

VIGIL



“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

~ I Peter 5:8

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DEATH

FINDING COMFORT

James E. Rogers

INTRODUCTION

Death is coming to all (Ecclesiastes 3:2; Job 5:26; 1 Corinthians 15:22; Hebrews 9:27) unless we are “left unto the coming of the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:15). While the Christian may not want to leave loved ones and things on earth, he is not afraid of what lies beyond the grave. “Precious in the sight of Jehovah is the death of his saints” (Psalms 116:15). With Paul, we have “the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better” (Philippians 1:23). We can know, when we “walk through the valley of the shadow of death,” we “will fear no evil” (Psalms 23:4).

We have stood at the grave trying to comfort sorrowing families and have used God’s Word to great benefit on such occasions. When burying loved ones, I have thought of passages of Scripture and those truths brought comfort. Some have faced grief in the tragic deaths of loved ones. Comfort comes from remembering and applying Bible truths. Let us use God’s Word now as we think about this subject.

COMFORT IS FOUND IN THE “SAYINGS” OF THE MASTER

The Master will say, “Come to the feast.” When the cry, “Behold,

the Bridegroom! Come ye forth to meet him” (Matthew 25:6), was given, the five wise virgins were prepared to accept the invitation. Matthew recorded, “they that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast” (Matthew 25:10). The song reminds us to “Come to the feast! . . . A place of honor is reserved For you at the Master’s side” (Charlotte G. Homer, W. A. Ogden, “Come to the Feast,” Alton H. Howard, Songs Of The Church, Howard Publishers, West Monroe, LA., 1977, Song Number 671). John repeatedly encouraged his readers to be faithful by referring to “him that overcometh” (Revelation 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 21:7). It was as if he was saying, “If you will overcome, you will come over and live with us!” The Christian, who knows his death is but an acceptance of the invitation, dies in comfort. Those who remain and know their loved one has gone to the feast are comforted.

The Master will say, “Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matthew 25:21,23). Jehovah never required us to be sinless, but he does require us to be good and faithful if we wish to die comforted. To “the angel of the church in Smyrna,” John

wrote, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life” (Revelation 2:8,10). The Psalmist reminds us, “In thy presence is fulness of joy; In thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalms 16:11). This puts one into the company of Abram (Nehemiah 9:7,8), Moses (Numbers 12:7; Hebrews 3:2,5), Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 31:20), Hanani (Nehemiah 7:2), Timothy (1 Corinthians 4:17), Tychicus (Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7), Epaphras (Colossians 1:7), Onesimus (Colossians 4:9), Silvanus (1 Peter 5:12) and Antipas (Revelation 2:13). One who runs with this crowd is anxious to join them in death. Who could regret a loved one’s going to meet with this crowd?

The Master will say, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). Those who die in the Lord simply go to receive their inheritance. Paul departed from the elders of Ephesus by saying, “And now I commend you to God, and the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you the inheritance among all them that are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

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EDITORIAL
TEACH US TO NUMBER
OUR DAYS
Ronnie Hayes

Death is a term that can send shivers up the spine of most individuals. And on the other hand, it is the means by which a battle-weary, faithful servant goes home. We don't want to talk about it, think about it and we usually don't want to study about it. Yet, it is a subject that we need to study. Moses penned these words, "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale that is told. The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Psalms 90:9-12). How can we number our days? Brother Robert Taylor, Jr. wrote in his book, *Studies in Psalms*, "This does not mean to determine the precise years of our pilgrimage on earth but make life count. Quality of life is vastly more important than quantity of life. We number our days when we glorify God, profit humanity and prepare adequately to go home to heaven in the sweet by and by. This and only this is the adequate application of the human heart in the ways of wisdom" (67).

Contemplating death should teach us to have the right priorities. If we want to hear "...Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34), instead of hearing "...Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire,

prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41), then it is imperative that we have our priorities right! The life we live must bring glory to the Father. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). We must learn to put first things first. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33). When we have the right priorities in our life, then we will love God as we should. "And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself" (Luke 10:27).

May we learn from death to profit humanity. Paul writes, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). Paul states that we will give an account of our lives. Will we have served humanity or been a scourge on humanity? What kind of spouse will I have been? To spouses Paul wrote, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22). "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25). To parents, Paul said, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). To citizens, Paul suggested, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God" (Romans 13:1). In every aspect of our life we can either be an asset or detriment. In Romans

14:7 we learn, "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself." We are not alone. We will influence others for good or bad. May the certainty of death teach us to love the souls of others, so that our influence will be leading them to heaven and not to hell!

Surely from death we will learn to prepare for eternity. Solomon wrote, "There is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death: and there is no discharge in that war; neither shall wickedness deliver those that are given to it" (Ecclesiastes 8:8). We have no control over death! It cannot be prevented. Death is inevitable. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). Seeing that death is inevitable, what should I do? I'll borrow the words of Amos, "...PREPARE TO MEET THY GOD..." (Amos 4:12). Christ said, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2-4). Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. The question is, "Have we prepared?" While time and opportunity is available, we would be wise to be obedient to the gospel of Christ.

To the wicked, death will mean "everlasting punishment" (Matthew 25:46). To the Christian, "death is not extinguishing the light from the Christian; it is putting out the lamp because the dawn has come" (unknown).

ANNIHILATION THEORY

Jerry L. Martin

As is true of every false doctrine (theory), this one originated from false teachers who had their own agenda (Acts 20:29; 1 Timothy 4:1-4; 2 Timothy 4:1-4). Such self-promoting teachers are devoid of truth and reason. They each are exposed as frauds when held in the light of factual truth. The future eternal well being of the souls of mankind is dependent upon not only a refutation of the false theory of annihilation, but also on the accurate illumination of the teaching of scriptures on the soul of man and its destiny.

First, let us identify some of the most prominent false teachers and their present day disciples who promote their false doctrine: Charles Taze Russell (Jehovah Witnesses), Ellen G. White (Seventh-Day Adventists), and Herbert W. Armstrong (United Church of God). These share the false concept that man is wholly physical and devoid of an eternal soul. They declare that death always means extinction, or cessation of being. When the book of Genesis declares; "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7), the annihilationist redefines "soul" to mean the breath of life in man, not an eternal spirit that shall live on after the body dies. To them, man is a soul (being) but does not have a soul, as in the case of animals. Thus, when physical death occurs, man's existence ends. The annihilationist surmises that the dead shall be brought back to physical life, the righteous to live forever in a physical existence on the earth (new earth), the wicked shall have their bodies burned up (experience a second physical death) when the physical earth is purified with fire. In their perverted view, the wicked will not physically continue to exist and experience eternal punishment but rather their punishment will be annihilation (consumed by fire).

Secondly, note that they use the same faulty reasoning and dishonest handling of the Scriptures that always lead false teachers to their defenseless

positions. The annihilationist argument goes something like this: "Morally, the doctrine of eternal conscious torment is incompatible with the Biblical revelation of divine love and justice. The moral intuition God has implanted within our consciences cannot justify the insatiable cruelty of a God who subjects sinners to unending torments. Such a God is like a bloodthirsty monster and not the loving Father revealed to us by Jesus Christ. Such action would be a foul stain on the lovable name of Jehovah. Satan himself is the promulgator of this God-dishonoring doctrine of eternal punishment. His purpose is to frighten mankind and cause him to hate God. How can Christians possibly perceive of and promote a God of such cruelty and vindictiveness he would inflict eternal punishment upon creatures of his creation, however sinful they might have been?" Friends, it is always faulty human reasoning that discards revealed truth and promotes their own view of what God should do. The prophet Isaiah records God's view of such matters. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts..." (Isaiah 55:8-11). Because God's ways are above our ways we should all be in awe of both His "goodness and severity" (Romans 11:22-36).

Thirdly, observe that a factual and forceful refutation of the annihilation theory is readily seen when one searches scriptures. In the very passages where they try to say that "destroy" means annihilate, the original language refutes their conclusions. "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). There are two different Greek words used in this context, one for what man can do "kill" (apokteino) or physically put to death the body. The other word "destroy" (apollumi) does not mean annihilation, but emphasizes a

continuation of existence in a lost state or ruined state to which the Lord can sentence a person's soul (Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Unabridged Edition, page 304). The Lord uses the same word (apollumi) when describing the "lost" state of the sheep, coin, and boy in Luke 15. The annihilationists are inconsistent in their handling of scriptures when they falsely claim that the righteous shall enjoy everlasting life (physical existence) but the unrighteous shall not experience everlasting punishment. In describing the judgment scene the Lord himself used the same word, "everlasting" (aion) to denote the duration of the existence and punishment of the wicked as He did the duration of the existence and blessings of the righteous. "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels...And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matthew 25:41, 46). There are numerous additional passages that emphasize eternal conscious torment as well as eternal conscious bliss (Revelation 14:11; 20:10, 11; 2 Thessalonians. 1:9; Jude 13; Luke 16:19-31). The passages the annihilationists use to argue that Satan and his angels will be punished because they are "spirit beings" declare that wicked mankind (those whose names are not found in the book of life) shall be cast into the same fire with the devil and his angels for the same duration forever and ever (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:10-15; 21:8). To think that one could live a wicked life all their physical existence and the most they would have to fear would be to face physical annihilation provides a false comfort and skewed view of the "goodness and severity" of a just God.

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WHY DID MY LOVED ONE DIE?

Brian Gentle

One of the hardest things to deal with is the loss of a loved one. Many reading this have already dealt with loss. I was nearly twenty-five before I had to deal with losing a loved one. Truthfully, I am still dealing with it and many other losses. One minute you are talking to your loved ones, never contemplating they may not be here tomorrow, and then the next minute they're gone. It happens that quickly. At some point during your loss the question may cross your mind, "Why did my loved one die?" This is not a selfish question per say but an attempt to get some answers during a difficult time in our lives. So, let's try to answer this question truthfully and honestly according to the scriptures.

My loved one died ultimately because of sin. Now this is the most obvious answer. The Bible says, "And the LORD God took the **man**, and put **him** into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the **man**, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, **thou** shalt not eat of it: for in the day that **thou** eatest thereof thou shalt surely **die**" (Genesis 2:15-17). Do you see the references made between death and man (Adam)? Because MAN ate of the tree, the possibility of our spirit being separated from our bodies (physical death) is inevitable (unless the judgment day comes first) and the greatest fear, being separated from our Father (spiritual death) is at stake. Scripture belabors these facts time and time again (cf. Genesis 3:19, Isaiah 59:1, 2; Romans 5:12; 6:23).

Our loved ones die because of nature's laws. Now that sin is in the

world, God no longer protects us as he did with Adam and Eve in the garden before their sin. "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19). Our hands must now till the ground so that we can be fed and now our bodies go through a decaying process to which it will turn back into dust from which it came. So what does that mean? It means that we are susceptible to nature and its effects. There are so many people who have tragically lost their loved one because of an accident (caused by themselves or someone else), a disease, or a terrible act of nature. Whatever the case may be, we need to understand one important fact: God does not cause these things to happen. Some may say God made this happen because he is punishing someone but this is simply not true. He told us when he is going to punish us. The Hebrew writer said, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). When is judgment? It is after our physical death. This is when eternal life will be given to faithful New Testament Christians and eternal torment to those who practice wickedness.

We must remember that there are some good things that happen in death. First, we no longer have to suffer. I have witnessed some of my loved ones go through tremendous pain. Their faith gave them a hope for that place where pain is no more. Because they lived righteously, I know they found that place. No one wants their loved one to go through pain, but isn't it worthwhile? "And

God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation. 21:4). Second, death is the avenue that has to be entered for us to be in heaven. Again, the Hebrew writer said "...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:2). Judgment is where the separation will take place and those who live a faithful life will be told to inherit the kingdom prepared for them (Matthew 25:31-34). Paul was ready for his "departure." Why? "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Timothy. 4:6-9). He knew what was waiting for him, he knew there was something better and he knew he had to depart from this world to have his "crown."

Are you prepared for heaven? Are you living an obedient life? "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:8-9). Our salvation is dependant on our obedience. In our salvation death will have no sting inflicting us and victory will be ours (1 Corinthians 15:54-58).

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HELL

Sam Willcut

While it is a joy to think, dream and discuss of the eternal bliss of heaven, it is equally as horrible, painful and frightening to discuss the eternal destination of destruction in hell. The number of people who do not believe in this destination of the afterlife is quite amazing. Even more amazing is the number of people who believe in heaven, but do not believe in its counterpart of hell. To prove such, statistics once showed that seventy-one percent (71%) of Americans profess to believe in heaven, but only fifty-three percent (53%) of Americans believe in hell. Yet, to believe in one is to believe in the other, for Jesus spoke of both places in the same breath (Matthew 25:46). Another statistic shows that the vast majorities believe they are going to heaven, but only four percent (4%) believe they are going to hell. In fact, while these same people will ignorantly point to the love and grace of Jesus with blinders, they fail to realize that Jesus taught more about the subject of hell than most in the Bible. Among many descriptions of this place, he describes it as a place where there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 24:50-51; 25:30). We can become disturbed when we see a child cry. A grown person crying can be heart-rending. Yet, all of this pales in consideration of the words of our Lord: “And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 13:42, 50). What will it be like when the weeping is so bitter, that the grinding of teeth in pain and anguish accompanies it? Jesus describes this as the final condition of those who are lost (Matthew 7:13). Let us consider a number of lessons that the Bible teaches about this horrible place of condemnation.

Hell is a real place. It is not merely a condition, a state of mind or an ingenious plot someone thought up

one day. Hell is a real place (Matthew 10:28). We are living in a time when people are taking the topic of hell lightly. How sad that the closest some people think about hell is in their profanity. Robert Schuller, the well-known televangelist of the Crystal Cathedral in California, once said that he had never preached a sermon on hell. Yet, if there is such a place as hell, preachers need to warn people about it. The problem is that people do not want to hear of a place of condemnation for their wickedness. They do not want to admit that some place exists where God judges and sentences based on morality and lifestyles. For those who want more preaching like Jesus, Jesus plainly points out the truth about hell. This real place is described as a place of fire (Matthew 3:12), a place of fixed and impassable separation from God and righteous loved ones (Luke 16:23-26), and a place that lasts an eternity (Revelation 20:10). While false teachers as LaGard Smith and Edward Fudge may teach on the subject of annihilation, the Bible says that the condemned in hell “shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

Hell is a prepared place—prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). The Bible speaks of hell as the “second death” (Revelation 20:6, 14; 21:8). Because sinners are now separated from God (Isaiah 59:1-2), hell is a place where one is separated from God (cf. Luke 16:23; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10). It is a prepared place of darkness (Matthew 25:30) because God is light (1 John 1:5). It is a prepared place of death (Revelation 21:8) because God is the source of life (John 5:26). It is a prepared place of misery (Revelation 20:10) because God is a God of comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3). The fact is that God never intended to create this place for us, and does not desire to send anyone there (2 Peter 3:9;

Hebrews 2:9). Rather, he is preparing a place of eternal life for all his faithful (John 14:1-3; Matthew 25:34).

Hell is a prepared place for those who are unprepared. The parable of the ten virgins illustrates this important lesson (Matthew 25:1-13). Hell is a place for those who are unprepared to know God and to obey his commandments (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). It is a place for those unprepared to have their name in the Lamb’s book of life (Revelation 20:15). This is why Paul encourages us with the words, “For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). One has said correctly, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions. The road to heaven is paved with good intentions carried out.”

To conclude, one of the most disturbing pictures of the story of Jesus about Lazarus and the rich man is the fact that when the rich man was in torment, his memory continued to exist about his past life (Luke 16:25). Thus, to spend an eternity in torment remembering every opportunity one had to obey God is so frightening and horrific, it ought to encourage us and motivate us daily to follow the will of God as closely as we should!

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WHEN HEAVEN AWAITS

Tom Larkin

“I go the way of all the earth” (1 Kings 2:2). Thus began David’s charge to his son Solomon. David knew that his death was near, but he also knew something else – death is the common lot of man. The psalmist posed the rhetorical question, “What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?” (Psalm 89:48). For all of our advancements in medical science we are helpless against the onward march of death. Nor shall that change, for the Bible decrees, “it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

Our appointment with death is one that we cannot avoid. Except for those that inhabit the earth when our Lord returns, all will pass into eternity through the door of death. But how the judgment that follows that appointment with death finds us and where we go afterward is within our power to affect. One of Revelation’s beatitudes states, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord” (Revelation 14:13). For those who come to the end of a faithful life in Christ, death is but the door into heaven’s bliss. But in order to “die in the Lord,” one must first “be” in the Lord and live a faithful life in the Lord. It has been stated rightfully that you cannot live wrong and die right. A person will come to be “in the Lord” only as a result of gospel obedience (Galatians 3:26, 27) and he will continue to be in the Lord as he lives faithfully according to the Lord’s word (1 John 1:7). For one who thus lives and dies “in the Lord,” heaven awaits.

Once we know that heaven awaits, death is never the same. For such a one, there is no fear of death. Fear of death has gripped the hearts of men since sin’s entrance in the Garden of Eden. But when heaven awaits, there is no need for fear. Because of his atoning work, Jesus has “delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject

to bondage” (Hebrews 2:15). As the call of our Lord went forth over the troubled seas to calm the fears of his disciples (Matthew 14:26, 27), so these words today calm the troubled hearts of the faithful Christian – heaven awaits. Truly, only the faithful can say, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil ...” (Psalm 23:4).

When heaven awaits, death is not loss, but gain. Loss of physical life does not have to mean that one has lost everything. Paul wrote, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Death is gain when life’s little day with all its troubles and cares is exchanged for that land of fadeless day where pain and crying and sorrow are no more and all tears are wiped away (Revelation 21:4). Truly, when heaven awaits, “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54).

When heaven awaits, death is not the end, but the beginning of that life that has no end. Each day of our earthly existence is lived with the knowledge that death is coming. But to those for whom heaven awaits, each day also brings nearer the beginning of eternal life in the presence of God. Paul wrote, “For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life” (2 Corinthians 5:4). Because heaven awaits, the faithful can be assured that they will go forth from the judgment into “life eternal” (Matthew 25:46).

When heaven awaits, death is not merely a separation, but also a blessed reunion. No doubt we all have felt the pain of separation when death takes a loved one. Such a time is one in which we need comfort. As he wrote to the church in Thessalonica, Paul did not prohibit sorrow at the death of loved ones, but encouraged the church to “sorrow not as those who have no

hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Surely we grieve for our loss and the separation that is imposed by the passing of loved ones, but faithful Christians know that separation will be replaced with reunion. At Abraham’s death, the Bible says that he “was gathered to his people” (Genesis 25:8). Surely this refers to more than being buried in the family burial plot – it conveys the realization of a reunion with redeemed loved ones.

That heaven awaits means that death brings the faithful into the presence of God. Though his was a miserable existence on this earth, the beggar Lazarus was “carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22). Pain and misery gave way to the joy and delight of God’s presence. No wonder the Bible says, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Psalm 116:15), for the death of saints brings them home to God.

Without doubt, there is much about death that is unknown. This causes a certain amount of apprehension and unease, but because of what the Bible does reveal about the death of the faithful, we can take courage, knowing that heaven awaits.

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WHERE ARE THE DEAD?

Bobby Liddell

As we stand by the graveside, sorrowful because of loss, our minds naturally ponder the place (and state) of our departed loved ones. We wonder, “Where are the dead?” The wisdom of man fails to enlighten us, for it offers no valid answer. The inability of the dead to communicate their whereabouts leaves us with no sure word from those alone who now know of a certainty, having passed through the doorway separating time from eternity, mortal from immortal, corruptible from incorruptible—life from death.

Obviously, death is a separation, for it divides the departed from the living, severing the ties of earth (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:39). The Holy Scriptures declare death to be the separation of the spirit from the body (James 2:26). All know the body, forsaken by the departed soul, bereft of the quickening spirit, begins to decay (John 11:39). Thus, we bury our dead out of our sight (Genesis 23:4). So, we can account for the physical remains (cf. Acts 2:29), but what about the true man, the inner man which motivated the body, giving it life (2 Corinthians 4:16)?

The wise man stated: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The spirit of man lives on, for it is not constrained by a coffin, not buried in the grave (cf. Acts 2:27). Thus, Jesus could truly affirm God is not the God of the dead, but of the living, because the spirit (in the context [v. 26], which specifically names Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all of whom were long since dead) lives on (Mark 12:27). Man does not cease to exist at death, nor is he annihilated after his decease (Luke 16:19-31). David and Bathsheba lost their son, but of his son’s continuing existence, following

his demise, David had no doubt, and he looked to the time when he could go to his son (2 Samuel 12:23).

While the dead sleep with the fathers (cf. 1 Kings 11:21), they are not in “limbo” (the Catholic doctrine which keeps “unbaptized children” from Heaven on “account of original sin alone”), nor are they in “purgatory” (the Catholic doctrine of a temporary abode of those who “have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions”). Neither are they wandering the earth as disembodied spirits, haunting, punishing, and tormenting their enemies as some so forcefully contend. The dead are not on earth invisibly guiding, protecting, comforting, or aiding their loved ones as others would wistfully assert. Concerning the current events of earth, “the dead know not any thing” (Ecclesiastes 9:5). This is not to affirm unconsciousness, or lack of memory, of the dead, but the fact that the dead do not intervene, nor are they knowledgeable of what transpires on earth after their parting (cf. Matthew 2:20).

God said to Joshua, “Moses my servant is dead” (Joshua 1:2). Where did Moses go? More than fourteen centuries after his death, he appeared to Peter, James, and John, and talked with Jesus (Matthew 17:3). Therefore, he did not cease to exist, although his earthly life had ended. He had gone to another place, but where? To answer, notice how Jesus depicted the departure of two very different men (Luke 16). A “certain rich man” died, and lifted up his eyes “being in torments” in hades (which means “unseen”—so called because those on earth cannot see the place to which the departed spirits go). Lazarus, poor, pitiable beggar, also died, and went to “Abraham’s bosom,” or paradise (cf. Luke 23:43), also in the unseen realm.

There they await the pronouncement of judgment, and consignment to their final abode; the rich man shall be forever in Hell, a place of “everlasting punishment”; the beggar shall be forever in Heaven, a place of “life eternal” (Matthew 25:31-46). Thus, the wicked dead suffer in torments, and the righteous dead are comforted in paradise. What of the body, left behind by the fleeing spirit? The body awaits the day of resurrection (John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). Reunited with the spirit, a new body, changed from mortal to immortal (cf. 1 John 3:1-2), shall be the perfect, perpetual domicile of the eternal spirit (1 Corinthians 15).

When Christ returns, the dead will be raised, the living will be changed, and He will judge the world (Acts 17:30-31), condemning the wicked to eternity in the fiery darkness of Hell, and rewarding the righteous with entrance into the beauty and glory of Heaven. Death and hades will be no more (Revelation 20:12-15).

To reach old age, as did Job, would be the desire of mankind; however, “Job died, being old and full of days” (Job 42:17). Of Methuselah, who lived to be 969 years old, the greatest recorded age of any man, Moses wrote, “and he died” (Genesis 5:27). All face the appointment with death (Hebrews 9:27), “but after this the judgment,” and each accountable person will determine where he shall be after this life (2 Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:12). Heaven and Hell are real, and are the ultimate destinations for the dead, whose spirits shall live on forever and ever. Thus, our greater concern should be, “Where will *we* be when we die?”

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Finding Comfort by James E. Rogers -----Continued from page 9

This shows that the one receiving the inheritance was separated to the work of God while he was on earth (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1). This shows where his heart was (Matthew 6:19-21). Paul was sent to the Gentiles “to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 20:18). This reminds one of his obedience to the plan of salvation and his faithful living thereafter. This faithful Christian is a partaker “of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Colossians 1:12). It is “from the Lord ye shall receive the recompense of the inheritance” (Colossians 3:24). He goes to receive “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4). Every Christian lives in view of the inheritance. When he has gone to be prepared to receive it, he is comforted. When his loved ones know he lived in such a way on earth to prepare himself to receive the inheritance, they are comforted.

CONCLUSION

Let us study the Scriptures to find comfort in death, both for the one who is dying or for those of us who will die in the future. There are many more passages and ideas in the Word of God that provide comfort in death. A diligent student of the Bible is never found without comfort when he faces the hard times of life. While men may not know what to say or how to say it in order to bring comfort, God has already said what needs to be said in the way it needed to be said. Proper application of Bible knowledge provides wonderful comfort at the time of death.

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