 300.

⁸ Dodd, *Interpretation*, 447.

⁹ Ladd, *Theology*, 299.

¹⁰ Robinson, *Priority*, 339.

on he explained the difference on the basis of a separate oral tradition which was uninfluenced by the Synoptic tradition.¹¹

Bultmann, on the other hand, takes quite another approach. Like Dodd he sees heavy gnostic influence in the Fourth Gospel. John, however, uses these mythological ideas to his own ends which are basically existential. Commenting on some of the dualistic motifs as he sees them in the gospel he says,

They all derive their meaning from the search for human existence--for "life" as "life eternal"--and denote the double possibility of human existence: to exist either from God or from man himself. . . . Each man is, or once was, confronted with deciding for or against God; and he is confronted anew with this decision by the revelation of God in Jesus. The cosmological dualism of Gnosticism has become in John a dualism of decision.¹²

Regarding such Johannine titles for Jesus Christ as "savior of the world," "Messiah," "Son of God," and "Son of Man" he states, "What is expressed by all these titles is that Jesus is the eschatological salvation bringer, that *his coming is the eschatological event*."¹³ His evaluation of John's record about Peter (1:42), Nathaniel (1:47-48), and the Samaritan woman is that ". . . to the evangelist these stories taken from tradition are symbolic pictures which indicate that the believer feels himself searched and known by God and that his own existence is exposed by the encounters with the Revealer."¹⁴

A specific example of his existentialization of Johannine eschatology may be seen as he coalesces resurrection promises with parousia promises, with promises of the coming of the Holy Spirit. He states that ". . . for John, Easter, Pentecost, and the parousia are not three separate events, but one and the same." He then concludes, "But the one event that is meant by all these is not an external occurrence, but an inner one: the victory which Jesus wins when faith arises in man by the overcoming of the offense that Jesus is to him."¹⁵

It is not that Bultmann denies the presence in John of what he would call a "popular" eschatological note. For him the most obvious is in John 5:28-29 where a belief in a future bodily resurrection is found. Since in his mind this is anomalous with the preceding material

¹¹ Dodd, *Interpretation*, 444-53. cr. Robinson, *Priority*, 340.

¹² R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951-55) 2.20-21.

¹³ Bultmann, *Theology*, 37.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

of this section of chap five, he attributes it to a redactor. Commenting on this passage he writes:

In any case vv. 28f. have been added by the editor, in an attempt to reconcile the dangerous statements in vv. 24f. with traditional eschatology. Both the source and the Evangelist see this eschatological event in the present proclamation of the word of Jesus. Yet the popular eschatology, which is so radically swept aside by such a view, is reinstated again in vv. 28f. The editor corrects the Evangelist by this simple addition, so that it is difficult to say how he thought the statements in vv. 24f. could be reconciled with it.¹⁶

Subsequent writers have variously agreed with, disagreed with or modified Dodd and Bultmann. Robinson, arguing for the priority of John and consequently, for an earlier date than is usually allowed,¹⁷ holds that John represents an early source which reflects Jesus' view of eschatology. We could refer to it as a thorough-going realized eschatology. He believes, on the basis of John 17:24, that John (Jesus) refers " . . . to the resurrection as inaugurating the parousia."¹⁸ Schnackenburg, on the other hand, while not dogmatic about it seems to favor the idea that certain eschatological elements in John's Gospel are the work of a redactor.¹⁹ "Does this mean that the redaction has introduced an idea rejected by the evangelist? Did the evangelist deny the common faith of the primitive Church in the end of events?" Having raised these questions, he answers, "There are no compelling reasons for this constantly reiterated idea. . . ." ²⁰ He challenges Bultmann's existential approach as too radical, opts for a realized eschatology that is compatible with "expectations for the future," and finally seems to advocate that John " . . . is concerned more with the existential situation and the ultimate fate of the individual."²¹ In light of this analysis, he concludes that "the idea of the parousia recedes; entry into the heavenly world to see Jesus' glory (17:24) is more important and, to some extent, takes over the function of completion which had previously been attributed to the parousia and the events of the end,"²²

¹⁶ R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Westminster: Philadelphia, 1971) 261. See also Bultmann, *Theology*, 39.

¹⁷ See his entire volume *The Priority of John*, and especially such statements as found on pp. 33-35.

¹⁸ Robinson, *Priority*, 341, n. 139.

¹⁹ R. Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (3 vols; New York: Seabury, 1980-82) 2.114-16.

²⁰ Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 116.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 431, 432, 435.

²² *Ibid.*, 435.

R. Brown proposes as a "workable hypothesis" the idea that "within Jesus' Own message there was a tension between realized and final eschatology. In his ministry the reign of God was making itself manifest among men; and yet, as heir of an apocalyptic tradition, Jesus also spoke of a final manifestation of divine power yet to come."²³ He later affirms that "apocalyptic eschatology" was indeed a theme " . . . found in Jesus' own preaching," although he is also sure that the two eschatological themes were not in the original edition of the Gospel.²⁴ He offers two cautions regarding such a redaction. First, we must not view the redactor as a censor " . . . but rather one who preserved J ohannine material. . . ." Second, we should not view the redaction as " . . . an attempt to make the Gospel more orthodox and acceptable to the Church." He was rather concerned " . . . to preserve Johannine material that would have otherwise been lost" and to assure that the realized eschatology of the Gospel not " . . . crowd out the expectation of the second coming. . . ."²⁵

L. Goppelt, a significant critic of Bultmann, was himself difficult to categorize in terms of his position on NT theology. While acknowledging that his position was " . . . by and large an independent one," J. Alsup associated him most closely with the "salvation-history school of thought."²⁶ Goppelt seems to have stated his own view in general terms, at least, when he wrote, "In the opinion of this writer, however, the New Testament did not understand salvation history as a plan of universal history in the sense of Irenaeus, but only as the interrelation of promise and fulfilment."²⁷

Goppelt addresses the problem of Johannine eschatology by using John 5:20b-30 as a paradigm. As have so many others, he initially notes the apparent tension between " . . . statements that speak of the full realization of salvation in the present for believers (vv. 20-27) right alongside others that . . . combine the realization of salvation with the parousia (vv. 28f.)."²⁸ He then proceeds to address this tension with a series of five observations with a view to clarification.²⁹

1) One way to account for the tension is to opt for Bultmann's proposal that a redactor inserted items about primitive Christian

²³ R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (2 vols; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966) I.CXIX.

²⁴ Brown, *John* I, CXXI.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ L. Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament* (2 vols; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981-82) 1.xv and 2.xiii.

²⁷ Goppelt, *Theology*, 1.280.

²⁸ Ibid., 2.303.

²⁹ Ibid., 2.303-305.

eschatology in order to make the Gospel acceptable to the church. 2) On the basis of stylistic and terminological analysis as well as on the basis of content he rejects Bultmann's hypothesis. 3) He then denies that John 5:28-29 set forth popular primitive Christian eschatology. It is his contention that "these verses did not speak about a general resurrection to judgment, but about a differentiated resurrection!"³⁰ This represents apostolic, not popular eschatology. 4) This differentiation between a resurrection to life or to judgment is based upon the presupposition of a prior decision of belief or unbelief in Jesus Christ during this life. (The text, rather than speaking of faith or unbelief, speaks of doing good or evil. This should be understood as apocalyptic language for doing truth or error [3:20f.]. Doing truth is equated in 6:29 with faith in Jesus Christ.) "Thus 5:29 said: The kind of future, concrete resurrection for the individual, depended on faith or disbelief in Jesus."³¹ The issue that remains is the harmonization of 5:24-27 and 5:28-29. Is there any place (need) for an eschatology of the future (bodily resurrection) when the eschatology of the present is so complete and final (present possession of eternal life and no prospect of judgment for the believing)? Goppelt's answer is in the affirmative since "according to vv. 28f. the decision had already been made so that from the very beginning the resurrection had a different-character; through it would only be carried out what had previously been given." "Thus vv. 28f. announced an hour in which Jesus' word would bring about concretely and ultimately that which it accomplished now for faith in secret, namely, life or judgment."³²

In light of this review of critical theories regarding the Johannine eschatology, what then may we conclude? First of all, from John 5:24-29 alone (and there is much more evidence than this throughout the Gospel) it is inescapable that there are two dimensions to John's eschatology. Beginning with Dodd, they have often been labeled "realized" and "futuristic."³³ Cautions have been raised regarding the use of "realized," however, which are most valid. S. Smalley suggests that "because of its ambiguity, the term 'realized'--although convenient--is probably best avoided, except when it is intended to signify the rigorous view that there is no future tense to salvation."³⁴ A. Hoekema thoughtfully notes:

³⁰ Ibid., 2.304.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 2.304-5.

³³ See e.g., Ladd, *Theology*, 306.

³⁴ S. S. Smalley, *John: Evangelist and Interpreter* (Nashville: Nelson, 1978) n. 313, 236.

Since. . . there remain many eschatological events that have not yet been realized, and since the New Testament clearly speaks of a future as well as a present eschatology, I prefer to speak of "inaugurated" rather than "realized" eschatology. The advantage of this term is that it does full justice to the fact that the great eschatological incision into history has already been made, while it does not take out a further development of eschatology in the future. "Inaugurated eschatology" implies that eschatology has indeed begun, but is by no means finished.³⁵

Others prefer to refer to the tension between the "already fulfilled" and the "not yet completed"³⁶ or to the overlapping of this age with the age to come.³⁷

Secondly, I would agree with Ladd that there is no conflict between these two dimensions, even though a genuine tension may exist.³⁸ As was noted in earlier discussion, Goppelt has provided a most plausible resolution of any apparent contradiction. Or, as Ladd states, "This recognition of judgment as a present spiritual reality by no means permits us to evacuate the eschatological judgment of its content."³⁹ It would appear, from our consideration of this text in John 5 and from the study of other texts, to be noted later that the dimensions of time and eternity parallel one another, with the two spheres of reality periodically intersecting, or at least becoming tangent to each other. Some eschatological matters are both now and then with emphasis upon the 'now' in biblical revelation (e.g., eternal life; death). Others seem to impinge on both now and then with emphasis upon "then" (e.g., Christ's return; resurrection). Yet others seem to be quite equally related to both "now" and "then" (e.g., judgment).

This last suggestion touches upon another aspect of Johannine style that must be understood if we are to understand adequately his eschatology. Ladd refers to it as "eschatological structure."⁴⁰ He sees in John a twofold division, one vertical (above and below) and the other horizontal (present and future).⁴¹ While in some cases John views these as one or the other, they are often presented as interpenetrating one another. For example, heaven is often seen as bearing

³⁵ A. A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans: 1979) 17-18. See also J. A. T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming* (New York: Abingdon, 1957) 170; n. 2, 178 and Priority, 340.

³⁶ O. Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967) 172;

³⁷ Ladd, *Theology*, 308.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 306.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁴¹ For extended discussion, see *Ibid.*, 229-36. See also D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1981) 799.

on the *here* and *now*, not simply on the *there* and *then* (e.g., 1:51; 3:27). Likewise, eternal life is rightly viewed as "life of the age to come"⁴² while being something to be experienced here and now (5:24). This eternal life is based upon a birth "from above"⁴³ which enables one to "see the Kingdom of God" already in this life (3:3).

III. *A Consideration of the Textual Data*

It is with the persuasion that the Gospel of John was written by one hand, the apostle John, with a cohesive view of eschatology that we now come to a consideration of the textual data. The Gospel deals with at least six eschatological themes (death, heaven, judgment, resurrection, eternal life, and Christ's return; other possible eschatological themes with which he deals, but which will not be discussed below, are Messiah [Christ], Kingdom, and salvation). These six themes are found in 16 of the 21 chapters (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 21) with the emphasis falling in chaps 3, 5, 6, 8, 11 and 12. In addition, there are perhaps eight other important texts not found in the six key chapters. Recognizing that some texts may be interpreted somewhat differently by different theologians, my analysis turned up 34 references to death, 26 to heaven, 21 to judgment, 18 to eternal life and four to Christ's return. The following discussion will deal with the six key chapters and the eight significant texts as they pertain to the six selected themes.

One more observation of significance needs to be made before an analysis of the text is undertaken. For all practical purposes the eschatological instruction found in John's Gospel comes from Jesus' lips. The only exceptions to this are one occasion when instruction from John the Baptist is recorded in 3:27-36, a brief response of Peter to our Lord's instruction in 6:36, Martha's comment about resurrection in the last day in 11:24, and John's own editorial comments in 12:1, 9, 17 and 21:23.

Death

Death is presented by John as being related to the present and/or the future and as being physical. or spiritual. Spiritual death is the present condition of those who fail to heed the word of the Son of God and who do not believe the Father's witness regarding His Son

⁴² C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* (2nd ed.; London: SPCK, 1978) 214-15. See also L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 227.

⁴³ W. Robert Cook, *Theology of John* (Chicago: Moody, 179) 85-86. See also Morris, *John*, 212-13.

(5:24). On the other hand, the one who keeps the Son's word will never experience spiritual death (8:51). Despite the seeming finality physical death, already during Jesus' earthly ministry the dead heard his voice and came to life (5:25). Perhaps the most dramatic instance of this is found in John 11. The death of Lazarus is described by Christ as sleep (11:11, 13-14), while his awakening from this sleep of death is called a resurrection from "the dead" (which apparently is an identifiable group) (12:1, 9, 17). The picture seems to be that the dead are those who may be awakened whenever Christ chooses to do so (11:11), and when so awakened they are restored to life (11:44). Thus, in a yet future day the dead ("all who are in the tombs") will respond to his voice (5:28-29).

Physical and spiritual death should never be confused, nor should physical and spiritual (eternal) life (6:49-50, 58). Eating the bread from heaven (Jesus Christ) will keep one from spiritual death and, in turn, provide eternal life (6:58). Apart from believing in Jesus as the saving Son of God, people will die (experience physical death at the end of this life) in their sins (in a state of spiritual death) (3:21, 24). On the other hand, to believe in Christ is to live spiritually even though one dies physically, and to live and believe in him is to enter a situation where one will never die spiritually (11:25-26).

Eternal Life

Most of John's record of truth about eternal life relates it to the present. It is viewed as involving an immediately realizable promise and as being antithetical to perishing (3:16). The one who receives eternal life is described as one who is saved or delivered from judgment (3:17-19; 5:24) since Jesus assures that person that they will never perish and that no one can remove them from his care (10:28). This long-range care and protection, which is available as a gift from Jesus Christ (10:28), comes in the form of nourishment which lasts, rather than that which spoils like bread (6:27). Eternal life is received by believing in God's unique Son (3:15-16; 6:47; 20:31). The believing by which it is appropriated has disobedience to the Son as its antithesis, that is, eternal life is received by obedience to the Son, namely the obedience of faith (3:36). Jesus elaborates upon this concept in 5:24 where he declares that the receiving of eternal life relates to the hearing of his word. As Barrett notes, "ἀκούειν is used, as שמע is often used in the Old Testament, with the meaning 'to hear and do,' 'to be obedient.'"^{44, 45} But not only must one obey the Son's word, they must

⁴⁴ Barrett, *John*, 261.

⁴⁵ Note also the etymological relationship between ἀλπίω, hear, and ὑπακούω.

also believe the Father's witness about the Son in the Scriptures, for therein is the Son found (5:39-40). Because of this Jesus can subsequently state that eternal life is found in the Father's commandment (12:49-50).

This line of reasoning naturally leads to the question as to what the connection is between eternal life and Father/Son. Jesus anticipates this question on two separate occasions. The Father "has life in himself," and is, he is uncaused and independent, and since the Son is of the same essence as the Father (fully and truly God) he partakes of the same quality (5:26). Further, as the Son partakes of the Father's life, so we, as we appropriate him, partake of his life (6:57).

There is also a "not yet" or future dimension to John's presentation of eternal life laid alongside the "already" dimension. In 6:40, 53-54 Jesus makes a connection between eternal life (spiritual) and resurrection life (physical). He makes a most heartening and, by its nature, absolute promise to the believer by declaring, on the one hand, that it is God's will that everyone who believes in the Son have eternal life, and, on the other hand, that he (the Son) will bodily raise such a one in the last day. If anyone eats the living bread, which is Jesus, now he will live from now on (6:51, 58).

Resurrection

In the paragraph John 5:19-29 we find three of our Lord's "truly, truly" statements. In the first (19-23) and third (25-29) significant resurrection truth is given. Initially, Jesus claims for himself power and authority in the areas of resurrection and life-giving that is parallel to that of the Father (21). While the second half of the statement repeats only the life-giving part of the first, omitting the resurrection, it should be viewed as elliptical. This is demonstrated by the unmistakable attributing of resurrection to the Son of Man in vv 28-29. It is further supported by the fact that life would not be given to those not raised. This is a remarkable and noteworthy claim.

It is in the third "truly, truly" statement, however, that the more extended statements are found. Herein he makes two distinct yet complementary assertions about resurrection. The first relates to the "already" and anticipates the "not yet," while the second forecasts the "not yet" with more specificity.

Currently, during Jesus' earthly ministry ("now"), the dead heard the voice of the Son of God and those who heard lived (25). The traditional wisdom on this statement is that this is an extension of the statement of v 24 about passing out of death into spiritual life.⁴⁶ This

⁴⁶ Out of over 25 commentators on this verse consulted, all but two, including this writer himself, have stated in print that this is a reference to spiritual death and spiritual

interpretation is based upon 1) the fact that "life" and "death" in v 24 are spiritual quantities and the assumption that v 25 merely extends this truth in spiritual resurrection language; and, 2) the presence of "and now is" in v 25 in contrast to its absence in v 28. It is generally assumed that since physical resurrection is not going on "now" it is patently obvious that it must be spiritual life/death in view.

Only two commentators were found who even acknowledge the possibility of an alternate explanation of the passage and neither of them made an attempt to defend or champion it.⁴⁷ This alternative interpretation, which I would propose for serious consideration, is that as with vv 28 and 29 so here physical resurrection is in view. This proposal is supported by two lines of argument which, if sustaining, lead to a third. 1) The use of "truly, truly" in both vv 24 and 25 argues for some shift in subject matter. L. Morris acknowledges that these words seem "to indicate a new start,"⁴⁸ although he does not follow through on this line of thought. If the "truly, truly" of v 19 introduces a set of eschatological subjects (resurrection, life-giving, judgment--vv 19-23), and if the "truly, truly" of v 24 relates these items to the spiritual realm ("eternal life"), then the "truly, truly" of v 25 may be understood as introducing several verses which relate the same themes to the physical realm. 2) It seems to be begging the question to automatically relate "and now is" to the spiritual realm. If "an hour is coming" may refer to Jesus' earthly ministry (cf. 4:23), so "now" may, as well. In light of the context, it does not at all seem to be stretching the text to see this as a reference to his miraculous ministry of raising the dead (Lazarus, 1:1-12:1; Jairus' daughter, Mark 5:22-23, 35-43; Luke 8:40-42, 49-50; widow-of-Nain's son, Luke 7:11-17).⁴⁹ This interpretation is further sustained when the contrast between "the dead"

life (see e.g., H. Alford, *The Greek Testament* (London: Rivingtons, 1874) 1.748; Barrett, *St. John*, 262; Brown, *John*, 1.215; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 131; Cook, *John*, 219; Dodd, *Fourth Gospel*, 364; W. Hendricksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953) 199; Hoekema, *Future*, 240; Ladd, *Theology*, 305; Morris, *John*, 318). Bultmann, *John*, 259 and Schnackenburg, *St. John*, 2.109, 3.428 understand death as a lack of authentic existential experience and life as existential authenticity.

⁴⁷ M. C. Tenney, "The Gospel of John," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) ix, 65 and B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: John Murray, 1876) 87.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 317.

⁴⁹ Some have claimed that these were not dead and that these actions could not have been resurrections. The texts themselves lay such contentions to rest. The statements about "sleep" and death made by Jesus about Jairus' daughter are clarified in his explanations to the disciples concerning Lazarus, together with John's editorial comment, in 11:11-15.

who hear Jesus' quickening voice (25) and "all" the dead who hear his voice (28) is noted. During his earthly ministry only some of the dead heard; in the eschaton "all" will hear. 3) If these arguments have credibility, then a third may be offered. This interpretation yields a tighter line of reasoning as John develops his case. Not only was there an inauguration of the life and judgment of the age to come during our Lord's earthly life (24), there was also an inauguration of the resurrection that relates to the age to come (25). Thus, we see in a relatively small way during his earthly ministry a foreshadowing of the power of the kingdom yet to come.

The idea introduced in v 25 is continued in vv 28-29 and here it clearly relates to the "not yet." The dead will rise from the tombs at Jesus' call. Some will rise to life and others to condemnation, which resurrections are related to "good" or "evil" deeds, respectively. This passage raises two theological problems which call for our attention. First, in the majority of cases it is assumed by the commentators that this is a reference to a general end-time resurrection.⁵⁰ Since I have addressed this issue elsewhere,⁵¹ I will merely summarize the support for it here together with reasons for its limitations as a preferred interpretation. As a general principle it may be noted that much of the argumentation for a general resurrection is based upon 1) the claim that John 5:28-29 makes no temporal distinction between the two resurrections noted and 2) a rejection of premillennial interpretation of Rev 20:1-6. Since the idea of a "differentiated resurrection"⁵² in 5:28-29 is played down or overlooked in amillennial and postmillennial thought, the parallel between this passage and Paul's series of resurrection distinctions (orders) in 1 Cor 15:20-24 is usually not acknowledged. There, as Goppelt points out, "Paul differentiated. . . a first from a second resurrection."⁵³ The same differentiation is called for in Rev 20:4-6 but the most obvious sense of the passage is not accepted by these writers. They argue variously, but basically their contention is that the 1000 years which separates the resurrections is to be viewed figuratively and that the first resurrection is spiritual.

It is our contention that the most natural way to take all of the pertinent texts leads to the conclusion that the resurrection of life and

⁵⁰ To their credit, Hoekema, *Future*, 239ff. and Hendricksen, *John*, 199ff., offer extended discussion of their belief in one final general resurrection as an attempted rebuttal of premillennial teaching that the end-time resurrections are separated in time as well as participants.

⁵¹ Cook, *The Theology of John*, 219-20, 228-29; Cook, *Systematic Theology*, 760-61, 798-99, 806-7.

⁵² Goppelt, *Theology*, 2.304.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

the resurrection of judgment are not only related to two distinct groups of people (believers and unbelievers), but at two distinct times (before and after the millennial reign of Jesus Christ).

The second theological problem is expressed well by Goppelt when he writes, "Surprisingly enough, of course, John 5:29 made the resurrection of life dependent not upon faith but upon doing good."⁵⁴ Is this the introduction of a works-salvation in contradiction to other NT teaching? The answer is an emphatic no. "The discriminating factor [rather than the determinative factor in this resurrection] will be good deeds as over against worthless . . . deeds (cf. Dan 12:2; Acts 24:15), which factor John indicates elsewhere as an external indicator of a man's either having been declared righteous by God or being of the devil (1 John 3:7-8)."⁵⁵ Goppelt argues convincingly that the doing of good or evil may be translated into "faith or disbelief." He further notes that this differentiation "presupposed that the decision [of belief or unbelief] had already been made prior to the resurrection and would not first come in the judgment of the world. At that point, what now was already reality for faith would only become apparent."⁵⁶

While the passage in John five juxtaposes both "already" and "not yet" aspects of resurrection, the remaining two passages deal with these aspects separately. In 6:39-40, 44 and 54 future resurrection is in view. Jesus speaks four times of resurrection "at the last day" (NIV).⁵⁷ Bultmann has attempted to account for this clear indication of belief in a future eschatology by making such phrases to be the result of ecclesiastical redaction. Barrett is certainly correct, however, when he states that ". . . there is no ground for thinking of them as anything other than a genuine part of John's thought and they must be interpreted as such."⁵⁸ This future resurrection is said to be God's will (6:39-40); it involves the saints viewed both collectively (39) and individually (40); and it will include those whom the Father has given to and drawn to the Son who consequently have eternal life. "The end of the work of God, as regards man, is the glorification of his restored and sanctified nature--*body, soul, and spirit*--in eternity. Without this, salvation and restitution would be incomplete. The adoption cannot be consummated without the redemption of the body."⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Cook, *John*, 219-20.

⁵⁶ Goppelt, Ibid.

⁵⁷ The translation of Ev as "at" by the NIV rather than "on" as by the NASB is more felicitous. It is an era (the eschaton) in God's purposes rather than a calendar day that is in view. Compare the use of "hour" in 5:25 and 28.

⁵⁸ Barrett, *St. John*, 294.

⁵⁹ Alford, *Greek Testament* 1.763.

The last resurrection passage (11:23-26,43-44; 12:1) relates to the "already" since it was a part of our Lord's miraculous earthly ministry. While Martha confessed belief in the end time resurrection (11:24) Jesus assures her that Lazarus will rise from the dead (11:23) and then proceeds to raise him that very day (11:43-44). Before he does so, however, he extends to her and to all who believe in him a remarkable promise. The promise is not, however, merely resurrection and life. He declares that he is 'resurrection and life. Thus, faith in him, that is, receiving him, is to receive the one who is resurrection and life. Therefore, the one who believes in him will have a life that carries him beyond death. It is the life of the age to come that he will receive now and have forever. Further, he will never die with regard to the age to come (11:25-26).

Heaven

Information on heaven as found in John's Gospel is contained in two kinds of passages. There are those in which the term "heaven" or some cognate thereof are used, and those which use alternate terms such as "above," "my Father's house," "a place for you," and so forth. A survey of the several passages gives unmistakable evidence that Jesus, from whom most of the information comes, John the Baptist, and John the apostle believed that heaven was a real place in an unidentified, but definite location which has immediate bearing upon and provides future hope for the believer's life.

There is a distinct and no less real category of reality and truth associated with heaven in contrast to the realities and truths of earth (3:12). Advantage and success in this life ultimately comes from heaven, which is to say that it comes from God (3:27). Christ, who is from heaven, for this reason transcends all others (3:31). Jesus' Father is the provider of genuine nourishment from heaven (6:31-32), which bread from heaven provides eternal life (6:33) and is equated by Jesus with himself (6:38). When eaten, this bread precludes death, has a living quality of its own, and came down out of heaven to bring the life of the age to come into the present (6:50-51, 58). This picture of heavenly bread being made available in an earthly setting is most instructive. "When John 6:48, which refers to the 'bread of life,' and 6:51, which refers to the 'living bread,' are compared, the truth of the passage is illuminated. The first phrase refers to that which the bread does; that is, it supplies life to the eater. The second phrase gives an active quality of the bread itself; it is self-perpetuating. Thus, the whole picture is of a source of life that is never used up."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Cook, *John*, 114.

The preceding passages, in which the term "heaven" occurs, all seem to focus on bringing heaven to bear upon present earthly life. The remaining passages move the focus to the future. First of all, heaven is described as that which is "above" rather than "below," and that which is contrasted with "this world" as being "not of this world" (8:23).⁶¹ Being born "from above"⁶² is essential to seeing the Kingdom of God (3:3, 7), while those who are lost in sin cannot come to this place which is "above" (8:21-23). Even the believing cannot go to this place until the divine timetable calls for it (13:33, 36).

In 8:27 (cf. v 23) John draws a connection between heaven "above" and the Father. Then, in chaps 14 and 16, he develops this idea more fully. Going to heaven is described as going "to the Father" (14:12, 28; 16:7, 10, 17, 28), and heaven itself is called both "my Father's house" and "a place for you" (14:2-3). The only other occurrence of "my Father's house" in John's Gospel is in 2:16 when Jesus is referring to the temple. There may well be an intended connection between the two phrases by way of contrast. The earthly temple did not have "many" rooms, but few, and there was not place for all of the Father's children, but only for the high priest. This imagery is carried into the book of Hebrews (e.g., 9:24-25) and, more significantly, into Revelation in the description of the New Jerusalem (21:3, 7, 22).

The Father's house is said to contain many "rooms" or permanent residences which he went to prepare for the rest of the Father's children (14:2). Some, appealing to the usage of *μῶνα* in certain passages of classical literature, have seen this term as setting forth "the contrasted notion of repose and progress"⁶³ which others have firmly and effectively rejected.⁶⁴

The word *μόνα* (dwelling places)⁶⁵ puts emphasis upon the permanence of these dwellings, while the plural number shows that individual provision will be made for all the Father's children. It must not be overlooked, however, that they are all together in one place. Thus the picture is of each child having a suite of rooms in the Father's house. All will be with the Father, enjoying His hospitality and sharing His love.⁶⁶

Jesus promised that upon going to the Father he would send the Spirit to meet the believers' intermediate needs (16:7, 13) until they

⁶¹ In John 3:31 John the Baptist equates "above" with "heaven."

⁶² For a discussion of the meaning of *ἄνωθεν* see Morris, *John*, 213 and Cook, *John*, 85-86.

⁶³ Westcott, *St. John*, 200.

⁶⁴ Barrett, *St. John*, 456-57; Morris, *John*, 638-39.

⁶⁵ *μόνα* is cognate to *μένω*, abide or dwell.

⁶⁶ Cook, *John* 229-30.

themselves would go to the Father and thus be with Christ and behold his glory (17:24). In going to the Father, Jesus would leave the world (16:28) and thus be beyond further tangible human contact (16:10) but not beyond effective human communication in prayer (16:23-24).

Judgment

As John reports on the subject of judgment, there are several introductory observations to note. 1) While he sometimes relates it to the "already" alone (3:36; 9:39; 17:12), and other times to the "not yet" only (5:29; 10:28), most of his information shows an interrelation between the present and future aspects of judgment (3:16-19; 5:22-24, 27; 5:30; 8:15-16; 12:31; 12:47-48). In his reporting he uses two basic sets of terms: a) κρίνω and cognates based on a root meaning separation, usually translated as judge or judgment, and in many cases meaning *condemn* or *condemnation*; b) ἀπόλλυμι and cognates which basically means *perish* and is rightly understood as being the opposite of being saved or receiving eternal life.⁵⁷ 3) The information on judgment seems to fall into three groupings: that which highlights the Judge, that which highlights the judged, and that which highlights the standard of judgment. The following discussion will follow these latter three categories.

First of all, concerning the Judge, Jesus teaches that by his first coming men and women are divided or separated. In recognizing this principle we discover that all judgment is not negative. It is with a view to sight for some and blindness for others (9:39). His presence brings judgment in this sense. While he did not come to judge but to save, his coming brought judgment (3:17-18; 12:47). As Barrett observes,

In different passages in John it is said that Jesus acts as judge (5:22, 27; 8.16, 26), and that he does not judge (3.17; 8.15). It is hardly credible that John should have been unaware of this apparent contradiction, or that it should have been undesigned. It appears in Paul (cf. e.g., Rom. 8:33ff. with 2 Cor. 5.10). The meaning in both Paul and John is that justification and condemnation are opposite sides of the same process; to refuse the justifying love of God in Christ is to incur judgment.⁶⁸

He further teaches concerning himself as Judge that the Father gave him authority to exercise judgment (both present and future)

⁶⁷ Although there are still those who will argue that "perish" means extinction, it is quite widely acknowledged that it refers to an eternal condition of punishment and separation from God (see e.g., A. Oepke, "ἀπόλλυμι, ἀπώλεια," *TDNT* I (1964) 396-97).

⁶⁸ Barrett, *St. John*, 434.

because he is Son of Man (5:27), that is because, as described in Dan 7:13-14, he is qualified. His judgment is just because he seeks the Father's rather than his own will (5:30). As he points out, in contrast to those who judge by human standards he judges no one this way. When he does judge (whether now or in the future) his judgment is true⁶⁹ because it involves both himself and the Father, the setter of universal standards of truth.

Secondly, John presents judgment as it relates to the judged. From a positive standpoint Jesus promises that his sheep will never perish (10:28), a very emphatic statement which allows for no exceptions.⁷⁰ This promise of deliverance from perdition is reinforced by his keeping of his disciples during his earthly ministry (17:12). The way this promise of deliverance from judgment/perishing may be avoided is by believing in God's only Son (3:16; 5:24).

On the negative side, Jesus' death was a judgment on the world and its ruler (Satan) (12:31-33). This is true because rejection of the Son brings immediate and lasting judgment. Although perishing is an eschatological concept, it is viewed here (3:16) as that which one begins to experience by not believing. This is spelled out in very specific language in 3:18 where we are told that the one who does not believe . . . stands condemned already."⁷¹ The coming of the Son into the world was like the coming of light into darkness, however, because their deeds are evil, this coming became a judgment (3:19). Not to believe in the one who came to die and provide eternal life is to continue under God's wrath, for his wrath remains on the one who does not obey (believe in) his Son (3:36). Then, finally, there will be a condemnation resurrection (5:29), that is, one that will inaugurate eternal punishment in the lake of fire (Rev 20:12-15).

Finally, he has something to say about the standard of judgment. What will be the basis for determining whether one is condemned or acquitted at the last day? It will be the message⁷² which Jesus spoke (12:47-48). Since v 47 states that Jesus will not judge the one who

⁶⁹ It is difficult to determine whether "true" should be understood here as accurate (more the sense of ἀληθής than ἀληθινός) or authentic.

⁷⁰ Cook, *John*, 96. See also Morris, *John*, 521, n. 72.

⁷¹ The perfect tense of the verb describes a past action, the issue of which remains true.

⁷² There seems to be a designed contrast between his words or sayings (ῥημάτων, 12:47) and his word of message (λόγος, 12:48). The former, when not kept, were not an occasion for judgment, while the latter will judge those who reject him. The larger collective truth, conveyed part by part in the individual sayings, is that for which mankind is accountable. "The 'sayings' are all bound up in one great message (λόγος), delivered and felt in its entirety" (Westcott, *St. John*, 187).

does not keep his words, there seems to be a conflict with v 48, but a more careful observation of the text will resolve this apparent tension. There is a progression from "sayings" to "message" (see n. 72) and from "hearing and not keeping" to "rejecting." When the one becomes the other, judgment ensues. Not keeping his words will not bring his judgment now, but it will assure judgment in the last day. Jesus' message will be either an instrument of deliverance or condemnation.

Christ's return

Of the several references in John's Gospel to the "coming" of Jesus there is a good possibility that it is used in more than one sense. It is generally conceded that 14:2-3 and 21:22-23 refer to the parousia, although sometimes it is maintained that more than this is in view.⁷³ On the other hand, 14:28 and 16:16-22 may well refer to his return to the disciples from death by way of resurrection. Barrett speaks of "studied ambiguity" and states,

For example, the sayings about coming and going can be interpreted throughout of the departure and return of Jesus in his death and resurrection; but they can equally well be interpreted of his departure to the Father at the ascension and of his return at the parousia. By this ambiguity John means to convey that the death and resurrection were themselves eschatological events which both prefigured and anticipated the final events.⁷⁴

Guthrie reaches a similar but more guarded conclusion. He suggests that "all Jesus' sayings in John about his parousia are capable of another interpretation, but there seem to be insufficient grounds for excluding the possibility that a future coming of an apocalyptic type is intended."⁷⁵

Granting that the 14:25 and 16:16-22 passages are ambiguous, it is nonetheless our contention that 14:2-3 and 21:22-23 are altogether singular in intended meaning. In 14:2-3 Jesus speaks of returning to his Father's house (heaven, cf. Ps 33:13-14, which is the New Jerusalem)⁷⁶ where he will prepare dwelling places for his own. Subsequently, at an undisclosed time he will return to take believers to himself in order that they may be where he is. There are several striking features about these passages, some of which argue strongly for this to be a reference to the parousia as over against some other

⁷³ Barrett, *St. John*, 457; Westcott, *St. John*, 201.

⁷⁴ Barrett, *St. John*, 491.

⁷⁵ Guthrie, *Theology*, 801.

⁷⁶ See earlier discussion on pp. 24-25 and Cook, *John*, 239-41.

coming. First of all, he uses the present tense, "I am coming." "Where a future verb form is expected he uses a present tense to indicate the certainty of his return, and by adding 'again' he suggests another time (not 'times') than the first."⁷⁷

Westcott is most certainly wrong in seeing the present tense as signifying continual comings (B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John: The Authorized Version with Introduction and Notes*, p. 201). As Blass and Debrunner note, "In confident assertions regarding the future, a vivid realistic present may be used for the future" (F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 168). Similarly, N. Turner writes, "Concerning the Futuristic use of the Present, Moulton suggested that these presents differed from the future tense 'mainly in the tone of assurance which is imparted'; they are confident assertions intended to arrest attention with a vivid and realistic tone or else with imminent fulfillment in mind. . . . It is oracular sometimes in class[ical] Greek (e.g., Hdt 8, 140) and so it is not surprising that it is used so much in the NT of the Coming One, with the verb ἔρχομαι" (J. H. Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 3:63).⁷⁸

Secondly, upon his return he speaks of taking the believer "where" he is.

The use of ὅπου (where) shows that this is not a reference to such a coming as Pentecost. Other commentators associate this passage with the idea of Christ's coming for His own when we die, but then we go to Him. In John 14:23 Jesus uses the same verb [ἔρχομαι] in the future tense to refer to a time when believers will be indwelt by Father and Son and also uses μόνη (abode) for the only other time in the New Testament. A comparison of the two passages shows that 14:23 refers to the Godhead coming to the believer, whereas 14:3 speaks of Christ coming for him. John 14:23 is fulfilled in this age and John 14:3 in the age to come.⁷⁹

Thirdly, the use of the second person plural pronouns must be noted. Referring to D. E. Aune's *The Cultic Setting of Realized Eschatology in Early Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), po 129, Guthrie notes that he "reckons that if the second person plural pronouns are taken seriously, In. 14:3 must refer to a future and final coming of Jesus and cannot refer to what he calls 'an individualized Parousia.'"⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Cook, *John*, 230.

⁷⁸ Ibid., n. 32.

⁷⁹ Ibid., n. 33.

⁸⁰ Guthrie, *Theology*, 801, n. 41.

IV. *Conclusion*

When allowed to speak for itself, the text of John's Gospel has a significant eschatological message for the church. There is no question that it is multi-dimensional in that it speaks to both the "already" and the "not yet" of Christian revelation. It also includes reference to both the above and the below, the heavenly and the earthly. Further, John points out the implications of eschatological truth for both the believing and the unbelieving. One may reject the implications of eschatological truth, but that person may not escape its ultimate realities.

Eschatological truth in John is basically Christological. For the most part it issues from Jesus' teaching and, to a large degree, focuses upon him. Whether the subject be death, heaven, judgment, eternal life, resurrection, or Christ's return, he is directly involved.

Finally, eschatological truth in the Gospel of John is preeminently practical. It is immediate and fundamental, bearing on everyday life. The possession of eternal life transforms this life and the life to come from mere existence to ultimate meaning and significance (12:25). The haunting and destructive fear of both physical and spiritual death are remedied in Jesus Christ (5:24; 11:25-26). Death will not have the final say because he will raise each one who believes in him (6:39-40, 44). Hope, which provides life with perspective and focus, is ours in the anticipation of being with him and beholding his glory in heaven (14:3; 17:24). God's wrath (judgment) is the assured but not necessary anticipation of all who reject Christ (3:36). His return offers relief to the troubled and faint of heart (14:1-3).

As John records elsewhere in response to our Lord's promise, "I am coming soon," so we repeat with the church through the ages, "Come, Lord, Jesus" (Rev 22:20).

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