

The Dead

Opening Hymn: #214 -- Only Waiting

And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.—Luke 9:59,60

This is not the easiest scripture in the Bible for our Christian friends to explain. How could dead people bury other dead people? Clearly they could not since we are told the dead know not anything. What Jesus is telling a potential follower is that one is not really alive in the world. “Aliveness” comes only in following the master. In other words: “Let those who are dead in my Father’s sight bury their dead corpses.”

But can we truly say that someone who is alive is dead? I think we can:

Luke 15:32 It was meet that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

Once the prodigal son left his father's house, he was as good as dead as far as the father was concerned. His return was just like receiving him from the dead. This parable aptly illustrates the relationship the entire world of mankind has with their heavenly Father.

Gen. 2:17 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. [3:6] And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat and gave also unto her husband with her and he did eat.

There are several explanations for the problem created by the phrase “in the day thou eatest thou shalt die.” Some have suggested that a day with the Lord is as a thousand years; Adam did die within the Lord's thousand-year day. The margin of many Bibles suggests an alternate rendering: “dying thou shalt die.” In other words, the dying process began in Adam the day he disobeyed God.

But I think we can also accept this scripture from a third viewpoint: In God's sight, man was dead the day he disobeyed the commandment. Like the prodigal son, he left his father's house without so much as a backward glance. To all intents and purposes, man was dead, powerless to help himself.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Here was the way of escape from the certainty of death: Christ was the answer!

Col. 3:2,3 [Phillips] Give your heart to the heavenly things, not to the passing things of earth. For, as far as this world is concerned, you are already dead and your true life is a hidden one in God, through Christ.

There is no apparent difference between the physical state of those in the world and those following the Master, but as Paul puts it, there is a true life that is hidden for now.

Eph. 2:1,2 [Phillips] To you, who were spiritually dead all the time that you drifted along on the stream of this world's ideas of living, and obeyed its unseen ruler (who is still operating in those who do not respond to the truth of God), to you Christ has given life!

It is just like the words Jesus uttered in our theme text: You have no life at all except in me. Let those who are spiritually dead, those who are drifting along on the stream of this world's ideas of living, bury their dead corpses.

Those that follow Jesus do die, of course. But John in Revelation talks about their death as something special:

Rev. 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours and their works do follow them.

Only a very few in this age “die in the Lord”. This sacrificial death in Jesus is described by Paul as a “baptism” into death.

Rom. 6:3-5 Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

The baptism of Jesus wasn't just a single event at Jordan. It was something that affected his entire life.

Luke 12:50 But I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I straitened [margin: pained] till it be accomplished!

Paul said he died daily, and that was an expression that applied as well to Jesus. We escape from death unto life by similarly following in the footsteps of Jesus, and that means a life of sacrifice every day. In a sense we give up nothing, for as part of the class called “The Dead,” our inheritance would be sin, sickness, and death. Of course the time is coming when the world will receive life from the dead through the ministry of Christ, head and body. And that's the point of our sacrificial baptism now.

1 Cor. 15:29 Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?

Our Mormon friends believe this text teaches the appropriateness of being baptized for others who are already dead. By receiving baptism in their name, presumably they are saved. But that is not the thought of this text at all.

This is the same baptism that Jesus described when he said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” Paul here talks about those who are similarly baptized into Christ's death. Verse 19: If in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable. Verse 31: I die daily. What point is there to all this suffering? Why not eat and drink, for tomorrow we are as good as dead? The point, of course, is that the dead shall rise to life

The Resurrection

The condemnation of man into death could have ended right there. Man could be sterile and propagation of the race never started. But that was never God's plan. Man could try to govern himself as best he could. But the results would always be the same. Without God, there was no real life. This lesson will only be appreciated by most men in the kingdom when they are raised back to life.

The concept of a resurrection from the dead is fairly novel among earth's religions. Even many Christians fail to understand this fundamental doctrine of the Bible. In the time of Jesus, there were teachers of the people—called Sadducees—who did not believe in a resurrection. In Mark chapter 12 they propound a hypothetical question: A woman marries a man, he dies, she marries his brother, he dies, and so it goes through seven brothers. In the resurrection, who will be her husband?

Now it is curious that the Sadducees thought this was a problem. The idea of one woman with seven husbands was contrary to their practices, but why should the woman have any of them as a husband? Marrying was governed by the law so that children would carry on the family name. Clearly such a need would not apply in the resurrection where there would be no children. And that was the way Jesus answered:

Mark 12:25 For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage: but are as the angels which are in heaven.

But this was not good enough. The Sadducees wanted a “thus saith the Lord” to prove the resurrection. They accepted only the law. It was their belief that angels, spirits and the doctrine of the resurrection were not taught in the law. So Jesus selected an argument they could not so easily dismiss:

Mark 12:26,27 And as touching the dead that they rise, have ye not read in the book of Moses how in the bush God spake unto him saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.

For the Sadducees this was a powerful reference. For it was Moses who received the law from God and delivered it to the chosen people. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were physically dead at the time God spoke to Moses. But he said he was the God of these three. Why? Because he knew they would live in a resurrection.

This argument was specially tailored to the beliefs of the Sadducees. But I like the argument used by Steven when he addressed the Sanhedrin:

Acts 7:5 And he gave [Abraham] none inheritance in the land, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

God promised Abraham the land. Abraham died without receiving so much as one square foot. Did God lie? Of course not! God's promise to Abraham can only be fulfilled by raising Abraham back from the dead.

When Paul spoke about the resurrection to King Agrippa, he found skepticism on the part of the king:

Acts 26:8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

The king like many others probably found it easier to believe that one continued on living in some other life when they appeared to die. THAT was not incredible. Jesus said the Sadducees were making a mistake: they did not know their scriptures and they did not know the power of God. It does not take more power to raise man from the dead than it took to create him in the first place.

Some of our Christian friends believe in a resurrection, but they say it is only for those who are righteous. This is not what Paul believed:

Acts 24:14,15 But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: and have hope toward God . . . that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

That means no exceptions. The key to understanding what God is doing in the world is an appreciation of this doctrine: the life man now lives is not the only life he will ever have. Whether he knows it or not, Christ's death on the cross guarantees him life from the dead.

The Spirits in Prison

1 Peter 3:18,19 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.

This is the reading of the King James and we need to make a few corrections to the translation. Christ "died" for sins, he didn't "suffer" for sins. "In the" and "by the" are not in the original Greek. So now we have:

Christ also hath once **died** for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God; being put to death flesh, but quickened Spirit.

What do you suppose the resurrection of Jesus as a spirit being had on the disobedient spirits in prison? It must have had an unforgettable affect for they saw the power of God.

The word "preached" is poor. The Companion Bible suggests that this Greek word has no thought of teaching. A better word is "heralded." So we have: "...quickened Spirit. In which condition he heralded [or announced his triumph] to spirits in prison who were sometime disobedient." Now let us move forward to the next chapter...

1 Peter 4:6 For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead that they might be judged according to men in the flesh but live according to God in the spirit.

I can find no commentator who applies "dead" to the world of mankind. That's because the word does not "live according to God in the spirit." Some who believe that everyone must have a chance to accept Jesus may think this refers to some kind of preaching work to those who were dead and waiting for the chance to accept Jesus. Such an idea comes from an incorrect interpretation of "preaching to spirits in prison" from the previous chapter.

Who lives to God in the spirit? Those who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. The gospel was preached, some accepted its message, were condemned by men, but accepted by God. The Companion Bible suggests this rendering:

1 Peter 4:6 [Companion Bible] For to this end to those who are (now) dead was the Gospel preached that though they might be judged in the flesh, according to men, yet they might live [again, in resurrection] according to God, as regards the spirit.

This is man's day of judgment, and man makes his judgment on the outward appearance. God judges differently. His reward to those who faithfully serve him in this age is a spiritual body. Paula says [1 Cor. 15:44]: It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

Rest of the Dead

Rev. 20:5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.

What is this? Didn't we agree that the world is raised to life in the thousand-year kingdom of Christ? Why are not the dead alive then?

Br. Russell suggests the verse is not found in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts. And that may be true. But none of the other commentators I've checked make this statement. So we should be careful before dismissing this scripture so easily.

Adam was perfect. He sinned and he died. Mankind died with him. When mankind is raised to life in the kingdom, will they be perfect? No. They come back the way they went down. Although righteousness will predominate, they will still have to unlearn their old sinful ways. It will only be at the end of the kingdom that man will have regained perfect life. It is only at the end of the thousand years that it can be said that mankind "lives again" in the full sense of the word.

The context of the scripture shows that this explanation or something like it must be the case. For in verse 4 the souls that were beheaded for Christ are said to "live and reign with Christ a thousand years." And whom do they reign over? If they are the only ones alive, they reign over nothing. This can hardly be the sense of the scripture.

Will Any Die in the Kingdom

So we have mankind coming back from the dead through the Christ, head and body. Will any die during the kingdom?

Acts 3:23 And it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people.

Clearly this teaches that obedience to the new rules will be enforced. God is not obligated to force everlasting life on anyone. If they refuse to obey, they will die. This seems to be the picture in:

Rev. 20:7-9 And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth and compassed the camp of the saints about and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

This is a picture of the end of the Millennial age. And it shows the destruction of those who were not loyal to God. But will any die before this? The scriptures are more or less silent on this point. I prefer

to believe that death won't occur until the end of the Millennium, perhaps in this way emboldening the discontented who think that death has been done away with.

Isa. 65:20 There shall be no more thence an infant of days nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old, but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.

Br. Russell has suggested this means everyone will get at least 100 years of trial. If they make no progress, they will die since further time in their case would do no good. But that thought doesn't appeal to me. First of all, it seems to violate the general context. Starting at verse 17 to the end of the chapter:

For behold I create new heavens and a new earth and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind . . . and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her . . . they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.

This is a prophecy of the completed work of the kingdom. Then we come to verse 20. It introduces such a jarring note that some scholars think it was a later addition and not part of the original text at all. Let's take a closer look at it:

“an infant of days”	no one whose life is quickly cut short
“old man not filled his days”	no one who is ready for death
“child shall die 100 yrs old”	

This is a faulty translation. The word “child” means one who is the prime of his life. Instead of being in one's prime at 20 years old, say, it will be that extreme old age (say 100 years) will be just like being in one's prime. The Septuagint renders this: “For he who is a 100 years old shall be young.”

Now the phrase: “sinner being 100 years old shall be accursed” (or “cut off” see Psalm 101:8, Companion Bible). This translation is poor. The one who will die is certainly the sinner who will not change his ways. He is physically in his prime (see the previous phrase), but the curse of God will come to pass and he will die. The Septuagint renders this: “And the sinner, who dieth at 100 years, shall be deemed accursed.”

I don't believe the 100 years is a literal number. Will no sinner die at 99 years? At 101 years? No one says the 100 years means exactly 100, no more and no less. In this text “100” is an expression referring to one's physical prime of life. It is faintly reminiscent of some words from Solomon:

Ecc. 8:12,13 Though a sinner do evil an hundred times and his days be prolonged . . . it shall not be well with the wicked . . . because he feareth not before God.

Here is the way I believe we should understand Isaiah 65:20 using the words from both the Knox and the Septuagint translations: “None shall die there unweaned from life; never an old man but lives out his full time. For he who is 100 years old shall be young; and the sinner, who dieth at 100 years, shall be deemed accursed.”

So we see that Isaiah 65:20 really is a precious promise of the blessings of the kingdom and that the ones who persist in sin will eventually be done away with.

So the whole world groans and travails together waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. They are dead to God and his plan. They bury their dead. They eat, they drink. And they know not what is happening around them. But soon earth's dark night of weeping will be over. Soon we will have the fulfillment of John's words in Rev. 21:

[Weymouth] And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea no longer existed. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God and made ready like a bride attired to meet her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: Lo God's dwelling place is among men, and he will dwell among them and they shall be His people. Yes, God Himself will be among them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death shall be no more; nor sorrow, nor wail of woe, nor pain; for the first things have passed away. Then He who was seated on the throne said, See I am making everything new. And He added, Write down these words for they are trustworthy and true.

Closing Hymn: #54 — “Once For All”

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