

DOES DEATH END ALL?

"If a man die, shall he live again?" Job 14:14.

It pleased God to bless His servant Job with eminent prosperity. His wealth was abundant, his station in life was exalted and his influence was extensive; and he had used all of them as a faithful steward. The abundance by which he was surrounded and the success of his enterprises were crowned with the enjoyment of a good conscience and the favor of God. His domestic felicity was superb.

In order that the excellency of Job's character might be manifested more clearly and Satan more thoroughly confounded in his purpose, God permitted Job to suffer tremendous losses.

(1) The loss of property.

God allowed all of Job's possessions to be swept away from him suddenly and without warning. The richest man in the East became a bankrupt in one day, which was enough to have driven many into despair.

(2) The loss of family.

All ten of Job's children were killed in a terrible storm. What was Job's response or reaction to that tragedy? He said, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

(3) The loss of health.

Job was covered from head to feet with a loathsome disease and putrifying sores.

(4) The loss of position.

This great man who had sat among princes was compelled to sit among the ashes.

(5) The loss of sympathy.

Even Job's wife turned against him. Fair-weather friends always get shipwrecked in a storm like that.

(6) The loss of his way.

Because Job could not pray satisfactorily, he wept and expressed the wish that he had never been born. Job preferred death to living without the consciousness of God's presence.

Job had suffered one blow after another until he had lost all of his possessions — family, possessions, health, position and friends. Everything had been taken from him and Job stood helpless in a troubled world. To make bad matters worse, Job could not understand it all, since he had been such a God-fearing and faithful servant of the Lord. With death staring him in the face, and earnestly desiring an assurance that he would live again, the sorely-tried patriarch asked, "If a man die, shall he live again?" As to the first part of Job's question, there is no doubt. There is no "if" about death. God's Word says, "It is appointed unto men once to die" (Hebrews 9:27). The important question is, "Shall he live again?"

Throughout the world and in every generation this ancient, universal and important question has been on the lips of men. From the dawn of history men have regarded life as incomplete if lived only on the earthly plane. Therefore, they have dreamed of and longed for a life beyond the grave. We can easily believe that the first man who ever lived on earth must have propounded this question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" to himself when he came face to face with death. Inscriptions relative to the dim unknown were carved in the pyramids of Egypt three thousand years before Christ was born. It is interesting to note that many of the primitive peoples have been more careful for their dead than they have been for the living. They have seen to it that the bodies of the dead have rested securely in caverns or rock-hewn tombs, while many of the living possessed only extremely poor shelters from the elements. The idea of a life beyond the grave is traceable in the literature of the world through the centuries. In fact, the subject of the future life is of perennial interest. Even now many earnest hearts are yearning for an answer to the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" They long for some sure word concerning what is to be after this life has ended and we have bidden goodbye to the scenes of time.

There is no question to which we more eagerly desire a clear and sure answer than this one: "If a man die, shall he live again?" Does man perish like the beasts, or does life persist somewhere in a great beyond? Does personal identity actually survive the grave?

There are various answers to this all-absorbing question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" You are now invited to consider a few of them.

I. Science.

When we ask, "Does death end all?", science says, "I do not know. I have watched the birth of babies and the death of people. I have raised the average of man's years upon the earth, but I do not know about a life beyond the grave. There may be a future life; perhaps there is; I do not know of anything which forbids it." This answer does not discredit science especially for, after all, the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?", does not belong to the realm of science.

II. Philosophy.

Upon the work of the scientists as a foundation, the philosophers have gone far into the regions of pure thought. It is their desire and hope that there will be a future life. Philosophers have said, "There ought to be a future life; everything that we know anything about demands it." As he raised the poisoned hemlock to his lips Socrates said, "And now we are about to separate -- you to life and I to death -- and which has the better part only God knows." The deepest thing in a person rises to say, "If there is not a future life, there ought to be."

III. Man.

When we ask the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?", the heart of man answers, "Yes, he shall live again." This answer of the human heart is based on:

1. Instinct.

Man has an inborn sense of a higher destiny. There is no stronger instinct inherent in the human heart than the outreach for immortality. This instinct to believe in a future life is universal. And instincts are reliable. Birds have the instinct to fly and they have wings. Fish have an instinct to swim and God has given them fins and provided water in which they can use them. Have you ever seen the birds flying away from the chilling blasts of winter? Have you ever seen the bee sailing out into the vast space filled with air, going from flower to flower, and then by its own peculiar instinct find its way straight back to its home?

Man has the instinct to eat and drink, so God has provided food and water for him. He has the instinct to walk, so God has given him limbs which make walking possible. Man has the instinct to know, so God has placed numerous ways and means of knowing within his reach. Man's spirit has an instinct for immortality, so if all this talk about a future life and a longing for it constitute only a dream, then it can be said that at this point alone God has implanted in man a deceiving and false instinct. Never has a bird, bee or beast been deceived or led astray by a God-given instinct. Neither will God plant this instinct in the soul and permit it to mislead that soul in its aspiration for immortality and the life beyond.

2. Longing.

Man has always had a longing to be immortal. There is a longing in every human breast for a life beyond the grave. Man simply cannot be satisfied to think that death ends all. I believe in a life after death because the desire to live forever is in my heart. God put that longing there. Remember, too, that God never made anything in vain. God gave to you and me the desire to live forever and, since He makes nothing in vain, He will provide the place and opportunity to fulfil that desire.

3. Need.

At the very best the development of this life is fragmentary. It will take another life to complete it. Immortality alone can finish our what life has left unfinished here. Many things are not right in this world, and until Christ comes again they will never be right. The justice of God demands a life beyond the grave. Life's inequalities demand immortality. Life's injustices bear unmistakable testimony to a compensating world beyond.

All of us have experienced the bitter anguish of losing one whom we loved very much. What solace is there if the grave has the final word to say? But we who know and love Christ

have the assurance that He has gone to prepare a place for us, and that nothing shall ever separate us from the love of Christ. With this radiant faith in Christ, Charles Kingsley was able to write on the tombstone of his wife: "We have loved, we love, we shall love." Edward Wilson dying in the Antarctic, with the howling wintry wind outside his frozen tent, wrote his wife this farewell message: "Don't be unhappy -- we are playing a grand part in a great scheme arranged by God, and all is well. We will meet after death, and death has no terrors. There are greater things for us to do together in the world to come." Death has no terrors for us, for we know that we pass from death to life, from darkness to light, from weakness to strength; also, we are assured that death gives us those whom we long to meet again.

Because our loved ones pass beyond the sound of our voices and the range of our sight is no evidence that they have become extinct. O. O. McIntyre, the gifted columnist, stood one day and watched a great ship putting out to sea. With him was a Frenchman who had lost his wife and was clothed in mourning. The Frenchman said, "Well, Mac, there goes the ship out of sight." Mr. McIntyre said, "Yes, out of sight but still going." My loved ones and yours are out of sight but still living.

4. Revelation.

"If a man die, shall he live again?" Yes, he shall live again. The phenomena of nature suggest it, the instincts of humanity desire it, the dignity of man demands it and the witness of revelation proclaims it.

The one great testimony which settles the matter of life beyond death for the man of faith is the Word of God. Joseph Cook said, "Pillow my head on no guess when I die." Well, the Word of God does not leave us in any uncertainty as to the reality of the future existence of the soul.

Christ did not say much about the future life, but what He did say was clear and emphatic. He 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 14:1-3). Listen to His words at the grave of Lazarus: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). There is no perhaps or probability about that. No language could be more positive or emphatic. It tells us that beyond death

"There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign;
Infinite day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain."

The resurrection of Christ is a historic fact as much as His crucifixion or His life. Christ died and He came to life again. In that experience we have the final and satisfying proof of the life beyond. Until Christ conquered death by breaking out of the tomb man's hope of immortality was only a longing. His resurrection from the grave gives us the assurance that we too shall be raised from the dead. Christ's triumph over death is the strongest foundation of assurance of a future life that we have. The resurrection of Christ is the only sure ground on which we can safely build our hope of immortality. Hear His own words, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19). Therefore, the resurrection of His people is an absolute certainty.

Listen to John: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him: for we shall see him as he is." (I John 3:1-2).

As Richard Baxter said,

"My knowledge of that life is small,
The eye of faith is dim,
But 'tis enough that Christ knows all
And I shall be with Him."

Assured of immortality through the risen Christ, let us live nobly for our Lord in a light that never dims, and amid joys which never grow old.