

## HOW SHALL WE BURY OUR DEAD?

DEAR SISTER RUSSELL: – I hope you will find time to look over and answer this suggestion which mother and I have been talking over. My mother is old, will be 80 years of age in February, is feeble, and is liable to be taken from us any time. God seems to have spared her all these years to be called out of Babylon, and to see his glorious light shine. It was so plain to her, when the truth was presented to her; it was of a truth meat in due season.

All of our kinsmen are strictly orthodox, and at my mother's funeral they will have some one of the shepherds of Babylon, to preach her funeral sermon, and I will not have it that way, if I can get you to comply with my mother's wish. I want to have this all fixed while my mother is here with me. I want you to write her funeral sermon, just as if she had written it herself.

We would write it ourselves, but we are only babes in Christ. I know if you will do it, it will be all right. So when the preacher comes I will present this written sermon to him, and request him to read this – my mother's request, and to have no other services.

I do not want to delay having it done, for mother wishes to see and read it, and to sign it with her own hand. Will you comply with this my wish and mother's? Although there are but few of the nominal church people who come to see us of late – for they think we are crazy or something worse – nevertheless they will come to mother's funeral, and I think by so doing I will let them know what my mother did believe and also give them some truth they never heard before. I leave it to you to select the text. Hoping you will not deny us this favor, I close with love from mother and self.

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In reply to this letter and other inquiries of a similar character we submit the following suggestions.

Death, under whatever circumstances it makes its approach, is a grim monster from which we instinctively shrink. Yet to those instructed out of the word of God, it loses much of its terror. The nominal church, and the world under its influence, have one common hope and fear concerning death. They dread it, not only because it is the severing of cherished earthly ties, but because of their fear of eternal misery, which they have been taught to believe may follow it. But while they believe that eternal torment is the portion of *the large majority of mankind*, in almost every individual case their human sympathies and reasonings get the better of their theology and their fears, and a little ray of hope is kindled, based not upon the knowledge of our Heavenly Father's gracious provisions for all, but merely upon their own human sympathies.

Yet such a hope is so uncertain that often great distress of mind is experienced. They have really no hope, as a sure, steadfast anchor to the soul in such an hour.

But with those who know our Father's plans, how different is the feeling with which they look upon the faces of their dead! There is, of course, the pang of severed ties, which leaves the heartache and wrings our tears, even though we know, like Martha, that they shall rise again; and the sympathizing tears of Jesus on that occasion show that such grief is not to be condemned. But at such times we sorrow not as those who have no hope, nor even as those whose hope is vague and indefinite. We know that already we are in the early hours of the glorious day which is shortly to bring release to the groaning creation; that the Life-Giver is already present; and that preparations are now being made to bring the dead ones back under more favorable conditions. And we would not, if we could, have them brought back one day sooner than our Father sees best.

We see that natural men who die are simply being hidden in the grave until the wrath upon the nations be overpast (Job 14:13), that they are waiting for the dawn of the great Lord's Day – the Millennium, and that *the saints* who *now* die *in the Lord* do not sleep for a moment, but are *changed instantly*, to the likeness of their Lord, and made ready for the great work of restitution just before them. Surely then WE should not sorrow as others who have no such assurance. We may rejoice even in the midst of tribulation, and in everything give thanks.

How shall we bury our dead? is a question asked by some who have come out of the various sects, and who feel that the old ceremonies on such occasions are not consistent with God's truth.

As to how the dead body shall be disposed of, is a matter of no consequence to the dead, but the proper disposal of the remains of our departed friends is a mark of our respect and affection. The prevailing customs among various people have much to do with individual ideas of propriety on such occasions; and these are largely influenced by the prevailing religious beliefs and the hopes which they inspire for the future.

The modern Jews believe that the resurrection will take place in Canaan, and hence the desire of many of them is to die there, and often some of the sacred soil is strewn about the body of the deceased. The Romanist, believing in purgatory, and in the power of the Priest to ameliorate the condition of the dead, thought to be conscious in purgatory, thinks it necessary to have masses for the dead, to have the dead body sprinkled with holy water, and to bury in consecrated ground. And Protestants, believing as they do in the doctrine of eternal torment for all who are not Christians, look anxiously to Protestant clergymen to console them with the thought that there is some hope in the case of their departed friends, whether or not their faithfulness to God appeared in their lives. And even the world, under the influence of these teachings, would not consider their friends decently buried if a minister did not come to preach a funeral sermon, and to give the idea to those assembled,

that the virtues of the deceased would sufficiently overbalance his sins, so as to secure for him an escape from eternal woe, especially if his name happened to be on a church roll.

The church nominal has a strong hold upon the people, in this and other public sentiments, created by the claims of the class which styles itself The Clergy. Many say, if we leave the sects to which we now are joined and recognize only the *one*, true church, "whose names are written in heaven," who will bury our dead? who will administer the ordinances of baptism? who will administer the elements of the Lord's Supper? etc.

To such we would say, that the clergy of the nominal church is a self-appointed class, claiming authority and power not scripturally vested in them more than in all the saints. The commission to preach the gospel is given to every consecrated child of God. – See Isaiah 61:1. The humblest are preachers divinely authorized now, as in the early church. No priest is needed to do for the brethren those simple offices which any one of them may perform for another. We have shown through the TOWER that their services are not needed either in the case of Baptism, or the celebrating of the Lord's Supper. Neither are they necessary for the burial of our dead. Nowhere in the writings of the apostles is there the least intimation that any of these services must or should be performed by a "clerical" class. On the contrary, "all ye are brethren" and may serve one another, except in marrying, which by civil law is taken out of your hands. Why, we ask, should any of those who recognize the errors of Babylon, call in her self-constituted "clergy" to serve them, when a brother or sister can be had to serve them better. Especially in the burying of your dead, how inconsistent and foolish it would be to call in those who are strangers to our grander hopes, to offer to us at such an hour the poor consolations of ignorance, or at least of doubt and uncertainty, or the vague fancies of their own imaginations? Rather be guided in such matters by reason, in view of the teaching of God's Word.

Remembering that the dead are past our doing for them, let such opportunities as funeral occasions furnish be improved for the advantage of the living. Friends come together on such occasions to express their sympathy with the bereaved, and to show their respect for the dead, and they are generally in a more impressible frame of mind than usual. Here is a most favorable opportunity to impress *the truth*, an opportunity which should never be lost where we have the privilege of controlling or influencing the arrangements.

We would suggest here a simple line of thought which any brother or sister might present on such an occasion. From whatever standpoint we speak, the object should be to briefly make clear, *First – the reality of death* – that it is not life in any sense, but the cessation of life; and that it is not a blessing, but a curse pronounced against the race, as the *penalty* for sin; *Secondly* – that the only hope of the race is in a resurrection, in being created again, by the same power that first called us into existence; *Thirdly* – that an awakening from death, and an individual opportunity of retaining life, is secured for every human being by the death of Christ; *Fourthly* – that the restored life may be eternal, on the original conditions of perfect obedience, when perfect obedience is made possible to all.

And if the deceased is one of the consecrated, whom you have reason to believe has been "faithful unto death," it may be shown that such are *now* – since 1878 – promised an immediate entrance into the reward of our high calling, since it is written, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord *from* HENCEFORTH."

For example, let us take for the text of such a discourse, which must necessarily be brief, the story of Lazarus' death and resurrection.

Read John 11:1-14 slowly, giving special emphasis to verses 11-14. Then comment somewhat as follows: Here we have the unmistakable *fact* of *death*, and our Lord's authority for calling it *a sleep*. It is actually death, but it was likened to a sleep in view of the resurrection. But what is actual death? Let Job tell us. He says, "Now

shall I *sleep in the dust*, and thou shalt seek me in the morning [The Millennial morning when the night of death and weeping is past] and *I shall not be;*" that is, I shall not exist, having been destroyed. (Job 7:21.) Nevertheless, although he thus realized death to be destruction, he expresses his hope of a resurrection, saying, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come. Thou *shalt call* and *I will answer thee*. Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands." – 14:14-15.

If Job is not in existence, yet answers to the Lord's call, the call must signify a re-creation – a call into being again – a resurrection. No other meaning could reasonably attach to such language. The Psalmist adds his testimony to the same thought, saying, "Thou turnest man to *destruction* [to death] and sayest, *Return*, ye children of men. For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. [The lapse of time between death and the awakening is nothing to the dead when it is past, since they are entirely unconscious of it.] Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are as asleep. In the morning they are like grass which groweth up. In the evening it is cut down and withered." (Psa. 90:3-6.) So brief is his present existence. Thus Job and David agree: the one says, when dead, "*I shall [R1018 : page 7] not be:*" the other says death is "*destruction:*" and both, like Jesus, liken it to a sleep, because there is to be an awakening, a resurrection.

God meant no pleasant, agreeable thing when he pronounced death as *a curse, a penalty for sin*. The Scriptures, throughout, represent it as an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26.) but, thank God, as an enemy from which there is at an appointed time to be a grand release, a resurrection, accomplished by him who redeemed us.

The faith of some seems to stagger at this promise of God when they come to view death in its true character. If death [R1018 : page 8] means non-existence, destruction, as the Scriptures affirm, then how, say they, is a resurrection *possible*? But Paul asks, "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that *God* should raise the dead?"

(Acts 26:8). And he shows clearly that he understood death to be destruction, saying, that if there were no *resurrection* those who had fallen asleep in Christ were *perished*, and the hope of the church was vain. – 1 Cor. 15:15-18.

When God makes a promise there is no room for doubt. And those who have the faith of John (Matt. 3:9), who believed that God could of the stones raise up children unto Abraham, are also able to believe that he can resurrect, or *create again*, that which was once *destroyed*.

A single thoughtful glance at the plan of redemption assures us beyond a doubt of a resurrection – "both of the just and the unjust," as our Lord declared. (Acts 24:15; John 5:28,29.) For we read that "As in Adam all die, *even so* in [or, by] Christ shall *all* be made alive," (1 Cor. 15:22,) and He "gave himself a ransom *for all*, to be testified in due time."

But when will this due time come? Peter answers (Acts 3:21,) that it will be at the second advent of Christ – "whom the heaven must receive UNTIL *the times of restitution of all things.*" The restitution, or restoring of all things, is the *object* of his coming. While in God's arrangement it will require a thousand years to restore the race to its original perfection, the awakening from death is necessarily a first part of this restitution work.

Although the race was redeemed nearly nineteen centuries ago, and Christ has not yet taken his purchased possession, this does not argue against the promise; for it is to be fulfilled *at the time appointed* – when Christ takes his great power and begins his reign, and the present powers of earth have passed away.

Job says, "O that thou wouldst hide me in the grave, that thou wouldst keep me secret until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldst appoint me a *set time* and remember me." And again he says, "So man lieth down and riseth not *till* the heavens be no more: They shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep." (14:12.) The present order of things, or

dominion of earth, is symbolically termed the heavens. The order of things that now obtains in the world must give place to the kingdom of Christ, the "*new heavens.*" And under the glorious privileges and opportunities of the Millennial reign of Christ, the dead shall be awakened and brought forth to share its advantages, which, if properly improved, will lead to life eternal. The restored life will be eternal on the original condition of perfect obedience to God. And perfect obedience will be possible to all when fully restored.

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If we have reason to believe that the deceased was one of the "elect," "little flock," we might refer to his hopes and their realization somewhat as follows:

But we are taught, also, that there are to be various orders in the resurrection – a first or chief resurrection, as well as a general resurrection. And it is written, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection." Such are those believers only, who are entirely consecrated to God, and faithful unto death. Such are to be joint-heirs with Christ, kings and priests unto God, and shall reign with Christ a thousand years, sharing with him in the great work of restoring all things. The resurrection of this class is first, not only in point of time, but also in point of importance. Such was the hope for which our (brother or sister) lived for the last – years and such the hope in which he died.

It is no vain thing to serve the Lord with the whole heart. Such shall reap a glorious reward with which the light afflictions of the present time are not worthy of comparison. Lukewarm service is an abomination in the sight of Him who readeth the heart; while even the imperfect service of those whose hearts are fully set to do his will, is well pleasing unto God. And the Lord, who discerneth the thoughts and intents of the heart, will make no mistake, nor will he be slack concerning his promises. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. (1 Thes. 5:24.) Let each lay well to heart the solemn lessons of God's Word and rest in implicit faith in its sure fulfillment.



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It would be appropriate also, if the circumstances should warrant it, to refer briefly to the general lesson taught by such an occasion to all. How that this life is the time in which our love for God, for his truth, and for our fellow men, can take an active form and display itself in deeds of self-sacrifice, whose sweet incense will endure when life is gone and precede us into the life to come. Appropriate words of sympathy for the bereaved ones, reminding them of God's care and love and protection, will suggest themselves according to the varying circumstances.

MRS. C. T. R.

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